

I Shall Not Want
Psalm 23

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(PSA 23:1) THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD; I SHALL NOT WANT. I SHALL NOT WANT. What a proud, POSITIVE, bold statement to make! Obviously, this is the sentiment of a sheep utterly satisfied with its owner, perfectly content with its lot in life. Since the Lord is my Shepherd, then I shall not want. Actually the word "want" as used here has a broader meaning than might at first be imagined. The main concept is that of proper care/management, not lacking — not deficient.

But a second emphasis is the idea of being utterly contented in the Good Shepherd's care and consequently not craving or desiring anything more. This may seem a strange statement from a man like David if we think in terms only of physical or material needs. David had been hounded and troubled repeatedly by the forces of Saul as well as those of his own estranged son Absalom. He was man who had known intense distress: personal hardship and spiritual anguish'

Therefore it is a mistake to think this statement "*I shall not want*" means that the child of God will never experience lack or need. It is imperative that we are to keep a balanced view of the Christian life. The Lord Himself warned His disciples before His departure for glory, that **(John 16:33) *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.***

One of the common fallacies is to think that if a man or woman is prospering materially, it is a significant mark of God's blessings of upon their lives. Now this may be true in some cases, but it is not always so. Rather, in bold contrast we read in **Revelation 3:17, "*Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked . . .*"**

Based on the teachings of the Bible we can only conclude that David was not referring to material or physical poisons when he made the statement, "*I shall not want.*" Yet amid such hardship he can still boast, "*I shall not want . . . I shall not lack the expert care and management of my Master.*"

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To grasp the inner significance of this simple statement let us understand the difference between belonging to one master and another - to the Good Shepherd or to an imposter. We touched on this last Sunday evening. Jesus Himself took great pains to point out to anyone who contemplated following Him that it was quite impossible to serve two masters. One belonged either to Him or to another. *(Mat 6:24) No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.* When all is said and done the welfare of any flock is entirely dependent upon the management afforded them by their owner.

If the herdsman is not concerned about the condition of his sheep and neglects his land and gives little or no time to his flock, letting them pretty well forage for themselves as best they can, then his sheep will soon fall by the wayside. If the lack of pasture management doesn't kill them, then they will likely fall prey to dogs, coyotes and rustlers. If left unattended, sheep are likely to suffer from lack of shelter, clean water and trace minerals like salt. If left unattended, sheep soon become a pitiful sight as they become weak and diseased.

I mentioned last week about reading of a shepherd with a lush and plush pasture for his sheep while his neighbor neglected his pasture and sheep and how those sheep gathered together at the fence and stared over into his rich green pasture. In my mind's eye I can see them standing at the fence, huddled sadly in little groups, staring wistfully through the wires at the rich pastures on the other side of the fence. To all their distress, their heartless, selfish owner seemed utterly callous and indifferent. He did not care. What if his sheep did *want* green grass; fresh water; shade; or shelter from the storms? What if they did *want* relief from wounds, bruises, disease and parasites? He ignored their needs — he could care less. Why should he; they were just sheep fit only for the slaughterhouse. As I think of this pathetic picture, this was a precise picture of those wretched old taskmasters, **SIN AND SATAN**, on their derelict ranch. What Satan offers is spiritual bondage.

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Despite the outward show of success, despite their affluence and their prestige, many people remained poor in spirit and unhappy in life because the wrong master owns them. By way of contrast, others being relatively poor people, who have known hardship, disaster and the struggle to stay afloat financially are content and joyful. **WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE? It's the master.** Those that belong to Christ and have recognized Him as their manager enjoy a deep, quiet, settled peace that is beautiful to behold. You see; their wants are supplied.

It is a delight to see men/women that are rich in spirit and generous in heart enjoy the spiritual freedom found in Christ. They radiate a serene confidence that overshadows all the tragedies of their time. They are under God's care and have found contentment.

Contentment should be the hallmark of the man/woman who has put his/her affairs in the hands of Good Shepherd. This especially applies in our affluent age. Let us understand that contentment is a trait that is developed; it is learned. Paul stated in **(Phil 4:11) Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.**

But the paradox is for many, despite an unparalleled wealth in material assets, they are insecure and unsure of themselves and well nigh bankrupt in spiritual values. Men seem to be searching for safety beyond themselves. They are restless, unsettled, covetous, and greedy for more - wanting this and that, yet never really satisfied in spirit.

By contrast the simple Christian, the humble person, the Shepherd's sheep can stand up proudly and boast. ***"The Lord is my Shepherd — I shall not want."*** I am completely satisfied spiritually with His management of my life. He is on the job twenty-four hours a day to see that they are properly provided for in every detail. He is ***"The Good Shepherd."*** (*John 10:11*)

A good shepherd delights in His flock. For Him there is no greater reward or deeper satisfaction than seeing His sheep contented, well fed, safe and flourishing under His care. This is indeed His very *"life."* He gives all He

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has to it. He literally lays Himself out for those who are His. He will go to no end or trouble and labor to supply them with the finest grazing, the richest pasture, ample winter feed, and clean water. He will spare Himself no pains to provide shelter from storms, protection from ruthless enemies and the diseases and parasites to which sheep are so susceptible. He is willing to lay down his life for his sheep. There has been a time when I was out at 4 o'clock in the morning walking in the rain looking for a baby goat that had gotten separated from its mother.

No wonder Jesus said, ***"I am the Good Shepherd — the Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."*** And again ***"I am come that ye might have life and that ye might have it more abundantly."*** From early dawn until late at night this self-less Shepherd is alert to the welfare of His flock.

The diligent sheep man rises early and goes out first thing every morning without fail to look over his flock. It is the initial contact of the day. With a keen & sympathetic eye he examines the sheep to see that they are fit and content and able to be on their feet. In an instant he can tell if they have been molested during the night — whether any are ill or if there are some which require special attention because he knows his sheep.

Repeatedly throughout the day he casts his eye over the flock to make sure that all is well. Even at night, he is not oblivious to their needs. He sleeps as it were *"with one eye and both ears open"* ready at the least sign of trouble to leap up and protect his own. This is a moving picture of the care given to those whose lives are under Christ's control. He knows all about their lives from morning to night.

(Psa 68:19) Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation.

(Psa 121:3) He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.

In spite of having such a master and owner, some Christians are still not content with His control. They are dissatisfied, always feeling that somehow the grass beyond the fence must be a little greener. These are carnal minded Christians—one might call them *"fence crawlers"* or *"luke warm"* who want the best of both worlds.

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I once read of a man who owned an ewe whose conduct exactly typified this sort of person. She was one of the most attractive sheep that ever belonged to him. Her body was beautifully proportioned. She had a strong constitution and an excellent coat of wool. Her head was clean, alert, well-set with bright eyes. She bore sturdy lambs that matured rapidly.

But in spite of all these attractive attributes she had one pronounced fault. She was restless — discontented — a fence crawler. So much so that he came to call her "Mrs. Gadabout." This one ewe produced more problems for her owner than almost all the rest of the flock combined. No matter what field or pasture the sheep were in, she would search all along the fences looking for a loophole she could crawl through and start to feed on the other side. It was not that she lacked pasturage. The fields lush and provided excellent grazing. With "Mrs. Gad-about" it was an ingrained habit. She was simply never contented with things as they were. Often when she had forced her way through some such spot in the fence, she would end up feeding on bare, brown, burned-up pasturage of a most inferior sort.

But she never learned her lesson and continued to fence crawl time after time. Now it would have been bad enough if she was the only one who did this. It was a sufficient problem to find her and bring her back. But the further point was that she taught her lambs the same tricks. They simply followed her example and soon were as skilled at escaping as their mother. Even worse, however, was the example she set the other sheep. In a short time she began to lead others through the same holes. After putting up with her perverseness for a summer the owner finally came to the conclusion that to save the rest of the flock from becoming unsettled, she would have to go. He could not allow one obstinate, discontented ewe to ruin the whole ranch operation.

It was a difficult decision to make, for he loved her in the same way he loved the rest. Her strength and beauty and alertness were a delight to the eye. He said that one morning he took the killing knife in hand and cut short her career of fence crawling. It was the only solution to the dilemma.

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She was a sheep, who in spite of all that had done to give her the very best care — still wanted something else. She was not like the one who said, "*The Lord is my Shepherd — I shall not want.*" Let this story serve as a solemn warning to the carnal, half-hearted Christian that wants the best of both worlds. Sometimes in short order they can be cut down. You see, if you are a Christian, then the Lord is your Shepherd and he will care for you, but this is a conditional promise. Some promises from the Lord are unconditional which means you received their benefit regardless of what you do – like the rain and sunshine. Other promised though are given on the condition that you do something. Such is the promise "*I shall not want.*" (Matt 6:33). **But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness** (there is the condition); *and all these things shall be added unto you* (and here is the promise).

Do you trust in the Lord enough to obey his commands? I hope that you do and if you are not a Christian that you will decide to become one tonight. If you are a Christian but have not put the Lord first in your life and have taken your eye off his focus, then come back and rededicate your life to him tonight.