

Worry Rx
Psalm 23
March 2, 2008

Because of Paul's heart attacks and surgery in January, we now have lots of these prescription bottles around. Neither one of us has ever taken much medication, but *now* there's the ACE inhibitor and the beta blocker, Plavix, and Vytarin and the baby aspirin. And more. These medications help protect against another cardiac event and keep Paul's blood flowing smoothly and pumping gently. They are designed to help with the physical challenges of heart disease. But what about the worry that it might happen again? What about the fear of catching a cold and having to cough? What about the anxiety about what is happening or not happening at work?

We've just heard what is perhaps the most familiar passage in the whole Bible read in three different versions: The King James, the New Living Translation, and the Message paraphrase. Many people, maybe most, associate this beautiful psalm with funerals. It is certainly a wonderful Scripture to read and hear in the midst of death and dying. But more importantly, it is a psalm to read and hear in the midst of life, because it sees daily living from a radically God-centered perspective. So today, as we think together about this familiar passage, I hope we can all hear it in a fresh way. I want you to hear it and apply it to your life today. At its most simple, the theme of Psalm 23 is trust and confidence in God. "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want." I have all that I need. I lack nothing.

Now, it's important to know that "the LORD" is not a title for God. That's how we hear it and think of it, I think. But the Hebrew word here is not a *title* for God, it is God's name, His personal name. It is the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush. Sometimes we say "Jehovah" or "Yahweh" to translate the Hebrew. In fact, one translation says: "*Yahweh* is my shepherd." Yahweh is *my* shepherd. It's personal.

Yahweh is my *shepherd*. Now, if God is my shepherd that makes me a sheep. I came to understand this in a very personal way a number of years ago, while attending a preaching conference at Montreat in North Carolina where the Presbyterian Church has a retreat center. We had a stretch of free time one afternoon and I was wandering around the campus of Montreat College, which is where the retreat center is located. In that chapel, off to the side, was a small prayer room. It is called the Ruth Bell Graham Prayer Room, named after the wife of Billy Graham. I guess maybe she gave the money for it. The room is simply adorned with words in beautiful calligraphy from a Scripture verse chosen by Mrs. Graham, words of Jesus: *Come unto me...* It was a simple room, except that it was sort of oval-shaped. Very simply furnished, with a small kneeler, a couple of simple chairs, a Bible or two.

But there was a large statue there in an alcove on the wall that caught my attention and as I reflected on it, it almost took my breath away. It was a shepherd, with a small sheep draped around his shoulders, and another tiny lamb curled up at his feet. That's a pretty common picture of a shepherd, the Good Shepherd. But in that moment, I saw something I'd never seen before. I realized that little lamb was me. I am that tiny, helpless lamb at the feet of the shepherd. I belong to Jesus, the Good Shepherd. And He cares for me, and He feeds me, and leads me, and guides me, and protects me. He will never leave me alone. And I need to remember that.

Maybe more than anything else, the 23rd Psalm is about remembering. Remembering who God is and who we are, remembering all that God has done for us: guidance and provision, protection and love, honor and blessing. I imagine David, surrounded by enemies, in a tight spot on the battlefield, as he often was, or perhaps Bathsheba, pacing the floors of the palace, thinking about the sins and sadnesses of her life, pausing to remember: Yahweh is my shepherd. Yahweh is my shepherd, I have all that I need. He leads me, He guides me, He protects me.

You see, the trouble is that so often in the midst of life, so often in the midst of struggles and trials and troubles of life, we get focused on the problems all around us, and we *forget* to remember. And instead of remembering, we worry. Any worriers in the house today? I know there are. I know that many of you come to church on Sunday with worries and fears and doubts and concerns. And as hard as we try sometimes, it's hard to just check them at the door. We come with worries about health – ours or a loved one's. We come with worries about our jobs or about school. We come burdened by difficult situations with friends or family members. Worried about difficult decisions we need to make. Worries about money: how will we pay all the bills this month? How will we afford that big car repair? Or if you don't worry about having *enough* money right now, you might worry about how to invest the money you have. Will I have enough to put my kids through college? Will there be enough when it's time to retire? Worry is one of the things that really get in the way of hearing God. Of seeing things from God's perspective, remembering God's promises about your situation.

If you find yourself asking, "God, where are you?" it's often due to worry. Because when you worry, you're not listening to God. When you worry, you're not looking to see how God is at work in your situation. What you need most of all when you're worried, when you feel like you're under attack, when you're confused about what to do, or uncertain of *how* you will be able to do what you know you *need* to do – what you need to remember most of all is this: "The LORD is my shepherd, I have all that I need." He makes me lie down. He leads me, He restores my soul, renews my strength, let's me catch my breath. He guides me, sends me in the right direction.

See, the problem is, we forget to remember. We forget to remember and rather than resting in the powerful knowledge that the LORD is my shepherd, instead I think that

I am in charge of my own life, and I want more.

I wander the dry, parched landscape of my world,

Swept along by the rushing torrents of all I have to do,

And my soul is troubled.

I do what I want, go my own way.

Even though I climb to the top of the heap and bask in the glory of "success" and popularity,

I am filled with fear, for I am all alone, with no one to comfort me.

Or so it seems. But even in the presence of these enemies of worry and anxiety and doubt, the Lord has prepared a table for me – a table where I taste the power of remembering. If you are worried about anything today, let me prescribe this for your worry sickness: *Remember*. When you find yourself starting to worry – stop and *remember*.

Read Psalm 23.