

## A Prayer of Declaration

### Psalm 23

Richard Tow 01.17.16

Yesterday, President Obama signed an executive order to release \$ 100 billion to Iran.<sup>1</sup> This comes after Iran humiliated ten American sailors on international television<sup>2</sup> and launched a ballistic missile in violation of international law last month.<sup>3</sup> But the Iranian Nuclear agreement is finalized and leaders are now saying “peace and safety” as a result.<sup>4</sup> Iran’s president said that deal is a “golden page” in Iranian history and “the only people unhappy were the ‘warmongers’ and ‘Zionists.’”<sup>5</sup> But will all this bring stability to the Middle East or will it simply finance more trouble there?

We have wars and rumors of wars going on around us. North Korea set off a hydrogen bomb Jan., 6<sup>th</sup>.<sup>6</sup> America responded with a display B52 power in the Korean Peninsula. Confrontation with China continues. Last month China accused America of “serious military provocation” when one of our B-52s flew near disputed territory in the South China Seas.<sup>7</sup> In short, the political environment of the world is very unstable, as are the financial markets.

Friday ended the worst 10-day start of a year in the history of the stock market.<sup>8</sup> Low oil prices are an indication of low energy demand which is an indication of a slowing down of the world markets.

So the question on everyone’s mind is what happens now? Where is all this headed and how does it affect me and my family? Nobody knows the details that answer that question. But I can give you a biblical basis for dealing with it.

What can you expect in 2016? You can expect:

### **I. To have all your needs met!**

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<sup>1</sup> George Jahn and Bradly Klapper, “Iran Has Met Nuclear Deal Obligations, Atomic Agency Chief Says,” Associated Press. Accessed 1/16/16 at <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/iranian-us-foreign-minister-focus-clinching-nuclear-deal-36329606>.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Starr and Tom Lobianco, “American sailors told by Iranian captors to ‘act happy,’” CNN. Accessed 1/16/16 at <http://www.cnn.com/2016/01/15/politics/iran-sailors-act-happy/>.

<sup>3</sup> The Tower.org staff, “Iran Launches Another Ballistic Missile, Violating UN Security Council Resolutions.” Accessed 1/16/16 at <http://www.thetower.org/2660-iran-launches-another-ballistic-missile-violating-multiple-un-security-council-resolutions/>.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Thess. 5:3. John Kerry declared, “Today marks the first day of a safer world....” (Jahn and Klapper article).

<sup>5</sup> Phil Helsel and Paul Goldman, “Iran’s President Rouhani Calls Nuclear Deal a ‘Golden Page’ in History,” Associate Press. Accessed 1/17/16 at <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/iran-nuclear-talks/iran-s-president-rouhani-calls-nuclear-deal-turning-point-economy-n498136>.

<sup>6</sup> Tony Munroe and Hideyuki, “North Korea says peace treaty, halt to exercises, would end nuclear tests,” Reuters. Accessed 1/16/16 at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-nuclear-usa-idUSKCN0UT201>.

<sup>7</sup> Fergus Ryan, “South China Sea: US bomber angers Beijing with Spratly islands flypast, The Guardian. Accessed 1/16/16 at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/19/south-china-sea-us-bomber-angers-beijing-with-spratly-islands-flypast>.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Adinolfi and Barbari Kollmyer, “US. Stocks post worst 10-day start to a year in history, *Marketwatch*, published Jan. 15, 2016 and accessed 1-16-16 at <http://www.marketwatch.com/story/dow-set-for-triple-digit-drop-as-oil-breaks-under-30-2016-01-15>.

Ps 23:1 *“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”*<sup>9</sup> That was David’s declaration. That was his expression of confidence in the Lord. David himself had been a shepherd. He had a shepherd’s heart. He took care of his sheep. He led them into green pastures. He made sure they were ok-- because they were his sheep. When a bear attacked those sheep, David rose up and defended them. When a lion sought to devour them, David protected them. David was there for them. And David knew that Jehovah is a much more faithful shepherd than he could ever be. If he was that protective and caring over his sheep, how much more God would be over His people. So David begins with the statement. *“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”*

The Hebrew word translated “want” means “to lack, to be without, to decrease, to be lacking, to have a need.”<sup>10</sup> I will not be without. I will not be decreased or diminished. My needs will be met.

The Living Bible says, *“Because the LORD is my Shepherd, I have everything I need.”* Phil. 4:19 *“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”* God Himself is the supplier. Our confidence in a good future does not stand on the shifting sand of society, but on the Rock, Jesus Christ. He is the Good Shepherd. Everything that I share with you is only true because, *“The LORD is my shepherd.”*

God told the prophet, Isaiah, *“Say to the righteous that it shall be well with them, For they shall eat the fruit of their doings. 11 Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, For the reward of his hands shall be given him”* (Isa 3:10-11). That’s what I’m doing this morning. I’m saying to God followers, *“it shall be well”* for you. God will take care of you.

He supplied manna in the wilderness and brought forth water out of a rock.<sup>11</sup> In another impossible situation, Jesus fed 5000 with only two fishes and five loaves.<sup>12</sup>

Turn with me to 1 Kings 17 and let’s see how this works. King Ahab and Jezebel have led Israel into idolatry and judgement. God has brought a draught on the land. It’s a financial disaster. It’s affecting everything. 1 Kings 16:33 says, *“Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.”*

But watch how God took care of Elijah. First He sent him to the Brook Cherith and had ravens feed him. 1 Kings 17:6 says, *“The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook.”* Not exactly a five-star hotel; but Elijah had all his needs met. Who would have ever come up with that survival strategy? Oh, yea, just get ravens to feed you! God says, *“For I know the plans I have for you...plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”* (Jer. 29:11 NIV). God wants somebody here to hear that. If you will abide faithful to Him, beyond question, He will abide faithful to you! In 2016 you will have everything you need.

Do you remember that the brook dried up? It was a good thing that Elijah’s faith was in the Lord, and not in the Brook. Eventually the Brook failed him; but the Lord did not. When the Brook dried up, God just opened up a new means of supply. Don’t panic if a brook dries up;

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<sup>9</sup> All Scripture quotes are in New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>10</sup> OT:2637 (from The Online Bible Thayer’s Greek Lexicon and Brown Driver & Briggs Hebrew Lexicon, Copyright (c)1993, Woodside Bible Fellowship, Ontario, Canada. Licensed from the Institute for Creation Research.)

<sup>11</sup> Deut. 8:15-16

<sup>12</sup> Matt. 14:19-20.

they do that at times. But the supply is not the brook; the supply is God Himself. He supplies out of His riches in glory.

Look with me at this second source of supply. 1 Kings 17:8-16,

*“Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, 9 ‘Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.’ 10 So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, ‘Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink.’ 11 And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, ‘Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.’ 12 So she said, ‘As the LORD your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.’ 13 And Elijah said to her, ‘Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son. 14 For thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth.’” 15 So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days. 16 The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by Elijah.”*

Let me just make a few observations from that passage.

(1) This was an unexpected source of provision: a widow who has nothing. She needed help herself. She had no visible means of support. What kind of preacher takes a poor widow’s last dime? Elijah was that kind. Yet her obedience yielded far more than her investment. Notice, in verse 13 she had to first give, then receive. A mentality that says, “I don’t have very much so I can’t give anything” continues to not have very much. Prov. 11:24-25 sets forth the principle. *“There is one who scatters, yet increases more; And there is one who withholds more than is right, But it leads to poverty. 25 The generous soul will be made rich, And he who waters will also be watered himself.”* The way God’s provision came to the widow is that she obediently gave out of her own need.

(2) What did she have to do first—before she did anything else?

Verse 13 *“Do not fear....* If she hadn’t done that, she would have never gotten the rest of it done. Fear paralyzes faith. When fear and self-preservation dominates our thinking—faith cannot operate. God is big enough to take care of you in the days ahead, come what may! Ps 37:25 *“I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread.”*

(3) Faith is required throughout this story: obedient faith, the kind of faith that James talks about in his epistle, faith that does what the Lord says to do and trusts Him with the results.<sup>13</sup> It took faith for Elijah to leave the brook where the ravens had fed him. Zarephath was a seventy-five mile trip through the dessert probably on foot<sup>14</sup> to find a widow. What does he find when he arrives—a woman with almost nothing to give him.

It took faith for that widow to give away all that she had. Keep in mind, there was more at stake than her own welfare. She had a child to feed as well. By faith she baked that cake for

<sup>13</sup> James 2:14-26.

<sup>14</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *The Life of Elijah*, chapter 6 “Directed to Zarephath.” Accessed 1/16/16 at [http://www.pbministries.org/books/pink/Life\\_of\\_Elijah/elijah\\_06.htm](http://www.pbministries.org/books/pink/Life_of_Elijah/elijah_06.htm).

Elijah. And faith continued to be required on a daily basis. It was not just one act of faith; it was living by faith. Every time she drew out that flour and every time she poured that oil, she had to believe for its replenishment. This is why the Lord taught us to pray, *“Give us this day our daily bread.”* It was not a warehouse full of food that she was drawing from; but a bin of flour and a jar of oil.

This kind of faith does not look at the size of the jar and determine whether there will be enough. This kind of faith looks at the size of her God and says, “I know that He will take care of me.” *“I shall not want.”* Psalm 78 talks about Israel’s unbelief during their wilderness journey. They provoked God; they tempted Him. Ps 78:19 *“Yes, they spoke against God: They said, “Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?”* We might be ok in normal circumstances; but can God take care of us in this impossible situation; *“Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?”* Yes He can take care of us in any set of circumstances.

What can you expect in 2016?

I. You can expect and should expect to have all your needs met. You can expect:

## **II. To be refreshed and restored!**

Ps 23:2-3 *“He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. 3 He restores my soul....”*

What is going to be restored? *“my soul....”*—my inner man, my emotional strength, my vitality.

The picture is of sheep weary from their journey lying down in lush green pastures and drinking from a cool, refreshing stream. God will refresh you along the way.

In 2 Cor. 4:16 Paul wrote, *“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.”*

It’s not just that God will take care of our physical needs; He also takes care of our inner needs. He is the God of all comfort. He gives rest to the weary.<sup>15</sup> *“There remains therefore a rest for the people of God”* (Heb. 4:9).

Jesus gave this invitation in Matt. 11:28, *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*

There are three conditions in that passage.

(1) Come to Him. Don’t try to go it alone. *“Casting all your care on Him for He cares for you.”* We’ve talked a lot about prayer. We get the refreshing as we commune with Him. The world offers all kinds of substitutes: alcohol, drugs, entertainment, gambling, etc. All those offer temporary stress relief; but none bring long-term rest and satisfaction. None restores the soul in a healthy way.

*“What a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry, everything to God in prayer. Oh what peace we often forfeit, Oh what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer.”*<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> 2 Cor. 1:3; Isaiah 41:31.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Scriven, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” *Hymns of Glorious Praise* (Gospel Publishing House, 1969) p. 403.

(2) Take His Yoke upon you. Come under His authority. Come into His service. *“He that waters will be watered.”*

(3) Learn from Him. He is meek and lowly. A mindset of humility is conducive to rest. Phil 4:6-7 *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”*

In 2016 He will lead you into “green” pastures—not barren ground. In 2016 He will lead you beside the “still” waters—not troubled waters.

Ps 103:1-2 *“Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! 2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits.”* Verse 5 *“Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”*

He refreshes and restores our souls.

What else can we anticipate in the days ahead? We can expect:

### **III. To be led in the right direction!**

Ps 23:4 *“He leads me in paths of righteousness....”*

(1) Notice He “leads” rather than “drives” us *in paths of righteousness*.

That’s why it’s important to follow. He won’t violate your will. He won’t make you follow Him in paths of righteousness. But He’s going where we need to go. If we follow Jesus we will wind up in the right place.

(2) I want to be led *in paths of righteousness*, don’t you?

There is something in the heart of a child of God that loves the things God loves and hates the things God hates. Regardless of the struggles we may have, down deep we want to live right—we want to please the Lord in all that we do. We don’t want to miss God!

(3) You don’t have to find the way; just follow Jesus. God has made it simple for us. Obey; follow the Good Shepherd.

Why does He lead us in the right direction? *“...for His name’s sake.”*

Not because we deserve it; but for the glory and honor of His name. God has put his reputation (His name) on the line. He will do it because He desires to do it. He will do it because He has chosen to do it. He will do it because He loves us and it will bring honor to His name to accomplish it.

Therefore, we can confidently expect Him to lead us in the right direction—not into temptation—but in paths of righteousness—not into destruction—but ultimately into glory forever and ever. Amen!

III. We can expect to be led in the right direction by our Shepherd. We can also expect:

### **IV. To be safe and protected!** wherever He leads.

Verse 4 *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death....”*

(1) Is that saying there will be no trials along the way?—no difficulties—no rough terrain?

No, sometimes to get to the green pastures in life, we have to walk through some valleys—to get to the mountain top, we may have to go down through some low places.

(2) But David says, “when life takes me there—*“I will not be afraid....”*

The Shepherd will not send me through that valley alone. He goes with me. He leads the way.

*“For You are with me....”* I don’t have to do this by myself!

He has promised in Heb 13:5 *“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”*

When the three Hebrew children were in the fiery furnace, they were not alone.

When Daniel was in the lion’s den he was not alone.

This is not a trouble-free life; but it is a victorious life.

(3) *Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”*

The rod is a club to beat off any attacking animals.

The staff is an emblem of support. Jacob leaned on his staff in old age. The shepherd used the staff to guide and direct the sheep.

IV. We can expect to be safe and protected under our Shepherd’s leadership. We can also expect:

#### **V. To enjoy abundant blessing!**

Ps 23:5 *“You prepare a table before me (a feast of good things) in the presence of my enemies.”*

(1) Our enemies are not flesh and blood—but spiritual wickedness in high places—evil spirits in the spiritual realm. Ephesians 6 tells us that. We have enemies; but *greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world.*<sup>17</sup>

Imagine the invisible realm where your enemies see you at this feasting table—they want to attack—but God has built a hedge around you—so they must stand at a distance and watch you enjoy yourself.

(2) Did you know that the Lord is always going ahead of you—to prepare good things for you to enjoy in life?

He already prepared 2016 for you. He has set some blessings in your path. He will make Himself known to you in some fresh, meaningful ways.

(3) How will your cup run over in 2016? The cup is neither half-empty or half- full; it is running over! The language here is language of abundance—Prepares a table, our cup runs over, our head is anointed with oil. There is more than enough.

V. Expect to enjoy abundant blessing. Also expect:

#### **VI. To be overtaken with goodness and mercy!**

Verse 6 *“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me....”*

(1) God is in pursuit to bless us. Those two hound dogs, Goodness and Mercy, track us down and overtake us. They’re going to find us in 2016.

The word translated *“follow”* in Ps 23:6 is *radaph*). It means to run after (usually with hostile intent; but of course not in this case). But that does say something about the intensity of the word. It’s not something that lingers behind. It pursues us and overtakes us with blessing.

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<sup>17</sup> 1 John 4:4

So God is ahead of us preparing a table—preparing good things. He is behind us—running after us with goodness and mercy. This is a good place to be.

(2) Too many of God's people expect to be overtaken with sorrow and misery, instead of goodness and mercy. The Devil works hard to convince sinners that everything is going to work out fine even though they don't serve God. And he works just as hard to convince God's people that nothing is going to work out. He works hard to undermine your faith and discourage your journey.

But David got a revelation, "*Surely (I mean it's going to happen) goodness and mercy will follow me all days of my life.*" (During my youth, in middle age, and in old age—all the days of my life.)

That's what God promises in Deut. 28:1-2.

*"Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. 2 And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God."*

Notice in this passage two concepts: (a) overtaken with blessing. You don't have to make it happen; God makes it happen (b) only one condition: obedience. God's condition always has been and always will be "Obedience." From the day He told Adam and Eve to stay away from a certain tree<sup>18</sup> and thereafter, obedience is the key. The difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is in the New, obedience is empowered by the grace of God.<sup>19</sup> The Holy Spirit indwells the believer and enables him to walk with the Lord.

What can we expect in 2016: We can expect:

VI. To be overtaken with goodness and mercy. And we expect:

### **VII. To enjoy fellowship with God and His people!**

*"...And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."*

(1) How valuable is that?

David considered it extremely valuable.

In Ps 65:4 he says to God, "*Blessed is the man You choose, And cause to approach You, That he may dwell in Your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, Of Your holy temple.*"

There is a satisfaction found in the house of the Lord that is found nowhere else. There are marvelous benefits enjoyed by those who gather the way we have this morning and worship God together.

Devil would love to deprive people of that: get them offended, get them isolated and separated from the presence of God and God's people. That's why the writer of Hebrews wrote, "*And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as you see the day approaching*" (Heb. 10:24-25).

(2) David considered this so important that he made it a priority in his life.

Ps 27:4 "*One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the*

<sup>18</sup> Gen. 2:16-17.

<sup>19</sup> Romans 6:14; 8:3-4.

*house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.”*

David loved corporate worship. He longed to be in the presence of God. He delighted himself in the Lord and in His house. And he expected to enjoy that all the days of his life.

Look into 2016 expecting to:

- I. To have all your needs met!
- II. To be refreshed and restored!
- III. To be led in the right direction!
- IV. To be safe and protected!
- V. To enjoy abundant blessing!
- VI. To be overtaken with goodness & mercy!
- VII. To enjoy fellowship with God & His people.

All of that is true for only one reason: *“The Lord is my shepherd....”* Is Jesus your shepherd? If not, then none of it is true for you. If so, all of it is true for you.

Learn how to use this word to encourage yourself in the Lord. Anytime you feel depressed; anytime you're anxious or fearful—make the same declaration David made.

*“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want....”* I plan to teach you various forms of prayer. One of those forms is Declaration. This is a Psalm of Declaration. During your prayer time, make this declaration over yourself and over your family.

We are going to proclaim this prayer. I want you to think of it as a declaration over your own life. I will say a sentence; then you will repeat it.

Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside the still waters.

3 He restores my soul;

He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.

4 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.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life;

And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.