

Sermon for April 22, 2018

“I Shall Not Want”

Psalm 23

John 10:11-18

What do you want? What do you want from life, from your occupation, your family, your God? Do you want peace, hope, riches, eternal life? Do you want food, clothing, shelter, security? Do you desire satisfaction?

Everybody wants something and often times those things we want, we also need. I have been through a lot in my life. The illness of family and friends. The death of loved ones including my parents. Back in 2004 my father died and I turned 40 in the same week. During those times I wanted all pain and sickness to go away.

I may have desired those things, but I didn't get them: I haven't gotten any younger and my Dad is still dead. Yet, I never suffered a lack of what I needed. The support of friends and family got me through the difficulties. The knowledge that God was with me, got me through a lot. Because the Lord was my Shepherd I lacked nothing that I needed.

The Psalmist nearly 3,000 years ago knew the same thing. He wrote "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." Most people hear the "I shall not want" part and it just passes by them lost in the magnitude of "The Lord is my shepherd." I guess the pastoral image of God caring for us like helpless sheep is still in their minds when the second half of the verse is read. Others take the time to read the second half of the verse and they see it as a commandment: "Thou shalt not want!"

But it is much more than that. "I shall not want" is a statement of result. Because the Lord is my shepherd, I will lack nothing. The Lord the Almighty will lead me to living waters. The Lord personally will lead me to green pastures of spiritual growth.

Because the Lord is our shepherd, he restores our souls and leads us in the paths of righteousness. Because the Lord is our shepherd, we are comforted even in the valley of the shadow of death. Because the Lord is our shepherd, he watches over us and cares for us in the face of our enemies. Because the Lord is my shepherd I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

But all that's rather abstract. What we need is a concrete example. It is one thing to say "the Lord is my shepherd" and it sounds good and all that. But what does that look like in real life. It's fine to talk about poetic green pastures and hypothetical pools of water. It is one thing to speak of metaphorical valleys of death and symbolic staffs of comfort. It is quite another to make it real and concrete.

God knows that we need a concrete example of these poetic words, so God gave us Jesus. And Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd." What does the good shepherd do? He lays down his life for the sheep. He sacrifices himself. You know sheep are easy prey. They are so domesticated that they have lost all instincts for self preservation. They lack a way of defending themselves. Without a shepherd, wild animals would slaughter them like - well - like sheep!

If a pack of wolves came after a flock of sheep the shepherd's job was to protect the sheep. But why risk your life for a bunch of sheep. If things got too dangerous most shepherds would abandon the sheep and save themselves. But Jesus is not just any shepherd. He is the good shepherd. He knows and cares for each one of his sheep. He knows and cares for me and lays his life down for me. And because this self-sacrificing Lord is my good shepherd, I shall not want.

Perhaps a contrast with the world will help us understand. The world's version of the 23rd psalm goes something like this. The world is my Shepherd, I can't get no satisfaction. Like a lost sheep I search aimlessly for green pastures and peaceful waters. My soul is empty. I am lost and forsaken. When I pass through the valley of the shadow of death I am afraid for I am alone. In the presence of enemies, I am abandoned, and my future is uncertain.

If you think I am exaggerating just look at the world. People search for some meaning to put their trust in. As a result, they put their hopes in almost anything. They jump from one fad to another searching for something meaningful. People invest their lives in things like money, drugs, shallow relationships, or love of self.

And in the end where does it lead them. The end is always some form of destruction: selfishness, addiction, hopelessness. They are abandoned and alone in the face of danger. The world's ways offer no true or lasting peace and hope. Unlike the Good Shepherd, Jesus, the world runs when the sheep are in danger.

The Lord is MY shepherd. Is he yours? Does the Good Shepherd know you as his own? Do you recognize and respond to the sound of his voice? Or do you beckon to the call of the world?

Because the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want! Are all your needs in life fulfilled? Or do you find that you can't get no satisfaction?

Make Jesus your shepherd. Accept him as your Lord and Savior. Recommit yourself to getting to know and responding to his voice. He will lead you to green pastures and still waters. And you shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever!