

Hope for Uncertain Times

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Psalm 23

If you think this seems strange to have church by live streaming, believe me, it is strange for me as well. Some might think it is unnecessary. However, I will caution you. I've been reading accounts from people in Italy who wish they had taken it more seriously before it hit. There is a window before the virus spreads rapidly. When the government told people to stay inside, they didn't really want to do it. Young people felt they were invincible to the virus. They went out to the public areas, people ate out, went to work as normal. Now they are dying in large numbers. The problem with this virus is it spreads very rapidly, and we have no normal immunity to it. We do need to heed the warnings and stay inside and that does not mean visiting with our friends, going to each other's homes, and doing life as normal.

There is much that is unknown about what is going to happen. This has left us in a very uncertain future. People are panic buying. You can't get hand sanitizer. We have had one case in Cuero. We are not to panic, yet we are uncertain what is going to happen.

I shared on Facebook a post by DennisonForum about the pre-trauma health workers are already facing. They hear what it is like overseas and are fearful for what it will be like here. They know they have to report to work, even when the disease is upon us. They are at risk. Moreover, they fear they will bring the virus home to their loved ones.

Chris Elkins is quoted by Dennison: "The reality of uncertainty and the absence of control are the most distressing things I am experiencing in all of this. There is no certainty about how this virus will spread or whom it will impact." Add to that the economic impact of what may happen and we are left with a lot of uncertainty. It is true that some people are treated and survive fine. Yet others, even young people, have died.

We are uncertain and we have no control. I like what Chris also says. "Coronavirus did not create this reality – it just made it clear." The reality is

that we have never been in control. We have assumed we have a measure of control, if we have money in the bank and food in our house. Yet, the reality is that we have never been in control. We have always been at God's mercy to survive each day. We cannot keep asteroids from slamming into the planet. And we cannot control what a virus might do. We are dependent on God because only God is in control.

When we face uncertainty, we must look to the Scriptures. Psalm 23 does it for me. David reminds me that God is the one leading me. He is the one leading you as well.

Psalm 23:1-6 NIVO

A psalm of David.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,

³ he restores my soul. He guides 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 love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

David reminds us that God is the provider. He is our Shepherd who leads us through life. He leads us, provides for us, makes us lie down. He restores us. He keeps us from harm by his very presence. He assures us of his mercy and love. He offers us the hope of eternity with him. Here is God's hope for uncertain times.

There are some ideas that come to me in this passage. God is our Shepherd and Savior. He has power, and He is our provider. God is in control, not we. Note that David does not say that God keeps away the enemies. He does not say that God keeps death away. He says that God is present when these things come near.

1. When times are uncertain, it is a good time to remember to put your faith in God.

I shall not want. The Hebrew basically says, "I lack nothing." I have no need God cannot supply. I trust God to be in control. God is in control. We are not.

We need to learn to rest in God in this panic season of uncertainty. People have emptied all of the shelves of essential items through panic buying. Some people have done this out of fear. Some out of greed. They want to protect their folks. Perhaps they feel they will be in control if they make sure they have enough supplies.

However, this panic buying leaves everyone else at risk. You cannot find disinfectant wipes anywhere. When people need to disinfect their homes, they cannot do so. This actually exposes more people to the virus. Selfishness is not the answer. Being selfish makes you more at risk. If others cannot clean their surfaces you are more at risk of getting contact with the virus. Hoarding cleaning supplies places you at greater risks. If you hoped to try and sell the cleaning supplies for a greater profit, you quit being a sheep and became a wolf.

Panic buying is not walking in faith. You are trusting in yourself, not God.

None of the goods people seek will give them real security from this virus. Only God can keep us. We need to let God put our hearts at peace. The real issue you are facing is a crisis of faith. Will you have faith in God?

Yes, you might face life and death. David, who wrote this Psalm, also faced life and death. He faced it when he was a child fighting the lion and the bear. He faced it as an adult when he fought hand to hand against his enemy. He knew only God could keep him secure. If you are going to have faith in God you are going to have to let God lead you.

There is hope in this crisis. That hope is found by having faith in God.

2. God will lead us through uncertainty, but we must be willing to follow.

He leads me by quiet streams. He makes me lie down. The sheep are easily disturbed souls. Yet, they are also easily distracted souls. The shepherd would lead them to quietness for rest, but the shepherd had to make them rest.

We need to allow ourselves to be quiet and stay in our homes as we are told. The virus spreads from person to person. The more contact you have with others, the greater the spread of the disease.

We want to keep doing life as normal. We want to have friends over. We want to go out. We want ... We have not taken seriously enough the reality of this deadly disease. We have come to believe in America that life is determined by what things we get to do. We want to be social. We want to go about our normal business. That is what they did in Italy. Now Italy is paying the price.

People are making false assumptions about this disease. They think it will not hurt them if they are young. Actually, many young people are being hurt. Besides, if you are young, you could bring the disease into your family and it could hurt someone who is older. We need to quit partying and playing.

We need to allow God to help us re-evaluate our priorities of life. What is really important?

Sheep don't like to lie down and rest. They don't like to stay in close with the shepherd. They want to wander away. We need to allow the Great Shepherd to lead us. Yes, he can lead us through those who are the experts in the field of medicine and those who watch over us in government.

God will lead us, but we must allow him to do so.

3. When the future is unknown, we can hold onto God because God still loves us.

David talked about walking through the shadow of death. He is describing how shepherds in Bethlehem had to lead their sheep up paths that would switch back and forth and cuts where the sheep could not always see the shepherd. He would hold his staff up high so they would know he was still there.

When David said he passed through the shadow of death, he wasn't talking about the act of dying. He was talking about the possibility of dying. The shadow of death is anytime something threatens life.

I worked for a security firm during my seminary days. One of the places I was stationed was a downtown hotel. The hotel was a high rise with two wings. One of the wings was shifted because a gas explosion in the area. That wing was closed to the public. Yet, as a security guard, I had to walk the floors of that closed unit at night. I had to walk it alone.

So, at 2 am, I would often have to go to the top floor and work my way down, one floor at a time. Most of the halls did not have any lights. The doors were set back from the hall. All I carried with me was my mag flashlight. I often recited, "When I walk through the valley of death, your staff and rod comfort me." I would pray, "Lord, you have to get me through safely."

There are many times we have to walk through the shadow of death. When we do, we have to trust God with the outcome.

We are about to walk through something for which we cannot know the outcome. Will we live? Will we die? Will we lose a loved one? We cannot know. It bothers us. It bothers the medical staff. All we can do is walk faithfully, do what we can that is good and right, and leave everything else to God.

Jesus is our shepherd. His staff is the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of the living God who is always with us, no matter what we may go through.

God has given us His assurance he is with us and he loves us.

Surely goodness and mercy / or love, will follow me all of my days, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. NIV has translated mercy as love, based on the Hebrew word *hesed*. That word sometimes means God's covenant love. He is the God who never leaves us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

We have this faith. Faith is more than a system of belief. It is a trust relationship.

Whoever you are, where ever you are, no matter what you have done in your past, I am here to tell you that God loves you. He invites you to trust in His love for you. I know you are uncertain. Ask God to come near. Ask God to forgive you of your sins and He will. Look to Jesus, God's Son to be your savior and hope. He will walk with you through this uncertain time.