Psalms For All Seasons - Part Two

# I Shall Not Be In Want

## (Psalm 23)

Welcome to all of you as we celebrate this week of Thanksgiving. We are in part two of our series this morning as we are discovering that the book of Psalms is a book for every season of life. I thought with Thursday being Thanksgiving that it would be appropriate to consider Psalms of thanks since that is in fact the season that we find ourselves in. But maybe even more importantly, we need to recognize that the greatest single threat to Thanksgiving is a spirit of entitlement.

Now, normally I try to refrain from making generalizations, but our culture has developed a sense of entitlement that has affected all ages. I used to think it was just the younger generations, but it may be just as contagious as COVID-19, and it is sweeping through our families, our communities, and our nation wreaking havoc. It is killing us in a way that the news doesn’t even talk about, but not surprisingly the Bible does. The apostle Paul said to every one of you,

“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment” (Romans 12:3).

In other words, he says to resist feeling like the world owes you something, resist the temptation of feeling entitled, because the world doesn’t owe you anything at all.

And yet today, more than ever, we have an increasing number of people who feel entitled to resources, opportunities, position, and yes, the praise. They want all of the benefits, the privilege, and the money, but they don’t want to do the work. They believe that they are entitled to happiness and a certain standard of living and for the most part we got here quite innocently.

You know, we were simply encouraging our children, trying to build up their self-esteem, and so we would tell them how amazing they are. We would say things like, “You’re the best, just incredible, you are so wonderful, that is spectacular.” And the thing is that they grew up believing it, and so they thought that wherever they go, or whatever they do, that they should receive all the accolades because they’re so amazing, so wonderful, so incredible and spectacular.

And as they became adults, they thought they should drive the nicest cars, have the most spectacular vacations, live in the biggest house, and have it all handed to them because they are entitled to it. And at the very core of the issue is the simple fact that we said it to encourage you, but you heard it as entitlement. And so now, every time you don’t get whatever you want, you have a temper tantrum, you begin feeling depressed and discouraged, wanting to self-medicate, because you felt like you really deserved it.

Now, within a biblical context, we recognize that this isn’t something new it’s just repackaged. We understand that the Israelites developed the same mindset when they were in Egypt. In spite of the fact that they were in slavery, in spite of their suffering, they became accustomed to the things that they enjoyed there. And so, when they cried out to God because of their suffering, and he delivered them from bondage, they declared his praise saying,

“Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice” (Psalms 105:1-3).

But I want you to notice what happened, no sooner did they begin their march in the wilderness, walking in their newfound freedom, did they begin complaining about what they didn’t have. They said,

“If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted…" (Exodus 16:3).

And so, they coveted the fish that they ate in Egypt, remembering the cucumbers, melons, and leeks. They reminisced about what they had been given at no cost, but conveniently forgot the great price they paid for this quote unquote free food.

Even later in their Babylonian captivity they carried with them this spirit of entitlement, grumbling and complaining against God, and the Bible says,

“Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities. They loathed all food and drew near the gates of death...” (Psalm 107:17-18).

And so, their sense of entitlement led them to disregard the blessings of God, not being thankful for what he had provided for them, just like they cried out in the wilderness saying,

“Now we have lost our appetite; (because) we never see anything but this manna” (Numbers 11:6).

And you would think we would learn from history, learning from our mistakes, but what many people don’t realize today is that it’s not what we give to our children that helps them to be successful. It’s what we leave in our children, investing in our children, that helps them to be successful. In fact, if you leave more to them than you have left in them, they won’t have the wisdom or the ability to handle what you left to them.

Much like the prodigal son, who went to his father and said,

“Father, give me my share of the estate” (Luke 15:12).

And I know it’s a parable, it’s an illustration of greater things, but maybe the father should’ve told him to get a job? You know, “You better get a job, nothing is coming to you, because you haven’t done anything. And so, don’t be waiting on me to die like a vulture before you start living your life.”

The problem is that our culture has been taught to believe that if you sit long enough, wait long enough, it’s going to come to you just because you’re supposed to have it. And so, it’s this spirit of entitlement that would rather have a dead father and a full wallet than to go out and get a job and work for it. And there are so many today that are not content with the blessings they have received from God, and they believe that they are entitled to something more, but the truth is we’re not entitled to anything, we don’t deserve anything.

And so, it doesn’t matter who you are or what you’ve done or how important you are, the fact is that you don’t want to get what you deserve, because you deserve condemnation. The only thing that we deserve is God’s judgment, and so we don’t want to start thinking too highly of ourselves, because it’s only by…

“The Lord’s great love that we are not consumed” (Lamentations 3:22).

And so, how can we recognize this subtle and pervasive spirit of entitlement that like the Grinch is trying to steal our thanks in this season of Thanksgiving? How can we identify it, so that we’re able to repent of it and overcome it?

I believe we must first search our hearts like David when he cried out to God,

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me…” (Psalms 139:23-24).

And so, if you search your heart and find yourself thinking, “I deserve to have a new car or a nicer home.” Or maybe, “I’ve worked hard all day to provide for my family, and I deserve to be able to sit down and watch TV when I come home.” Or “I’ve been saving, and I deserve to buy what I want for a change.”

And so, you begin looking, dreaming, and coveting, setting up idols in your life, and a spirit of entitlement will keep you from knowing Jesus intimately. And so, when we find ourselves feeling discontent because we’ve been comparing our lives to someone else’s. When we’re feeling disappointed because we think God has withheld something that we need to experience the good life. The Bible says,

“Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the Lord” (Psalm 107:43).

In other words, once we’ve searched our hearts and found entitlement lurking in the shadows, we need to get it out, we need to consider the great love of the Lord.

Listen to what David said in Psalm chapter 23, he said,

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want” (Psalms 23:1).

He could say that with confidence because he knew the Lord personally, he’d experience his provision and his protection. He had deep encounters with God in the wilderness, and above all he knew God’s promise that nothing can separate them from his love. And so, he declared,

“How priceless is your unfailing love!” (Psalms 36:7).

Because he knew that God would always love his children and that they could always find refuge in the shadow of his wings.

David also knew from experience that God was faithful, that he would never leave him or forsake him, and so he said,

“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me…” (Psalms 139:7-10).

And so, David considered the great love of the Lord, remembering that the Lord was his shepherd, and that he would not be in want. He knew that God would always sustain him, and so he made this declaration,

“My soul finds rest in God alone... He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress; I will never be shaken” (Psalms 62:1-2).

David knew that God was enough and he knew that God was all that he needed and so he prayed,

“One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple” (Psalms 27:4).

David considered the great love of the Lord, the faithfulness of the Lord, remembering that the Lord was his shepherd, that he was the sheep, and he was able to fully trust that the Lord would take care of him, even though he said,

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death” (Psalms 23:4).

And so, when we remember the goodness of God, praising him in our wilderness seasons, knowing that he has provided everything we need for life and godliness, we can rest content in his provision.

Now, that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t pray and ask God for things that we need because the Bible says,

“No good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless” (Psalms 84:11).

And so, your needs can be a catalyst for prayer, because you know the faithfulness of the Lord. And you know the goodness of God, you trust in his promises, and like David you know that you shall not be in want because,

“He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake” (Psalms 23:2-3).

And so, we remember the faithfulness of God, and as David said,

“I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me” (Psalms 23:4).

And so, like the example of David’s unwavering trust, the apostle Paul takes us even deeper telling us that we should follow Jesus’ example. In Philippians chapter 2, he said,

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” And even though Jesus is the only one who is truly entitled to anything, the Bible says that Jesus “who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:5-8).

And so, even though Jesus didn’t deserve to bear our sins on the cross, dying in our place, he chose to give up his own desires for our eternal good. That is an amazing statement as you consider what Jesus endured for us. The Holy Spirit said in Isaiah chapter 50, verse six,

“I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting” (Isaiah 50:6).

As we consider the Lord’s great love and his example, we remember that he didn’t come for himself, he didn’t come to be served, but to serve. And so, he suffered and died for us, and yet you can’t find one instance where Jesus grumbled or complained. Even though he was entitled to all things “he made himself nothing,” he didn’t say a word, he was completely silent, and that is what the Bible says that our attitude should be, “the same as that of Jesus.”

Now, since Jesus didn’t feel that he was entitled to happiness, we shouldn’t feel like we are entitled to be happy either, because he said,

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

And so, as we follow the example of Jesus, we recognize that we’re not entitled to happiness, nor are we entitled to the acceptance of others.

I know that there are many people today who believe that they should be able to do whatever makes them happy and that they should be accepted no matter how they choose to live, but the Bible teaches us to…

“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness…” (Ephesians 5:11).

And in the same way, those of us who are following Jesus, those who are living righteous lives, shouldn’t expect that the world would accept us either because Jesus said,

"If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you” (John 15:19).

And so, as followers of Jesus we’re not entitled to happiness, acceptance, or even a certain standard of living, because Jesus said,

"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20).

And so, no matter where you live, whether in Asia, Africa, North or South America, like the apostle Paul, we need to learn to be content in whatever situation we find ourselves in. In fact, he said it this way,

“I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked” (2 Corinthians 11:27).

And this may be a political issue, with people on the left and on the right having differing opinions, but we’re not really entitled to a certain standard of living.

In the same way, we’re not entitled to marry whomever we want, because when Jesus taught about marriage, he said that marriage was for a “male and female” and “the two will become one flesh” (Matthew 19:4-5). In other words, he ruled out all the other options, because marriage can only be between one man and one woman. Anything beyond that is contrary to God’s institution of marriage and therefore is sin.

And at the very heart of the issue, we must recognize that we are not entitled to our own interpretation of truth. We know according to Proverbs chapter 14,

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end, it leads to death” (Proverbs 14:12).

And so, even though many people want to believe what they want, do what they want, it doesn’t change the truth. Jesus told us that God’s Word is truth, and so we accept his Word, otherwise Scripture says,

“We deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

And so, we must correctly handle the Word of truth because were not entitled to our own interpretation of truth, and therefore our attitude, our thought processes, and our state of mind should be as that of Jesus Christ.

Today, I want to challenge you to search your heart, to remember the Lord your God, and imitate your Savior. To humble yourself before God and allow the Holy Spirit to help you identify any areas where you may feel entitled or deserving, having unrealistic expectations that may have blossomed into feelings of discontent. And so, we need the Holy Spirit to illuminate those things for us, helping us to overcome those areas, so that we find contentment in God’s goodness and in his presence. In fact, the Lord promises,

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13).

And so, when you set your mind to it, you can find what you are looking for, you can have that attitude of gratitude, because the Bible says that it begins in your mind. Solomon said,

“As a person thinks within themselves, so they are…” (Proverbs 23:7, NASU).

And so, you can change your attitude, getting rid of that sense of entitlement, putting on the mind of Christ, and experiencing the renewing of your mind.

You begin by investing time in prayer and in the Word of God, and you will quickly discover your attitude changing as you embrace each day as the psalmist said,

“This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalms 118:24).

And just by making a simple shift in your focus to thanking God for his goodness and faithfulness, you will be able to…

“Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture” (Psalm 100:2-3).

Armed with that knowledge, we are able to come boldly, as verse four says,

“Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations” (Psalm 100:4-5).

And so, we give thanks to the Lord with a focused mind, purposefully putting on the mind of Christ, and we enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise, declaring with David,

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Psalms 23:5-6).

And so, we want to choose to be thankful, to have an attitude of gratitude, so that our attitude would reflect that of Christ Jesus, and we want to…

“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

But honestly, it’s your choice, God has given you everything you need, but it’s really up to you. God’s will is for you to give thanks in all circumstances, not grumbling and complaining about what you don’t have, not worrying about what you are missing, but being content with what God has provided. In fact, Solomon said it this way,

“Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite…” (Ecclesiastes 6:9).

Because there is so much in the world competing for your attention, there is a battle for your heart, and it is your choice whom you will obey. And so, I want to encourage you to be thankful and content with what you have because as Solomon said,

“Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind” (Ecclesiastes 4:6).

And that is so important to remember, because a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

In fact, one of my favorite things about Thanksgiving is that it is not over commercialized like so many other holidays and thanksgiving is a believer’s greatest asset against temptation.

“For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world” (1 John 2:16).

And yet, I’m afraid that many times we miss out on the opportunities before us, not realizing that when we cling to things of this world that we are missing out on the gift of the Father’s presence. But as we loosen our grip and give God thanks for all things, and in every circumstance, he welcomes us into his gates. As we let go of the things of this world declaring,

“The Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations” (Psalm 100:5).

We enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.

Would you open your heart right now and give thanks to the Lord as we close in prayer?

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