



He restores my soul

If you please, come in for another Fireside Chat

Good morning Brothers and Sisters,

It is still cold this morning. It was 37° early, 45° now, and going to about 54° this evening. We continue about 20° below normal, still dropping to 34° tonight. Much more global warming and we will all freeze to death. I know, I know. I'm too stupid to understand the complicated intricacies of climate change. But, just hang in there for a short while because it will soon warm up. I'm hoping we don't shoot right past spring and into summer. I love spring.

As the temperatures rise across the nation, so do tempers. I would have thought that relaxation of mitigation restraints would have made people happy. Now we are divided, once again, into two camps: those who are wary about opening the country and those who are ready to explode out of their restraints. The one side wishes to exercise caution and the other side to throw it to the wind. Instead of drawing the nation together, Covid 19 seems to present another cause for vitriolic rhetoric and division. We can't find a middle ground, probably because post-modern philosophy doesn't call for finding one. 24/7 news, news editing, and news creating, all the more when ideologically driven, magnifies everything. It is getting so bad I am thinking about interrupting our fireside chats with an op-ed. I don't know. I don't feel like it. It wouldn't be encouraging, but maybe it would be useful.

If we need encouragement Psalm 23 is as good a place to look as any in the Bible if, of course, we can get past the familiarity we have with it, relate to the imagery, and see its application to our present distress. We have considered thus far:

The Lord is 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 name's sake.

We have talked about following the Shepherd; green pastures and quiet waters; and bringing glory to God by following the Shepherd for "His name's sake." The only thing we have not considered in the passage is the restored soul.

A restored soul probably has a dual meaning. By following the Shepherd we shall be refreshed in this life. We will find, if not comfort in our distress, acceptance of our circumstances. Paul wrote, "I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need (Phil 4:12)." I don't think I need to recount for you the sufferings that Paul endured (see 2Cor. 11:22-28), besides the thorn in the flesh that the Lord would not remove. Paul knew suffering. God told him His grace was sufficient and for Paul it was.

The restored soul has another meaning: Redemption. We are redeemed by the blood of Christ. We have our sins remitted. We have hope, the "anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast (Heb. 6:19)" confirmed by "two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie (Heb. 6:18)," His word and His oath. Perhaps in troubled times we need to remind ourselves that this world was never to be an easy place to live and we were not designed to live here forever. Death is a certainty.

From the Warren Christian Apologetics Center April Newsletter, Charles Pugh reminded his readers of C. S. Lewis's thoughts on the threat of death. Lewis addressed the nation of Great Britain during the London bombings by the Nazis in World War II when he became the second-most recognized voice in the nation, next only to Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and during the rise of the nuclear threat of the cold war era. A converted atheist who became arguably the world's greatest Christian apologist in the twentieth century, Lewis wrote:

What does war (you can substitute for war the atomic bomb or Covid 19 if you wish) do to death? It certainly does not make it more frequent: 100 per cent of us die, and the percentage cannot be increased....Does it increase our chances of painful death? I doubt it. Does it decrease our chances of dying at peace with God? I cannot believe it.

In other words, do not let us begin by exaggerating the novelty of our situation... you and all who you love were already sentenced to death before the atomic bomb was invented (Covid 19 was set loose); and quite a high percentage of us were going to die in unpleasant ways (cancer, as an example.). [We] have added just one more chance of painful and premature death to a world which already bristled with such chances and in which death itself was not a chance at all, but a certainty. (*Present Concerns: Essays by C. S. Lewis*)

Perhaps these are not uplifting thoughts, but they are real. No matter how much we try to throw up protections around ourselves; try to avoid pain and suffering; try to secure ourselves and all whom we love from hardships, there is no avoiding them. Yet, we do take comfort in remembering the hope we have in Jesus. That, indeed, restores the soul.

If nothing else Covid 19 has provided us with a reality check. Before the virus struck we were sailing along in pretty good shape. Record employment. Record low unemployment. Increasing wages. Soaring stock market and fattened retirement accounts. Grocery shelves that were never empty, great technological advances to make life easier and more convenient, and an infinite array of ways to amuse ourselves. For the most part life was good, or so it seemed. As with most of our pursuits in life, they are illusory. Then, the big illusion crashed. An unexpected, invisible, and mortal enemy appeared and over night life was turned upside down and inside out. Death threatened all around and the future loomed uncertain. If we had any sense of security from our worldly circumstances, it mostly vanished.

What has happened (I think it has happened; I hope has happened) is that more have turned to God; more have turned more sincerely and intensely to God, more have seen that they must depend on God. When we turn to Him; when we depend on Him, all things look differently and all things become better. Sometimes the circumstances don't change, but we change the way we look at the circumstances; and that makes all the difference. We focus on green pastures and peaceful waters, the simple things of life that God grants to everyone who will look for them. He grants us spiritual grasses that nourish and spiritual water that gives life, also available to anyone who will reach out and take them. He sets before us life or death and allows us to choose. He restores our souls, both now and forever. Let's heed the psalmist:

I will hear what God the Lord will speak, for He will speak peace to His people and to His saints; but let them not turn back to folly (Ps 85:8).