

Our Source of Certainty in Uncertain Times

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[0 : 00] Thank you very much, Richard. Great song that we need to be thankful for, that our God is faithful. Don't answer out loud, but how would you describe life during this pandemic?

Fearful, stressful, frustrating. What about uncertain? Over the past two months, we have certainly been living in uncertain times.

There's been a lot of uncertainty about a variety of things. What businesses are open? And if I go, will they have what I need?

Is my job secure? Some people, they live with that uncertainty week by week. Some people, how am I going to work my job and provide childcare for my children?

And most, all of us are wondering, how long will it be before life turns to some kind of normalcy?

Chuck Swindoll wrote a book, a devotional book on the Psalms.

[1 : 16] He called it Living in the Psalms. And he gave his chapter on Psalm 23 this title, The Grind of Uncertainty.

And he begins the chapter with these words, I have observed that fewer inner battles are more fierce than the daily grind of uncertainty. No doubt, you too have encountered one or more of its many faces as you have struggled with purpose and pain, job security, financial pressures, physical handicaps, relational snags, and a dozen other confusing puzzles not quickly or easily solved.

It is for the dark hours of uncertainty that David penned a song we know as Psalm 23. If we took a poll of what chapter of the Bible has God used most over the centuries to bring comfort and hope to Christians, I believe we would far and away pick the 23rd Psalm.

For the past several weeks, I've been thinking about and praying about what passage of Scripture should I focus on, preach from on our first Sunday back.

This is a special time. We've been away for nine weeks. We're here now as God's people, worshiping Him, studying His Word. What passage should I preach? Well, as I thought about that, prayed about that, I thought about Psalms.

[2 : 54] Psalms has something that touches every condition, every emotion. I started thinking about the Psalm 100.

It's a psalm about giving thanks, and we have a lot to be thankful for. But early this past week, I think the Lord brought my attention to the 23rd Psalm.

That's the chapter. That's the passage that we need to look at. Now, I can think of several reasons why this is a good study for us.

First, Psalm 23 is a very familiar passage of Scripture, and I think it'll help us, do us all good, to study something that is familiar during this unfamiliar time we're in right now.

Psalm 23 is also a very comforting and encouraging passage. Comfort and encouragement is something that most of us need a lot of times, maybe especially now.

[3 : 59] And then Psalm 23 is written in a way to give us assurance on a personal level. Look at it. Psalm 23, verse 1. The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want.

Look at it. The Lord is, present tense, my, talking about something very personal here, is my shepherd.

And as a result of that, I have all that I want, or more specifically, all that I need. I want us to begin today and do about a five or six week study of this familiar psalm with a prayer that God will use it to help us have more certainty in these uncertain times because of our personal experience with the Lord as our, or let's make it personal, my shepherd.

Now, David wrote Psalm 23 as an older man, as the king of Israel. But as he wrote this psalm, he thought about his boyhood experience as a shepherd taking care of his father's sheep.

You can read about that in the book of 1 Samuel. It's important that we understand the perspective from which David wrote. He didn't write from the perspective of himself being the shepherd.

[5 : 33] Look at it. He wrote, the Lord is my shepherd, which means he wrote from the perspective of a sheep being cared for by the shepherd.

So, the first key to understanding Psalm 23 and profiting from it as the Lord wants us to is this. If we're going to find certainty for uncertain times in Psalm 23, we must learn to see ourselves as we really are before God.

We've got to learn to see ourselves as God sees us. Now, in the context of Psalm 23, we are helpless sheep. And that is not a compliment.

Don't think in terms of Mary had a little lamb, its fleece was white as snow and all that kind of junk. Sheep are not something that anybody wants to be.

If we did a poll this morning in this room right now, if you had to be an animal, what would you be? Probably some kind of great dog or a great cat like a lion, a tiger.

[6 : 47] Maybe a bear. Some people may want to be a bird because you like to sing or something like that. But I don't believe anybody would say if it could be any kind of animal, they would be a sheep.

Haddon Robinson explains why being a sheep is not complimentary. Look at this. A sheep is all of the things that we do not want to be.

It is defenseless, dependent, and stupid. But when David wrote, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, he was saying by implication that he was a sheep.

He was defenseless, dependent, and foolish. You and I might as well admit it. Before God, we too are sheep.

Yet in the depths of our proud hearts, that is a very difficult admission to make. I don't want to be a sheep.

[7 : 53] I don't want to think of myself as dumb and defenseless like a sheep is. But we can't get around it. In both the Old and New Testament, a lot of times, God's people, Christians, are referred to as sheep.

Here's one that's probably most in this room you know this, from Isaiah 53. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way as opposed to God's way.

Jesus described us as Christians, his people, as sheep, and he, our good shepherd, in John 10.

We'll look at that more a little bit later in this series.

The only way that we will ever find comfort in Psalm 23 is to admit that we spiritually now, spiritually, before God, we are like sheep.

We are totally dependent on our shepherd. We just can't make it on our own. Now, I know some people are thinking, well, I'm not dumb.

[9 : 10] People aren't dumb, and you're right. This does not mean, this idea of us being sheep, does not mean that we should think of ourselves literally as a dumb, sheep-like animal.

As human beings, we are created in the image of God. And we should never lose sight of that. As human beings, we are created in the image of God. We are God's highest, most special creation. We have many God-given qualities, intellectually, physically, ability, a lot of physical abilities, socially.

And all that makes us far superior to the best animal, the most intelligent animal. But let's remember this. Ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, sin has made human beings as spiritually impoverished and needy as sheep.

We really are before God spiritually lost, separated from God. That's what sin did there in the Garden in the beginning. God created Adam and Eve.

[10 : 32] They enjoyed perfect fellowship face-to-face with Him. But when they sinned, what happened? They hid from God. Sin separated them.

They knew they were wrong. Something had gone wrong. They couldn't see, look at God as they had in the past. Sin messed up that relationship. Think about this.

On our own, we are defenseless against the devil, against the forces of evil in this world that oppose us, that tempt us. And think about this.

We demonstrate our spiritual foolishness by allowing ourselves to be shaped more by the influence of this world, this world that opposes God, than being shaped by the truth of God's Word.

God's Word. That's why Paul writes in Romans 12, don't let the world squeeze you into its mold, because that's what we naturally do. And that shows us just how foolish we are.

[11 : 43] So, if you look at Psalm 23, if you've been a Christian for any length of time, if you grew up in a home where the Bible was ever read, you ever went to church, you know the 23rd Psalm, if you want to really experience comfort and hope from it, first, look at yourself as God looks at you.

You are a spiritually lost sheep. You are without hope in terms of having a right relationship with God, being able to live life in a way that will please Him and serve His purpose.

We are sheep who are in desperate need of God's shepherd-like guidance, protection, and loving care.

Jesus emphasizes that loving care part in John 10 that we'll be looking at. Now, once we understand who we are in this Psalm, then we're ready to start looking at the main player, the focus of the Psalm, the Lord.

Look at this. If we're going to find certainty for uncertain times in Psalm 23, we must learn to see God as He really is. And David's real clear. David begins with the Lord.

[13 : 10] Now, whenever you see the word Lord in all capital letters as it is in this English translation, it's translating the Hebrew word Yahweh. That's God's most sacred name.

And it means that God is self-sufficient and God is self-existent. Let's think about that for a moment. To say that God is self-sufficient means He has absolutely no needs.

God needs nothing. God has no need for more wisdom because He is all-wise. God never has to look around and try to find more power because He is all-powerful.

You know that God never could become more loving because as Scripture calls Him, He is love.

When we think about God being self-sufficient, that means that God has all the resources at His disposal in who He is, what He possesses, He has all the resources He will ever need to meet our needs.

[14 : 22] God is, if you're a Christian, think about it, is my shepherd, my protector, my guider, my comforter.

And then look at this. To say that God is self-existent means that He has always existed as God. Put it another way, He is timeless. He is above time, beyond time.

Don't dwell on that too long because that will blow your mind on it. To be above time and space like God is, time is a creation of God. Think about it this way.

He never changes. That's hard to imagine because everything changes. You say you don't like change? Well, die. Die or get used to it because everything changes.

During the, I don't know, maybe a couple of weeks ago, Lisa was looking for something. She found some old pictures. My hair was jet black.

[15 : 32] I didn't have to suck in this, I didn't have a belly. Think about what you look like five years ago. Think about what you look like ten years ago.

Think about twenty years ago. All you have to do to know that change is constant is just look at yourself in the mirror day by day.

We change. Our children grow up. They have children. Our parents and grandparents, they die. They die.

They're no longer a part of our lives. Everything about life changes. This coronavirus pandemic has been an unexpected and harsh reminder of how quickly things can change.

But change was not introduced into our country or culture or homes as a result of this pandemic. everything changes but God is what I'm getting at.

[16 : 47] God is the one constant. God's character never changes. God's promises never change. God's power will remain the same forever.

God's power will remain the same forever. We can have confidence in the Lord as our shepherd because he will always be who he has revealed himself to be.

He will always do what he has promised to do. That's hard to get our heads around to think about it because nobody else does. Nobody else can do that.

It's sad. Some of you have experienced this with your parent or grandparent or aunt or uncle. My dad when he died was not the person he'd always been because of Alzheimer's.

A lot of us in this room right now, we can't do what we used to do the way we used to do it. We just don't have that kind of strength or stamina now.

[17 : 58] But God, he will never be changed by some kind of disease. He will never be changed by what happens in this world.

His power will never be in any shape, form or fashion diminished. This is the Lord that David says is my shepherd.

Now if you're a Christian, make that personal. Say it to yourself or even if you want to, say it out loud right now. The Lord is my shepherd.

This is a statement of fact that every believer can say, can claim every moment of every day. No matter how uncertain things are where you work or the school situation.

The Lord is my shepherd now. And that should make a tremendous difference in how we face our uncertainty.

[19 : 07] Let's make this even more personal by looking at what Jesus said in John chapter 10. Jesus describes his relationship with all who trust him as the good shepherd who knows, loves, and cares for his sheep.

Let me give you an example. John 10 verses 14 and 15. Jesus said, I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.

And I lay down my life for the sheep. That's how much he loves us. That's how much he gives of himself for us. Now I want you to look at this next one.

Jesus also says that his sheep, his followers, Christians, his sheep know his voice and they follow him.

This is in John 10 verses 27 and 28. My sheep hear my voice. He's talking about through his word and through his spirit.

[20 : 12] My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. Now see, Jesus is describing a fact about who all real Christians are and what they do.

We as he is, we hear his voice. He knows us and we follow him.

He says, I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand. We are eternally secure through faith in Jesus.

We are living in uncertain times. But wasn't life uncertain before this pandemic ever reared its ugly head? There's uncertainty in our homes from time to time.

There's uncertainty related to jobs. There's uncertainty about our health. Uncertainty is just part of life. We are spiritually helpless sheep who need the good shepherd Jesus to guide us through this uncertain world and the end to lead us into heaven where all certainty will end.

[21 : 52] Can you say right now, can you as an individual, can you say right now, the Lord is my shepherd?

Are you one of the Lord's sheep? You know his voice. As you read his word, you hear his voice.

Not literally. As you read his word, as you live as a Christian with the spirit of God living in you, you hear him leading you, you experience his leading you, prompting you from within.

Are you one of the Lord's sheep who hears his voice and you follow him? You obey him. None of us does it perfectly.

None of us does it every day. No one does it to the absolute nth degree. But if we are children of God and dwell by the spirit of God, we'll have the desire and we will put forth the effort to hear his voice and follow him on a regular basis.

[23 : 06] Now what I want us to understand is this all applies to people who believe. David wrote the 23rd Psalm as someone who knew the Lord as his shepherd.

He was a believer. Jesus in John 10 was describing his relationship with his followers. So the question here is are you as a Christian are you seeking to listen to the voice of your good shepherd as he speaks through his word and through his spirit on a regular basis?

And are you listening to him because you love him? You trust him? You know that his way is right. His way is best even if it's hard.

You know the only way anybody can live with confidence and certainty in our uncertain times is to humbly admit we can't do it on our own.

We are spiritually helpless like sheep and we really are totally dependent on our shepherd God, our shepherd Lord to give us wisdom.

[24 : 33] to guide us in the right way. To help us stay on the right path in life. Now if God has shown you that your problem is not that you're a weak Christian it's just you're not a Christian well you need to admit that and thank God for making that clear to you.

And the way you should respond is to don't argue but to humble yourself, admit your need, turn from your sin, repent, change your mind about how you're living and put your trust in Jesus as your Savior.

Call upon Him to save you. I want us to look at one more thing quickly that will also give us certainty. Look at this, number three.

If we're going to find certainty for uncertain times in Psalm 23, we must learn to enjoy and be content in our relationship with God. Now think about what that's saying.

The Lord is my shepherd with an emphasis on I shall not want. I think Chuck Swindoll does a good job of explaining this point. Look at it. He says the key thought is this, because the Lord is my shepherd I shall lack nothing.

[25 : 49] Some of you have a translation that says the Lord is my shepherd I shall lack nothing. Swindoll says no uncertainty should frighten me because the Lord is my shepherd. Look at what he says.

I shall not lack rest or provision. Why? He makes me to lie down in green pastures. I shall not lack peace. Why? He leads me beside quiet waters.

I shall not lack restoration or encouragement when I faint, fail, or fall. Why? He restores my soul. I shall not lack guidance or fellowship.

Why? He guides me in the paths of righteousness. I shall not lack courage when my way is dark. Why? Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil for you are with me.

I shall not lack companionship. Why? You are with me. Can you honestly say things like that? Can you honestly say that you have come to the point in your relationship with the Lord that you enjoy Him?

[26 : 59] You know Him. You love Him. You enjoy Him. And you are content with the things He has provided for you.

Now we're going to be looking at the many ways God provides for us as we go on in this series. But the main question now is does your personal relationship with the Lord bring you joy and contentment?

Now I am not asking if you're finding joy and contentment in the things that God gives you. We're talking about are you finding joy and contentment in God as your Heavenly Father and in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord?

Just about every Sunday my sons daughters-in-law and grandchildren come to our house for lunch. Lisa and I we get a lot of joy and contentment by just having them with us like that.

It has nothing to do with what they do because they don't do a doggone thing but come and eat our food. Our joy comes from spending time with them.

[28 : 28] We are content to know them and love them and experience their love and just share life with them. Well that's how the Lord wants us to enjoy and be content with Him.

And when that does happen we will be able to say like David because the Lord is my shepherd I have all that I need.

Let's pray together. Lord show us now how you want us to respond. Show us as Christians Lord if people in this room say I do enjoy my relationship with you.

I am content in having you and what you provide. affirm them their God. Just draw them close to you and affirm that kind of love and commitment and contentment.

But Lord if that's not true for Christians convict them of their failure to seek joy in you and be content in knowing you and having what you provide.

[29 : 58] help them dear God to confess their selfishness or any kind of specific sin that's keeping them from enjoying you.

Show them how they need to change some things in their lives. And Lord if there are people in this room who are not believers believers don't let them rest easy till they turn from their sin and trust Jesus.

In fact right now God we pray that you will just overwhelm them with brokenness over their sin heartfelt repentance and cause them their God to call upon Jesus to save them to want that and surrender their lives to him.

With every head bowed and every eye closed listen to the Lord and just obey him. It'll just be a time of your personal commitment so that you can leave here knowing the Lord is my shepherd.