

Lacking Nothing

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to be looking at this Sam over the next four Sundays and today we'll be looking at verses 1 to 3 of this Sam. But I'll read the Sam, the Sam as we all know, a fairly short Sam and I'll just read the Sam, a Sam of David. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 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. 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 will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

What is this Sam? So I suppose you would say to me it's a Sam about seeing God as a shepherd. It is King David recalling his shepherd experience and looking at that experience and applying it to his experience of God. And that of course is true. But you could say it's a Sam if you know a bit more about the book of Sam's and you know that there are different types of Sam's in the book. For example praise Sam's, thanksgiving Sam's, complaint or lament Sam's, or this Sam which is known as a Sam of confidence. And it certainly has a striking note, doesn't it, of almost daring confidence. The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want. What is this

Sam? Because the interesting thing about this Sam is that David isn't really addressing God and he's not complaining to God. He's reflecting, he's recalling, he's remembering.

[3 : 3 6] And in the sense of that is the form in which David has composed this Sam. It is a lesson in itself for us that perhaps we need to do a bit more reflection, a bit more recall and a bit more remembering of God's goodness to us of the fact that God is our great shepherd as we were reading in Ezekiel. You could also say that the Sam is a testimony. It's almost as if somebody had said to David, what keeps you going in life? What is your recipe for life, for living? What is the directing principle of your life? What is the basic principle or idea or concept of your life that brings everything together, the highs and the lows and everything else in between? Aristotle could say that unexamined life isn't worth living. That's not the answer that David comes up with. As David answers to those voices, he makes this striking statement, Jehovah is my shepherd and he puts this statement beside it, I shall not want. We'll come to that in a second because the same David who composed the previous Sam,

Sam 22, seemed to be in a lot of want. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Of course I'm aware that it's a messianic Sam, but it also has a historical component to it. And it's David that is uttering these sentiments about his own experience. Why are you so far from saving me? I tried to you by David you don't answer, yet you're wholly enthroned in the praises of Israel. Our fathers cried and you rescued, but I am a worm and so on.

So we need to ask the question, what does that phrase mean? I lack nothing. And we also need to remember that once one swallow doesn't make a summer and that one Sam isn't the whole truth. The great thing about the book of Sam's is it's an anatomy of the human psychology and the human soul. It traces every nook and cranny of our human experience. And we have to be careful from a pastoral point of view that we don't put on to people as if any single Sam which is capturing a moment of experience of the Sammest pilgrim journey is the whole truth. But this is certainly the truth at this point. And I'm going to unpack those four verses around four ideas. Relationship, rest, restoration and right paths. First then, relationship. In answer to those great questions of who am I, what is it all about?

Is there a purpose? Is there meaning? Where should I go to find my deepest needs as a human being met? My need for acceptance? My need for significance? My need for self worth?

Where should I go? David says this, the Lord is my shepherd. Relationships are important at every level, aren't they? Relationship with your spouse, relationship with your church, relationship with your colleagues, all of these relationships are important. Often the question is asked to someone, are you in a relationship? Relationships are also challenging, aren't they? And hard. But you know there's one relationship that no one in this sanctuary can do without. And that's the relationship that David is articulating here. Notice David is not just saying I could write a treatise on God, I could do a scribe theology course on God, I can talk about God. Notice the secret of David, that Nick's statement that he makes, the secret is in the first words, Jehovah or Yahweh, this great, everlasting, self-existent, majestic, loving, beautiful God. He says David is my shepherd. I am in a relationship with him. To use the words of an apostle in the New Testament truly, our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son. And therefore the first question that each of us need to ask ourselves today is this, am I in a relationship with this everlasting God? Yes, I may have heard a lot about him, I may even know a lot about him, but see that little pronoun, [11:16] I, it's mighty important. The Lord is my shepherd. Isn't it an amazing statement that, would you not agree? How can it be that this God that has always been there from everlasting to everlasting, this God that doesn't need anything to add anything to the magnificence of his being, is offering you and me a personal everlasting relationship with him? So there's the first thing that David is able to say. The reason that I can face life, the reason that I can make sense of life, the reason that I have hope in life is that the Lord is my shepherd and he adds, I shall not want. Now, as I've said, if you look in some of his other 72 Psalms, he's written just under about half of the Psalms, or at least under half of the Psalms are ascribed to him. And in many of those Psalms, he's not articulating confidence, it is articulating need and want. Therefore, what does he mean when he says the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want? Well, I think he means at least two things.

This God of mine that is my shepherd is the owner of everything in the universe. And he knows everything about the universe. And I couldn't be in better hands. And although in my pilgrimage in my journey of life, I may go through dark and difficult times as the Psalm goes on to articulate, I least know that my great needs for acceptance, for forgiveness, for being made and declared in a right relationship and righteous with this God, I know that these great fundamental needs of mine are met. And in that sense, I shall not want all these great questions that human beings ask at some time or other. So the first thing that it's important is the relationship. Secondly, rest. That's what these images point to. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. This is an image that

David has of the almost intolerable heat of the sun. And traveling perhaps for a long time, leading his sheep and eventually coming to green pastures so that the sheep tired and weary and hungry can be fed and can rest. And interestingly, the language here is pointing to fresh and tender grass, which is the meaning of some of the words that is used in the original language here. And these still waters, water that the sheep is able to slake its thirst from without feeling nervous or worried. And so these statements, he makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters. They point to a rest and a peace.

So this is what David is saying. You want to know why the Lord is my shepherd? Because I like nothing. You want to know why the Lord is my shepherd? I've got a rest, a spiritual rest. I've got a deep peace within my soul. I am no longer agitated and troubled and wondering is life just a sick joke? I am no longer wondering is there really no ultimate purpose to anything?

Is all our art and all our theology and all our endeavor, is it finally reducible almost to a joke? No, says David. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. It's as if he has said to my soul, be quiet, be still and know that I am God. I have rest in this great quest of acceptance. That's that wonderful statement. You'll know it whenever I say it, accepted in the beloved. I have rest in knowing that my sins are forgiven, my guilt and my shame. My sin, oh the bliss said the handwriting of this glorious thought. My sin not in part but the whole is nailed to his cross and I bear it no more. It is well with my soul. I have rest in terms of my awareness of my identity. Something that is important in our day to so many people and perhaps because we have lost the sense of our identity, I mean as a people, as a nation, as communities, as image bearers of the invisible God. But it's not just awareness that we are image bearers, but it's awareness that our greatest identity is as children of God, sons and daughters of God. And so there is this rest. May I ask, is there that rest deep within your being today? Knowing that you're accepted in Christ, knowing that your sins are forgiven? Thirdly, restoration. He spoke about his relationship. The Lord

is my shepherd I shall not want. He speaks about his rest. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. This is why the Lord is my shepherd. This is why my life is in his hands. But then he says, he restores my soul. He restores my soul. Now it also is capable of being translated, he refreshes me. Notice I said me there and not my soul. And the reason I intentionally said that is that the language again in the Old Testament and this particular word points to the whole

[20 : 58] being. It points to, if you use a phrase, our being in unity as a psychosomatic being.

If you like body soul, body spirit, but integrated and unified as one entity. And therefore this statement could simply be translated, he restores me, the whole me.

But there is an initial restoration that is needed, isn't there? The story of the prodigal son reminds us of that. The prodigal son was far from God and it took him a long time to come to his senses. I wonder, is it taking you a long time to come and be restored to where you belong within the family of God? But we need restored, do we not, all the time, every day. And this is what David is flagging up here. Notice his language here. His language points to, he's not talking about single instances. He's talking about, this is something I have experienced regularly enough, constantly enough. That rest that he gives me, I've experienced it more than once. That relationship that's ongoing and that restoration I've experienced it several times. He restores, notice the plurals, he restores my soul, he restores me. Perhaps you're in a place as a Christian where you need restored. Take comfort from this statement of David's and take comfort from his experience. This is the God who restores again and again and again. Finally, right paths. David, what is the secret of your life? What brings it all together for you? What answers the deepest human questions and not just questions but needs and longing and desires that you have? David answers the fact that the Lord has now shipped. David answers, he gives me rest. David answers, he restores me. But there's something else to say in these verses. And that is that he leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Or again, it can be interpreted, he leads me in the right paths. He leads me in the right paths. And when we get to this

point in David's testimony or in David's reflection, David is essentially saying, you know these fantastic experiences of rest and you know these fantastic experiences that I have with God in my relationship of refreshment and restoration. They're not just to make me feel cozy. They're not just to make me be, if you like, in an unhealthy way, pietistic. They are meant to lead me to going along in my walk as a Christian, in my responsibility as a Christian to be light and salt, to be walking along the right paths. The right paths in terms of, of course, sola scriptura by Christ alone, by the scripture alone. The right paths in terms of sola Christos, Christ alone, and the right paths in terms of faith by faith alone. But as I've said, they are also to be the right paths in terms of our publicising our faith. Faith is not meant to be privatised. It's not meant to be a secret. It's meant to be public. But also, he's leading us in David is saying in the right paths in terms of the destination. And the Sam, of course, finishes, doesn't it, at God's house. Now before I finish, I will say that sometimes we are on journeys and we find ourselves having to go along a path that isn't really, it's hard to get our heads round that that could be a right path. Let me give you an example of what I'm thinking about here. When we got married, my wife and I, our best man, sadly soon afterwards, in his, well, maybe not that soon, but in his forties, he developed motor neurons. And the doctor said to him, you've got five and a half years to live. And that's exactly how long we lived. And I used to go and see him. And he used to repeatedly say this to me, as his body got weaker and weaker, with a mind that was still fully intact within that dreadful body. He said, I know God has a purpose, but I've got no idea what that purpose is. And I've got no idea why whatever his purpose is, he needed to do this. Welcome to the real world. He leads me in the right

path. God works all things together for good. It doesn't mean that those all things are in and of themselves good. And I would even dare to say that there is some sense in which it may not be correct to say God has sent this. We inhabit a world that is free. And God respects that free world that he has made, although one day he's going to transform it. And God also respects the freedom that he has given to ourselves as a human race.

[30 : 59] Otherwise, he would be intervening every single moment, which he manifestly doesn't. And therefore, part of his providence, part of his sovereign decision is to allow that state of affairs.

So when we read something like this, he leads me in the right paths. And it begins to create a problem for us in our minds as we think of a particular path that we've had to endure and had to go down. Let's bear in mind that not all of the things that happen within that path to us are necessarily

in and of themselves good, but God in his wisdom and in his providence works all of these things together for our good. There is then these voices that I've imagined that might have been asking David, what is your take on life? And here is his testimony and here is his answer. The Lord is my shepherd. I have a live relationship with the living God and that transforms everything. And if you want to know some of the ways that that relationship has, some of the experience that that relationship has brought to me, here it is, he's given me rest. He's given me restoration. And he leads me in the his paths that are right for my salvation and for my preservation and for my destiny to be with him forever and ever. Can you then, would you be able to give the same answer as David if asked those questions? Are you able to say, Lord is my shepherd? I shall not want. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us.