

The Shepherds Psalm

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Dedication

To my father, whose wise leadership, firm faith, strict discipline, and timely counsel gave me the inspiration to be a follower of the Great Shepherd, whose name it seeks to glorify, I dedicate this book.

The Shepherds Psalm

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Foreword

IN this little volume I have sought to set forth the rich spiritual lessons of the twenty-third psalm in the light of the background of the Palestinian shepherd and his flock.

No other psalm from the ancient Hebrew hymnal makes such an eloquent appeal to the hearts of Christian pilgrims as they travel through the land of the enemy” to the fold of safety in the Celestial City.

if the reading of these pages produces a deeper appreciation of this psalm of Christian experience, and a greater desire to follow “the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls” wherever He leads, the author will feel richly repaid for the time and effort required to bring this book into existence. T. G. B.

The Song of Songs

The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me to lie -down in green pastures:
He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul:
He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:
For Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.
Thou prepared a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
Thou anointed my head with oil; my cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

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The Summary of Christian Experience

The Song of Songs

THE SHEPHERD PSALM is the most beautiful and best known of all the songs of the book of Psalms, the only book of divinely inspired songs ever written. (See 2 Samuel 23:1-3) The Peshitta, one of the oldest Syriac translations, calls the book of Psalms "The Songs of David," and another, "The Book of Songs." It is a hymnbook whose songs were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and are, therefore, a part of the Scriptures.

The word "psalm" "comes from the word poetry, a musical instrument that resembles a harp and that was used by the ancient Hebrews to accompany their songs. The Oriental sheep seem to love music while they are feeding or resting, as it assures them that the shepherd is present and that all is well. It is for this reason that most of the Eastern shepherds learn to play on the harp or psaltery. Some of them, like David, become very skillful musicians. They have plenty of time for practice.

Names of Psalm

This psalm has been given many different names. It is called "The Shepherd Psalm," "The Shepherd Song," "The Psalm of Solemn Beauty," "The Psalm Everybody Knows," and "The Psalm Immortal." It has been called "My Creed" and "The Minstrel Song." Martin Luther called it "A Little Bible," because it is the summary of Christian experience. He also compared it to the nightingale, which, though it is small among birds and has a homely plumage, pours out its beautiful notes with thrilling melody. Henry Ward Beecher called it "The Nightingale Psalm;" J. Wilbur Chapman, "The Meadow Lark;" and William Evans, "The Psalm Bird." It is also called "The Psalm of the Good Shepherd," because of His love and leadership through all the experiences of life. It is declared to be the most perfect picture of happiness ever penned, and represents the state of mind all desire, and the want of which means failure. It is said to be universal because it is individual, and individual because it is universal. It not only relates the experience of an ancient saint, but it speaks to us in our own language of an experience that is our own.

Concerning the eternal nature of this beautiful psalm, Dr. F. B. Meyer wrote: "Nor is its work done. It will go singing on through all the generations of time, and it will not fold its wings till the last pilgrim is safe, and time ended; then it shall fly back to the bosom of God, whence it issued, and sound on, mingled with all those harmonies of celestial joy which make heaven musical forever."

Summary of Experience

The Decalogue is an abridged edition of the Bible, because it contains "the whole duty of man," and is "exceeding broad" in its application and demands, embracing the whole human family in all ages and climes. The Beatitudes constitute a summary of the Sermon on the Mount and the principles of Christianity as set forth in the New Testament. Likewise the Lord's Prayer is a synopsis of all prayer, giving in seven petitions a summary of all the requests that meet the needs of man, both temporal and spiritual.

In the same manner the Shepherd Psalm constitutes the entire book of Psalms in brief. It sums up in six short verses of 118 words, 27 of which are personal pronouns, the whole of the Christian's experiences under the leadership of the Great Shepherd, who has been over the road before us and who ever says to His flock, "Follow Me," for "I am the way, the truth, and the life," and "he that follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

The Location

The Scriptures not only give a divine message, but they also show a divine arrangement. The twenty-third psalm is properly placed between the twenty-second and twenty-fourth psalms. The twenty-second psalm is "The Psalm of the Cross," or "The Psalm of Calvary." It describes the meditations of Jesus on the cross between the words, "My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken Me?" with which it begins, and His final exclamation, "He hath done it," or, according to the Hebrew, "It is finished," with which it ends. It is the song of Mount Golgotha. The twenty fourth psalm is the Psalm of Mount Zion, "The Psalm of Coronation," or "The Psalm of Triumph." It pictures the triumphal entry of Christ into the New Jerusalem after His ascension. It is the psalm of the Kingdom of Glory. The everlasting gates of the Celestial City are lifted up for the triumphal entry of the King of glory!

"Lift up your heads, O you gates; and be you lift up, you everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up

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your heads, O you gates; even lift them up, you everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah.” Psalm 24:7-10.

In between these two mountains is the twenty-third psalm, the Psalm of the Valley with its green grass, still waters, and grazing sheep. It is given to bring hope, comfort, and courage to God’s people during their earthly pilgrim journey between the cross and the crown. This experience is reached only by way of the cross. “The way of the cross leads home.” Between the Mount of Calvary and the Mount of Zion, the Mount of Agony and the Mount of Triumph, is the Valley of Salvation, or Christian experience, through which the Divine Shepherd safely leads His flock.

The Valley of Death

This valley is also called “the valley of the shadow of death.” The twenty-third psalm is therefore called “The Psalm of the Resurrection.” It describes the experience of the Son of God as the Good Shepherd passing through this dark valley in order that He might lead others safely through the dark shadow of death, to the high lands of life and glory beyond. How true it is that “the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps.” Jeremiah 10:23. But there are “green pastures” and “still waters,” with rest, comfort, mercy, and righteousness, in this valley between the two mountains.

The pastures are green and the waters are cool and refreshing because the mountains on either side receive the showers and send them in blessings to the valley, The valley owes its verdure and its productiveness to the mountains, and the valley of experience in which we live and through which we travel is made refreshing by the water of life, and productive of the bread of life, because of the continuous supply of divine grace from the Mount of Hope and Glory in the future. It is from the Mount of the Cross and through the Valley of Experience to the Mount of Zion that the Shepherd of our souls leads His flock.

The Author

Jesus said, “I am the Good Shepherd,” and therefore He is the shepherd of the Shepherd Psalm. He is also the real author, for He is “the Word of God.” His Spirit was in all the prophets, including the “sweet singer of Israel.” 1 Peter 1: 11. It is very probable that Jesus in His youth had experience as a shepherd, as have most of the boys and youth in the region where He grew to manhood. It was very appropriate that the Great Shepherd of men should choose as His earthly instrument to write this psalm, a man who was *himself a shepherd in his youth, and who was divinely chosen to shepherd the nation of Israel at the very time when he was shepherding his father’s sheep in the vicinity of Bethlehem, perhaps in the very region where a thousand years later the angel Gabriel announced to the astonished shepherds the birth of the Messiah, the Great Shepherd of Israel. and the angelic choir sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” Luke 2:14.

It is also appropriate that the Good Shepherd should be “the son of David,” the shepherd king. Of the Lord’s selection of David to rule over Israel, we are told: “He chose David also His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds: from following the ewes great with young He brought him to feed Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance.” Psalm 78:70, 71. David’s experience as a shepherd lad, and his years of sorrow and suffering while being pursued by Saul before he ascended the throne for which he was anointed in his youth, followed by success, prosperity, and years of peace as Israel’s greatest king, were a fitting background for the Shepherd Psalm. It was a psalm of experience. David had been divinely led through all the experiences set forth in the psalm, including “the valley of the shadow of death,” and the peace and satisfaction of the “green pastures” and “still waters.”

There is an old Hebrew legend that the harp of David would give forth music at midnight when the wind swept across its strings. One who has drunk deeply at the fountain of the Psalter, commenting on this legend, remarks that “the poetry of that tradition is condensed in the saying that the book of Psalms contains the whole music of the heart of man, swept by the hand of his Maker.”

Familiar Figures

Perhaps because Palestine, where the Bible was largely written, is a land of sheep and shepherds, the figure of a shepherd leading his sheep is used all through the Scriptures to represent the spiritual leadership of the people of God by the Great Shepherd and His under shepherds. More than six hundred times in the Bible do we find the words “shepherd,” “sheep,” “lamb,” “ram,” “ewe,” and “sheepfold;” and when we add “flock,” “herd,” “drove,” and similar expressions, the number is increased to one thousand or more. Owning and shepherding sheep in the Orient is considered a most valuable preparation for leadership. A faithful shepherd has often been called to the leadership of a city, tribe, or nation. Abraham,

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Isaac, and Jacob were shepherds. Their only occupation was sheep raising. Joseph told Pharaoh that his father and his brethren- were shepherds and knew no other occupation.

Moses was a shepherd for forty years before he was appointed shepherd of Israel for another similar period. Both flocks were led through the same region, the first being a preparation for the latter. Moses knew every trail and watering place and green pasture in the region of Mt. Horeb. He was also acquainted with the people who lived in that region. He knew their language and customs, and doubtless many times thanked God for his previous experience as a shepherd as he led the hosts of Israel through the same country. "Wisdom to govern an ignorant and undisciplined multitude must be gained through self mastery. Here Moses gained that which went with him throughout the years of his toilsome and care-burdened life, a sense of the personal presence of the Divine One. The great work assigned him he desired to make in the highest degree successful, and he placed his whole dependence upon divine power. He felt his need of help, asked for it, by faith grasped it, and in the assurance of sustaining strength went forward. Such was the experience that Moses gained by his forty years of training in the desert. To impart such an experience, Infinite Wisdom counted not the period too long or the price too great."-"Education," pp. 62-64.

Amos the prophet and David the prophet-king received their training as shepherds. There can be no better training in meekness and humility, trust and confidence, than is found in the life of a shepherd, and these are essential qualifications for leadership.

Complete Provision

The promise is, "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:19. The complete provision for our spiritual needs is set forth in the Shepherd Psalm. "As a gracious host, it has furnished a table for the poor, has given bread and meat to the hungry, and water to the fainting and thirsty; it has rained down manna for the needy, and provided to people the corn of heaven. It has given rest for the weary, peace to the perplexed, beauty for ashes, oil of joy for mourning, a garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. It has charmed away our grief, poured balm and consolation into the sick and wounded. It has healed the broken hearted, ' set at liberty them that are bruised, preached deliverance to the prisoner and the captive, and broken their chains. It has befriended the deserted and forsaken, defended the weak, remembered the forgotten, companioned the lonely, restored the disinherited, strengthened the feeble knees, and lifted up the hands which hung down. It has repaired and built up old, wasted lives and raised up generations long desolate. Like the high priest of the Lord with bejeweled breast, it has ministered to God and men."-"The Spirit of the Shepherd,," M. P. Krikorian, pp. 20,21.

The All-Providing Shepherd

Freedom From Want

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD; I shall not want." "The Lord is my shepherd: therefore can I lack nothing." (Prayer Book.) The opening sentence is a summary of the entire Shepherd Psalm. The whole message deals with the leadership and providing care of the Great Shepherd and Benefactor of our souls as we journey from Mount Calvary to Mount Zion, from the cross to the crown. Of this first promise and prophecy, William Allen Knight, in his little book, "The Song of the Syrian Guest," says:

"There is the opening strain of its music; in that chord is sounded the keynote which is never lost till the plaintive melody dies away at the song's end. All that follows is that thought put in varying light."-Page 10.

The Shepherd

The spelling of the word "LORD" in small capital letters identifies Him as Jehovah-Savior, or Jehovah-Jesus. He is the great 'I AM' who addressed the shepherd Moses at the burning bush on the slopes of Mt. Sinai, and told him to lead His people "like a flock- out of Egypt to the green, pastures of the Canaan land. Ten centuries later Jesus identified Himself as the Shepherd-Lord of this psalm, when He said "I am the Good Shepherd." John 10:11. To His disciples Jesus said: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Luke 12:32. Paul referred to Jesus as "that Great Shepherd of the sheep" (Hebrews 13:20), and Peter called Him "the Chief Shepherd." 1 Peter 5:4.

The latter text indicates that the good, great, and chief Shepherd has under shepherds who care for His earthly flock in His absence, and feed them in His stead. Spiritual leaders in all ages have been called

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shepherds or pastors. The word “pastor” comes from the Latin *pasco*, which means “to feed.” A pastor is one who provides pasture. Throughout the Scriptures the members of the church are spoken of as “sheep” and as a “flock.” Jesus spoke of the Jews as “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Peter said to the Christian Jews: “You were as sheep going astray; but now are returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.” 1 Peter 2:25. Prophecy said of Jehovah-Jesus, the Shepherd-Lord, “He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm.” Isaiah 40: 11.

My Shepherd

The psalm does not say that the Lord is a shepherd, or the shepherd, but that “the Lord is my shepherd.” One Christian writer has suggested that the sentence should be repeated four times with the emphasis on a different word each time. “The Lord is my shepherd. The Lord is my shepherd.” “The Lord is my shepherd.” The Lord is my shepherd.

The statement indicates a personal knowledge and acquaintance. At a certain gathering an aged minister asked a noted actor to recite the twenty third psalm. It was so beautifully recited that the guests were spellbound, and a subdued murmur of praise expressed their approval. The actor then turned to the minister and asked him to repeat it. When the man of God had finished, there were tears in the eyes of all, including the actor. The actor recognized the difference and felt it keenly. He said to the minister: “I know the psalm, but you know the Shepherd.” Do you know the twenty-third psalm only as one of the oldest and best of all literary productions, or does it make its appeal to you because you know and follow the Shepherd? Can you say truthfully from the heart, “The Lord is my shepherd”?

Know His Voice

The intimate acquaintance of the sheep with their shepherd is indicated by the words of Jesus recorded in John 10:2-6, 14, 15, 27. Oriental sheep refuse to follow a stranger, whom they recognize by his voice. More than once efforts have been made to deceive the sheep by putting on the shepherd’s clothes and trying to imitate his voice. The sheep have been temporarily deceived into following a stranger in the dress of the shepherd, but when he spoke, they fled in terror. They become acquainted with the words and gestures and music of their shepherd. They have instincts akin to that of dogs. Shepherds in the East often call out during the night to assure the sheep of their presence, and of their safety from false shepherds, thieves, and wolves.

If we would know safety and comfort during the night of sin, we must ever keep our ears a tune to the Great Shepherd’s voice. If we do, we will not be frightened by the threatening cries of the many enemies of our souls. Even though His voice be “still” and “small,” it ever says to the flock of His love, “This is the way, walk you in it,” or, “Fear thou not. For I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness. Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish.” Isaiah 41: 10, 11. God’s true people who know the Good Shepherd recognize His voice and are not deceived by the calls of false christs and prophets, strangers to God and His word. There is safety only in acquaintance with the Divine Shepherd.

The Provider

“I shall not want” if “the Lord is my shepherd.” The gracious promise is: “My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19); and, “They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.” Psalm 34: 10. It was the shepherd king of Israel who wrote: “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.” Psalm 37:25. After reproofing His disciples for their lack of faith in Him as their great provider, the Good Shepherd said: “Seek you first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” Matthew 6:33. Jesus reminded His followers of His care for the needs of all living creatures and of their confidence and trust in Him. He reproofed them for making food and drink and raiment the all-absorbing passion of their lives; for, He said, “your heavenly Father knows that you have need of these things.” We need to remember that “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof,” including “the silver and the gold” and “the cattle upon a thousand hills,” and that “no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.”

Exodus Movement

Doubtless the greatest example of the watch care and guidance of the Great Shepherd was during

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the forty years of wandering of ancient Israel in the wilderness during the exodus from Egypt. It is compared to a shepherd guiding his sheep. "Thou led Thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron." Psalm 77:20. He "made His own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. And He led them on safely, so that they feared not." Psalm 78:52, 53. In Isaiah 63:11 the question is asked: "Where is He that brought them up out of the sea with the Shepherd of His flock?" In regard to the Great Shepherd's provision for all the wants of His flock during their wilderness sojourn, we read: "The Lord thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand: He knows thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the Lord thy God hath been with thee; thou has lacked nothing." Deuteronomy 2:7. "Thou gave also Thy good Spirit to instruct them, and withheld not Thy manna from their mouth, and gave them water for their thirst. Yea, forty years did Thou sustain them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not." Nehemiah 9:20, 21.

Jehovah-Jireh

Abraham was commanded to take his only son Isaac and offer him as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah, the type of Mount Golgotha. It was a three-day journey, and "every step of each mile was a step of sorrow toward the type and shadow of Calvary."

As Jesus left most of His disciples at the garden gate while with the chosen three He went to His Gethsemane, saying to the others, "Tarry you here, while I go and pray yonder," so Abraham left his servants at the foot of the mountain with the words, "Abide you here and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." As Christ bore His own cross to the summit of Golgotha, so Isaac carried the wood for his own sacrifice to the summit of Moriah. On the way up the mount Isaac asked the question, "Father, behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" What a test of faith for the old patriarch! There must have followed a few moments of profound silence, and then, wiping the perspiration from his brow, Abraham answered, "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering." With these words of faith he struggled on to the summit, where, with trembling hands, he built an altar and laid on it the wood.

The son, "obedient unto death," like a lamb before her shearers, "opened not his mouth" in protest against the will of his father. Isaac permitted himself to be bound and laid on the wood in readiness to be sacrificed. It was when the knife was raised to strike the fatal blow that a voice called Abraham's attention to "a ram caught in a thicket by his horns," which he sacrificed "in the stead of his son." Then it was that Abraham called the name of the place "Jehovah-Jireh," which means, "The Lord will provide." It was on the summit of this mount of faith and vision that Abraham saw the day of Christ, and was glad. (See John 8:56)

Another Jehovah-Jireh

Nineteen hundred years after the experience of Abraham, the Good Shepherd laid down His life for His sheep on Mt. Calvary, only a short distance from the place where Isaac was offered on Mt. Moriah. It was from Mt. Moriah, on which the temple was built, that Jesus, "the Lamb of God," was led "as a lamb to the slaughter," to Mt. Golgotha, where He was sacrificed as our substitute and surety. Thus the Lord provided a Lamb for us when we faced certain death because of our own sins. Calvary is, therefore, another and greater "Jehovah-Jireh," the mountain of the all-providing Shepherd.

Jehovah-Jesus not only made full provision for our salvation and spiritual needs on the cross; but He was the great provider during His earthly visit. He fed the multitude with both temporal and spiritual food. After the disciples returned from their missionary journey, Jesus said: "When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked you any thing? And they said, Nothing." Luke 22:35.

All Wants Supplied

The purpose of the entire psalm is to show that the Good Shepherd supplies all our needs. "I shall not want rest: 'He makes me to lie down in green pastures.' I shall not want drink. 'He leads me beside the still waters.' I shall not want forgiveness. 'He restores my soul.' I shall not want guidance. 'He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.' I shall not want companionship. 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me.' I shall not want comfort. 'Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.' I shall not want food. 'Thou prepared a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.' I shall not want joy. 'Thou anointed my head with oil.' I shall not want anything. 'My cup runs over.' I shall not want for anything in this life. 'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.' I shall not want anything in eternity. 'I will dwell in the house of the

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Lord forever.” Mrs. John R. Mott.

Fulfilled in Christ

“I am the Good Shepherd. Thou shall not want rest. ‘Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’ Thou shall not want drink. ‘If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink.’ Thou shall not want forgiveness. ‘The Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins.’ Thou shall not want guidance. ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life.’ Thou shall not want companionship. ‘Lo, I am with you always.’ Thou shall not want comfort. ‘The Father shall give you another Comforter.’ Thou shall not want food. ‘I am the bread of life: he that comes to Me shall never hunger.’ Thou shall not want joy. ‘That My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.’ Thou shall not want anything. ‘Whatsoever you shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you.’ Thou shall not want anything in this life. ‘Seek you first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.’ Thou shall not want anything in eternity. ‘I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am there you may be also.’ - Idem.

“The Lord my Shepherd is, I shall be well supplied; Since He is mine and I am His, What can I want beside?” - Isaac Watts.

The Green Pastures

Satisfying Rest

HE MAKETH ME to lie down in green pastures.” “In pastures of tender grass,” margin. “He makes me to dwell in rich pastures,” Aramaic. “He hath set me in a place of pasture,” Douay. “He lets me rest in verdant fields,” Fenton. The picture is that of rest and satisfaction in a fertile place of safety and abundance. The chief desire of the shepherd is to find good pasture where there is plenty of water. Such places are rather scarce in Palestine and in all of Western Asia. Most of the country where sheep graze is quite barren, and the flock must scatter through the mountains in search of grass. This makes it difficult for both the shepherd and his sheep to find rest. There can be no satisfying rest as long as there is hunger and thirst. Animals lie down when they are satisfied. “They are eating and lying down” is an Eastern expression applied to both persons and sheep when there is an abundance of food and drink. It indicates ease and tranquillity because of the assurance that the daily needs are abundantly provided for. Where there is plenty of grass, sheep are easily and quickly satisfied, and then they lie down and digest their food.

All Important Question

With the Oriental shepherd the all-important question is pasturage for his sheep. This occupies his mind throughout the year and almost day and night. To conserve his pasture he feeds his flock on the lowlands in the early spring, and as the summer heat dries up the grass and water springs, he moves them higher up into the mountain. Pasture lands are often rented and paid for in sheep and wool. Shepherds and even tribes fight over feeding grounds, as sheep raising is their chief and often their only means of livelihood. Pasturage and water, therefore, is a life-and-death question with the Eastern shepherd, where his sheep constitute his living and his wealth. The shepherds who live in villages lead their sheep to pasture about six o’clock in the morning, but in more distant pastures, where the shepherds abide “in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night” (Luke 2:8), the sheep begin grazing about four o’clock, or as soon as daylight begins. While the sheep are hungry and the dew is still on the grass and leaves, the shepherd usually leads his flock to the worst part of the pasture. The moisture makes the foliage tender and sweet, and therefore more palatable. (See 1 Chronicles 4:39,40.)

Spiritual Pastures

The Scriptures constitute the green pastures and verdant fields of the Christian. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” He also said, “I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.” John 10:9, 10, 28. The Lord’s care for His flock in leading them into “a fat pasture” and “a good pasture” is beautifully set forth in Ezekiel 34:11-15. The Lord has rich spiritual pastures for His sheep, where they may find abundance of food and satisfaction with no fear of shortage or thought of greed. But the Christian, who desires spiritual health and satisfaction, must, like the sheep, get into the

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pasture early, and begin the day with God and His word. It is in- the early dawn of the day that the word of God is the most refreshing to the soul. Then, because of the refreshing sleep of the night, the soul is hungry and the spiritual food, watered with the dew of divine grace, is tender, fragrant, and refreshing.

Secret of Spiritual Power

Prophecy declares that the secret of Christ's wisdom and spiritual power was His early morning feeding on the word. (See Isaiah 50:44) "To help the weary with a word, He roused me at the dawn, at break of day He waked my ears to listen like a child." Fenton. "The Lord, the Eternal, has given me a well-trained tongue, that I may rightly answer the ungodly; morning by morning He wakens me to learn my lesson, and never have I disobeyed, or turned away." Moffatt. Entering the green pastures of the Scriptures early in the morning has also been the secret of success in the lives of great spiritual leaders in all ages. With them, as with the Master, the first and best hours of the day were spent in prayer and the study of the word. Charles Simeon spent the morning hours from four to eight with God, and Wesley began his devotional period at four and continued it for at least two hours. Bishop Ken was with God before the clock struck three each morning; and Bishop Asbury said: "I propose to rise at four o'clock as often as I can, and spend two hours in prayer and meditation."

Samuel Rutherford began his devotions at three, and Joseph Alleine began his four hours of spiritual feeding at four. Whenever he heard a tradesman plying his business before he was in his study, he would exclaim: "Oh, how this shames me! Does not my Master deserve more than theirs?" Another great preacher said: "I ought to spend the best hours in communion with God. It is my noblest and most fruitful employment, and is not to be thrust into a corner. The morning hours, from six to eight, are the most uninterrupted and should be thus employed." Like the sheep, we should get into the green pastures early in the morning, so that we may find rest and satisfaction during the heat of the day, with its tests and trials. "My voice shall Thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto Thee, and will look up." Psalm 5:3.

Enforced Rest

"He makes me to lie down." The Hebrew word translated "makes" indicates a forcible, compelling action. It is absolutely necessary that there be pauses in our busy lives, and if we refuse to take them, they may be brought about by sickness. Jesus said to His tired disciples, "Come you yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile." Mark 6:31. Often we are unwilling to rest because our duties are so pressing and time is so limited. When the sun is high in the heavens, and the sheep become hot and thirsty, the shepherd leads his flock in search of a cooling and refreshing stream, or under some great tree where there is a well and watering troughs. When they reach the place of water, he compels the sheep to lie down and rest a little while before he allows them to drink, or while he draws water from the well and fills the drinking troughs.

The illustration may be drawn from this experience of the shepherd and his sheep, since, in the psalm, the lying down is mentioned before the watering. Of course, after the sheep quench their thirst, they lie down again and rest at least two hours during the heat of the day before feeding again. In Palestine most of the business houses close for two hours in the middle of the day, during which time the merchants and the workmen seek a cool place and rest. "Tell me; O thou whom my soul loves, where thou feeds, where thou makes thy flock to rest at noon." Song of Solomon 1:7. The joyous answer is, "My beloved feeds his flock among the lilies." How precious is the promise of the Great Shepherd: "I will feed My flock, and I will cause them to lie down, said the Lord." Ezekiel 34:15. It is easy to get sheep to lie down after they have been well fed and their thirst is quenched.

Difficult Task

To get people to rest and "lie down- in this busy, rushing age of strain and nervous tension is a difficult task. The command to rest is one of the most difficult commands to obey. Most Christians are more willing to "go" than to "tarry." They would rather roam the hills than lie down in green pastures. "It is generally recognized as being A very difficult thing to get God's people to thus 'lie down.' They will do almost anything and everything else than that. They will run, walk, fight, sing, teach, preach, work, in a word do almost anything and everything except seek seasons of quiet and periods of retirement for secret communion with God and quiet soul nurture." And yet "there can be no spiritual: strength sufficient to walk in 'paths of righteousness' unless time is taken to 'lie down' in the 'green pastures' of the divine Word and by the still waters of prayer. To 'lie down' is the first lesson the Great Shepherd would teach His sheep." –

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“The Shepherd Psalm,” William Evans, p. 27.

It was because Christ withdrew from the multitude regularly for prayer and study that He was able to draw the multitudes to Himself. We are told that Enoch “spent much time in solitude, giving himself to meditation and prayer. Thus he waited before the Lord, seeking a clearer knowledge of His will, that he might perform it. To him prayer was as the breath of the soul; he lived in the very atmosphere of heaven. Patriarchs and Prophets,” p. 85. Night is one of the resting places when the Divine Shepherd “gives His beloved sleep.” What a marvelous provision for weary and heavy-laden humanity! How sweet and refreshing is the night of repose after the day of toil!

Soul Rest

The word “Sabbath” means not merely rest but soul rest. Mere physical rest on the Sabbath is not true Sabbath keeping unless the soul is at peace with, God through the consciousness of sins forgiven. In speaking of the Sabbath, the apostle says, “There remains therefore a rest to the people of God.” Hebrews 4:9. The margin says “keeping of a Sabbath” in place of “rest.” The Sabbath is a wonderful provision which the Lord has made for both physical and spiritual rest every seventh day. It is a refreshing oasis in the midst of the strenuous duties of life. The Sabbath is the day of all the week when the Great Shepherd leads His people into the green pastures of His word, feeds them on the bread of life, and leads them beside the still waters to refresh their souls with the water of life. It is on the Sabbath that the Lord makes His people “lie down” in rich pastures for soul rest and spiritual refreshing. This was indicated to ancient Israel by the fact that fresh show bread was placed in the typical sanctuary every Sabbath morning.

“Resting in the pastures and beneath the Rock, Resting by the waters where He leads His flock, Resting while we listen, at His glorious feet, Resting in His very arms! O rest complete!” -Frances Ridley Havergal.

The Source of Rest

The Great Shepherd says to every weary soul: “Come unto Me, all you who are tired out and carrying burdens, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28-30, Aramaic. An ancient prophet said: “Thus said the Lord, Stand you in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and you shall find rest for your souls.” Jeremiah 6:16. (See also Isaiah 32:17, 18) Such is the rest and satisfaction of soul that is enjoyed by those who follow the leadership of the Great Shepherd, and who lie down in His green pastures. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be completely satisfied.” Matthew 5:6, Weymouth.

“Lord what a change within us one short hour
Spent in Thy presence would prevail to make!
What heavy burdens from our bosoms take,
What parched grounds revive as with a shower; We kneel, and all around us seems to lower;
We rise’ and all, the distant and the near, Stands forth a sunny outline, brave and clear.

“We kneel, how weak! We arise, how full of power! Why, therefore, should we do ourselves this wrong, Or others, that we are not always strong; That we are ever overborne with care;

That we should ever weak or heartless be,
Anxious or troubled, when with us is prayer,
And joy and strength and courage are with Thee.

Richard Chenevix Trench.

Beside the Still Waters

Divine Leadership

HE LEADETH ME is a declaration and an acknowledgment of divine leadership. A willingness to submit to the undisputed guidance of the Great Shepherd is the result of feeding in the green pastures of His word. The Oriental sheep must be led. Without a shepherd they become confused and are easily lost. Sheep have almost no sense of direction. When left to themselves, they become scattered and are an easy prey to

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wild beasts and thieves. A shepherd must lead them to the pastures, the watering places, the cooling shade, and again to the fold. The very safety of the sheep depends on the leadership of the shepherd and the willingness of the flock to follow.

The same is true in a spiritual sense. Jesus said of the shepherd: "The sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. And when he puts forth his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice." John 10:3, 4. He then said: "I am the Good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." Verses 14, 27. Jesus also said: "If any man will come after Me, let him follow Me." Matthew 16:24.

Daily Prayer

One of the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer is for daily leadership. "Lead me" is the cry of the Christian pilgrim to the Great Shepherd as he journeys through a foreign land to his eternal home. Christ has gone over the road before us, "leaving us an example, that" we "should follow His steps." 1 Peter 2:21.

"He that said he abides in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked." 1 John 2:6. The prophet of old truthfully said, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps." Jeremiah 10:23. Without divine leadership, man becomes confused, and, like a sheep, loses all sense of direction. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world: he that follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walks in darkness knows not whither he goes." John 8:12; 12:35. Of the redeemed it is said, "These are they which follow the Lamb whither so ever He goes." Revelation 14:7. They follow Him in heaven because they followed Him on earth.

"He leads me, O blessed thought! O words with heavenly comfort fraught! What ever I do, wherever I be,
Still is God's hand that leads me.

"Sometimes amid scenes of deepest gloom, Sometimes where Eden's bowers bloom, By waters still, over
troubled sea. Still is God's hand that leads me."

Still Waters

"He leads me beside the still waters." "He leads me to refreshing streams." Moffatt. "Waters of rest" is the meaning in the Hebrew, and is the rendering in the footnote of the Revised Version. "To the waters of rest He takes me" is the translation of a Hebrew scholar. The description is that of quiet and virtually motionless water, or water that is not turbulent and swift. It is a well known fact that sheep will not drink from swiftly flowing or gurgling water. Sheep must be watered, at least twice a day. The shepherd knows the watering places, and must lead the flock to "refreshing streams" or the "waters of rest." The water, however, must not be stagnant or muddy. The picture is that of pure and smoothly running water. Sheep are always fearful about entering a turbulent stream. They cannot be driven across a swiftly running stream. It is necessary sometimes for the shepherd to carry or drag a sheep across, and then the others will follow. There is danger of a sheep's being drowned, because of his long, heavy wool. This is especially true of the Oriental sheep, which have long, fat tails that weigh from fifteen to forty pounds. The tails of the lambs of the East are not cut off as they are in this country.

Mountainous Country

Palestine is mostly a rough and mountainous country, especially where the sheep graze. The streams are therefore swift and filled with waterfalls and riffles. It is sometimes difficult to find pools and eddies where the sheep will drink. Sometimes the shepherd must make pools and create "still waters" for his flock by making a temporary dam across the little stream, by clearing away the reeds and the moss, or by digging out a small cistern in the gravel. If there is but one little pool, the sheep are made to wait until the watering place is ready, and then they are taken to it a few at a time. The lambs are often carried in the arms of the shepherd, and sometimes he waters them from his own drinking cup. Regardless of how thirsty the sheep are, they will refuse to drink until they can find "still water." They cannot be tempted by either turbulent streams or filthy, stagnant water. The water must be both still and fresh.

Because streams are scarce in many parts of Palestine, especially in the summer when many of them disappear, the sheep must often be watered from wells, fountains, and cisterns. When the shepherd leads his flock to such watering places, he makes them lie down and rest while he draws the water and fills

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the large stone troughs. Then he leads a few at a time to the “still waters” until the entire flock have had their thirst quenched. He then leads them to a place of shade, where they lie down. In the hot summertime they often rest from ten in the morning till three in the afternoon, when they are again led to the pastures for grazing.

Spiritual Application

The Oriental shepherds wash their sheep from time to time, especially just before shearing, so that the wool will be white and clean. The Divine Shepherd has also provided for the cleansing of His flock “with the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:26), until their characters are “as white as snow” and “as wool.” Isaiah 1: 18. The precious promise is, “In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.” Zechariah 13:1. The Great Shepherd has also provided the still, pure waters of salvation and eternal life. To His flock He cries out, “Ho, everyone that thirsts, come you to the waters.” Isaiah 55:1. “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink.” John 7:37. “He that comes to Me shall never hunger; and he that believes on Me shall never thirst.” John 6:35.

Jesus promised the woman at the well that He would give her “living water,” and “whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” John 4:10, 14. The thirst of those who come to this fountain of living water will be continually quenched. Christ is a living well whose waters are ever flowing and never stagnant. The promise is that even in the redeemed state “the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them into living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” Revelation 7:17.

Tranquil Waters

The human heart longs for rest, quietness, and tranquillity. Turbulent waters are as distasteful to us as to the sheep. In the Scriptures they are symbolic of strife, war, commotion, and uncontrolled passions. “The roaring of the sea and its billows” brings “distress” and “perplexity” to the nations in the last days, so that the hearts of men faint for fear as they view the things that are coming on the troubled world. (See Luke 21:25, 26) These restless, troubled waters are everywhere today, even in the hearts of men and women. It is the result of sin. “But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, said my God, to the wicked.” Isaiah 57:20, 21.

Peace, safety, and happiness depend upon the faith and calmness that come through the consciousness of forgiveness and cleansing. “In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.” Isaiah 30:15. Fearfulness is always noisy, excited, and flurried. Noise is the result of friction and discord. It is the clashing together of discordant elements. Christ rebuked the turbulent waters of the Sea of Galilee with the command, “Peace, be still.” The record is that “there was a great calm.” Confidence is always quiet and calm. It produces composure and stillness.

Scriptural Admonition

“Be still, and know that I am God.” Psalm 46: 10. Only quiet people can know God. “Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.” Psalm 37. “Be still before Jehovah,” Revised Version, margin. “Be silent to God, and let Him mold thee.” Luther. “Study to be quiet,” was the admonition of Paul. “To be quiet does not mean repression, but it does mean mastery, and mastery means quietness. Mastery is holding true to God. The machinery of life must run smoothly and quietly if it is to run for long.”—“The Shepherd and His Sheep,” J. Walter Rich, p. 74. A noisy engine is a sign of death. Still waters usually are deep, and deep waters usually run smooth. It is the shallow waters that are noisy and ruffled. Likewise shallow characters are fussy, ‘noisy, and easily ruffled. A shallow lake is always easily disturbed by winds. The apostle declares that “the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is in the sight of God of great price.” 1 Peter 3:4. A meek and quiet spirit is also of great price in the estimation of men.

The Virtue of Calmness

“Calmness is the rarest quality in human life. It is the poise of a great nature, in harmony with self and its ideals. It is the moral atmosphere of a life, self-reliant, and self-controlled. Calmness is singleness of purpose, absolute confidence, and conscious power-ready to be focused in an instant to meet any crisis. Calmness comes ever from within. It is the peace and restfulness of the depth of our nature. The fury of storm and of wind agitate only the surface of the sea; they can penetrate only two or three hundred feet-

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below that is the calm, unruffled deep. To be ready for the great crises of life we must learn serenity in our daily living. Calmness is the crown of self-control. When man has developed the spirit of calmness until it becomes so absolutely a part of him that his very presence radiates it, he has made great progress in life. Calmness cannot be acquired of itself and by itself; it must come as a culmination of a series of virtues. The man who is calm does not selfishly isolate himself from the world, for he is intensely interested in all that concerns the welfare of humanity. His calmness is but a holy of holies into which he can retire from the world to get strength to live in the world. He realize that the full glory of individuality, the crowning of his self-control, is-the majesty of calmness.” – “ The Majesty of Calmness,” William George Jordan, pp. 7-11.

Perfect Peace

The “still waters” are also symbolic of perfect peace. “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusts in Thee.” Isaiah 26:3. Such peace is “unbroken by storms, uninvaded by the rabble rout of care, unreached by the highest surges of sorrow, unstained by the contaminating touch of sin. The very same peace that reigns in heaven, where all is perfect and complete.”-”Peace, Perfect Peace,” F. B. Meyer, pp. 10, 11. The peace promised the Christian is that “of a river” (Isaiah 48:18) that is deep and broad and long. It continues flowing day and night to bless all that it touches. “Great shall be the peace of Thy children.” Isaiah 54:13. “Great peace have they which love Thy law and nothing shall offend them.” Psalm 119:165. “Offend” might be translated “ruffle,” “disturb,” or “distract”. Paul declared that the peace of God “passes all understanding.” Philippians 4:7. This is the peace that Jesus bestows upon His followers. (See John 14:27; 16:33)

“Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin? The blood of Jesus whispers peace within.

“Peace, perfect peace, by thronging duties pressed? To do the will of Jesus: this is rest.

“Peace, perfect peace, with sorrows surging round? On Jesus’ bosom naught but calm is found.

“Peace, perfect peace, with loved ones far away? In Jesus’ keeping we are safe, and they.

“Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown? Jesus we know, and He is on the throne.

“Peace, perfect peace, death shadowing us and ours? Jesus has vanquished death and all its powers.

“It is enough; earth’s struggles soon shall cease. And Jesus call to heaven’s perfect peace.”

-Bishop E. H. Bickersteth.

The Great Restorer

Complete Restitution

“HE RESTORES MY SOUL” is the gospel in miniature. “To seek and to save that which was lost” was the purpose of the advent of the Great Shepherd to this dark world. Complete restoration from the curse of sin is the mission of the gospel. (See Acts 3:19-21) “Restitution” means to bring back to a former state or condition, or to restore to original ownership that which was lost, stolen, or misappropriated. It means to redeem or buy back that which has passed into the possession of another, or to revive and heal that which is sick or wounded. The original state or condition of both man and his home was perfection. “God created man in His own image.” He “made man upright” (Genesis 1:27; Ecclesiastes 7:29), and placed him in a perfect home under perfect conditions. The purpose of the plan of redemption is to save and restore all that was lost through sin. Paul says that “when the perfect state of things is come, all that is imperfect will be brought to an end.” 1 Corinthians 13:10, Weymouth.

Oriental Expression

“Soul” as used here and throughout the Scriptures has a variety of meanings. It is often applied to one’s life or person. Individuals are often spoken of as souls. “He restores me” is an expression often used in the East. He “revives life in me” is the James Moffatt translation of our text; and, “He brings me back, my life refreshed,” is the Fenton translation. In Western Asia when a man is tired and thirsty, he often says, “My soul has left me,” just as in this country we say, “I am dying of thirst.” When a weary person is revived by a cup of cold water or some food, he says, “You have saved my life,” or, “You have redeemed

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my life.” The ignorant in the Orient often say, “We are thirsty for knowledge.” But the chief purpose of this statement, and, in fact, of the whole of the twenty-third psalm, is to promise soul or spiritual restoration. “He hath converted my soul,” is the rendering of the Douay translation. In another psalm the shepherd-king of Israel said, “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.” Psalm 19:7.

Lost Sheep

No other animal is so easily lost as a sheep. Sheep have no sense of direction or position. Dogs, cats, horses, cattle, and birds know where they are and where they are going, but not so with sheep. Sheep have a very limited vision. They cannot see clearly more than ten or fifteen yards. Strangers and animals can get close to them before they are aware of their presence. They follow the shepherd more by the sound of his voice than by sight. When the flock is grazing, the sheep are inclined to scatter, and the shepherd is kept busy restoring lost sheep to the flock. As soon as they find they are alone, sheep always begin to bleat, and they continue to bleat until they are restored to the flock. The chief work of the shepherd is to restore lost and straying sheep. When a sheep is missing from his flock, he can never rest or sleep till it is restored. Sometimes he searches all night long, and when he finds and restores the wanderer, he is very happy, and even celebrates with his neighbors or the other shepherds. His interest in finding lost sheep is, not alone in their material value, but, chiefly because of his love for them. Long association makes them “dear to the heart of the shepherd,” as we sing. The chief shepherd is usually very severe with the under shepherds who permit a sheep to be lost.

Lost Souls

It is also the tendency of human beings to go astray and wander from the flock of God and the fold of safety. In a spiritual sense man is as senseless and helpless as a sheep. Left to himself, he has no sense of direction. The sinner does not know where he is or whither he is going. “It is not in man that walks to direct his steps,” declared the prophet. Jeremiah 10:23. “There is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” Proverbs 14:12. Man is ever inclined to seek his own ways and get hopelessly lost and confused. He cannot find his way back unaided any more than can a sheep. How meaningful is the statement: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.” Isaiah 53:6. But the Great Shepherd “restores me when wandering- and “redeems when oppressed.” He is more interested in His sheep and lambs than any shepherd could ever be. In His estimation a man is “more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir.” Isaiah 13:12.

The parables of the lost sheep and the ninety and nine illustrate the Lord’s love for even the one lost soul. This is also emphasized by the parables of the lost coin and the lost or prodigal son. The sheep was lost and knew it, but it did not know how to get back to the fold. It welcomed the help of the shepherd who led or carried it home. The coin was also lost, but it did not know it. Not being aware of its lost condition, the coin had no concern or desire to be found and restored to its rightful place. The prodigal son knew that he was lost, and he also knew the way home, but he did not care to be restored until he had learned his lesson, and then he returned of his own volition to be welcomed by his loving and anxious father. These three parables represent the three different kinds of lost or wandering sheep of the Great Shepherd.

Jesus said that the true Shepherd will leave the ninety and nine “and go after that which has gone astray, until He find it.” The search is not abandoned till it ends in success.

“Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
But yet in love He sought me;
And on His shoulders gently laid,
He home rejoicing brought me.” -Sir Henry W. Baker.

Captured Sheep

Sheep are often captured by thieves or are taken into custody by the owners of property on which they have strayed and are then held for ransom. When sheep wander into fields or pasture that belong to another shepherd or farmer, they are often taken captive, and the shepherd must buy them back or pay a fine for each trespassing sheep. On some occasions the sheep is forfeited to the owner of the land, and in order to be restored, it must be purchased at even more than its regular value. Love and sentiment will lead the shepherd to restore the sheep at almost any price.

Satan is the great sheep stealer. Through sin we sell ourselves into bondage, and then we need to

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be ransomed by One who can pay the redemption price and restore us to the rightful Owner. Through Christ, His stolen and captured sheep “may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.” 2 Timothy 2:26. The work of Christ is to “bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house- (Isaiah 42:7); “to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.” Isaiah 6 1: 1. Man cannot rescue himself from the clutches of the great adversary, nor can he pay the redemption price. He needs a Deliverer and a Redeemer.

Wounded Sheep

The sheep pastures of Palestine are covered with narrow trails that run in every direction. It is very easy for the sheep to get lost and fall into a thicket or over a precipice or into a ravine. With their long wool and heavy tails they are very clumsy, and are often wounded. The Oriental shepherd must be a sheep physician. He must seek his lost and wounded sheep and bind up its wounds. Sometimes he must reset broken bones. He carries with him a vessel of oil for the anointing and healing of the sores and wounds.

Sin is likened in the Scriptures to disease, and the gospel to a remedy that restores to spiritual health. (See Isaiah 1:5, 6) Jesus said, “They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Luke 5:31, 32. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that if he would break off his sins, it might be “an healing of your error.” Daniel 4:27, margin. The psalmist cried out, “Lord, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against Thee.” Psalm 41:4. To Israel the Lord said, “Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your back sliding.” Jeremiah 3:22. “The Lord binds up the breach of His people, and heals the stroke of their wound.” Isaiah 30:26. “He heals the broken in heart, and binds up their wounds.” Psalm 147:3.

Thirsty Sheep

The distance from the fold to the pasture and back to water is often great, and the strength of the sheep is taxed on a hot day. Intense thirst produces great suffering, and the sheep must wait till watering time. In the heat of the day, they often bunch up and bend down their heads to seek shade in the shadow of one another. Under such circumstances, what comfort a refreshing drink brings! When the shepherd leads the thirsty and weary sheep to the “still waters” of ‘the stream, or draws water from the well for them, if the sheep could talk as do the sheep of the Shepherd Psalm, they would say, “He revives my life,” or “He brings me back, my life refreshed.” The soul or life is indeed refreshed and restored to the freshness enjoyed in the early morning. After their thirst is quenched and they have rested for a few hours, both the shepherd and his flock are refreshed with renewed strength and life.

In the same way the feeding in the green pastures of God’s word and the drinking of the water of life from the wells of salvation completely restore the spiritual life of the weary Christian pilgrim. “Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” Isaiah 40:30, 31. What a beautiful picture of soul restoration!

Examples

The Scriptures contain some notable examples of the restoring power of the Great Shepherd. The shepherd author of the Shepherd Psalm spoke from experience. He had wandered away and had been seriously wounded by sin, and then fully restored by the Great Shepherd.

“When the prophet with an accusing finger spoke the laconic words, ‘Thou art the man,’ David’s conscience became his own jury and judge. The once happy harpist, who had poured praises unto the Lord in streams of rarest melodies, hanged his harp upon the willows, so that every breeze strummed its own tune. Instead of the sweet harmony of former days, there came a jangling and horrid discord. The fallen king tore the veil away from his soul, stripped the sorry record bare, and wrung from out his smitten heart the great confession, which is a classic in the deep penitential prayer for the remission of sins and sanctification for all times: “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.’ Psalm 51:1-7.

“Swift on the heel of this grand confession come the beatitudes as bright as the colors of the rainbow: ‘Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto

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whom the Lord imputes not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, you righteous: and shout for joy, all you that are upright in heart.' Psalm 32:1, 2, 11. This is the hymn of a man . whose soul is now restored to God." – "The Spirit of the Shepherd," M. P. Krikorlan, pp. 52, 53.

“With all the shame, with all the keen distress,
Quick, ‘waiting not,’ I flee to Thee again;
Close to the wound, beloved Lord, I press,
That Your own precious blood may overflow the stain.

“O precious blood, Lord, let it rest on me!
I ask not only pardon from my King,
But cleansing from my Priest; I come to Thee,
Just as I came at first-a sinful, helpless thing.

“Oh cleanse me now, my Lord, I cannot stay,
For evening shadows and a silent hour.
Now I have sinned, and now, with no delay,
I claim Thy promise and its total power.

“O Savior, bid me go and sin no more,
And keep me always beneath the mighty flow
Of Thy perpetual fountain, I implore,
That Thy perpetual cleansing I may fully know.”
Fairces Ridley Havergal.

The Paths of Righteousness

Divine Guidance

HE LEADETH ME in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake He guides me.” Revised Version. “He guides me by true paths, as He Himself is true.” Moffatt. Perhaps above everything else the Oriental shepherd is a guide. He guides his flock in safe paths to green pastures and beside still waters. He never drives his sheep. He leads them, and they follow him. “He goes before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.” John 10:4. In the East, when a man is seen driving sheep, it is at once known that he is a hireling or a robber and not the true shepherd. The same is true in a spiritual sense. A true pastor or shepherd is not a dictator. He does not drive. He leads his flock. Sheep cannot find their own way. In places where sheep graze, the land is covered with paths that lead in all directions. This is especially true in a hilly or mountainous region. Sheep cannot of themselves find the right trail, the one that is safe and that leads to the pasture. They must be led by one who knows the way. Some paths lead to the edge of the precipice or into the wilderness, and others to enemy territory, to grain fields and vineyards, where the sheep would be seized and held for ransom. Sheep must, therefore, be led by a shepherd in whom they have confidence. Many desert paths are illusive. They are clear and plain at the start, and then fade out to nothing in the desert sands. They end nowhere. They have no goal or destination.

Follow Me

“Follow thou Me,- was Christ’s message to Peter and to every sheep of His flock. Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” John 10:27. No person will go wrong who follows the Divine Shepherd, for He never leads into questionable places. Those who follow Him will never go any place where He refuses to lead. Jesus said, “He that follows Me shall not walk in darkness.” The road He chooses may not always be to our own choosing, but we can be sure that it is for our good. “God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him.”-”The Desire of Ages,” p. 225. This world’ is so filled with pathways and byways that run in every direction, and there are so many voices calling here and there, that it is absolutely necessary that -we have a divine guide to lead us in right paths. It is of vital importance that we select a guide who knows the way and leads us in it. From the Great Shepherd comes the cry, “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” and from His true sheep

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comes the response,

“Lead Thou me on, and then my feet, though weary,
Shall never falter in life’s rugged way;
And though my pathway lead through wilds most dreary;
Guided by Thee, my feet shall never stray.”

The Price of Safety

The price of divine guidance in safe paths is complete, surrender to the will of the Great Shepherd. “In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths,” is the promise of our Guide. (See Proverbs 3:6) The sheep are safe only while they follow their shepherd. They dare not choose their own way or exercise their own wills. Implicit obedience to the will of the shepherd is the price of safety. There is never any real freedom in disobedience. There is no liberty in lawlessness, as the inmates of jails and penitentiaries will testify. “Obedience to law is liberty” is a modern maxim which is a principle of divine origin. Three thousand years ago the psalmist said, “I will walk at liberty: for I seek Thy precepts.” Psalm 119:45. There is no liberty outside of law and order. Right paths are narrow, restricted, and often difficult, but the end is green pastures, still waters, rest, peace, and life. Leadership calls for discipline and obedience to rules and regulations. Surrender is the cost of divine guidance.

The Divine Will

In some things it is easy to know the divine will in our behalf. There can be no question of God’s will in regard to our characters. “This is the will of God, even your sanctification.” 1 Thessalonians 4:3.

It is His will that we be like Him in character. But it is not so easy to know His will in many other things, and then we must close our requests for guidance with the statement, “Nevertheless not my will, but Your, be done.” This is especially true in regard to our work, where His guidance must vary with each individual. Our careers and missions in life are all different, and what is God’s will for one may not be His plan for another.

Others cannot decide this question for us. God alone knows, and we must find out from Him, for He has a plan and an eternal purpose for each life. Guidance in this respect depends upon three things: (1) A careful and prayerful study of His word, that we may be sure that we are in harmony with His will in respect to our lives and characters; that we are sanctified and set apart by His word. (2) The impressions and convictions regarding our duty which the Lord, by His Spirit, gives us. These convictions must be growing and continuous and persistent. (3) The open and closed doors or providence. We must recognize a divinely opened door in the direction He wishes us to take, and closed doors in other directions.

All Three Necessary

If any one of these signs is missing, it is evidence that the way is not yet plain and clear. The word of God, the inward conviction, and the open door should all be present in every clear indication of the will of the Great Shepherd. To obtain this evidence often requires time, and no person should ever be hurried into a decision that affects his lifework and his future career. In regard to knowing God’s will through opening providence, we have a good example in the experience of Peter in giving the gospel to Cornelius, the Gentile centurion, and his family. Peter was praying for the presence and guidance of God. A vision was given to prepare him for the task which the Lord wanted him to do. The messengers from Cornelius and the power that attended the preaching of the gospel to this Gentile family, completed the evidence of divine guidance even in that which was naturally distasteful to a Jew. God gave His word that Peter should not “call any man common or unclean.” Peter was given the inward impression that he should go with the messengers, and when he arrived, he found the door of opportunity wide open. There was but one thing for him to do, even though he knew that his action would later be called in question by the other disciples. A relating of the evidences of divine guidance closed the mouths of his critics.

In Right Paths

The paths in which we are led must be right and not merely seem right, for “there is a way that seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” Proverbs 16:25. Wrong paths usually seem right to wandering sheep. They may be perfectly honest and sincere in their choosing, and yet be wrong, with tragic results. Following the divinely given directions, we are safe, for God’s leading can be

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only in right paths. He always leads us in “the path of the just,” which is as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day.” Proverbs 4:18. Leadership always indicates progress, a going forward, continuous spiritual development. One must advance into new truths and deeper spiritual experiences, or he will fail in the end. Stagnation always means death.

Divine Righteousness

There are two kinds of righteousness, and only one is right. There is divine righteousness and self-righteousness, and the latter ends in death. Jesus said, “Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:20. That the righteousness of the Great Shepherd is meant in our text is evident from Psalms 5:8: “Lead me, O Lord, in Thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make Thy way straight before my face.” It is “Thy righteousness” and “Thy way” in which we are to be led, and not our own. This is the way of obedience to the will of God as expressed in His law. ‘And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He hath commanded us.’ Deuteronomy 6:25. ‘All Thy commandments are righteousness.’ Psalm 119:172. So our text really means, “He leads me in the paths of His commandments.” Webster defines righteousness as “conformity of both heart and life to divine law.” Since the transgression of the divine law is sin (1 John 3:4), and no sinner is in the right path, it must be evident that only those who measure up to God’s great rule of life and standard of righteousness can be said to be traveling in “the paths of righteousness.” Christ, the Great Shepherd, is the way, or path, of righteousness because He is “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” Jeremiah 23:6.

Because of Enemies

The prayer of the psalmist was, “Teach me Thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.” Psalm 27: 11. “Those which observe me,” is the marginal reading. Enemies in the form of wild beasts of prey, robbers, and rival shepherds were always on the lookout for straying sheep. The psalmist declared -that his table was spread and his food prepared and eaten “in the presence of mine enemies.” He said, “They are ever before me.” This is literally true of every Christian. The great enemy of our souls and his hosts of evil angels are ever before us and around us, seeking our lives. Our “adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour.” 1 Peter 5:8. We are never safe for one moment except in the presence and under the protection of the Great Shepherd. He is “our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Christians need to walk very carefully and circumspectly, for they are constantly being watched and observed by others, especially their enemies who seek occasion against them. Like Daniel when his political enemies sought occasion against him, we should be able to bear the closest scrutiny in our private lives and public conduct, so that nothing can be found against us except concerning the law of our God.

His Name’s Sake

Being led in the paths of righteousness is not alone for our own good and glory, but “for His name’s sake” who leads us. It was to the glory of the shepherd that he lost none of his sheep. Loss through his carelessness reflected on his ability and reputation as a shepherd. The Divine Shepherd leads us in right paths for His own sake. His name or character or reputation is at stake. Parents are always anxious that their children conduct themselves properly, not only for their sake and the development of their own characters, but also for the sake of the family name. The Christian bears the name of Christ. Christ is concerned that His name be not taken “in vain.” He wants us to be “like Him” for “His name’s sake.” When Moses pleaded with the Lord in behalf of rebellious Israel whom He had threatened to destroy, he said to the Lord: “If Thou does destroy them, what shall we say to the nations, and what wilt Thou do for Your own name’s sake?” The psalmist said of the salvation of ancient Israel: “Nevertheless He saved them for His name’s sake, that He might make His mighty power to be known.” Psalm 106:8. The promise is, “The Lord will not forsake His people for His great name’s sake.” 1 Samuel 12:22. We therefore have the right to I O-ok up to the Lord and pray, “Do not abhor us, for Thy name’s sake, do not disgrace the throne of Thy glory: remember, break not Thy covenant with us.” Jeremiah 14:21.

All Who Serve

Whatever is done in service for others is done not alone for their good, but also for the name’s sake of the doer. His reputation is at stake as well as the welfare of the ones served. The physician tenderly cares for his patients, not alone for their sakes, but also for his own “name’s sake.” His character and

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reputation as a physician are at stake in the welfare of his patients. His practice is affected by the way he cares for his patients. The same is true of a lawyer and his client, a pilot and his ship, a guide and his followers, and a preacher and his congregation. There exists a double reason for faithfulness in all our service for others; namely their good and our name's sake. It is to the glory of the Great Shepherd that we reach the kingdom. When the perilous journey is over, "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied (Isaiah 53: 11) with the price He paid and the sufferings He endured to bring about our redemption. He will never be sorry of His bargain or regret the sacrifice made to bring us to glory. Thus our prayer should ever be, "Thou, Great Shepherd of the sheep, lead Thou me on."

"Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but Thou art mighty,
Hold me with Thy powerful hand;
Bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more."

The Valley of the Shadow

No Fear of Death

YEA, THOUGH I WALK through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me." Psalm 23:4. "Though I may walk through death's dark vale, I fear no hurt, for You are with me." Fenton. "My road may run through a glen of gloom, but I fear no harm, for Thou art beside me." Moffatt. This psalm, like all the Scriptures, shows evidence of a divine arrangement. The dreadful experience represented by "the valley of the shadow of death" is not placed at the beginning, but in the middle of the psalm, after the sheep have been strengthened with food, water, and rest, and have gained confidence in the leadership of the shepherd by being led in right paths. It would be discouraging to a Christian to begin his spiritual life with such dark shadows. Having experienced the four "R's" of Refreshment, Rest, Restoration, and Righteousness, the Christian is prepared to go courageously forward, regardless of the pathway. His confidence in divine leadership never fails in the shadow because he had followed so faithfully in the sunshine. Those who keep company with Christ in days of peace and prosperity have no reason to fear in days of adversity. They find the Great Shepherd, a very present help in trouble."

Familiar Imagery

The naming of valleys according to their danger to the sheep is familiar among Oriental shepherds. A Syrian shepherd speaks of "the valley of robbers," and "the valley of the raven." In our own country we have our "Death Valley," so named because of past experiences there. The Bible speaks of "the valley of decision," "the valley of vision," "the valley of Jezreel," "the valley of Achor," "the valley of Jehoshaphat," the valley of Hinnom," etc. It is not at all strange that the psalmist should speak of the deepest and darkest of all valleys as "the valley of the shadow of death."

Palestine had just such a valley, and it was known to and dreaded by the shepherds. David was especially well acquainted with it, and had led his flock through it more than once. It is south of the Jericho road between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. It is a deep gorge through a mountain range the precipitous walls of which are honeycombed with caves occupied by wild beasts and poisonous insects and serpents. One writer declared that "the heat broods over it like a disease and settles down like a curse." Yet it was necessary for the sheep to be led through it in order to reach the "green pastures" beyond. The path through this dark and dangerous valley plunges from 2,700 feet above sea level to 400 feet below. The valley itself is about five miles long and not more than twelve feet wide at the widest section at the base of the valley, and the cliffs tower up to 1,500 feet. To the shepherd it is the most dangerous valley in Western Asia, and it is doubtless the one David had in mind when he wrote this beautiful psalm. Many sheep had been killed in this dark gorge, and it was indeed "the valley of the shadow of death."

The Enemy's Land

The trails through these dark canyons of gloomy shadows and haunting fears from one tableland or pasture to another were dreaded by both the shepherd and his sheep. It was a journey through the land of the enemy, as it was the favorite haunt of wild beasts of prey and the place of lurking thieves. As the sheep

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passed silently along the sides of the deep gorges, where the shadows were dark because of the protruding rocks, they were in constant danger of being attacked by animals or seized by robbers. The bottom of these canyons is often filled with thick brush or dense forest, which is a covert for unseen and unsuspected enemies. Here the fear of death haunts the shepherd and his sheep. When a man's life is in danger in the East, it is often said, "He is under the shadow of death," a saying that indicates that he is in imminent danger, and may be killed at any time. It is sometimes said of one in danger, "Death is hanging over him."

Spiritual Application

Doubtless drawing from the language of this psalm, other sacred writers have used the expression "the shadow of death" in a symbolic sense in connection with divine leadership. "Seek Him that makes the seven stars and Orion, and turns the shadow of death into the morning." Amos 5:8. "The morning is to them even as the shadow of death: if one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death." Job 24:17. Jesus said of His mission to earth, "The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up." Matthew 4:16. Christ here indicates that all sinners are sitting in darkness and are in "the region" or "valley" of the "shadow of death." The statement of Jesus is doubtless drawn from Isaiah 60:2, 3: "Behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." In one sense this world of sin and the land of the enemy is "the valley of the shadow of death" through which we need divine guidance as we travel as pilgrims and strangers- toward the green pastures of the heavenly Canaan. While passing through this "vale of tears" and haunting shadows we are in constant danger of attacks by enemies, seen and unseen, known and unknown.

Dark Experiences

In another sense the language of our text doubtless applies to the dark and fearful experiences through which all Christians must pass from time to time in the journey of life. The Christian pathway is not always through green pastures and beside still waters.

"In pastures green? Not always; sometimes He Who knows best in kindness leads me
In weary ways, where
heavy shadows be.

"And by still waters? No, not always so; Often times the heavy tempests round me blow,
.And over my soul
the waves and billows go.

"But when the storm beats loudest, and I cry Aloud for help, the Master stands by,
And whispers to my
soul, 'Lo, it is I!'"

"Above the tempest wild I hear Him say, 'Beyond the darkness lies the perfect day. In every path of Mine I
lead the way.'"

Henry H. Barry.

The presence of the "Light of the world" lights up the dark paths of life, so that the dark shadows are dispelled and the fears are quelled. The path "of righteousness" is a lighted pathway, for "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day." Proverbs 4:18.

Shadow of Death

Perhaps the chief application of our text is to death itself. This is a valley through which all must pass, for "it is appointed unto men once to die," and all must meet the appointment. "Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.--The road to the rich pasture lands of the heavenly Canaan leads through this dark valley. Death is the darkest of all dark valleys. (See Job 10:21, 22.) Death is divinely declared to be an enemy. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." 1 Corinthians 15:26. Men in the strength of youth and manhood may laugh at death, but when they come face to face with this great monster, they find it a solemn event. "It is a solemn thing to die." "The fear of death" has haunted all mankind since the death of Abel. Christ came into the dark shadow in order to destroy this fear and deliver death's victims. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the

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same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” Hebrews 2:14,15. (See also Revelation 1:17,18.)

A Shadow

While none can escape the journey through the valley of death, the coming of the Great Shepherd and His sacrifice on the cross have turned this fearful enemy, death, into a mere shadow to those who accept the gospel and divine leadership. To the child of God the grave is not the end of life, but only a resting place between this life and the next. The Great Shepherd took away the awful substance and reality of death, and left in its place a mere shadow with which Christians must reckon. It is true that we are sometimes frightened by shadows; but we need not be, for no shadow can harm anyone. The shadow of a lion is not dangerous except as it indicates the presence of the substance. Neither can the shadow of death harm the true sheep of Christ, because through His death He “turns the shadow of death into the morning,” or the resurrection. The psalmist said: “He that dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.” Psalm 91:1. Christ deprived death, of its poisonous fangs, so that on the resurrection morning the Christian victors can cry out in triumph: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” Contemplating this glorious fact, the apostle exclaimed, “Thanks be to God, which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Corinthians 15:55, 57. Death is a terrible reality to the wicked, but only a shadow to the righteous. There are shadows in the valleys, but there is sunshine on the hilltops beyond.

The Source of Courage

“I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me,” is the source of courage and the enemy of fear. There can be no haunting fear in the presence and fellowship of the Great Shepherd. “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear: because fear hath torment. He that fears is not made perfect in love.” 1 John 4:18. With the statement under consideration, the personal pronouns of our psalm change to indicate a closer fellowship. It is no longer “He,” but “Thou.” The psalmist, as the danger becomes greater, ceases to talk about the Great Shepherd, and begins to speak to Him. He seems to be at his very elbow. They seem to be walking arm in arm. In time of dire need the Lord is indeed: “a very present help.” The way is dark and dangerous, but the Christian is not alone. He can truthfully say, “If God be with us, who can be against us?” We can then say with Paul: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall, tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.” Romans 8:31,35-37. The psalmist said, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.” Psalm 46:1, 2. (See also Isaiah 33:14-17; Psalms 15) “What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee.” Psalm 56:3. “I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; He also is become my salvation.” Isaiah 12:2.

God’s Presence

“I am with thee” is the promise of the presence of the Divine Shepherd as we pass through the valley. To Moses, while he was leading Israel like a flock through the wilderness to the green pastures of Canaan, the Lord said, “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” Moses answered, “If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.” (See Exodus 33:14, 15) To all Christians comes the assuring promise: “Now thus said the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine. When thou passes through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walks through the fire, thou shall not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.” Isaiah 43:1, 2. The waters and rivers here doubtless have special reference to the final time of trouble, and the fire to the lake of fire. Sheep are especially afraid of streams of water, and these are often found at the bottom of the dark valleys or gorges which they must cross. It is often necessary to carry or drag one of the leading sheep across the stream, and then the others will follow. They are not afraid when the shepherd wades the stream with them. David said, “Thou wilt show me the path of life: in Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore.” Psalm 16: 11. “I shall yet give thanks, for His presence is salvation,” is one translation of Psalms 43:5.

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Wonderful Promise

“Thou art with me! Oh, the wonders and deep mystery of it all! The All Mighty with the weak, the Creator with the creature, the Infinite with the finite, the Eternal with the temporal, the Unchangeable with the changing, the Divine with the human, the Holy with the sinful. He is deeply conscious of God’s sovereign presence.”—“The Spirit of the Shepherd,” M. P. Krikorian, pp. 70, 71.

Christ, the Great Shepherd, reiterated this wonderful promise to His followers in connection with the great commission just before His departure: “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

“Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies;
Heaven’s morning breaks, and earth’s vain shadows flee;
In life and death, O Lord, abide with me!”

The Comforting Rod and Staff

Complete Protection

“THY RO’D AND THY STAFF they comfort me,” or, “give me courage.” Moffatt. The rod and the staff are symbolic of authority and power. They represent complete protection and defense from all evils. These instruments in the hands of the shepherd were a constant comfort and source of courage to the sheep, assuring them that their leader was ever ready to protect and fight for them in the hour of danger, even at the risk of his life. The connection between this statement and that which immediately precedes it indicates clearly that the rod and the staff bring comfort and courage to the sheep especially while they are passing through deep, dark, and dangerous gorges, called “the valley of the shadow of death.” The sheep are not frightened either by the shadows or by their substance while the shepherd is with them with his rod and his staff. He also carries a sling, which he uses to frighten away animals and robbers before they get close enough for him to use his club. With plenty of time and pebbles for practice, the sons of the East often become experts in the use of the sling, as did David while he was a shepherd. Seven hundred left-handed children of Benjamin were able to “sling stones at a hairbreadth, and not miss.” (See Judges 20:16)

Defense and Guidance

The rod was a weapon for defense against wild animals and robbers. It was a stout stick or club with a ball or knob at one end filled with nails or pieces of iron. It was an ugly and terrible weapon. “Thou shall break them with a rod of iron; thou shall dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel (Psalm 2:9), is an expression used by the psalmist in regard to the setting up of the kingdom of the Messiah and His destruction of His enemies. As quoted in the New Testament, this text reads: “He shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of My Father.” Revelation 2:27. The rod also represents the evidence of the right to rule. It was a sort of scepter in the hands of the shepherd, indicating his authority and right to rule the flock.

The staff was used for different purposes—to guide the sheep, to extricate them from the pit or thorns, to make them lie down or rise up, to punish them. Also the shepherd leaned on the staff while he guarded his flock. In times of drought, when grass was scarce, the shepherd used his staff to knock down leaves from the trees to supplement the flock’s food supply. “Your staff is your best friend,” is an Oriental saying. The presence of the shepherd with his rod and his staff gives comfort and assurance to the sheep, especially in times of danger. At the close of the day the sheep are counted and named as they pass under the shepherd’s staff into the fold, to see if any are missing. If the sheep could talk, they would say to the shepherd, “Thy rod and thy staff they comfort, encourage, and defend me, and I shall not be lost.”

The Great Shepherd

“Thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule My people Israel.” Matthew 2:6. “Feed,” margin. “One who shall be the Shepherd of My people Israel.” Weymouth. “Who will shepherd Israel My people.” Moffatt. Texts previously read declare that Christ rules or shepherds His flock with “R rod of iron.” “He will shepherd them with an iron flail.” Revelation 2:27. Moffatt. A “rod,” or “flail,” is an instrument used in threshing or scourging. In Hebrews 12:6, we are told that “whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son

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whom He receives.” He then declares that those who refuse to receive the chastening of the rod are “bastards, and not sons;” that the discipline is not pleasant, but is “for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness;” and that the application of the scourging rod “yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” (See verses 7-11) Some sheep need to be severely disciplined by the shepherd, and because of his love he does not spare the rod. True love is always wise, and acts in the best interest of the one reprovved and chastised. Discipline is the greatest of all -evidences of love. Jesus said: “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore and repent.” Revelation 3:19. “All whom I hold dear, I reprove and chastise.” Weymouth. “I reprove and discipline those whom I love.” Moffatt. There can be no exception to this rule. No member of God’s family can escape. The sheep of the Great Shepherd must pass under the rod of discipline, or He refuses to claim them as His own.

Polishing Process

Not ordinary stones, but diamonds and stones of great value, are polished until all the rough and uneven places are removed and the surface is smooth and lustrous. It is the polishing and grinding process that enhances their beauty and increases their value. The value of many stones is unrecognized and unknown till they are polished. There are many diamonds in the rough whose value only God can see. He wastes no time on useless and worthless material. The very fact that He “polishes” us is evidence that He regards us as having worth. If the polished stone could talk, it would speak with appreciation of the grinding, polishing process through which it passed in bringing it to glory. It would acknowledge that all things had worked together-for its own good and beauty. There would be no regrets or repinings over the severe discipline received. The stone would find comfort in the results of its experience.

Necessity of the Rod

In a time of great distress the psalmist cried out, ‘10 God, why has Thou cast us off forever? why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Thy pasture?’ Psalm 74:1. The answer is given in the proverbs: “A rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding,” and “the rod and reproof give wisdom.” Proverbs 10: 13; 29:15. Many times in the Scriptures the rod is used to symbolize the means of correction and discipline. “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.” Proverbs 22:15. “He that spares his rod hates his son: but he that loves him chastens him betimes.” Proverbs 12:24 “Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.” Proverbs 19: 18. “Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beats him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shall beat him with the rod, and shall deliver his soul from hell.” Proverbs 23:13, 14.

The Lord follows the same method in dealing with His sons, or the sheep of His pasture. “Some of us may be crippled by the rod of correction, ere we learn the divine art of listening to the Shepherd’s voice and walking obediently in His way instead of setting our own wills against His. Others of us need to have our thighs put out of joint, before our names are changed from Jacob to Israel, and before we can testify of a Peniel, ‘I have seen God face to face.’ To still more of us there has to be given, like Paul, ‘a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet us,’ before we can hear the Shepherd-Lord speak from heaven the assuring words, ‘My grace is sufficient for thee.’ The rod is the tool of the Master with which are fashioned refining qualities, sturdy virtues, and soul splendor.” – “The Spirit of the Shepherd,” M. P. Krikorian.’ pp. 78, 79.

The rod is closely related to “the paths of righteousness- that lead through “the valley of the shadow of death” to the feeding grounds of the green pastures that lie beyond. “Feed Thy people with Thy rod, the flock of Your heritage as in the days of old,” cried one of the prophets. Micah 7:14.

The Comforting Staff

Doubtless the rod and the staff are referred to in Zechariah 11: 7 “I fed the flock of slaughter, verily the poor of the flock. And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock.” Revised Version. “Graciousness” and “Binders,” or, “Union,” is the marginal reading. By use of the rod and the staff the shepherd keeps the sheep bound together, thereby demonstrating his love and favor to them. Thus the Great Shepherd feeds and unites His flock through His two staves of unmerited grace and binding love.

This work of divine grace and union is beautifully described in Ezekiel 34:11, 12: “Thus said the Lord God: Behold, I, even I, will both search My sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out My sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.” The latter statement

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probably has special reference to the dark -valley of the shadow,” in which the rod and the staff of the shepherd bring comfort and courage. “A staff is a friend of the road,” is an Oriental proverb, and the same might be said of the rod. With these two instruments of defense and discipline, the flock need “fear no evil,” even while passing through the dark and dangerous valleys that are filled with haunting shadows and lurking enemies.

Staff of Life

We speak of bread as “the staff of life,” and thus it is reckoned in the Scriptures. One of the curses that the Lord pronounced upon Israel for disobedience was that He would break “the staff of your bread” (Leviticus 26:26); and of His judgments the psalmist said: “Moreover He called for a famine upon the land: He brake the whole staff of bread.” Psalm 105:16. On another occasion the Lord threatened to “take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water.” Isaiah 3:1. The “stay and the staff” are doubtless the same as the rod and the staff of the Shepherd Psalm. Here they are again associated with the feeding and nourishment of the flock. In fact, that is the sum of the shepherd’s mission. Since the “staff of bread” is the symbol of the food that sustains our physical lives, the “staff” in our text must in a special sense represent the word of God, or the bread of life upon which our spiritual life depends and on which we lean for support and comfort. Since Christ is the Word and “the living bread which came down from heaven,” and He declared Himself to be “the bread of life,” He becomes the staff on which Christians must lean for support. In Canticles 8:5 the church is symbolized as a woman “leaning upon her beloved.” In Micah 3: 11 is the statement: “Yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us.” In other words, they fear no evil because the Great Shepherd is in their midst, and on Him they lean or depend for comfort and protection. When Israel put their trust in Egypt instead of in the Lord, they were told that they “trusts upon the staff” of a “bruised reed,” “on which if a man lean” it will fail him. (See 2 Kings 18:19-22)

Source of Comfort

To the Christian flock, the Scriptures are the source of comfort, courage, and defense. They therefore constitute both the rod and the staff of the Great Shepherd by which He guides, corrects, defends, and comforts His people. Paul declared that “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” Romans 15:4. The psalmist said: “This is my comfort in my affliction: for Thy word bath quickened me.” Psalm 119:50. “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4), is one of the Beatitudes. And the source of all comfort is stated in 1 Thessalonians 4:18: “Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” In times of distress, grief, and danger, the Scriptures are a strong staff on which we can lean for comfort and support. To help make the Word a staff of comfort, the Holy Spirit has been given as “another Comforter” who, according to the promise of Jesus, would “abide with you for ever.” Speaking of the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, “I will not leave you comfortless [margin, “orphans”]: I will come to you.” John 14:18. It is the mission of the Holy Spirit to teach us “all things” and to guide us “into all truth.” John 14:26; 16:13. The comforting work of the Holy Spirit through the gospel message is beautifully pictured in Isaiah 61:1-3.

Rod of Defense

“The sword of the Spirit” is said to be “the word of God” in Ephesians 6:17. This mighty sword is one of the weapons by which the Christian soldier is “able to stand against the wiles of the devil,” and after the battle “to remain victors on the field.” In this description of the warfare of the soldiers of the cross against “wicked spirits in high places,” prayer is named as one of the means of defense. In the great battle of Christ with the devil in the wilderness of temptation, it was the combination of prayer with the Word that brought Him the victory. “It is written” combined with days of prayer and fasting caused the great enemy to depart “from Him for a season.” He fled from the battlefield in defeat. And with the mighty “weapons of our warfare,” we are able to pull down the “strongholds” and cast down evil “imagination” and “every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God,” and bring “into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. How many times the enemy of our souls has been defeated by the mighty weapons of the armory of heaven! How comforting are the rod and the staff of the Great Shepherd! “The Lord is my defense; and my God the Rock of my refuge.” Psalm 94:22.

“O for a faith that will not complain

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Beneath the chastening rod,
But in the hour of grief or pain, Can lean upon its God.

“Lord, give me such a faith as this,
And then, whatever may come,
I’ll taste even here, the hallowed bliss Of an eternal home.”
-Bathurst.

A Table in the Wilderness

A Supply of Bread

THOU PREPAREST A TABLE before me in the presence of mine enemies.” “Thou art my host, spreading a feast for me, while my foes have to look on!” Moffatt. This is an answer to the skeptical questioning of the children of Israel during their wilderness sojourn: “Yea, they spoke against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?” Psalm 78:19. Verses 20-25 picture the table which the Lord spread for the hosts of Israel in the barren desert during the forty years of their journey from Egypt to Canaan. It was indeed a table prepared for them in the presence of their enemies, with which they were continually surrounded. The text is a promise to all future generations of God’s people that the same God still lives and provides. He is the all-providing Shepherd-Lord, the Preserver and Benefactor of all mankind. We can truly and heartily say at all times, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” To those who are questioning the divine provisions for our every need, both temporal and spiritual, we can say with faith and assurance: “My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:19. Not our wants, but our needs, will be supplied.

The Table

Both the Hebrew and the Aramaic word for “table” means to “cast off” or “spread out,” and refers to the custom of the Arabs and other Eastern people of casting down or spreading out their outer garments or a piece of skin, cloth, or a mat, on which to eat their meals. While traveling, they spread their outer garment on the ground and spread their lunch upon it. The five thousand whom Jesus told to sit down on the grass in companies while being fed, may have cast their garments down for tables as was the custom of the time. In that mighty miracle the Lord demonstrated His ability to prepare a table in the wilderness where no food seemed available. David, had often spread out such a table while he was a shepherd boy in the vicinity of Bethlehem, and again while he was a fugitive from King Saul. He had many times prepared him a table in the wilderness in the presence of those who were seeking his life. Almost every meal was eaten under the danger of sudden attack by enemies.

Table of Flock

We must remember, however, that the table spoken of in our text is that of the flock and not of the shepherd. It is provided by the shepherd for the flock. There is no change in the imagery of the psalm from a shepherd and his sheep in the wilderness, to a banqueting scene in a palace or home. We must not get the picture of a table spread with tablecloth, dishes, and food such as we are accustomed to in this country. The original meaning of “prepared” in both Hebrew and Aramaic is “to struggle” or “to fight,” and was used to describe the Eastern woman kneading her bread and struggling hard to get the dough in readiness for baking. The word was therefore used often in connection with the preparation of bread or food, as we still use it. In our text the word has to do with the constant fight or struggle of the shepherd with the many enemies with which the sheep are surrounded while they feed in the wilderness. It was a constant struggle for the shepherd to feed his sheep and protect them from enemies while they were feeding. His chief duty was to find green pastures and protect the flock while they ate their daily food. The table of the sheep was therefore the earth itself as it was spread out and covered with grass. The green pastures constituted the table prepared for the flock in the wilderness.

The Preparation

The table or pasture of the sheep must be prepared for them by the shepherd because of the enemies, of which there are many. No animals are so helpless and defenseless as sheep. They are wholly dependent upon the love and protection of the shepherd. The shepherd carefully examines the pasture in

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preparation for the sheep. There are a number of poisonous weeds and shrubs in the East that are often unknown to the sheep. Poisonous plants cost one shepherd more than three hundred sheep. The shepherd must, therefore, be a botanist as well as a physician. He must know the names and nature of all vegetation where his sheep graze. Some poisonous plants are hard to distinguish from edible foliage, and others are poison only at certain times in their growth. If not too plentiful, the poisonous plants are uprooted by the shepherd and burned. He may also discover serpents or their dens from which they sting the sheep on their noses while they graze. He must also see that no wild animals are present on the feeding grounds to molest the sheep. He literally prepares the table for the sheep, so that they can feed in safety surrounded by enemies who are helpless because of the presence and vigilance of the shepherd. The promise to “the remnant of Israel” is, “They shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.” Zephaniah 3:13.

Other Applications

Some writers believe that the language of our text may be drawn also from the fact that anciently the shepherd’s tent and camp was a place of refuge for fugitives from the avenger of blood—a sort of city of refuge. In the protection of the shepherd the fugitive could eat his meals in safety while his pursuer waited for him outside the camp. It was also a custom of olden times to bring the captives of war into a great banqueting hall and chain them, especially the chief captains, to pillars where they would witness their captors eat from a table loaded with tempting food. It is the delight of Easterners to load their tables with food when rivals, enemies, or officials visit the home. They try to outdo each other in demonstrations of generosity and hospitality, even though they must borrow food from a neighbor for the occasion. Every effort is made to impress the visitor with the evidences of wealth.

The primary application is without doubt to the grazing of the sheep in the pasture in the presence of their enemies—poisonous weeds’ serpents, wild animals, and robbers who are unable to harm them because of the presence of the shepherd. Lions have been unknown in Palestine since the Crusades, but there are jackals, wolves, hyenas, panthers, and bears. There are more than half a dozen different poisonous serpents as well as scorpions, and the eagles and vultures are enemies of the air, especially to the lambs. The sheep always do their feeding in the presence of their enemies.

Spiritual Application

Under the symbolism of lovers, the church says to Christ: “He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love.” Song Of Solomon 2:4. The Good Shepherd not only prepares the spiritual feast and provides the food, but it is His table at which we banquet. The table is spread in answer to the prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread.” As we partake of the bounties, we must never forget that we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture. But we are more than His sheep feeding in His pasture; we are His guests, and He is our Host. In the East, to be invited to sit at another’s table is a sign of friendship and a mark of honor. It indicates a fellowship and affection that is not readily broken. It was for this reason that the psalmist expressed his surprise when the covenant of bread was disregarded: “Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, bath lifted up his heel against me.” Psalm 41:9. In the East it is still a serious offense to partake of one’s hospitality and depart an enemy.

The Great Provider

Speaking of our temporal needs, Jesus said, “Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things.” He then said, “Seek you first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” Matthew 6:32, 33. When the spiritual is given the first place in our lives, we need have no fear in regard to the needs of the body. Physical necessities must always be kept subordinate to the spiritual. This is what Jesus meant when He said to the Jews: “Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will, give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” John 6:49-51. Jesus prepared this table by dying on the cross. When He instituted the communion service, or the Lord’s supper, in the upper room, Jesus blessed and broke the symbolic bread and said to His disciples: “Take, eat: this is My body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me.” 1 Corinthians 11:24. The temporal bread is a symbol of the spiritual, and the spiritual a pledge of the temporal. After a long life of experience’ and observation, David was able to say, “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.” Psalm 37:25. Truly righteous people do not beg. They ask of God, but they do not solicit their fellow men for bread.

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Our Enemies

Christians have many enemies, but as the guest of the Great Shepherd we are safe from every foe, for “if God be for us, who can be against us?” “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?” for “we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.” We can, therefore, say with the apostle Paul: “I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (See Romans 8:31, 39.) Ephesians 6:10-18 describes the Christian’s warfare against his enemies, the “wicked spirits” or evil angels. The devil and his angels are the chief outward enemies of God’s people by whom they are constantly surrounded. The counsel is, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour.” 1 Peter 5:8. Just as truly as the person who will be “a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4), those who become a friend of God will receive the bitter enmity of the world under the ruler ship of its wicked prince. But often our worst enemies are the evil tendencies within our sinful natures, Vicious habits, inherited and acquired, are the foes of our own household from whose presence we are never free. Even though our enemies are all around us, they cannot cut off our food supply unless they cut off our connection with God, who supplies all our needs.

Presence of Enemies

The Bible contains some striking examples of God’s provisions for His people in the presence of their enemies. David himself had many experiences of this kind, not only when he was a shepherd, but also as the shepherd of Israel. While being hunted by Saul, when his life was in imminent danger at all times, he knew what it meant to have a table spread for him by the Lord. As the Lord led the host of Israel “like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron- during their forty years’ journey from Egypt to Canaan, He abundantly demonstrated His ability to feed and protect His flock in the midst of innumerable foes who sought their destruction. (See Deuteronomy 8:1-18) The purpose of all their experiences was to teach them “that man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.” “That the Lord always makes provision for our spiritual needs is the chief lesson we are to learn, and it is while we are partaking of the divinely prepared spiritual banquet that the enemies of our souls make their greatest effort to destroy us.

Elijah knew that the Lord could provide a meal in the wilderness by the most unusual methods. While hiding from the wrath of Ahab and Jezebel beside the brook Cherith, ravens “brought him bread and flesh” every morning and evening. Later he was cared for “many days” in the home of the widow of Zarephath near Zidon from a barrel of meal that never diminished and a cruse of oil that never failed. On another occasion he was awakened to find that an angel had baked him some cakes and brought him a cruse of water. While being hunted like a wild animal with a price on his head, he had a table always prepared for him in the presence of his enemies. The God of Elijah still lives. The same God has promised to supply all our needs -according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

“On the Rock of Ages founded,
Who can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation’s walls surrounded,
Thou may smile at all thy foes.” - John Newton.

The Anointing Oil and the Overflowing Cup

Healing and Abundance

THOU ANOINTED MY HEAD with oil; my cup runs over.” “Thou has poured oil upon my head.” Moffatt. In the imagery of the shepherd and his sheep, we have now come to the close of the day. The wanderings of the day are over, with varied experiences, and now the sheep have been brought safely back to the fold for the night, where the closing scene is to be enacted. The shepherd stands in the narrow door of the sheepfold with his rod or staff. He is really the door, for he must turn his body to let the sheep pass through one at a time. This is sometimes called “the rodding of the sheep,” for the rod or staff is dropped on each sheep’s back, and the sheep is held till the shepherd makes an examination for thorns,

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scratches, wounds, bruises, or evidence of sickness or exhaustion. The shepherd is a sheep physician and knows how to diagnose and cure the many ills to which sheep are susceptible. He always carries medicines in his belt or girdle and also an ox horn filled with oil for anointing purposes.

The Oil

Beside the passageway into the fold the shepherd keeps a large bowl of oil and a container filled with water. He may find as many as a dozen sheep that need special attention. He is prepared to cleanse and close up every wound, and to mollify with ointment every bruise and sore. His chief remedy is the anointing oil. This is usually sheep butter, but olive oil is also used. He also uses a healing salve called "cedar tar" to thoroughly anoint wounds and bruises after the oil has been applied. While treating the sheep, the shepherd usually talks tenderly and lovingly to them, calling them by name and expressing his sympathy in endearing terms which they seem to understand and appreciate. His love is so often demonstrated that they never question it. When a sheep seems weary, the shepherd fills his large cup with water and quenches its thirst. As the eager sheep shoves its nose into the cup already filled to the brim, the water overflows. If the sheep could speak its gratitude, it would say to the shepherd, "Thou anointed my head with oil; my cup runs over," an expression that indicates that every need had been abundantly supplied. The Oriental shepherd is always far more concerned over the welfare of his flock than over his own needs. The loving and unselfish care of a shepherd for his sheep is beautifully set forth in Jacob's statement to Laban recorded in Genesis 31:38-40.

Symbols of Abundance

In the Far East the anointing oil and the overflowing cup are symbolic of abundance. Orientals make every effort to impress their visitors with their wealth. Only the well to do can afford to anoint the heads of their guests with oil. "They have so much butter and oil that they can bathe in them," is an Eastern expression in regard to the prosperous. After bathing, the women anoint their long hair with oil, luxury that poor women cannot afford. It is believed that David wrote this psalm near the close of his career. As king he had practiced these Eastern customs many times. He had many occasions for demonstrating his wealth and prosperity to noted guests whom he entertained in his royal palace. He had also been received into the homes of many kings, princes, and nobles. The overflowing cup has the same significance. Dishes and wine cups filled to the brim and overflowing give evidence of abundance. It is a sign that the host has plenty, and that the guests need not fear to eat and drink all they want. On the other hand, a scarcity of food on the table and half-filled dishes give evidence of poverty. The guests may even decline to eat.

Sign of Hospitality

The anointing with oil when a person enters an Eastern home is a sign of hospitality. The oil used by the wealthy is very expensive. It is composed of three precious ingredients, aloes, cassia, and myrrh. The first is produced chiefly in Cochin China and North India, the second comes from North India and the third is a gum from a thorny tree or bush that grows chiefly in Arabia. This anointing oil is so fragrant that it fills the whole house and is sometimes distinguishable in the hair and on the clothing for days. Because of Simon's critical attitude toward Mary for breaking an alabaster box of expensive ointment over the feet of Jesus as He sat at the table of the Pharisee, Jesus rebuked him by reminding him of his own negligence and lack of hospitality: "My head with oil thou did not anoint. But this woman hath anointed My feet with ointment." Jesus then declared that love was the motive that inspired her act of honor and hospitality, and a lack of love accounted for his negligence. (See Luke 7:36-50) The anointing was a mark of great honor and respect. David had shown it to many distinguished visitors to his royal palace at Jerusalem, and had often received the same honor from others whom he visited. The Lord's hospitality to His guest is beautifully set forth in Psalms 36:7, 8: "How excellent is Thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou shall make them drink of the river of Thy pleasure."

Anointed to Office

Anointing is also symbolic of appointment to office. The highest offices known to the ancients were those of kings and priests. Both were anointed as a symbol of divine approval for leadership. The statement, "Thou anointed my head with oil," must have carried David's mind back to the time when he was brought in from watching his father's sheep to be anointed king by Samuel, and again of the time of his coronation, when he was anointed king of Judah amid the shouts of the multitude.

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In describing the anointing of Aaron, as high priest, the psalmist speaks of “the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments.” Psalm 133:2.

The anointing oil was symbolic of the Holy Spirit with whom Jesus was anointed for His earthly mission at His baptism. “Messiah” means “the Anointed.” The record is that “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him.” Acts 10:38.

In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus quoted the statement from Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor,” and applied it to Himself. Luke 4:16-19.

Symbol of Gladness

The oil was also symbolic of great joy and gladness as the result of the Lord’s abundant provision for man’s every need. The psalmist said: “He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that He may bring forth food out of the earth; and wine that makes glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengthens man’s heart.” Psalm 104:14, 15.

In prophecy the psalmist represents the Father as saying to the Son: “Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever: the scepter of Thy kingdom is a right scepter. Thou loves righteousness, and hates wickedness: therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows. All Thy garments smell of myrrh and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces: whereby they have made Thee glad.” Psalm 45:6-8. (See also Hebrews 1: 8, 9) The priest could not perform the duties of his office till he was anointed, and Emmanuel could not fulfill His Messianic mission without the heavenly anointing. The Lord says to all His people, “You shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.” Exodus 19:6. In Revelation 1:5 we are told that Christ “hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father.” As “kings and priests” or “a kingdom of priests” Christians also need to be anointed for their mission of world evangelism. Theirs is a priestly work, and they need the anointing of the Holy Spirit. This they have been promised. (See Luke 24:49, Acts 1:8) Pentecost was a great spiritual anointing for gospel service. This will be repeated under the latter rain just before the Second Advent of Christ. (See Revelation 18:1.) The greatest need of the modern church in its Laodicean condition is a spiritual awakening and anointing. (See Revelation 3:14-22)

The Cup of Blessing

The Scriptures speak of two different cups: a cup of blessing and a cup of wrath. The cup of blessing has been made available to man because Jesus drank the cup of sorrow to its bitter dregs. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus said, to Peter, “The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?” John 18: 11. But when He faced the terrible ordeal, He cried out, “O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” Matthew 26:39. Because Jesus drank this cup of suffering and death, He is able to say to those who accept the plan of salvation, “Behold, I have taken out of your hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of, the cup of My fury; thou shall no more drink it again.” Isaiah 51:22. With joy the righteous can say, “I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.” Psalm 116:13. When David complained of the prosperity of the wicked, he said that “waters of a full cup are wrung out to them.” Psalm 73:10. But later he “went into the sanctuary of God” and discovered that their blessings and prosperity are only temporary. He saw that in the end they would have to drink the cup of God’s wrath to the dregs. He said: “In the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and He pours out the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them.” Psalm 75:8. This is “the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation,” which all the wicked lost must drink. (See Revelation 14: 10) It is “the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath.” Revelation 16:19.

Overflowing Cup

The cup of blessings which the Lord gives His flock “runs over.” The supply is more than sufficient for ourselves and others. There is nothing selfish, miserly, or niggardly about the Lord in His dealings with His people. Cups never run over till they are filled to the brim. The Lord believes in “good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over.” It -is the overflow that blesses others and fills their empty cups. The river Nile does not enrich and bless the land along its shores till it overflows its banks. The Lord wants His people to have life, and that “more abundantly.” He says, “These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in, you, and that your joy might be full.” John 15:11. Just as the

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overflow is nature's means of blessing, the Lord intends that there shall be an overflowing surplus of spiritual blessings for all with whom we come in contact. Stinginess tends to dry up the source of the fountain of blessings. "There is that withholds more than is meet, but it tends to, poverty," and "there is that scatters, and yet increases." Proverbs 11:24. The rich fool in the parable attempted to conserve his surplus for himself, and found that when he was called to account for his soul, he was a pauper.

The Source of Blessings

Christ, the Good Shepherd, is the fountain of life and the source of all spiritual blessings. To every thirsty soul He cries out: "Ho, everyone that thirsts, come you to the waters, and he that hath no money; come you, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do you spend money for that which is not bread? And your labor for that which satisfies not? Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat you that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." Isaiah 55:1, 2. Jesus applied this prophecy to Himself when at the Jerusalem feast He cried out, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believes on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this He spoke of the Spirit, Which they that believe on Him should receive. for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)" John 7:37-39. To the woman at the well of Samaria Jesus said: "Whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." John 4:14.

Said Charles Wesley:

"Thou, O Christ, art all I want. More than all in Thee I find."

Another has said of the Great Provider:

"My cup runs over,
Thou bountiful Friend.
Thy great loving-kindness
Hath never an end."

The Guardians of Goodness and Mercy

Assurance and Confidence

SURELY GOODNESS AND -MERCY shall follow me all the days of my life." "Thy goodness and mercy." Aramaic. "All through my life goodness and kindness wait on me." Moffatt. This can be said with confidence in regard to the future, because goodness and mercy had accompanied the shepherd and his flock through all the wanderings and experiences of the day that had just come to a close. Some writers believe that this illustration is drawn from the fact that some Eastern shepherds have two well-trained shepherd dogs follow the flock which they lead. They act as rear guards of the sheep to keep them from lagging behind or straying from the flock, and to protect them in the rear from attacks by wild animals or other enemies. In a symbolic sense goodness and mercy may represent the Christian's royal escort of guardian angels who ever attend and defend God's people. These twin manifestations of divine grace are two of the chief attributes of the Great Shepherd.

Nomad Life

The life of the Eastern shepherd and his sheep is that of wanderers. They continually migrate from place to place in search of pasture and water. The nomadic and unsettled life of the shepherd continues all his days. He is a rover and a wanderer all the days of his life. His travels take him and his flock into strange, lands and among unfriendly and often hostile people. They are ever in danger of attacks by enemies-robbers, wild animals, birds of prey, serpents, scorpions, and insects. The sheep need the loving care and unselfish protection of the shepherd day and night. His goodness and mercy are ever present. He is a "present help in trouble." He is no respecter of persons, but treats all alike, whether they be white or black, old or young, newcomers or old pets. He maintains his love and vigilance night and day, summer and winter, through cold and heat, drought and plenty. "All the days" includes the dreary wintry days as well as the bright summer days; the days that are filled with dangers and difficulties as well as those filled with joy

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and prosperity. The Christian is a pilgrim traveling through a foreign land ruled by the enemy. His pathway through the wilderness of sin is beset by dangers on every hand. He needs the guardian angels of goodness and mercy all the days of his life.

Blessed Assurance

“Surely” expresses the complete confidence of the sheep in the shepherd. The assurance for the future is based on the experiences of the past. The sheep are sure of the future because they have tested the goodness and mercy of the shepherd through all the days of the past. Assurance and confidence are the result of experience. They can be built up and established in no other way. We can be sure of God’s leadership in the future if we have been faithful followers in the past. From the days of his shepherd life in the vicinity of Bethlehem, through the dark and dreary days of his flight from the wrath of Saul, when he sometimes despaired of his very life, crying out, “I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul” to the days of his prosperity as king, David had found to his entire satisfaction that the Great Shepherd is dependable and trustworthy under all conditions and circumstances. He could truthfully say, as did his son Solomon, “Blessed be the Lord, that hath given rest unto His people Israel, according to all that He promised: there hath not failed one word of all His good promise.” 1 Kings 8:56. Of the Divine Shepherd we are told that “He shall not fail nor be discouraged” (Isaiah 42:4) during His earthly mission; so why should “the sheep of His pasture” become discouraged? The goodness and mercy of God are the “two immutable” and “everlasting arms” that unfailingly support and uphold His people through all the days and experiences of life. (See Hebrews 6:17-19)

Inseparable Attributes

Goodness and mercy are two of the attributes of God that are inseparable. One is not complete without the other. The mercy that takes away our sins is not enough. We need something to take their place. The two together supply all our needs, temporal and spiritual. In another psalm David said, “The Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting.” Psalm 100:5. Again he said, “O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good: for His mercy endures forever.” Psalm 136: 1. Each of the twenty-six verses of this psalm end with the statement, “His mercy endures forever.” With these two vigilant guards following us “all the days” of our lives, we are ever safe from attacks from behind. We are safe from our treacherous enemy, who makes his attacks during the most unguarded moments and usually from the rear. We are also kept from straying from the flock and becoming lost. When we depart from the Great Shepherd, these watchdogs of the sheep are sent to bring us back to the flock and to safety. The wanderers from the paths of righteousness are always followed by these two angels of goodness and mercy, even though they are unaware of their presence. Lot “pitched his tent toward Sodom,” but to that wicked city angels of God followed him, and had it not been for the rear guards of goodness and mercy, he and all his family would have perished.

Complete Protection

The guardians of goodness and mercy represent complete protection on all sides. The surprise attacks of the enemy are usually made from the rear, and therefore the Christian needs a rear guard. It is always easier for us to face the foe than to meet an attack from the rear. In fact, the Christian armor of Ephesians 6:10-18 furnishes no special protection for the back. But the Lord has made abundant provision for defense on all sides. “The angel of the Lord encamped round about them that fear Him, and delivered them.” Psalm 34:7. “There shall no evil befall thee for He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.” Psalm 91:10-12. Another precious promise is: “You shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your reward.” Isaiah 52:12. “Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and your health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward.” Isaiah. 58:8. In both of these latter texts the marginal reading for “be thy reward” is “shall gather thee up.” A “ward” is a guard or watchman as one who stands guard against attacks from the rear. In our text these rear guards are represented by “Goodness” and “Mercy,” who are personified as watchdogs or angel guardians who follow and protect us “all the days” of our lives.

Goodness

“God” and “good” come from the same root word. “The Lord is good” is a Scriptural statement. Jesus said, “None is good, save one, that is, God;” and of man we are told that “there is none that does good, no, not one.” Goodness is one of the divine attributes, and should, therefore, never be regarded

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lightly or used in a careless manner. The use of “goodness” as a substitute for “God” as an exclamation, or in the sense of swearing, is taking God’s name in vain, and is a form of blasphemy. “O taste and see that the Lord is good,” was an appeal of David to those who hungered after righteousness. On another occasion he said, “How great is His goodness.” Goodness is one of the beautiful fruits of the Spirit when the character of God is imparted to the sinner. Paul declared that those who despise the riches of God’s goodness do not know that “the goodness of God leads” to repentance. Romans 2:4.

The following are a few of the many expressions of the psalmist: “Oh how great is Thy goodness, which Thou has laid up for them that fear Thee, which Thou has wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men! Thou shall hide them in the secret of Thy Presence from the pride of man: Thou shall keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.” Psalm 31:19, 20. “The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.” Psalm 33:5. “The goodness of God endures continually.” Psalm 52: 1. “Blessed is the man whom Thou chooses, and causes to approach unto Thee, that he may dwell in Thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple. Thou crowns the year with Thy goodness; and Thy paths drop fatness. They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness: and the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing.” Psalm 65:4, 11-13. All the temporal blessings of life are demonstrations of the goodness of the Lord that never fails. Appreciation for the blessings of life are beautifully expressed in the following song of grace sung by the boys and girls of a large orphanage in Corinth: “God is great and God is good, And we thank Thee for this food. From Thy hands must we be fed. Give us this day our daily bread.”

Mercy

Mercy is another attribute of God that should never be used irreverently. It should never be used as a byword. While God’s goodness is especially demonstrated in the temporal blessings of life, mercy is needed more particularly for the inner and spiritual life. Mercy is needed because of our sins. All of us have sinned and come short of God’s glory. It is only on the basis of mercy that we are forgiven and receive eternal life. When convicted of the great sin of his life, David threw himself on the mercy of God, and cried out, “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving kindness; according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.” Psalm 51: 1. After being assured of forgiveness and restoration to divine favor, the shepherd-king in his joy could say: “I will sing of Thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of Thy mercy in the morning: for Thou has been my defense and refuge in the day of my trouble. Unto Thee, O my strength, will I sing: for God is my defense, and the God of my mercy.” Psalm 59:16, 17. David also said, “I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever.” Psalm 52:8 This is another way of saying, “All the days of my life.” How comforting it is to be able to say of our Great Shepherd that “He delights in mercy” and “is rich in mercy,” and that “He is abundant in goodness and truth.” In Him “mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” Isaiah 63:10.

A Permanent Experience

The divine leadership that assures the blessings of goodness and mercy is not to be temporary. It is to continue “all the days of my life.” Jesus is the Shepherd not only of all the ages of the reign of sin, but during all the ages of man’s growth and experiences from birth to death, from the cradle to the grave. He does not start us along the “paths of righteousness” and then forsake us and expect us to make the rest of the journey alone. His assurance is, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” Matthew 28:20. This is the promise to the church as a whole. To the individual the promise of His presence is “all the days of my life.” This includes the day of birth and the day of death and all the days between. “Certainly I will be with thee,” was the Lord’s assurance to Moses when he hesitated to ‘assume the responsibility of leading the hosts of Israel from Egyptian bondage to Canaan deliverance. During the wilderness journey the Lord again gave the assurance, “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” To this promise Moses replied, “If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight? Is it not in that Thou goes with us?” Exodus 33:14-16. The presence of God was the evidence of the goodness and mercy of God. When the youthful prophet Jeremiah was fearful of assuming the responsibility of delivering the terrible and unpopular messages of God to rebellious Israel, the assurance was given, “Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, said the Lord.” Jeremiah 1:8.

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Conditional Promise

God never makes an unconditional promise. Goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, provided I follow the Great Shepherd in paths of righteousness all the days of my life. The promise is that “the upright shall dwell in Thy presence.” Psalm 140:13. “Thou wilt show me the path of life: in Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore.” Psalm 16: 11. “What is your life?” is a question man has never been able to answer fully. But Jesus answered it in His prayer to the Father: “This is life eternal that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou has sent.” John 17:1 The apostle declared that “He that hath the Son of God hath life; and he that bath not the Son of God bath not life.” 1 John 5:12. The guardian angels of goodness and mercy will follow through life those who from experience can say, with the apostle Paul, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live. Yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” Galatians 2:20.

Forever in the Fold of the Good Shepherd

Fitting Climax

“AND I WILL DWELL in the house of the Lord forever” is a fitting and beautiful climax to the Shepherd Psalm, which is the summary of Christian experience between the cross of Mount Calvary and the crown of Mount Zion. After his journey through life, the Christian pilgrim becomes “the Eternal’s guest, within His household evermore.” Moffatt. Because of the divine leadership through all the experiences of the past, he can confidently say: -

“Goodness and mercy all my life Shall surely follow me;
And in God’s house forevermore My dwelling place shall be.”
William Whittingham.

Permanent Dwelling

“The house of the Lord” is placed in contrast with the shepherd’s tent, his temporary abiding place which he must ever move from place to place during his life as a nomadic wanderer. The language may be drawn from the return of the shepherd to his home in the fall after spending the spring and summer with his sheep in the mountains or wilderness. This is a very happy occasion for both the returning shepherds and the home folk. A religious festival is usually held to celebrate the event. The home-coming pilgrims usually go to the house of God to offer prayers of praise and offerings of thanksgiving for the divine protection that had been over them and for the goodness and mercy that had followed them during their wanderings in search of pasture and water. Whether the illustration is that of the shepherd and his flock safe within their tent and fold at night after the wanderings of the day, or of the return home after the summer season of grazing in the mountains and the wilderness, the song ends in the blissful silence of rest and peace in the protection of the fold of the Good Shepherd.

Confidence in Future

This last stanza of the shepherd’s song begins with the word “and,” which seems to connect all the experiences of this life with those of the life to come. It is the connecting link between earth and heaven; between the valley of Christian experience and the mount of celestial glory; between the pilgrim tent in wilderness life here and the permanent dwelling place in the mansions of the hereafter. “What an end! It is the most celebrated and in the rhetoric of redemption, connecting indissolubly and forever the creature with the Creator, the human with the Divine, the weak with the Almighty, the temporal with the Eternal, man with God.” *The Spirit of the Shepherd*, M. P. Krikorian, P. 115.

The Good Shepherd had often cheered His weary sheep along the way with the promise of their being guests in His own palace when the journey was over. In loving tenderness He had comforted them with the message: “Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” John 14:1-3. To reach the mansions of the house of the Lord had been the lifelong passion and longing of “the sheep of His pasture.” The psalmist expressed this longing desire of every genuine Christian when he said: “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after. That I may dwell in the

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house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.” Psalm 27:4. This is the “house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

Mount Zion

Beyond the twenty-third psalm with its “valley of the shadow” and its wanderings under divine leadership, is the twenty-fourth psalm with its “hill of the Lord” and the royal palace with “everlasting doors,” where dwells “the King of Glory.” (Read Psalm 24:3-10) Those who faithfully follow Christ as the Good Shepherd in this life will abide in His house as guests in the glory land. Then there will be one fold and one flock. For the first time the sheep of His pasture will all be gathered together, an innumerable multitude out of every age and race of mankind, who will continue to “follow the Lamb whither so ever He goes.” Throughout all eternity He “shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters.” (See Revelation 7:9, 13-18; 14:1-5) Beyond the night of sin is the perfect day. Beyond the valley of death is the abundant life with its fields of peace and plenty. In the green gardens of Paradise the Great Shepherd will continue to lead His flock beside the rivers of living water. God’s people will no longer be pilgrims and strangers in a foreign land. They will be restored to their own land. (See Psalm 37:9, 11, 29; Matthew 5:5; Ezekiel 37:12-14)

The Christian’s Hope

While to the unbeliever “life is but a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities,” and he strives “in vain to look beyond the heights,” to the Christian the future is bright with hope and joyful anticipation. How happy we should be that “the paths of righteousness” do not end in “the valley of the shadow of death,” but lead to the tablelands of peace and sunshine beyond. “Beyond the grave lie the Plains of Peace, the Homeland. “-Evans. This statement was based on the following poem by Clifton Bingham:

‘Is the way so dark, O wanderer,
Is the hill crest wild and steep,
Far, so far, the vale beyond thee,
Where the home lights vigil keep?
Still the goal lies far before thee,
Soon will fall on thee the night;
Breast the path that takes thee onward,
Fight the storm with all thy might.
Though thy heart be faint and weary,
Though thy footsteps faint would cease,
journey onward-past the hill crest
Lie for thee the Plains of Peace!

“Is thy path so rough, O pilgrim,
Passing on thy way through life;
Deep the sorrows that beset thee,
Great the burdens, wild the strife?
Though the hill of life be weary,
Though the goal of life be far,
Set thy whole heart to endeavor,
Turn thy soul to yon bright star.

“From the toiling, from the striving,
There at last shall come release;
One shall bring thee past the hill crest,
Home into the Plains of Peace;
One shall bring thee past the hill crest,
Home home, home unto His Plains of Peace!”

The Homeland

When we reach the Plains of Peace in the homeland of glory, “temporal things which are only the

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vesture of the eternal have ebbed to be no more; the earthly has been clothed with the heavenly. Night has been swallowed up in heaven's morning. The battle ends in victory amid the welcoming host of the celestial world; the weary traveler, the wandering sheep, reaches the Father's house of many mansions, never again to leave. There we shall sit down with the Shepherd, the Master of the house, at His table in His kingdom. We shall put off the pilgrim's aba and put on the royal robe. We shall go no more out." – "The Spirit of the Shepherd," M. P. Krikortan, pp. 118, 119.

Permanent Experience

But we need not wait till we reach the homeland in order to have a permanent dwelling place in the house of the Lord." The Lord has a house or temple on this earth which is the shadow and type of the heavenly, and before we can enjoy an eternal habitation there, we must learn to abide in Christ and His temple here. A permanent Christian experience in this life is the necessary preparation for a permanent home in the life to come. Wherever God dwells is His house or temple, whether it be in the heart, the church, or the heaven of heavens. When Jacob awakened from his divinely given dream of the ladder that connected earth and heaven, which symbolized the plan of redemption, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." Genesis 28:16, 17. The presence of God is the house of God and the gateway to heaven. Jacob vowed that he would never depart from the house of the Lord all the days of his life.

A Living Pillar

Of this temple of God on earth Christ is "the chief cornerstone" and "the head of the corner," and Christians are declared to be the pillars and living stones of which it is composed. (See Ephesians 2:20-22; 1 Peter 2:3-5; Revelation 3:11, 12) A pillar is the symbol of strength and stability. This promise to the overcomer, includes a permanent Christian experience in this life, so that we "shall go no more out" of the church temple. It indicates an experience such as the disciples had in the upper room, which gave them stability, so that there was no, more falling out by the way or backsliding. This is the experience that God's remnant people must have in order to receive the latter rain of spiritual power and be prepared to meet the Great Shepherd when He returns for His sheep to gather them into His eternal fold. "So shall we ever be with the Lord" should be an experience that begins in this life. If we remain in His presence "all the days" of our lives here, we "will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" in the homeland to which we are journeying.