

Confidence in Unsettled Times

Psalm 23

Welcome to all worshipping with us in online formats, gathered in houses, hospitals, and hotel rooms.

*Last week, a **New Hope** man who works overseas watched from a **Pacific island** near Guam:

*"I was able to watch the service on YouTube from my quarantine hotel in Saipan. While being stuck in the hotel room it is easy to get **depressed and lonely**. Thank God for modern technology...I'm so happy to know that **God is in control**...I'm excited to hear that you will be able to open for in-person worship. I will be **praying for Gods protection** on my church family."*

We also welcome those who have gathered with us FACE to FACE for the first time in 12 Sundays!

*How fitting that today is **Pentecost Sunday**, commemorating the very **first gathering** of the early church when they were filled with the **presence and power of the Holy Spirit**.

*And there is little doubt that the **Holy Spirit** continues to do a work **in/through His church**.

***We received a letter and a gift just yesterday for India:**

*"We are members of a church in Northport, but since Covid-19 we have been **faithfully and eagerly worshipping with New Hope** on line. We are blessed beyond measure! The enclosed check is the result of **a vision I had in the middle of the night**. Suddenly I saw a woman and her child sitting on a dirt floor in a dark room. They were utterly poor. I can't explain it, but I knew without questions they were Indian, and I knew instantly **it was from the Lord**. (This has **never happened to me before**). The enclosed is for your India mission to help the poor, and for sharing the Gospel."*

*Nobody would have predicted that **2020** would be such an **unsettled year** that disrupted all of life.

***During the last 10 weeks of UNSETTLEDNESS**, we have **GROUND**ED ourselves in the **Psalms** because the #1 thing most needed for believers is **Confidence in the Lord**.

"The Lord is our Refuge." As a way to keep this daily reminder in front of you...we have a small gift to go on your Fridge...to remind you as often as you eat: **"The Lord is our Confidence."**

Today we turn to our 11th Psalm of Confidence, and no Psalm is more famous than the 23rd.

*It bears the same # worn by **MVP Michael Jordan**, and is the **MVP: "Most Valuable Psalm"**

*Its **poetry** is unequaled; its **popularity** is unsurpassed; its **path** is well worn; and its **power** remains as precious today as the first day David, the Shepherd, sang it for the first time.

It was quoted by **George Bush on Sept. 11, 2001** in his speech to comfort our nation.

It was read by a priest in the film **Titanic** as the ship was sinking.

It was read at **Whitney Houston's funeral**...and **thousands of other funerals**, to give hope. (Ironically that her **last public performance**, Houston sang 1 song: **"Jesus Loves Me"** and her **funeral service was hosted at a church called "New Hope"**)

Ps. 23 is a **cultural icon for Americans** that reminds us that our **hope is in the Lord**.

*Although associated with **funerals and dying**, Ps. 23 is actually a **“Psalm for the Living.”**

*“The Lord is **my** shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes **me** lie down in green pastures. He leads **me** beside still waters. 3 He restores **my** soul. He leads **me** in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.*

4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

1. **The Lord is our Shepherd,** (v.1-3)

*Notice how **PERSONAL** David views the character of God.

*“**MY** Shepherd; makes **ME** lie down; leads **ME** beside still waters; restores **MY** soul; leads **ME**.”*

*The Lord is pictured as **“MY Shepherd;”** His role is to provide & direct & love & protect.

***Believers** are often called **“Sheep;” Churches = “Flocks;” Pastors = “Shepherds”**

***Or as the Ugandans called Pastor Tim: “Musumba”**

*But all of us ultimately follow **Chief Shepherd**, who laid down his life for the sheep.

***I would bet you a sandwich that many struggle viewing God as personal: “MY SHEPHERD.”**

*In fact, a great number of us **tend to view God as distant** and that he **tolerates us**.

*Do you realize - **your view of God will change everything about your perspective** when life gets unsettled and difficult?

*If we **view God as a Distant Uncle**, who is **cold and removed**, we will tend to view events of life as random, and usually get **angry or fearful** when life feels out of control.

*But if we **view God as a Good Father who is near, personal, and involved**, we will be comforted knowing He is good and all our days are under His watchful care.

Notice the immediate **PEACE and COMFORT** David has: **“I shall not want.”**

Other translations clarify: **NIV: “I shall not be in want.” NLT: “I have all that I need.”**

*Every **toddler** learns to whine: **“I want...Gimme”** Every adult has known a “lack” of something

*But David believes that with God as His **Shepherd**, he has everything he truly needs.

***I met a Shepherd once...**on a picturesque farm in **the Green Mountains of Vermont**.

***Rick was a good Shepherd**, who managed land and cared for the sheep.

*He would move the **sheep each year from paddock to paddock, field to field**, feeding them, providing for their needs, and protecting them from danger.

*One night on the farm we **heard gunshots** and woke up to **spotlights roaming the fields**...later learning that they were protecting the sheep from predators.

***If I could have interviewed the sheep**, I'm sure they would've said: *"We face many dangers, but Rick is a Good Shepherd, and as long as he's around, we have all we need."*

Even better than Rick is Jesus the **True and Better Chief Shepherd**, who *"makes you lie down in green pastures, leads you beside still waters, and restores your soul."*

*My friend, when you have Christ as Lord, you truly have everything you need.

2. ...and He is with us, (v.4)

v.4 is perhaps the most famous verse in the Bible:

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil..."

*David does not say there will be **"no valleys"** or that we will never face **"evil"**

***No, the pastures of life are not always green; and waters are not always still.**

*David, **walked through many dark valleys and faced enormous battles with evil.**

*But as he followed the Good Shepherd, **David found a secret in life.**

***He found a Vaccination; a Cure for the Disease of Fear.**

"I will fear no evil, For YOU ARE WITH ME!"

*Running through **David's veins** during any adversity was the vaccine: ***God is with me!***

*Do you realize how often **we face fear** in life...and allow it to control us?

*Fear of the future; fear of health; fear of outcome; fear of people; fear of virus...

*Fear: alters our habits; controls our behavior; and robs us of joy/peace.

***"The worst evils of life are those which do not exist except in our imagination."* (Spurgeon)**

***Let the last 12 weeks be instructive.** There is little doubt that the **FEAR of the virus** in our country is far worse than the actual **Reality** of contracting it.

*David battles **Fear with the Vaccine of Faith.**

*His confidence does not come from the **absence of trouble**, but from the **presence of God in the trouble.**

*Yes, we will have VALLEYS, but we always **walk THROUGH them** with the Shepherd.

***One of our mission partners in Asia** is battling fear with faith as they **deliver food to thousands of refugees and encounter major opposition:**

"Our team during last week's food distribution were harassed by police due to giving food to a minority ethnic group. Our team leader told me, 'We were careful, but we refuse to be fearful.' The police yelled out that if they broke social distancing laws it was an automatic 3 year jail

term...Our leader went on to say, 'The people were amazed and many cried that the team would risk even being associated with them.' They were able to share that **'they are not forgotten by the God** who created all things, his name is Yeshua, and they are his servants.' The team will do another food drop later this week to this village...We are all so thankful to Jesus..."

***David offers us the Cure for the Disease of Fear: "God is with us."** And if he be with us, who can possibly be against us.

3. ...both now and forever. (v.5-6)

• **Now** (v.5)

*David uses three metaphors, which all showcase how good God has been to him.

"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies" **Victory.**

"You anoint my head with oil." **Authority.**

"My cup overflows." **Prosperity.**

*IOW: No matter how **dark the valleys have been**, God has been faithful and has always seemed to bless him **with greater victory in the presence of the Holy Spirit.**

***If David were interviewed by FOX or CNN** about his life, he would sum up his entire life by saying: **"You know, God has been so good to me."**

*That is the most beautiful testimony of saints just before they enter glory.

*Whether it's **Ravi Zacharias** on the national stage, or **Beulah Polzin** from Bellaire campus, it is the ability to look back on life and say: **"God has been good. My cup overflows."**

• **Forever** (v.6)

"6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

*This is **the end of Ps. 23...and the assurance of how life will end: In the presence of our Lord.**

*The ultimate confidence we carry through the valleys of life is that we are heads towards **Mt. Zion**, where our Good Shepherd dwells.

*Followers of Jesus hold fast to a resurrection hope.

*Just as Christ **reversed decay, defeated death, and stood up bodily**, soon a day is coming when God will raise us up and we will dwell with the Lord in glory.

***This week, I got a note from a New Hope lady comforted by this:**

*"You reminding us today that we already know how this life story ends, reminded me...I can relax in Him, and be confident. We will not be shaken, for **He WINS THIS MATCH.** He is in control. We know this already. We can have peace."*

Action Steps:

Fear: Refuse it.

*Take a lesson from our mission friends in Asia facing trials: ***“Careful, but refuse to be fearful.”***

*Yes, we will walk through “Valleys of the shadow of Death.”

But we **walk THROUGH THEM WITH FULL ASSURANCE THAT** “The Lord is with me.”

*In the valleys, David refuses to be fearful. He says: *“I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”*

Every single day we encounter fear, this is a choice to make:

*“When I get a **bad medical diagnosis**, I will fear no evil...God is with me.”*

*“When I face **an uncertain business future**, I will fear no evil...God is with me.”*

*“When I get frustrated with **political leaders**, I will fear no evil...God is with me.”*

*“When I get anxious about **next election**, I will fear no evil...God is with me.”*

Temper: Watch it.

***One thing true in the past 12 weeks is that all of us have...**

*LOST something and are WAITING on God for something.

*As we **wait**, we may not be able to control the **timing**, but we can control our **temper**.

*What is **ONE THING YOU ARE WAITING ON** the Lord for?

*Are you waiting for **business turnaround?** For **direction with school or work?** For **financial breakthrough?** For **political change or legal action?**

*How is your temper? Are you being patient, trusting the Lord? Or impatient and angry?

One NH woman texted this:

*“**Waiting is hard**, especially waiting on the Lord. Sometimes He is slow, but as Christians we know **His timing is perfect**...When we believe, with confidence, that **God has a plan** we honor Him with our trust. We need to **be still** so that we can know that He is God. Praying for you, the pastors, staff and elders of New Hope...You always tell us we are loved. So are all of you. As our leaders you have great responsibility but **none larger than waiting for God.**”*

*If you are a follower of Jesus, one of our greatest callings: Wait on the Lord.

Contentment: Learn it.

***The last 12 weeks have robbed us of many things: wealth, control, comfort, certainty;**

*Many people just want the good ‘ol days: ***“I want to get back to normal.”***

*But before we **“go back to normal”** let’s remember what normal was for a lot of us:

*Our **schedules were busy**; our **patience was thin**; our **finances were stretched**; our **families were hurried**; our **hearts were empty**; our **pursuit of God was minimal**.

*Do we really want to return to normal...if normal lacked the presence of God?

*David says: *"I shall not want."* IOW: I have everything I need.

*Paul in the NT: *"I have learned **the secret of being content** in any and every situation"*

*This is a **secret we all need to learn: Content with our Lord. He is our Shepherd. We have all we truly need.**

Valleys: Endure it.

*The Lord warns in Revelation that days on earth will get exceedingly bad for believers.

*In fact, the **pain yet to come will make the last 12 weeks look like paradise.**

*What will we need the most during that time? **3x the Lord repeats himself:**

*"Now is the time for **the perseverance of the saints.**"*

***Even as we begin to reengage church life, let me say:**

"Now is the time for the perseverance of the saints."

*I believe the **hardest days for the church are in FRONT OF US, not BEHIND US.**

*I believe the **last 12 weeks are just a warm-up** for days of great **volatility** yet to come.

*We may face **greater opposition and cultural adversity** that will challenge our patience

*We may face **false accusations and political pressure** that will test our resolve.

*But no **matter how dark the valley**, we will rally around the **23rd Psalm** and say:

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me."