

June 7/8, 2025

## Finding Satisfaction in an Anxious and Discontent World

*Everything We Need Series*

**Psalm 23:1**

Pastor Mark Mathewson

Well, this morning, we begin our summer series looking at the 23rd Psalm, a deep reflection on it. And each week we'll take a small portion of that psalm and reflect on it, and then consider what it might mean for us. Now you might be thinking, "Why take a whole summer on Psalm 23? Most of us know that really well. We're familiar enough with it. It seems pretty self-explanatory." But oftentimes, when we're so familiar with the passage of Scripture, like Psalm 23, some problems can arise. One is we simply don't think about the words as we read or hear them. I read Psalm 23 and the words just kind of scan by my eyes, and I don't think about the meaning. Or I hear them, and the sound goes in one ear and out the other, and it does little to affect me. And so on I go.

The second problem, and probably stemming from the first, is that we probably don't actually believe Psalm 23 because of our familiarity. And you might say, "Oh no, this is my favorite passage of Scripture. Of course I believe it." But there's a difference between me saying I believe something and actually believing it. If I believe Psalm 23, I'll orient my life around it; I'll live it out. And unless I do that, I don't know that I can really say that I believe it. So my hope is, through a deep look at Psalm 23 over the summer, that our familiarity with it will be enlivened and excited, so that it does become something deeply meaningful to us, deeply transforming.

I'd like to ask you to do something, and it's not going to take much of your time, maybe a couple of minutes each day. Now we helped you out a little bit this morning when we read Psalm 23 together. But I would like for you to commit to reading and reciting Psalm 23 every day during the course of our sermon series. In fact, preferably twice a day, at the beginning of your day and at the end of your day. You might even have Siri or Alexa recite it for you. Pro tip: Switch your device to the British voice, and you'll get much more out of it. *(laughter)*

I would also like for you, again, and I think if you do the first, you'll accomplish the second, is to commit this psalm to memory. That's one of the lost things I believe, as Christians, that we used to do and we don't do anymore, but to have that psalm in the front of our minds for whenever we need it...which is quite often. And I hope that you do that. In fact, you could take the small section that we cover, commit to memorizing that during the week, and by the time we get to the end, you'll have Psalm 23 down. Of course, there are bonus points if you memorize it in Hebrew. *(laughter)*

In the Clint Eastwood movie, *Pale Rider*, a young teenage girl, Megan Wheeler, suffers the death of her dog, due to a raid on her small settlement. And in a scene where she's out in the forest burying her dog, she quotes Psalm 23 and she begins by saying this, "*The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want, but I do want.*" And I think that that sums up what many Christians think, and what

they believe, is that they will read that first verse of the 23rd Psalm, and they'll say, "Yeah, ***Yahweh is my shepherd. I lack nothing***...but I do want."

Our world conditions us to be anxious and discontent with our lives. We're anxious and discontent with our identities, whether it be gender identity, sexual identity, or all kinds of other identities. We're anxious and discontent with our finances. We're anxious and discontent with our relationships. We're anxious and discontent with our status and popularity. We're anxious and discontent with our possessions. We are an unsatisfied people. And for many, satisfaction is just one more "like" away on my Instagram post, or just one more "subscriber" to my YouTube channel. Or satisfaction is just a little bit more money in my paycheck or my bank account. It's just that one more relationship away. Perhaps it's one more cosmetic surgery away or the loss of a few pounds away. For me, satisfaction is just that one more book away. Okay, I'm not being honest...10 books. But when we get those things, we immediately discover we're not satisfied at all, and so we're on this relentless, tiresome pursuit of satisfaction.

And Psalm 23:1, the verse we want to look at this morning, reminds us of where permanent and full satisfaction can be found. So, I hope you're ready with me to launch this sermon series by looking at Psalm 23:1. Of course, Psalm 23 is a beloved psalm because of its serenity, its simplicity, it's encouragement in portraying Yahweh as both shepherd and host. It's a psalm of confidence. The psalmist exclaims this deep trust in Yahweh, even in the midst of difficult circumstances. It's a psalm we often use at funerals, and rightly so, to encourage those who grieve. But we need to think of this psalm as the psalm for every day. "I need the truth of this psalm day by day." So, verse one, this first line of the psalm that we're going to look at this morning, and I'm going to be using the New International Version this morning, says:

**The LORD (*Yahweh*) is my shepherd, I lack nothing.** (\*NIV, Psalm 23:1)

And this sets the theme for the rest of the psalm. In fact, we can look at the rest of Psalm 23 as giving a deeper explanation of what this first line actually means. This first line is comprised of two parts. The first half of it is a confession. **Yahweh is my shepherd.** The second part is the consequence of the truth of that confession. And we want to take some time to look at each part of that opening line, so, **Yahweh is my shepherd.**

As we mentioned, this is a confession. The psalmist isn't making a mere statement of fact, as I might say, "Water is H<sub>2</sub>O." Rather this is a deep conviction of his, coming deep from within him. He lives this out. This shapes who he is, and he affirms it, even if it might cost him something. That's a confession. It's not just merely a description that he's given.

In a pastoral society like ancient Israel, the devoted shepherd stood as a symbol of loving care and constant vigilance, as one who lived moment by moment with his flock. The shepherd was everything to his sheep. He was a guide who could take them and lead them to the various pastures that they needed to go to for food or to lead them to the water sources where they would have water. He was their protector against the predators who might prey on them...attack them...devour them. He was their provider, not only providing them with the food and water that they needed,

but with shelter, or any other care that they needed. He was their physician. Whatever the sheep needed, the shepherd was there, was present with them, giving them what they needed. And this is how Yahweh is presented in this first verse. He's the one whose presence is constantly with His people, providing for them, protecting them, guiding them.

In the ancient Near East, this title and role of shepherd was not reserved only for actual shepherds, those people out in the fields with their flocks of animals. But it was used for rulers, religious civic rulers and, most definitely, it was used for kings. And in fact, in the Hebrew Bible, the kings of Israel were often judged as shepherds. One instance of this I'd like to look at briefly is in Ezekiel 34. Verse 1:

**The word of Yahweh came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; (Remember, he's not talking about the people out in the fields with the animals, but with the leaders.) prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Yahweh says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.**

**' "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of Yahweh: As surely as I live, declares Sovereign Yahweh, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of Yahweh: This is what Sovereign Yahweh says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them."**

(Ezekiel 34:1-10)

That's quite an indictment. But the kings of Israel were not just to be political figures and do political things like make treaties with other nations and kind of rule the government. The kings of Israel were expected to be shepherds. They were to care for their people, provide for them, and protect them. But most importantly, the kings of Israel were supposed to guide or lead them into worship of Yahweh and into obedience to the covenant. But by and large, Israel's leaders failed. But unlike the leaders of Israel, the Hebrew Bible portrays Yahweh as one who had a long track record of being a faithful shepherd to His people. Back in Genesis 48 at the end of Jacob's life, he's blessing his sons, and he says, "*The God of my grandfather, Abraham, the God of my father, Isaac, He has been a shepherd to me,*" One who has led him and provided for him. Several places

in the Psalms, Yahweh is portrayed as the shepherd who led His people out of Egypt and led them through the wilderness. Listen to the words of Psalm 78. I'll begin in verse 52:

**But He brought His people out like a flock;  
he led them like sheep through the wilderness.  
He guided them safely, so they were unafraid;  
but the sea engulfed their enemies.  
And so He brought them to the border of His holy land,  
to the hill country His right hand had taken.  
He drove out nations before them  
and allotted their lands to them as an inheritance;  
he settled the tribes of Israel in their homes. (Psalm 78:52-55)**

So Yahweh is their faithful shepherd. But we also can fast forward some 500 or so years beyond Psalm 23, when the prophet Ezekiel will say that Yahweh will be the shepherd who will lead Judah out of exile and back to their land. If we return to Ezekiel 34 and continue where we left off reading in verse 11, we see this:

**“For this is what Sovereign Yahweh says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares Sovereign Yahweh. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.” (Ezekiel 34:11-16)**

I hope you heard some of the echoes of Psalm 23 in there. In fact, I would recommend that you take some time, at least in the near future, to take Psalm 23 and take Ezekiel 34 and lay them next to one another and read them together, and you'll see how many echoes of Psalm 23 are in Ezekiel 34. Because, with the failure of all the kings of Israel being a good shepherd to the people, here we have Yahweh, who “is” the good shepherd for the people.

**Yahweh is my shepherd.**

That's our greatest assurance, right? our greatest comfort. His shepherding is what brings us satisfaction. It's what allows us to lack nothing. Who else would you want to be your shepherd? Human history is witness to the foolishness and the futility of following any other shepherd than Yahweh.

Well, the second part of this first line of Psalm 23 now tells us the implication of Yahweh being our shepherd, and it is that **I lack nothing**. Now I want us to understand something here. The psalmist is not stating his subjective feelings. Rather, he's pronouncing an objective fact about the reality that satisfaction necessarily flows from Yahweh being his shepherd. In Him, I have all that I need.

Now I find an interesting connection between this phrase in verse one, that **I lack nothing** with something that Moses tells the nation of Israel before they're ready to go into the Promised Land. In Deuteronomy chapter 2, we'll discover this. But first let me set the stage. The nation of Israel has been delivered from Egypt. They've wandered through the wilderness, and now they come to the southern border of the Promised Land. They're to go in and take it, but they see giants. They don't trust Yahweh, and so they don't go into the land. Yahweh sends them back out to wander more in the desert. When the time is right, they go up to the eastern border of the land of promise, and there they can look across the Jordan River and see the land that God has given them.

And Deuteronomy is Moses' speech to the people to prepare them to enter the land. We can think of it like a coach at halftime giving the pep talk. So Coach Moses is saying, "You know, we were really bad the first half, right? We failed. But the game's not over. We can go in and take this land because of our God, because of Yahweh." And Moses keeps pointing them back, saying, "Remember...remember...remember what Yahweh has done for us." And along those lines, in chapter 2, verse 7, Moses says this,

**Yahweh your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this vast wilderness. These forty years Yahweh your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything. (Deuteronomy 2:7)**

Do you hear Psalm 23, verse 1, there? Well, what's this connection besides just that the same Hebrew word is used in both places? Well, let me ask you this: Were the wilderness wanderings of the nation of Israel easy? Not at all! There were difficulties and trials and troubles all along the way. But nonetheless, with Yahweh as their shepherd, they didn't lack anything. And so I think we should understand what the psalmist is saying here in verse 1, does not indicate that if Yahweh is our shepherd, our life is going to be easy, right? Psalm 23:1 doesn't say "Yahweh is my shepherd; therefore, life is going to be a breeze. No problems at all." No, it's that despite the difficulties and trials of life, and the disappointments, if Yahweh is my shepherd, I still will lack nothing.

What other shepherd would you want to follow? I have all I need with Him. I'm satisfied. There's no anxiety; there's no fear, no discontent. Why? Because he's with me. He cares for me; He provides for me; He guides me. And how I respond to life's pressures or the culture's expectations, or my own misguided desires, will say a lot about whether I actually believe that if Yahweh is my shepherd, that I will lack nothing.

A Galilean Rabbi understood this, and in a sermon that He preached on a hillside along the Sea of Galilee, He said this:

**“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”**

**“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will He not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matthew 6:25-34)**

And while we’re talking about this Galilean Rabbi, and of course it’s Jesus, and when we get to the New Testament, Jesus is presented to us as the shepherd of Psalm 23, as the shepherd of Ezekiel, 34. In John 10, verse 11, Jesus says, **“I am the good shepherd. I lay down my life for my sheep.”** And the presence of this shepherd is what provides and protects and guides.

But Jesus is not only the shepherd. He’s the shepherd King. That leader, the shepherd leader that Israel had for so long looked for, the leader that we so long for, that shepherd King is here. It’s Jesus, and that’s the good news.

The gospel is this: that the hope of Israel, this shepherd King is here, and He invites us to be part of His kingdom, to be part of His flock. And the good news is that anyone who turns away from their other loyalties, turns away from their other shepherds, and gives their allegiance to Him, will not only find forgiveness of sins and eternal life and a new community to belong to—the Church—but that person will find satisfaction. They will be the kind of person who lacks nothing. Does that sound like the kind of life that you want?

Maybe you’re here this morning and you’ve never given your allegiance to the shepherd King. I would ask you to seriously consider doing that, because it’s then and only then will you find the satisfaction that you’ve been looking for. It’s then and only then you will find the leader, the shepherd, that you’ve always longed for. Many of you here this morning have given your allegiance to the shepherd King. But let me ask you, “Do you really believe that He is your Shepherd, and that because of that, you lack nothing? Do you live a life without fear and anxiety? Are you satisfied with the life that He has given you?”

A life of satisfaction can only be found in Him. And can you say, **“Yahweh is my shepherd, I lack nothing,”** as a confession? Or when you say that, is it just like saying water is H<sub>2</sub>O? But hopefully with the psalmist, we can say that from the core of our being, that I believe it. I live my life as if I’m truly committed to the fact that I have all I need with Yahweh being my shepherd.

There’s one more point I’d like to make that I think maybe is often overlooked. And it’s that Psalm 23:1 also anticipates life in the new creation. For those whose shepherd is Yahweh, not only can they experience satisfaction and contentment in this life, but they will experience it to its utmost fullness in the life to come and do so for eternity.

An expert in the Hebrew Bible, James Mays, wrote this: “The recitation of Psalm 23 prepares for the eschatological picture in which it is echoed, the picture of the lamb who has become king and shepherd, and guides the redeemed to living water. Here, the absolute sense of **I do not lack** is completely fulfilled.”

And the picture he is talking about is found in Revelation chapter 7, a beautiful chapter where John is told that there are these 144,000, 12,000 from each of the tribes of Israel. But when he turns to look at them, what he sees is a numberless multitude of every nation, tribe and tongue. These aren’t two groups. It’s just a different description of the same group of all of God’s redeemed people. And the setting is that at Jesus’ return, when Jesus wins victory, the redeemed are vindicated. And in chapter 7 they sing a song of victory. And right after that song that they sing, we read these words. And again, I want you to listen for echoes of Psalm 23.

**Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?”**

**I answered, “Sir, you know.”**

**And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore,**

**“they are before the throne of God  
and serve him day and night in his temple;  
and he who sits on the throne  
will shelter them with his presence.  
‘Never again will they hunger;  
never again will they thirst.  
The sun will not beat down on them,  
nor any scorching heat.  
For the Lamb at the center of the throne  
will be their shepherd;  
‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’  
‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”**

(\*NIV, Revelation 7:13-17)

So satisfaction in this life, but also in the life to come with Yahweh...Jesus...Yahweh in human form, as our shepherd.

Who is your shepherd? Maybe it's you. Maybe you depend upon yourself for life satisfaction, for all the provisions that you need, for protection. Maybe it's a celebrity. Maybe you look to the government to be your shepherd, to provide for you and protect you, to give you satisfaction. Maybe it's a social influencer. If so, have you found the satisfaction you're looking for? Can you really say Jordan Peterson is my shepherd, or Taylor Swift is my shepherd, or Patrick Mahomes is my shepherd, or Megyn Kelly, or Oprah Winfrey is my shepherd therefore I lack nothing?

Psalm 23:1 reminds us where satisfaction, where contentment can only and ultimately be found. If the shepherd, King Jesus, is not your shepherd, you can expect a life that's unsettled, that's anxious, that's discontent. If the shepherd King Jesus is your shepherd, you can expect a life of satisfaction despite whatever problems and trials and difficulties and sufferings you might face in this world. My prayer for you is that this shepherd King Jesus is and will always be your shepherd. Let's pray,

*O shepherd of Israel, who lovingly supplies in abundance all that your people need, grant us the contentment with the good gifts You so generously provide, so that we may not foolishly and in futility follow other shepherds to our ruin, but rather remain under the guidance and protection of the Good Shepherd King Jesus, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever, Amen.*

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