

## Session 5

January 3, 2021

### OVERCOMING WORRY

#### Psalm 23:1-6

Jesus spent a portion of the Sermon on the Mount encouraging people to stop worrying about food, and clothing, and what tomorrow holds. His treatise begins with the words, “Do not worry about your life...” (see Matt. 6:25ff.) because the Heavenly Father already knows what we need. But as it is with so many things in life, that is far easier said than done! With all of the pressures of life, and the steady stream of uncertainties that we face, worry seems to be the first thing we do.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm is a source of comfort in many different ways. For this week, the lesson focuses specifically on overcoming worry. In these brief verses, David was encouraged by three different aspects of God’s care.

**We need not worry...we have God’s provision (vv. 1-3).** I always picture David penning this psalm while still a shepherd. In my mind, I see him watching over his father Jesse’s sheep, confident that they have everything they need. He is their shepherd. Suddenly he is startled with the thought...the sheep have a shepherd. But what about *him*? Who is *his* shepherd? “Ahh,” he thinks... “the Lord is my shepherd. And because the Lord is my shepherd, I have everything I need” (v. 1). The green pastures and still waters of verse 2 depict peace and tranquility from a sheep’s perspective. Green grass is a sheep’s delight, as well as a shepherd’s. The still waters pose no threat. They are clear and quiet. *He restoreth my soul* (v. 3) is literally “gives life back to my soul.” This can refer to the soul that has wandered—as sheep are prone to do—into sin, or can refer to giving a “second wind” to the soul that is wearied or anxious from the difficulties of even a committed life. The *paths of righteousness* (v. 3) are not slippery slopes with dangerous cutbacks, but smooth paths that are straight and comfortable. In every case the sheep of His pasture are free to live their lives in peace, because the Lord has provided *everything* needed. For reflection: *As a follower of Christ, you may not have had everything you wanted. But can you honestly say that you lacked anything that you truly needed?*

**We need not worry...we have God’s protection (vv. 4-5).** The paths of righteousness (v. 3) are contrasted here with the valley of death (v. 5) as David transitions from the Good Shepherd’s *provision* to His *protection*. This represents the shepherd’s second great obligation. Not only must the flock be *fed*, but the flock must be *safe*. People are no different. Worries about personal provisions like food are compounded by worries of personal safety. David knew the flock was a tempting target to the predator and the thief. His qualifications to take on Goliath were bolstered by his ability to protect his father’s sheep from attack (see 1 Sam. 17:34-36). His very presence guarantees security. The *rod* and *staff* should not be allegorized (or “spiritualized”) as some commentators do, but rather seen for what they represent: the weapons needed to keep the flock safe from attack. How safe? Sufficiently safe to enjoy a full banquet while the enemy is lurking about and being held at bay (v. 5). In fact, David is so confident in the Lord’s protection, that he actually feels royally pampered and abundantly blessed, even as his enemies look on. For reflection: *With all the crises our nation now faces, can you identify areas where—in spite of it all—the Lord has protected you and pampered you to the point that your “cup runneth over?”*

**We need not worry...we have God's promises (v. 6).** The psalm concludes with one of the most glorious promises a believer has: an abundant life filled with God's goodness and mercy in the here and now, and His divine presence for all eternity. A thousand years after David penned those words, the Lord Jesus voiced them in His own personal promise: "In my Father's house are many mansions... I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2-3). For reflection: *Can you think of other promises made by the Lord Jesus that help us not to worry, even in the toughest times?*