

Christ Is Enough :: Psalm 23

Take your Bibles and turn to 1 Samuel 16. As we begin a new series in the Psalms of David, I want us to turn to this passage where we are first introduced to David. This is a pivotal moment in the history of the nation of Israel. The Lord had rejected Saul as king, and now He is sending Samuel the prophet to Jesse the Bethlehemite to anoint a new king from among his sons. The sons of Jesse came before Samuel one-by-one. Look at verse 6,

⁶When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him." ⁷But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." (1 Samuel 16:6-7)

This is such an important statement because it shows us what God's greatest concern about every individual human being is. He is most concerned about your heart. He is after your heart. This is because the most important thing about us, the thing that most shapes us, is our affections. Samuel thought the way that we all tend to think. He was looking for the biggest and strongest of Jesse's sons to be king. When he saw Jesse's firstborn, he knew he had found the one. But, much to Samuel's surprise, God did not choose Eliab. God had another man in mind, didn't he? This process repeated a total of seven times. Jump ahead to verse 10.

¹¹Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here."¹² And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him, for this is he." (1 Samuel 16:11-12)

David was God's choice for king. As is often the case with God, He chose the least likely candidate. Interestingly, David seemed to have no interest in being king. He was the only one not present at this anointing ceremony. He was just a young man, likely around 15 years of age. Clearly, the Lord saw something in David. He is described by Paul in the book of Acts as "a man after God's own heart." Paul borrowed that phrase from the book of 1 Samuel. When God rejected Saul as king, He said, "The Lord has sought out a man after His own heart." (1 Samuel 13:14) That is a phrase that has come to define the life of King David. What does it mean? Quite simply, it means that David's heart was a lot like God's heart. What a statement! Isn't that essentially what every Christian longs for? Don't we all long to have a heart like God's. How did David become a man after God's own heart?

There is a principle in life that goes something like this: You are formed by what you love. Can I ask you a question that may be the most important question about your identity? What do you *want*? That's the central question at the very core of who you are and who you will become. We are formed by our loves and desires. Our affections are the winds in our sails. We are moved where our hearts direct us. It's no accident that, in the culture war that raging around us, the center of the battle is love. There is a war for your heart.

There are two ways that could go. You will either be conformed or you will be transformed by what you love. Remember this familiar verse in Romans 12,

² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2)

If you love the things of this world, you will be conformed. If you love God, you will be transformed. What is the difference?

The Greek word for conformed is *sysxematízo*, and it is a compound word. It can be translated “with the same outward shape.” It implies outward pressure shaping us into a mold or pattern. The world around us is not neutral. It is infused with a certain scheme, and it is pressing in upon us. The Bible tells us that this scheme, this pattern, is not even controlled by humanity. The world and its way of thinking is governed by spiritual forces of evil who are opposed to God. Their aim is ultimately our hearts. They endeavor to keep us captive in the desires of our flesh. They understand human nature. They know that we are shaped by what we love, and they want us to love the wrong things. To be conformed is to be shaped by the world and its desires. It is to have our affections held captive by the schemes of the devil. They don’t want our affections to ever rise higher than the things that are seen. When we only love the things that can be seen we are being conformed—we are being shaped by the pressure of the world, and we are blind to the only one who can truly make our hearts free.

The Greek word for transformed is *metamorphóo*, which means a change in form as a result of being with someone or something. It involves an outside presence bringing about an inward change. In English, we use the word to describe the process by which a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. But even that doesn’t fully capture the meaning of the original Greek word. This process happens when the heart becomes enamored with the truth of God. It happens you’re your affections come under the sway of the truth of the gospel. Those who love God supremely will be changed into new creatures by His presence within them. This is an inside-out change of the creature that is centered in the realm of our loves.

So, we could summarize like this: To be conformed is to be shaped from the outside by the twisted schemes of the devil, who controls the patterns of this world, whose aim is to deceive us into loving the creature more than the Creator. To be transformed is to be changed from the inside by the presence of God. You are in either of these two processes. You are either being conformed or you are being transformed.

David was transformed. That’s what it means to have a heart after God’s own heart. So how did David become a man after God’s own heart? It can all be traced back to his love for God. David loved God. He loved Him more than anything else. That’s what it means to be a man after God’s own heart. It is to want God above all else. It is to see God for what He is and to pursue Him with all of the soul. It is to thirst for God as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. (Psalm 63:1)

When Jesus invites us to be His disciples, He is inviting us to love Him supremely. What is the human relationship the Scriptures use to depict our relationship with Christ? Marriage. Wives, do you remember when your husband proposed to you? “Will you marry me?” What does that question mean? He was actually asking you, “Do you want me?” He was asking you whether you wanted to give yourself entirely to him for the rest of your life. He was committing himself to you, and he was asking if you would do the same for him. When Jesus invites you to be His disciple, He asks the same question. Will you marry Me? Will you be my bride? Will you love me above everything else? He is most concerned about what we want, what we desire. He knows that it is our desires that will shape our actions. James K. A. Smith, the author of the book *You Are What You Love*, says, “Discipleship is a way to curate your heart, to be attentive to and intentional about what you love.” That is just another way of saying what the Proverb said many years earlier.

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. (Proverbs 4:23)

We’ve titled this series “After His Heart” because we want to have a heart that could be described in that way. We want to examine the Psalms of David because in them we find the clearest reflection of his heart. A Psalm is a song and a prayer. You may have heard the saying, “He who sings prays twice.” I think there’s some truth to that. Christians are musical creatures. We don’t even have to be commanded to sing because it comes naturally to us. Melody and harmony flow out of us. The Scriptures teach us that songs of praise are the natural response to our redemption. The redeemed of the Lord sing His praises. We sing because music makes a connection with our hearts. David wrote Psalms to express what was going on inside. So, it is here in the Psalms of David that we find the deepest expressions of a heart that is on fire for the Lord. We find the heartbeat of true discipleship.

We begin our study into the heart of David tonight with his most famous Psalm. Turn to Psalm 23. Of all the Psalms of David, there has been one that has always somehow stood out among the crowd as the pearl of the Psalms. It is for good reason that Psalm 23 is treasured the world over. This short little Psalm is filled with encouragement, and it holds out to us the very heart and center of our Christian faith. Many have the words of this Psalm framed in their homes. Many have held it close during the darkest times of their lives. The opening words of the Psalm capture the simplicity of David’s relationship with His Lord.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. (Psalm 23:1)

As we saw in 1 Samuel 16, David had firsthand experience of being a shepherd. David learned a theological lesson from his experience in the pastures of Bethlehem. Isn’t this often one of the best ways we learn about God? He often reveals Himself to us through the ordinary, the mundane, the everyday activities of our lives. David, the shepherd, discovered that The Lord cared for him just as he cared for his sheep.

I like to think of this verse as a breath. Take a breath. With every breath we inhale, and then we exhale. The first line is what we breathe in; it is oxygen, it is life-giving. "The Lord is my shepherd." The second line is what we breathe out, "I shall not want." This is the exhalation that results from breathing in the sweet air of the promise of God that He tends to us like a shepherd tends to his sheep. This is a staggering statement. It is so counter-cultural. When you know that the Lord is your shepherd, you know that you have all that you need, and so you know that you will never be in a state of wanting. The world tells us that our wants should be our guide. Follow your heart. Follow your dreams. That's the Hallmark and Disney motto. The problem with these mottos is that our desires are corrupted. We are in bondage to wrong desires. We cannot trust ourselves. We are in a constant state of wanting from birth, but we have to come to see that our wants are devoid of God. As long as our wants are devoid of God, they will lead us down destructive paths.

David shows us something very important about the soul who has the Lord for his shepherd. It leads to a quiet, undivided heart. David is not saying that he knows he is going to have an easy life. David certainly did not have an easy life. He had some high highs and some very low lows. Yet David was able to say, "I shall not want."

Do you know what it is to have this quiet heart—this heart at rest? What is the secret? I believe the secret of the quiet heart is found in the pronouns. Don't miss the importance of the little word *my*. David did not say, "the Lord is *the* shepherd." Neither did he say, "The Lord is *our* shepherd." That would be true, but it is not the same as saying, "The Lord is *my* shepherd." That is something deeply personal. David knew that the Lord cared for him. It makes me think of the old hymn His Eye is On the Sparrow. Look at these words.

Why should I feel discouraged, why should the shadows come,
Why should my heart be lonely, and long for heav'n and home,
When Jesus is my portion? My constant Friend is He:
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

Yes, His eye is on the sparrow, but He cares so much more for you. Jesus told you so.

"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (Matthew 6:25-26)

David had a personal relationship with his Shepherd. He was a sheep in the pasture of His God. This was how he found rest in the midst of the storms of his life. Can you say with David, "The Lord is *my* shepherd?"

In the rest of the Psalm, David unpacks the glorious reasons why his heart is at rest in the pasture of his Good Shepherd. Let's read through the rest of this Psalm and discover three reasons why Christ is enough. First, Christ is enough because of His provision. Look at verse 2.

He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. (Psalm 23:2)

There's that personal pronoun again: me. He makes *me*. He leads *me*. It's all this one-on-one relationship. David lays out four ways the Lord provides for him. First, green pastures. Now, having lived in Bethlehem, David had seen both green pastures and brown pastures. Look at this picture of the hills outside Bethlehem.

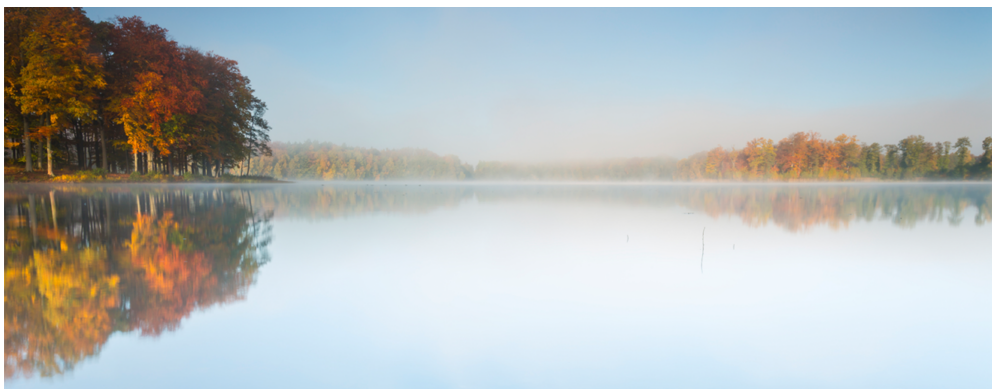


You see, Bethlehem has a very arid climate and receives little to no rainfall from the months of May-September. So, the pastures in that region often look like that during the summer. But in the months of October-April the rain comes, and it can be transformed into this:



That's like heaven for sheep! Green pastures! The truth is we often go through the dry, brown pastures in this life, don't we? But the promise here is that no matter how dry our surroundings in this world are, no matter how dire our circumstances, Christ offers us refreshment for our souls at all times. We can have this rest even in the midst of the toil and suffering of this world. He makes us lie down in green pastures even when, *especially* when, we are burdened by the cares of this life. Rejoice in the Lord, *always*, again, I say, rejoice! He provides green pastures for the soul.

Second, Christ also provides still waters for his sheep. Take a look at this picture.



This idyllic scene conveys to us that Christ provides refreshing rest to the weary soul. The famous words of Christ certainly come to mind.

²⁸ Come to me, all 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. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

Christ leads me beside still waters. He quiets the storm. He calms my anxiety. He is the Prince of Peace. The peace He gives is not like the peace the world offers.

Third, He also provides us with His strength. Look at verse 3.

He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (Psalm 23:3)

The Hebrew word for restore here means to turn back or to bring back. Sheep often need this kind of restoration. It's much like the Parable of the Lost Sheep.

³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ (Luke 15:3-6)

I love the imagery of the shepherd carrying the sheep home on his shoulders. Look at this image.



That is how Jesus restores our souls. When we wander astray, He tracks us down, picks us up on His shoulders, and carries us back home. Our Shepherd will not let us be lost. Try as we might to get away from Him, He will always restore our souls. He will always carry us back home.

Having carried us home from our wandering ways, He leads us in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. This is the fourth part of His provision. He provides us with paths of righteousness. How do we know the paths of righteousness? Because He reveals them in His Word. Not only does He reveal them in commandments and laws, but He Himself is the embodiment of them. He is the Word made flesh. He has enabled us to walk in this path by going before us. He is our example in that He perfectly obeyed His Father. He sends us a Helper to lead us in this way, too. Notice that it is for His name's sake. Don't miss the importance of that little note David adds there. Our obedience is for His name's sake. When we walk on the paths of righteousness it is for His name's sake! It reminds me of Matthew 5,

¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

Because all that we are is the result of Christ's provision, it brings glory to our Father in heaven. It is all for His name's sake, to the praise of His glorious grace! So, Christ is enough as our Provider.

Second, Christ is enough because of His protection. Lest we think that having Him to lead us means we will never be faced with trouble or danger, David adds these famous words of verse 4.

Even 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. (Psalm 23:4)

This is not an easy verse to sing. It is almost as high as our faith can reach. Who has not felt the fear of the valley of the shadow of death? It looms over us all as a fearsome foe. Who can stare this unbeatable juggernaut in the face and feel no fear? Only the one who knows that the Good Shepherd is with him. Christ as our Shepherd laid His life down for His sheep. (John 10:11) He became a lamb so that as our Shepherd He could deliver us from the slaughter. Look at Hebrews 2.

¹⁴Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

Here's the wonderful news! Since Christ has delivered us from the fear of death, He has also delivered us from all fear. We truly have nothing to fear, Christians! That is the secret of the Christian that no other person can know. If He has delivered us from death, we can confidently face anything in this life.

David is not saying that he lived a life completely devoid of fear. Of course not! He is saying that he had found a power greater than his fears. He had found that there is a presence that gave

him courage to face his greatest fears. Our fears can be conquered when we realize that the things we fear are afraid of the One who is with us. That's why His presence calms our fears. His presence means that nothing can harm us unless He wills it. He is the one who parted the seas. He is the one who walked on water. He is the one who calmed the storm. He is the one who rose from the grave. He is the one who causes the demons to shake with fear. So why should we fear when He is with us?

His rod and staff are for our protection. They protect us in two ways: positively and negatively. Positively they protect us from outside dangers. He fends off all the predators who would sneak in to attack us. Negatively, they protect us from inward dangers. He uses them to correct us.

Third, Christ is enough because of His presence. This is the highest of all! Watch how David concludes this Psalm.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

(Psalm 23:5-6)

Notice that it all leads to His presence. Christ sets a table for us. This means He bountifully supplies our every need. He does it right in front of our enemies. Those who would scoff at us for trusting wholeheartedly in the Lord have to witness the rich supply that Christ makes for His sheep. But more specifically, what is the table that Christ has prepared for you? It is the communion table. It is the bread of His body and the wine of His blood that He has prepared for us and given to us to eat and drink together today. At that table there is forgiveness. There is the outpouring of mercy.

What is the significance of the anointing of the head with oil? This ties back to the book of Leviticus and the anointing of Tabernacle and the high priest, Aaron. When the Tabernacle was being consecrated, Moses poured oil on the head of Aaron to anoint him before he ever went into the holy place. This anointing oil was God's way of saying that Aaron was chosen to come into His holy presence. It is a way of expressing that holiness without which no one can see God. Christ anoints us with an oil that's even greater than the oil with which Aaron was anointed. He anoints us with the oil of the Holy Spirit. He makes us a kingdom of priests. This is all symbolic of His presence. He makes us fit for the presence of God! That's what Paul expresses at the beginning of Romans 5.

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1-2)

That leads to an overflowing cup.



What a difference from the emptiness we've all experienced in this world so many times over. In the presence of the Lord, we experience a fullness that overflows. It pours out even into the lives of others. The overflowing shows us that the satisfaction we receive from Christ is not to be held onto for ourselves. It is to be shared with others as well. We are to pour Christ out into the lives of others.

Then, in the last verse, we see the end of the journey. The Psalm began with the Lord and it ends with the Lord. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He ensures our safe passage through this short, uncertain life. His goodness and mercy pursue us right up to the moment we take our last breath. All our lives He has been faithful. Then, when at last we have left these old bodies behind, He will take us home to Himself. We will dwell in His house forever. How could we possibly need anything more than this? Once you have the assurance that Christ is your Shepherd and that all His benefits have been added to you, you really can say, "I shall not want."

So, what are you wanting today? God is after your heart. Remember where we started?

For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7)

God saw David's heart, and He sees your heart. The Lord wants to hold sway over your affections. There is a battle raging over your heart. Christ is wooing you to Himself today. He wants your love. Are you being conformed to the pattern of this world? Or are you being transformed by the renewing of your mind, which is to say, by the knowledge of the glory of

God in the face of Christ Jesus. Christ is enough, but you have to come Him. You have to set your eyes on Him and take them off of the things of this world.

You know that Jesus suffered and bled so that you would love Him. You say, I thought He bled for me to forgive my sins. Yes, He did! That wasn't the end, though. Forgiveness is only the beginning. He forgave your sins so that you would love Him! He wants your love because He knows that once you love Him you will be transformed. You will begin to become like the One you love. So, what do you want today? Let me tell you the only thing you can want that will actually satisfy: Jesus Christ. David loved Him, and so he could sing,

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. (Psalm 23:1)

Can you? Let's pray.