

## PSALM 23:1

### INTRODUCTION

Last week we looked really at the opening words of this Psalm and placed them within the context of both the Old and New Testaments. We looked at how the shepherd theme was central to the teaching of the whole bible and in particular we looked at John 10 where Jesus calls himself the good shepherd who gives his life for the sheep.

We have discovered that the Lord is the shepherd of those who by repentance and faith have come into a living relationship with God. Now let me emphasise that point again before going any further into this Psalm. It is so important and so vital for understanding and benefiting from this Psalm that I have to ask again. Do you have a living and meaningful relationship with God through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ?

You see Christianity is not merely about knowing certain truths about God and Christ etc. the heart and core of the Christian's faith is that one is brought into a living relationship with Christ the Good Shepherd. In doing so we are brought into a living relationship with the Godhead, the father, Son and Holy Spirit. Do you know what I am talking about from experience or is your Christianity no more than a religion, a religion of rituals and of good works and certain moral standards? But true Christianity is about a relationship to Jesus Christ as our Shepherd and as a result we will have certain moral standards and we will do good works.

But those things must be as a consequence of our vital and living relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ who becomes our Good Shepherd. However if you do know the Good Shepherd personally then you will long in your heart to know him better (Philippians 3:10) and you will use the means of grace that God has established for knowing him better.

When you know the Good Shepherd then just like any human relationship that knowledge will grow and develop just like a marriage relationship. It becomes more mature and meaningful as our relationship grows. Now this is important for our failure to grow in the knowledge of the Lord means that the truths that flow from this Shepherd relationship will not be as beneficial as they should be.

### 1. THE IMPLICATIONS OF KNOWING THE SHEPHERD

**a) Satisfaction** – “I shall not be in want” or “we shall lack nothing.” The word translated ‘want’ really means what the word ‘want’ originally meant. It means that I will not be discontent with my lot. I will be satisfied with my lot in life because I know that Jesus is my Shepherd and looks after every one of my needs. Now this statement in the eyes of unbelievers seems to be ludicrous.

Our society is based on gaining more and discontentment lies at the heart of our society. Our advertising media plays on this sense of restlessness by enticing us to want more and more and better things. It seems that no one is content even those who claim they are content very often are only kidding themselves and their lifestyle soon displays that inward discontentment that is rife in human nature.

This society that we live in can suck us in as well so that even Christians can become very discontented people, so that we are always looking for more and are chasing after this craze or that one seeking that illusive contentment. Sometimes this discontentment is dressed up on spiritual terms so that we have Christians chasing this experience or that one but what is important is that every Christian should learn that God our Shepherd is where we find satisfaction, for he supplies all our needs, physical mental emotional and spiritual. Yes we know what the Psalm says we have quoted it often enough but do we really believe it, do our lives show our contentment?

How would you describe yourself? Would satisfied be one word you would use? More importantly is it a word that others would use of you.

Now we must remember that David's point here is not that God will grant us all our desires and wishes but that he will see to it that we will not be in need.

A shepherd looking after his sheep will do two things for his sheep. He will make sure that they have all that they need for a healthy existence. So he supplies them with food and water, security and treats them when they are sick. Secondly a shepherd will make sure that they don't get anything that will harm them. That's exactly what our good shepherd does for those of us who are his sheep.

And that is why only the Christian will find true satisfaction in life because it can only be found in the Good Shepherd in Christ alone.

Jesus as our Good Shepherd makes sure that all his true people have everything that is necessary for them to get to their final destination. This of course is heaven. He makes sure that nothing harmful will ultimately destroy us or ruin us.

If we know the Shepherd and are seeking to live close to him then we can be assured that we will never lack God's perfect supply for every genuine need. Now this is a great promise for we live in very uncertain days but in spite of our uncertain days we can be certain that God our Shepherd will supply all our needs. It is no wonder that we are told in Matthew 6:25-34 that we are not to worry about tomorrow because God will take care of the needs of tomorrow.

Yet if we are honest so often we do worry about tomorrow so often we are not satisfied or at least not as satisfied as should be; is the reason for this that we do not really in practise believe this wonderful promise that we shall not be in want. Is our relationship totally bringing us that satisfaction that we all crave? If not then perhaps we need to consider some other things that will help us to experience this satisfaction.

## 2. THE PATHWAY TO SATISFICATION

I have traced the Hebrew word for 'want' through the Old Testament and I think this will help us to understand the pathway to true satisfaction in God through Jesus Christ. Now I am assuming that we have taken that first step of coming to know Jesus Christ as our Good Shepherd. If we have then He is all we need if we are to have this satisfaction but there are certain things about this relationship that we need to consider.

It might be that some of these things are actually robbing you of the satisfaction of knowing in practise that the Lord is our Shepherd.

**i) Actively Obey The Shepherd (Psalm 34:9).** The word 'lacks nothing' is the same word used in this Psalm for I shall not be in 'want.' The idea of the word fear in Psalm 34 is not a fear of dread but it is one of awe and respect and it always implied obedience. You do not show awe or respect for God if you do not obey him.

So if we want to experience our Shepherd supplying all of our needs and if we want to enjoy satisfaction then we must be people who are serious about and are actively engaged in obedience. Now The Lord as far as I can see has not promised to supply every need of those who do not fear him or are actively disobedient to his word. In fact the very opposite is true, that the disobedient are not satisfied they do indeed have many wants and needs (Proverbs 13:25). Even as Christian people when we choose through disobedience to go our own way or when we fail to go the Lord's way, then what we find is dissatisfaction. However when we actively walk according

to God's ways and follow his leading as the Good Shepherd then what we find is that God showers upon us his gracious provision in order to provide for every one of our needs.

Now we have to realise that being disobedient to God might make you prosperous, it might bring a certain degree of happiness or at least, so it seems but it will never bring true satisfaction. However following of the Shepherd in active obedience might lead us to being less prosperous, it might lead to times of extreme difficulty but we can be assured that it will lead us to satisfaction for our satisfaction is not in things or people but ultimately in the Lord who is our Shepherd.

So often God does not provide for our perceived needs until we take that step of obedience. I can think of people worried about giving up their job and going to train for the ministry. Generally speaking there is no big pot of money sitting in their bank account put there by God to encourage them to obey. No! Often it is the very opposite lots of needs and little money but as that person obeys the Lord's call and goes to study at College God supplies every one of their needs. The amazing thing is that we so often find that when we obey the Lord we find God meeting our needs in an amazing ways. It is only as we are actively walking in obedience that we experience the Fatherly care of our Shepherd.

Disobedience is failing to trust our Shepherd, it is actively saying we know better than our Good Shepherd, it is actually saying I will look after myself you cannot be trusted. But the more we know this Shepherd and the more we know that he can be trusted then the more we will obey him and as a result we will experience sometimes in amazing ways his providential care of all our needs.

ii) **Allowing the Shepherd to meet our needs through others (Deuteronomy 15:7-8)** Now according to these verses the way that God meets our needs so that we are not in want is through his own people. God channels his provisions through other people. However it is always a hard lesson to learn to receive from others. In many ways we don't mind God providing for our needs and we don't even mind God using us to provide for the needs of others but we are often too proud to receive from others. It takes as much grace to receive as it does to give. We are by nature proud self-sufficient people. We do not like to think that we are dependant upon others, we value our independence and often the Lord needs to humble us in order to teach us that he will provide for us but his way of doing so is often through other believers.

Unless we all learn this lesson then we will not be satisfied, for we will always be seeking ways for supplying our own needs and being discontent when we find we are unable to do so. At times we will be surprised whom the Lord uses to provide for us. In my experience as in your own it's very seldom the wealthy, but it is often Christians that we might consider to be less well off than we are.

But the important thing is that we need to see others as one of the ways that God Shepherds us by caring for our needs. It is still God who is providing for us but he chooses to do it through others.

But of course we must not forget the other side and remember that each one of us who knows the Shepherd this evening must be willing to be used to supply the needs of others. For if we are not then the truth is that we will never find this satisfaction that we read about in this Psalm. God's way of shepherding us is to allow us to be used to shepherd others. The strange thing about this satisfaction is that you can't gain it by hoarding. In the mystery of God's ways the more you gather to yourself the less you are satisfied with it. Benjamin Franklin once said, "The more a man has, the more he wants. Instead of filling a vacuum, it makes one.

If it satisfies one want it doubles and triples want another way." The question is, are we willing to take some of what God has given to us and redistribute it to others around us and in other countries in our world? This is not only God's way of meeting the needs of others but it is also his

way of loosening greed's grip on our hearts. Listen to these Proverbs for they teach this truth so clearly (Proverb 11:24 and 28:27).

It's important if we are going to know the Shepherd exercising his care over us to learn humility so that we are able to receive from others as from the hand of God. Likewise we need to learn humility so that God can use us to help meet the needs of others. Our failure to receive and our failure to give are both the results of a heart that is full of pride. Therefore the only way to be satisfied and experience the truth of this Psalm is to both be willing to give and be willing to receive so that the needs of others are met and our own needs are met.

**iii) Allow The Shepherd To Meet our Needs His Way (1 Kings 17:8-24).** – Let me explain what I mean by drawing your attention to a remarkable story found in 1 Kings 17:8-24. The word translated 'want' in our Psalm is found in this story and it teaches us a very important lesson. The incident in Kings tells us that during a drought God directed Elijah the prophet to travel to Zarephath and find a widow who herself was almost destitute.

She had just enough flour and oil to bake one loaf of bread. Her plan it seems is to feed herself and her only son and then prepare to die of starvation. When Elijah arrives God commands him to tell the woman to make the bread for him (Elijah). When the woman explained her situation to Elijah she is given a wonderful promise (1 Kings 17:14). The word 'used up' is our word 'want' in the Psalm.

Now the point I want to make is that if you were in that poor woman's shoes would you have believed God? Come on be honest. If you were Elijah would you have delivered that message? What this woman is being asked to do goes against all logic. Yet Elijah was willing to let God provide for his needs through this poor woman and this woman was prepared to allow God to use her little to provide for the needs of others. The lesson is that God is not boxed in so that he has to supply our needs in ways that we would expect. Nor is God bound to use only those who have no needs to supply the needs of others.

If we had of been in this situation we would have reasoned as this woman at first did, I couldn't use this flour and oil for you this is all I have got. I need it and so does my son. But this remarkable widow found grace to obey God and as a consequence she found God's promise fulfilled in her life. God is creative in the way he provides for his people.

Don't box him in so that you think he can only meet your needs in certain ways or through certain people. God meets our needs his way sometimes using the most unlikely people and we also must be prepared to be used, even though we ourselves might think we have many needs. God is no man's debtor, He provides as he wants and uses whom he likes and the only way to find this real satisfaction that this Psalm is speaking about is found in:

- a) Actively obeying the Shepherd
- b) Allowing the Shepherd to meet our needs through others
- c) Allow ourselves to be used to meet the needs of others
- d) Allow the Shepherd to meet our needs his way.

Amen