

INI Hymns 521
Good Shepherd Sunday

Sermon 22-22
5/8/22

Psalm 23:1-3

*1 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."

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

What an amazing statement! "I SHALL NOT WANT," I shall not lack any good thing that I need for my life and salvation. That is a picture of perfect contentment. For a sheep to lie down in green pastures beside the still waters is an idyllic picture of someone who is completely satisfied and content with life. Is that kind of perfect contentment even possible in this world of sin and sorrow, turmoil and greed? That is what we want to explore today.

PERFECT CONTENTMENT - IS IT POSSIBLE?

King David is not just dreaming about some utopia. He is describing his own life and experience. He says for himself, "I shall not want." He's telling us, it's not only possible, he has it and is enjoying it! David says for himself, "He makes ME to lie down in green pastures; He leads ME beside the still waters." That is because he has the LORD, Jehovah, the God of the Universe as his Shepherd.

Wouldn't you like to have such a life of perfect contentment unafraid and untroubled by any worry or need? Well I have good news for you, you already have this life!

Are you a little skeptical of that statement? Are you thinking, "What do you mean? My life doesn't resemble what David is describing. My life is full of turmoil, stress and anxiety. 'I shall not want?' that hardly describes my life."

To that I would ask: Do you believe that Jesus is your Savior who died to take away your sins? I hope you all are saying, "Yes, of course I do." Then you have Jesus as your Lord and He is your Good Shepherd who is taking care of you just like He took care of King David. Let's just think about what that means that Jesus, the Lord Jehovah, is your Good Shepherd.

Today we honor our mothers. I can't think of any better example of what it means to have Jesus as your Good Shepherd. A loving mother is always attuned to the needs of her children. She puts their needs ahead of her own. To the best of her ability she gives them what is best for them and takes care of them, physically, emotionally and spiritually.

That is exactly what Jesus does for each and everyone of His sheep as our Good Shepherd. The one big difference is that the loving mother does that "To the best of her ability." There are times when a mother is not able to provide what her children need. She is only human. There are times when she may not know what is best for her children. She may have misguided thoughts about what is best for them, influenced by the world. And, because she is only human, she has a sinful and selfish nature as well which may neglect her children's needs. But none of that is true of our Good Shepherd. Jesus is the LORD, Jehovah the almighty God over all things. There is nothing He can't do for us, no need that He cannot provide. He is also perfect, which means He always knows and does exactly what is best for us.

So it is absolutely true, with the LORD as your Shepherd, you shall not want. You can have perfect contentment. But let's make sure we understand the word "want" as it is used here. That doesn't mean that you won't ever want or desire anything. That is the way we usually use the word want today. Little children learn that word very early. Walking through the store it's, "I want this or I want that." But this is the old English word which means to be lacking something. To be without food, or clothing or shelter is to be in want. I shall not want means I will not lack any good thing, physically, emotionally or spiritually. Our Shepherd takes perfect care of us and gives us exactly what we need.

Then why is there so much discontent in the world, not only among unbelievers but also among believers? That is because perfect care and perfect contentment are not the same thing. Perfect

contentment stems from perfect care but it is not an automatic result of perfect care. Contentment is a state of mind not a matter of reality. A person can have everything that is good and still not be content. As believers in Christ, we have Jesus as our Good Shepherd. He does love us and care for us perfectly, but we may not always recognize or trust that. We will enjoy perfect contentment only to the extent that we trust in Jesus' perfect care and know that whatever God ordains is good.

To have perfect contentment and say "I shall not want" doesn't mean you don't ever have any troubles or hardships in your life. It doesn't mean that everything will always be smooth and easy. Just look at King David's life. When all the army of Israel trembled at the sight of Goliath, David stepped forward to fight the giant without fear because He knew God was with Him. They all believed in the same God, but David trusted that God and was confident. David spent many years of his life running from King Saul who wanted to kill him. He was living in the wilderness and hiding in caves. He even went and lived among the Philistines, his enemies.

Would he have liked to have things different? Sure! Was he ever worried or afraid? Yes, he wrote about it in some of his Psalms, but he always turned to the Lord and put his trust in the LORD as his Shepherd. He knew God had anointed him to be the next king of Israel and he trusted that God would preserve his life and make him king. So, in spite of the many hardships, David could honestly say, "I shall not want" because the LORD is my Shepherd. Even while he was being chased by Saul's army, he could lie down in green pastures and drink of the still waters trusting in his Good Shepherd to protect him.

The Apostle Paul spoke of the same type of contentment in the face of trials in his letter to the Philippians 4:11-13. Paul was in prison and thanked the Philippians for sending some supplies to him. Then he said, "I am not saying this because I lack anything; in fact, I have learned to be content in any circumstances in which I find myself. I know what it is to live in humble circumstances, and I know what it is to have more than enough. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, while being full or hungry, while having plenty or not enough. I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me."

Paul says that he had "learned the secret of being content in any and every situation." What is that secret? Quite simply it is to know that the LORD is your Good Shepherd and truly trust that everything He does is good. Even when he was stoned, and beaten and thrown in prison, he knew that if God allowed it He would use it for his good. Did he enjoy it? No, of course not! But he knew that God was using those times of pain and suffering to keep him humble before God and that was for his eternal good.

Know that your Good Shepherd is taking care of you! Whether you have a lot or little, Jesus knows exactly what you need. He will never leave you or forsake you. He makes you to lie down in green pastures and beside the still waters. He truly does provide all our needs and will not forsake you. But most of all, "He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." Everything Jesus does for us relates to His care for our soul and our eternal welfare. He already laid down His life for His sheep to save us from death and hell. So He certainly will do whatever is needed to restore our soul and lead us in the path of righteousness. He will do all to keep us in the faith.

That is where our true contentment comes from, it is the peace of knowing our Savior is watching over our souls, and giving us His righteousness. It is the peace of knowing our forgiveness in Him, and that no evil shall befall us. St. Augustine, a well known theologian of the latter 4th century said of God, "*You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.*" That is really true. No one can find real peace and rest, true contentment until they rest in God. When our soul is well, everything is well. When we know our righteousness in Christ, we can be truly content and at peace to lie down in the green pastures of God's word and drink the refreshing waters of God's Grace.

The one who does not have the righteousness of Christ by faith, that is the unbeliever, will always be searching for something to fill the void in their soul. We too, may struggle with doubt! Then we can lose the peace and contentment of faith. When that happens, go back to the word and

know that your Good Shepherd does what he promises here - He does "Make me to lie down in green pastures" and He does "Lead me beside the still waters" of His word and restores our soul.

It is as Bob Kauflin wrote in his song, "It is well with my soul."

"When peace like a river attendeth my way - When sorrows like sea billows roll.
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, 'It is well, it is well with my soul.'

"Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate And has shed His own blood for my soul."

"My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought My sin, not in part, but the whole, Is nailed
to the cross, and I bear it no more (yes) Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul."
That is perfect contentment!

Amen.