

I Will Not Lack Refuge

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[0 : 00] My shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul.

He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his namesake. Yea, 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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall chase me down all the days of my life. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Mighty God, grant to us peace and comfort by your spirit, also by your word. Allow us to be saturated with it and to take it in, to understand it, to truly apply it to our hearts and minds and lives in a way that emboldens us and gives us much peace.

[1 : 09] And to understand that you are giving and leaping upon us goodness and mercy. It chases us every day. And may we get that.

May we comprehend it. May we experience it. Really understand in a way, not only cognitively, but in every other way. Open our eyes, Father, to the beauty of this psalm, in particular, verse 4, that we're looking at.

Amen. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Scholars say that what he was probably talking about is in a certain place in Israel, in that land of Palestine, there were places where you would travel or have to travel a narrow path in order to get somewhere more quickly. You wouldn't take the road all the way around. You would pass through a place where on both sides there was a cliff. And it was a very, very narrow entrance.

It was much like a canyon. Quite tall. And in fact, it was so tall that at the bottom it was somewhat dark. It looked dark. And the shadow of death was in the precipice and the possibility of passing through death.

[2 : 39] Because it was there where wolves or wild animals could attack you easily. It was there where you could find your enemies waiting for you in an ambush to take your goods and to take your things that you were bringing with you to the other side.

That's why they often traveled in groups for protection. And so this shadow, the valley, the canyon of the shadow of death was a real thing.

And it was quite frightening. And yet he says, 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. The outline of Psalm 23 is, We look initially at the person of the shepherd profess. And then we see what the promise of the shepherd here has digressed. Psalm 23, 4 literally reads, Because I am my shepherd, the great I am, Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament, the God of now.

[3 : 50] I shall fear no evil, even though I'm walking through the valley of deep darkness. So Christian, here's the main point. You can be fearless in the face of evil because in the Lord you will not lack any refuge for protection.

So let's look at two things here. The fact of fear and the foundation for fearlessness. The fact of fear. Obviously there are occasions when we will be afraid.

Legitimate. Sickness looming about. Threats of violence. Thieves. There are many occasions.

There are many occasions, many things. And our country, for a very, very long time, has been in a position of relative peace. Where we haven't had to fear much.

And here, they were afraid. There are times when they had legitimate fear. There are times when we have legitimate fear. And the word fear here in the Hebrew means terror or dread or dismay or

anguish or trembling or horror.

[5 : 01] Or to shake or to quake. Yeah. Sometimes fear can drive you that way. Where you're so afraid you literally shake.

Shaking in your boots. Fear is an emotion that God has given to us. Because in its proper context, it's a safety valve. You know, those who have a brain dysfunction.

Who do not, literally cannot fear. Cannot feel the fear in them. They don't have the emotion of fear. They're clueless as to what's before them.

What could possibly harm them. Because that emotion is there to help safeguard our lives. They just don't feel it. Which is rather odd.

Nevertheless, there are some people who have that. And yet, God has put that in us. As a safety valve. To keep us from danger. It alerts us to the dangers.

[5 : 59] Even in relationships. You know, if we have a fear. If our child is fearful of somebody. We ought not to ignore it. Because maybe they're sensing something going on.

One important and necessary fear, of course, that scripture tells us is the fear of God. But it's the fear, revere of God. Yeah, he is a great God whom we ought to fear because of what he can do. He's a great God that we ought to have, you know, be terrified of for a great reason. And for those of us who know him and trust in the Lord, you know, we can be terrified and yet at the same time revere him greatly.

But wrongly expressed, fear can be perverted by fearing the things that God forbids to fear. You know, there are things that he tells us we ought not to fear.

Or by failing to follow God's word because of sinful fear. You know, not to do what he wants us to do. Not to complete what he calls us to do because we are afraid.

[7 : 11] Those are the types of fear that can be perverted. But here what we find is David speaks about the fact and the reality of fear. He says, even though.

Yeah. We can't ignore it. And by the way, it is not sinful always to be afraid. I've had people counsel me with great intentions.

But very bad advice that I ought not to or people ought not to ever fear anything. It's ludicrous. I'll tell you, if a big black bear, a big brown bear, a big grizzly bear enters my house, I'm going to be afraid.

Don't tell me it's a sin to be afraid of this thing. You know, if one is hit with an illness, you know, if I'm hit with an illness and receive bad news, you know, there's that twinge of fear.

That's not sinful. But he says, you know, David, the beauty of the Psalms is it gives us a reality check. It doesn't ignore life.

[8 : 17] It doesn't tell us that we ought to be happy clappy all the time. About everything that happens. You know, like the old, when they come out in the 80s or 90s, that children's version.

And I was privileged to have to suffer through it. Barney, you ever see that purple dinosaur? The goofy dinosaur. He was always happy about everything.

You know, that's how Christians are supposed to be, right? It's ludicrous. The Bible doesn't call us to that. The Bible, especially in the Psalms, tells us and gives us a variety of situations and instructs how we ought to feel about those things.

There are things where we ought to be ecstatic. There are other things where we ought to be angry. And there are things about which we ought to be fearful. And so David says that even though he's realistic, he sees things truthfully, he can attest to the fact that the shepherding situation can bring about hair-raising experiences.

Read 1 Samuel 17, for example. You look at David, you know, to go out and confront Goliath. I doubt seriously that he went out there without any twinge of fear.

[9 : 29] He probably was concerned, very concerned, about this big giant who was the hero of the Philistines. Or like the bear, or like the lion, or whatever.

He had times to fear. The thing of it is, is Dr. John Maxwell, the leadership guru in the Christian world, often says is feel the fear and do it anyway. Do what is right.

Follow through. And yet here he's talking about walking through a narrow, deep crevice or valley or canyon that could easily invite attacks from thieves or enemies or wild beasts.

And so as a good shepherd that David would become for a while as king, he remained with his sheep no matter what the danger might be. And that is exactly what good shepherds do.

They stay with the sheep. They don't run away. Good pastors, good shepherds, good elders stay with the sheep in spite of the fear that they feel.

[10:32] Even though David recognizes that life is not grassy green meadows all the time by quiet waters, there are some very real dark canyons in life.

That someday when you confront a situation and you are afraid. You have no need to truly fear. For a reason. Even though, it's not to be understood as a possibility, but rather even though speaks of something that you will someday encounter something that you fear.

You can't promise yourself that you will be immune to trouble, trials, temptations or travesties. You always prepare for the worst, but you hope and expect the best.

Even though, here David is declaring his ability to distinguish between the variables of life and the constancy of the Lord. Major comparison.

[11:32] As long as our eyes are on the Lord, we're in good shape. But when our eyes are focused on the constantly changing circumstances, especially right now where we are in a social hurricane, tornadoes popping up all over the place, surround us.

When we are focused on that and that alone, we're in deep trouble. So he passes through these unknowns, these dark canyons, and he calls it the walk.

In the Hebrew, the walk was a way of life. This is his way of life. His way of life is to walk through those valleys. It's our progression of life. It's not static. If that were the case, we'd be dead.

But neither is it a panicked run because David walks through it. So what does David walk through? He says the valley of the shadow of death.

And it means death's shadow. It's life's dark moments, which include death or the threat of death.

For David, several places where there were more direct routes you could take through the tall canyons, these canyons were places that were rather scary.

[12:49] But in the midst of this frightening walk, what's his attitude? What's his reaction? He looks first not at what we can see here, not at what he does not say.

He does not say, I will not fear. I'll leave it at that. Because I'm brave. I'm okay. I can handle it.

Which, by the way, being brave or courageous has nothing to do with fear.

Right? What does he say? I will fear no evil. I will fear no evil. The idea of this no evil is anything that could injure or endanger him.

It's not necessarily talking about a moral evil and wickedness. What he's talking about, the kind of evil that comes upon people that could kill or maim or hurt or injure.

Endanger him, his livelihood are those over whom he's responsible. He says, I will fear no evil. It's not a careless, irresponsible, reckless abandon.

[13:56] This is controlled focused. This is determined courage. But in this situation, he says, I will fear no evil. And he tells us why.

He doesn't say, I'm a fearless person. He doesn't say that. Because I have everything under control. No, he doesn't say that. Because I'm so brave and courageous and wonderful.

No, he doesn't say that either. The psalmist brings us now to the foundation of fearlessness. You, God, are my refuge. That's the foundation for fearlessness.

Because you are my refuge, I will lack fear when it comes to evil. And there are three things that give David the basis for this. What are they? First of all, God's presence.

His presence. Secondly, his rod. His rod. And thirdly, his staff. You can be free from the fear of bad things or evil because of God's presence.

[15:00] You know, up to this point, verses one through three, Paul's focus has spoken about God. He. He's talking about the Lord. About him.

But now he switches gears. He now talks to the Lord. He says, you. Why is it that he shifts like that? Well, the shift in language tells us that from here on, the psalm is decidedly personal. It's intimate.

It's not just some ethereal thing. It's not just some theory that he proposes.

This is a real thing that he's experienced and he knows and he speaks out of a heart and out of experience. Lord, you are my refuge.

So when in the status of this life, where in his experiences, does this lacking of fear, fearing evil take place? Well, it occurred in the middle of the shadow of death.

[16:01] Isaiah 43 reminds us. Verse two is when you pass through the waters, I will be with you. The Lord says and through the rivers, they will not overflow you.

And you walk through the fire, you will not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. Why? Because the Lord is his refuge.

What does death ultimately mean for us as believers? Well, it transports us into some place in the very intimate presence of God. Notice it is not the strength and presence of the sheep that alleviates the fear.

But it's the firm grasp of the person in the presence of God that alleviates fear. It's not that we have a bunch of sheep around us and they're going to protect us. But rather that we have the great shepherd who is here with us.

Who does that? You see, you can be free from the fear of evil because of God's rod. As you probably know, and I've mentioned this in the past, God's rod, the rod had to do with many different things.

[17:12] It could be a scepter. It could be a symbol of Israel. It could be a symbol of tribes. It could be a symbol of authority. But the rod was literally, you would find an oak tree that was not very tall.

And you would dig it up and you'd pull it out. And the ball, where the roots come from, there's like a ball there. They would pull it up and they'd trim it so that it would be about 12 to 15, 16 inches long with the ball there.

And you'd sand away or cut away the roots coming out from the spawn. You know how oak is. If you work with oak, I've seen oak. It's tough. It's hard wood.

Really hard wood. And they would take it, you know, sand it, smooth it, oil it, and do whatever they would do. And they would take at the top of that rod, this, you know, the pole part, the staff part.

They would drill a hole and then put leather and then hang it on their belt. So that any time there was some enemy that would come around, like wolves or lions, tigers or bears or whatever, they'd pull it out and it was a weapon.

[18:24] And you get clunked with something like that and, you know, it's a pretty formidable weapon. That was a rod. And shepherds would use it, not against the sheep, but shepherds would use it to protect the sheep.

They would use it against the enemies. And so it was a symbol of protection. God's rod serves to protect us.

The shepherd king guards and protect us from all of his and our enemies. We have many promises in the scripture, like Psalm 34, 7.

The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear him and he delivers them. It was also used, interestingly enough, to count sheep.

Because as the shepherd would take his sheep out to graze, then it was time for them to come back. He would prod them with the rod as well as the staff.

[19:24] And he'd prod them, you know, if they would go off. And they would follow him. And then he would stand there where the corral was, you know, often made of bushes or rocks or sticks or logs or whatever they could, to keep the sheep in there.

The shepherd, he himself would be the gate. Where he would sit in the gate or lie in the gate. And they wouldn't cross over him. And as they came in, he would count. One, two, three, four.

And we see that in Leviticus 27. Where the sheep pass under a rod. And he would touch each one, showing how close and careful that relationship was. You can see that little sheep being tapped on the back by the shepherd.

Hey, he noticed me. But it was also to prod the sheep. You know, when one strayed, it would be used to motivate him, bring him back.

Which is what the word of God is sometimes spoken of as the rod. Such as in Isaiah 41.4, it brings us back. Corrects us. But thirdly, we can be free from the fear of evil because of God's staff.

[20:39] That staff is that long, crooked stick. It was the one that we see, little Bo Peep. You know, she has that staff. Mary had a little lamb and may have had a staff.

That tall thing, you know, that was a crook. That, by the way, was a symbol of Israel. And it was also a symbol of the great shepherd, God, who was king.

That was the emblem that they used of God's staff. In Exodus 21, we see this staff is used for support. They didn't use cane.

They used a staff. You know, when you're elderly and you need to get around her, you used a staff. It also refers to God's spirit. God's spirit is called a staff.

God's spirit is used for support. Because sometimes when sheep would get out there and they'd fall over, trip over, or they're off to the side, or in the ditch, you know, the shepherd would take the staff and, you know, grab it around the neck and pull the sheep up.

[21 : 37] It's kind of a rescue thing. It's used for guidance. It was a symbol of guidance. the Lord does guide and direct us it was also used for rescue and so his rod of protection and his staff for guidance are what keep us from being overcome by fear they comfort us are you afraid?

God has his rod I would rather be in the hands of God who comes against our enemies and his enemies than to try to bring it about ourselves because his vengeance is far greater he's far more just than we are are you afraid?

you need comfort? well his staff is also there for you he guides you he's there to correct you he's to instruct you to comfort you he's there as his spirit to lead you to give you great comfort yes even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil why?

because you the great shepherd oh Lord God are with me and your rod and your staff will comfort me father grant to us much comfort and peace during this time of turmoil while the vast majority of the people such as ourselves are living still going about our lives and living in peace and we're constantly our eyes and focus is constantly towards those who are creating all kinds of challenges help us help us not to focus on them or what's going on in those major cities but help us to focus on you oh Lord the great shepherd our great shepherd that we have no need to fear evil because you are with us comfort us father and bring about the reality of your rod and bring about the reality of your staff to comfort us and then Lord for those who have lost loved ones we pray for your mighty comfort and peace and grace to be with each and every one for we ask these things in the precious name of Christ our shepherd amen to be with