

## 34. The Book of Psalms 23:1

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### *The Great Shepherd-Part 2*

a message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier

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This morning I want to draw your attention to Psalm 23.

Psalm 23 is the best known and most loved of all the psalms. Yet as Christians living in 21<sup>st</sup> century America—much of the significance behind this incredible psalm escapes us. The reason is because most of the biblical writers were farmers, ranchers, fishermen and shepherds who drew much of what they wrote about from their everyday occupations and surroundings.

Whereas most of us living in 21<sup>st</sup> century America are '*city-dwellers*' and as such we're totally unfamiliar with things like shepherding sheep, raising livestock, tending vineyards—and other things that were well-known to them.

We must therefore 'transplant' ourselves, if you will, into their cultural context and familiarize ourselves with their cultural surroundings if we are going to fully understand and assimilate everything that God wants us to understand in the pages of His Word—and that especially goes for Psalm 23!

Many commentators believe that David wrote this psalm later in life—no doubt drawing from his younger years as a shepherd watching over his father Jesse's sheep. But here David the shepherd, who became a king, is reflecting on—the King Who became a Shepherd!

While this psalm has a universal *appeal* (almost all who have heard it, love it), it doesn't have a universal *application*—because, unless a person can personalize the statement (as David did), "**The Lord is my Shepherd**"—he or she cannot claim the rest of the psalm as their own.

#### II. I shall not want—verse 1b

##### Psalm 23:1 (NKJV)

<sup>1</sup> **The Lord *is* my shepherd; I shall not want.**

Now knowing that David was a man after God's own heart—I have to believe that he is putting the emphasis on the word "**I**" rather than on the word "**want**." You see, becoming a Christian, a member of Jesus' flock, doesn't mean you will automatically be satisfied in life.

There are a lot of people who are Christians and yet are still "**wanting**" practically everything they see. Having Jesus as your Shepherd doesn't mean that all worldly cravings and desires simply *disappear*.

But what you need to realize is that—you only desire what you don't have. Your stomach only craves food when it's *empty*—when you're *full*, you're satisfied and there's no desire for anything more.

The reason, I believe, that David could make a statement like this was because—he was truly satisfied.

That's why the beginning part of verse 2 belongs with the end of verse 1—**"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures."**

Sheep will only lie down in green pastures when they're satisfied! You see, what David desired more than anything else in life he already had—the LORD! And that caused him to declare in Psalm 27:

**Psalm 27:4 (NKJV)**

<sup>4</sup> One *thing* I have desired of the Lord, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.

Many Christians today come along and put the emphasis on the word **"want."**

**"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want"**—why? *"Because the Lord is going to give me everything I want in life!"* Or in other words, the Lord is going to satisfy all their worldly wants and desires! Everything their heart desires they have been led to believe (through prosperity teachers) the Lord will give them.

You see, there are two entirely different mindsets at work here—two entirely different heart attitudes. Paul spoke about this in 1 Timothy 6 when he said—*"Some people look at God as a means of gain (a way to get rich), and others look at God as great gain!"* (1 Timothy 6:6-7)

The thing about it is—if you make material blessings the focus in your relationship with God— you'll never be satisfied. The reason is because the flesh is never satisfied and therefore will always be demanding more and more things, more and more stuff—because it gets bored easily and always has its 'eye' on something or someone else!

For a lot of Christians, the Lord might be their Shepherd—but they always seem to want more. That's because they are allowing the flesh and not the Spirit to control their life. But understand, the flesh is a voracious monster that's never satisfied no matter how much you feed it!

God said with regard to this kind of person—

**Isaiah 55:2–3 (NKJV)**

<sup>2</sup> Why do you spend money for *what is* not bread, And your wages for *what* does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat *what is* good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. <sup>3</sup> Incline your ear, and come to Me!...

**Only Jesus, the Good Shepherd, can satisfy that longing within.**

The issue here is *contentment*—which is another way of describing what David was saying here—**"The Lord is my Shepherd—I am content!"**

The tragedy in the Christian church today is that there are so many unsatisfied, discontent sheep. These are carnal Christians who are never satisfied, always wanting more, always looking for '*greener pastures*', not really satisfied in their relationship with Jesus but always hungering for something else.

That wasn't the heart of David who was able to say from his heart—*"The Lord is my shepherd and I'm content; I don't want anything in this world but Him!"*

Contentment has become a very elusive thing today. We are living at a time in America where more people have more things than ever before—yet seem less content than ever before!

It seems the more people have the more they want. We can obviously see as we look around that contentment isn't attached to money or material things or else—the rich would always be the most content while the poor would always be the most discontent.

Yet it's so often the other way around. The reason is because—contentment is an attitude of your heart and not the result of your outward circumstances. A person can be very rich outwardly and yet be poor inwardly (empty inside)—while another can be very poor outwardly and yet possess a heart that is rich toward God and very content!

Paul the Apostle tells us that contentment in life is an act of the will and not the result of how much you have or don't have. In other words, **we choose to be content or not to be content**. Contentment is something we have to 'train' ourselves to have—Paul said, "*In whatever state I find myself in whether with a full stomach or an empty stomach, I have learned to be content.*" (Philippians 4:10-12)

Now it's unfortunate that David' son Solomon didn't share his father's relationship with the Lord. Solomon started out pretty well in his relationship with God as a young king → [See 1 Kings 3:3-13](#)

But after a while it seemed that something was missing in his life. His heart seemed unsatisfied and empty and so slowly he began to drift away from the Lord to pursue other things—like many Christians today. Solomon was the wealthiest man on earth—and yet he was restless and discontent in life—which tells us it's all a matter of *perspective*.

This is something that King Solomon finally figured out after many years of running around trying to find contentment and happiness in life through all kinds of worldly things that only exacerbated his emptiness and discontentment.

He shares his journey in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

On the day he was coronated as king, his father David had admonished him to serve the Lord with a *loyal* heart, but the Holy Spirit tells us later on in 1 Kings 11:4, that Solomon's heart was '*not loyal to the Lord his God.*'

The word *loyal* carries with it the idea of "*completeness*" or "*whole-heartedness.*" Solomon's heart was not completely given over to God—Solomon had a *divided* heart. The Hebrew word literally means "*at peace with.*"—Solomon's heart was not at peace with God.

I believe that Solomon knew the Lord, but his heart was still restless—his relationship with God didn't really satisfy him like it did his father David. Because of it he slowly began to turn away from the Lord looking to fill the void with other things. He spent most of his life in a backslidden state chasing happiness and fulfillment in a number of different ways.

He multiplied gold and wives and horses to himself, the very thing that God had forbidden the kings of Israel from doing in Deuteronomy 17:16-17, "*lest these things should turn his heart away from God*"—which is exactly what wound up happening.

But at the end of his life, he comes back to God and writes the Book of Ecclesiastes. The Book of Ecclesiastes is really a book about *perspective* where King Solomon talks about his perspective of life at different times during his life and how it affected the way he lived his life.

One of Solomon's favorite words in the book is the word, "*vanity*" which he uses 38 times—the Hebrew word is "*hevel*" which means, "*emptiness, futility, vapor.*" In other words, whatever disappears quickly, leaves nothing behind, and does not satisfy is considered *hevel*—vanity! (some have likened it to 'soap bubbles')

Now you're not going to properly interpret this book nor understand what God is trying to teach you through it if you don't understand the key phrase that really sheds light on where Solomon is coming from in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

That key phrase is "*under the sun*"—it occurs 29 times in the book, along with a parallel phrase, "*under heaven.*" Both of these give us the *perspective* from which Solomon is writing about life. He is looking at life from a human, earthly perspective—not a heavenly or an eternal perspective.

As you read the book and you listen to Solomon's pessimistic view of life, keep in mind his perspective—he is examining and evaluating life "*under the sun,*" "*under heaven.*" In other words, life lived from an entirely earthly, materialistic perspective—life without God!

His conclusion is—"*Everything under the sun is meaningless (vanity), like chasing the wind.*" (Ecclesiastes 1:14) Any life that is lived for this life only, any philosophy of life which says, "*Let's eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die*"—will lead to a meaningless, empty life.

Solomon finally figured that out after many years of looking for meaning in life in all the wrong places: → pleasure → learning → building great buildings → starting and running a successful business etc. (you can read the book for yourself).

But listen to the conclusion he comes to after all of his frantic chasing after happiness and the meaning of life:

**Ecclesiastes 2:17, 22-23 (NLT)**

<sup>17</sup> So I came to hate life because everything done here under the sun is so troubling. Everything is meaningless—like chasing the wind...<sup>22</sup> So what do people get in this life for all their hard work and anxiety? <sup>23</sup> Their days of labor are filled with pain and grief; even at night their minds cannot rest. It is all meaningless.

How sad, and yet so many people are making the same mistake that Solomon made—thinking that more money, more material things, more vacations to exotic destinations—will bring them happiness.

Or if their career or business takes off or if they buy a new house or get a new spouse or if they go back to school and earn their B.A. or Masters or PH.D.—that somehow these things will satisfy them and bring meaning to their lives.

Most people aren't really satisfied or happy in life, but they still believe that, with a little more of this or that—they will find true happiness.

This is where Solomon had an advantage over all of them—he had a lot more of everything! But it led him to a point of crisis that few people ever come to—he had it all, he had done it all, he had nothing left to experience, nothing left to look forward to—he had maxed out life and still he was miserable!

The conclusion he comes to is, "*Everything in life is empty and meaningless and vain!*"  
Yes but, everything in life is empty and meaningless and vain where? → "**UNDER THE SUN!**"

In other words, life lived entirely from earth's perspective—*"Life apart from God!"* Any life that is lived only for this life will be an empty, unsatisfied, meaningless life. At the end of the book, and after spending years of his life looking for happiness and fulfillment in all the wrong places—he finally comes to realize that.

It was only when he started to look for the meaning of life *"above the sun"* instead of *"under the sun"*—that he finally found the answer he was looking for. He sums up his findings at the end of the book where he states the chief goal of life this way—*"To fear God and obey His commandments."* (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

Many years later Jesus would take that observation and put it in the positive when He said that the chief goal of life is to *"love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength."* (Mark 12:30) Or in other words we will only find meaning in life when we live for God and not for self!

How important it is for Christians that we look at life from God's perspective (heavenly, eternal) and not our own earthly perspective—

**Ephesians 2:4-6 (NKJV)**

<sup>4</sup> But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup> and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus.

As important as the proper perspective is in life—perspective is the result of *position*. A person living in the Penthouse of a skyscraper has a whole different perspective of a city than does the person who is living on the ground floor.

The same is true of life in the spiritual realm. My perspective of life will be determined by where I am living—close to earth (the world) or seated with Christ in heavenly places.

An earthly perspective of life will lead to a life of selfishness, materialism, emptiness and vanity—because God made us with *"eternity in our hearts."* (Ecclesiastes 3:11) As such only a life lived for eternity—only a life lived for God and His Kingdom will satisfy and fulfill us.

A life lived for this life only, will only lead to frustration and futility—and the constant realization that everything in life is "emptiness and vanity."

Look, there are many 'exciting' experiences you can get involved in that will give you a rush—but they will all end and sometimes you'll wind up worse than when you started. An affair might bring some temporary excitement and euphoria only to *destroy everything* that's important in life—your relationship with God, your marriage and family.

Getting high on alcohol or drugs might give you a temporary escape from your problems—but in the end will only lead to greater problems.

Many people today are engaging in dangerous activities for the thrill and adrenaline rush—these would include things like: skydiving, 'BASE jumping (where people will parachute from 4 different 'launch points'—BASE is an acronym for: **B**uildings, **A**ntennas, **S**pans (bridges), and **E**arth (cliffs or mountains), or rock-climbing without safety ropes—or other high-risk activities where they literally risk their lives to get a high.

These things might make you feel 'alive' for a while but the high they bring will eventually end (in some cases by ending your life!)

Times are tough and people are craving some kind of excitement to add some meaning to their dull and often dreary lives. For the Christian, the answer is not going back to the world like Solomon thinking it has something you're missing that will make you happy.

If you're not a Christian, the answer is to gain a new perspective on life.

You see, if you will accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior—God will place you 'in Christ' and seat you with Jesus in the heavenlies where you will have an eternal perspective of life.

Only that perspective of life will allow us to live for God and not for self.

If you keep your eyes on the Lord, find your fulfillment in Him, and see every situation from a heavenly perspective—you will finally be able to say like David:

***"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want anything or anyone else that this world has to offer—I can 'lie' down in green pastures because I am satisfied, I am content!"***

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If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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