

Sermons and Addresses

BY

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The Twenty-third Psalm.

A sermon, preached at Bethesda Chapel, Great George Street, Bristol, on Sunday Evening, June 20th, 1897,—Jubilee Sunday.

The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restored my soul: He leadeth 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 preparest a table before me the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head
with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the
house of the Lord for ever.—*Psalm xxiii.*

OUR meditation this evening, as the Lord may help us, will be on the short but precious 23rd Psalm, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." This was spoken and written by King David. Now, naturally, we should be inclined to say, "No wonder that he said, 'I shall not want', because he, who had once been a poor shepherd boy, looking after a few sheep, was now a king." And not merely a king, but an exceedingly mighty king, for he had it in his power, if it had been necessary, to send many thousands of soldiers into the battle. And not merely a very mighty king, but an exceedingly rich king. Therefore, we are inclined, naturally, to say, "That was the reason why he said, 'I shall not want'." He was, indeed, exceedingly rich, for he had gathered together for the building of the Temple such an enormous sum that it would amount to more than 900 millions of pounds sterling of our money, so vast a sum that all the enormous national debt of Great Britain could be cleared off at once by it. And out of his own privy purse alone he had given for the building of the Temple more than 18 million pounds sterling, a thing that has never been heard of since in history.

Yet these were not reasons why he said, "I shall not want," but because Jehovah was his Shepherd! He looked after him. He cared for him. He fed him. He nourished him. And thus the great point regarding ourselves is, that the Lord Jesus is our Shepherd, that we are His sheep; and this we know if we are heeding His voice. Let us ask ourselves, Do we hear the voice of the Lord Jesus? Do we attend to what He says? Are we mindful of seeking to please Him, and to carry out His Word in our life and deportment? And, above all, do we trust in Him Who laid down His life for the sheep, Who made an atonement for poor sinners, whereby all who trust in Him for salvation might be saved? These are deeply important questions, which we should aim to be able to answer in the affirmative. Thus it is with me. Then,

even though we may be amongst the poorest, the most ignorant, the most tried persons on earth, we, too, shall be warranted by the fact that we are the sheep of Christ to say, "I shall not want." And here particularly notice this. "I shall not want" does not simply refer to bodily necessities, or merely to mental necessities, but to everything that we can possibly need while here on earth. If we find the spiritual conflict is great, and we seek more and more to enter into our weakness, and helplessness, and nothingness, and entire dependence on God for assistance, here is a word for our comfort which does not belong to David only, but to us also, individually, if we have Jehovah-Jesus for our Shepherd. In whatever want, of whatever kind, we possibly can be while on the road to Heaven, it is our precious, glorious privilege, with David, to say to ourselves, "I shall not want, because my Heavenly Father is my Shepherd, my precious adorable Lord Jesus Christ is my Helper, my Friend, my Elder Brother, my Saviour. He will never leave me, nor forsake me!" O, how unspeakably blessed is the position of the weakest, the feeblest, the least instructed child of God! Therefore the great, the deeply important question once more is this, "Do we belong, individually, to the sheep of Christ?" My heart's desire and prayer is that everyone here present may with earnestness seek to get into such a Scriptural state of heart, as to be warranted to say, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

In the second verse, the figure of the shepherd and His sheep is kept up. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." Not "driveth me to a few dry blades of grass." But green pastures, tender grass. Then, the sheep are not driven to these; but they are at leisure to partake of the green grass, the tender grass, the "green pastures," and to lie down and to rise again, as sheep. Now, the figures here used bring before us the blessedness of a child of God! The world knows nothing of our happiness in the Lord, and cannot, therefore, in the least degree enter into the blessedness of our position as God's children.

Our eyes have been opened to see the awful state in which we are by nature; that is, led captive by the devil, at his will, to do the things which are hateful to God and perfectly contrary to His mind. Further, it has pleased the Lord not merely to show to us this lost and ruined condition, but to enable us to own it before Him, to confess that we are undone, lost, and ruined, and that we cannot save ourselves. Even this is not at all. But God has helped us by the power of His Holy Spirit to put our trust simply, solely, and entirely in what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for sinners, even fulfilling the whole law of God in our room and stead, and bearing the punishment which we have deserved on account of our numberless transgressions, so that we stand before God as just ones. That means we are reckoned on the part of God as just and righteous—unjust and unrighteous though we are in ourselves. We,

through this faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, not merely become children of God, and heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ but already, while yet in the body, all our numberless transgressions are forgiven.

We have not to wait till we die, or till the Lord Jesus Christ comes, in order to obtain forgiveness from all our sins; but the moment we put our trust alone in Jesus for salvation, that moment every one of our numberless transgressions is forgiven, and shall be remembered no more throughout eternity. O, how unspeakably blessed is this position, and the result of it is peace and joy in the Holy Ghost! We, without dread and fear, now think about God—so to speak, look Him in the face, guilty sinners though we are naturally—without being the least afraid of an eternally Holy God. O, how precious! How unspeakably precious this is!

And then, when at last it pleases God to take us home to Himself, after He has helped us during the whole of our earthly pilgrimage, in all our variety of difficulties, and trials, and perplexing circumstances, and amid the manifestations of our weakness and helplessness—when at last He takes us to Himself, either by passing through death, or, if found alive at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, being taken to Him, then we enter upon our inheritance. And that inheritance is nothing less than what our Heavenly Father gives to His Only Begotten Son, as the reward of His mediatorial service, for all He did on earth, for all He suffered on earth, for the passing through the hour of darkness, in order that the innumerable company of poor sinners which no man is able to count might be saved.

What our Heavenly Father gives to Him in the way of glory and reward for all this, we who put our trust in Him, shall share with Him. We can say to ourselves, as believers in the Lord Jesus, “Though I deserve nothing but hell, I shall not only have Heaven, I shall not only partake of the rivers of pleasure at the right hand of God, but I shall share with my precious adorable Lord Jesus Christ all the glory which the Father gives to Him for His mediatorial work!” O, what is contained in this! If the world only knew what the sinner who believes in Christ obtains through faith in Him, all the world would joyfully seek Him but it is because it is not apprehended, it is not known, that with carelessness and indifference the world passes on, and often and often till it is too late to awake it.

“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.” The figure here used regarding the sheep brings before us the exceeding great blessings and happiness which are the result of putting our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. What, therefore, we have to do is to seek more and more to ponder it, and more and more to enter into it, with reference to ourselves. Then, not merely “green pastures” are mentioned, but “still waters.” “He leadeth me beside the still waters;” the waters of quietness, on account of the timid nature of

the sheep. This is especially referred to. Not a mountain torrent, which might frighten away the sheep, are they led to for drinking; but to the quiet still waters, in character with the sheep. They are not frightened away. "He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for His Name's sake." I will mention here (what I have mentioned, I think, before) that this has nothing to do with bringing backsliders to Himself again. In the Hebrew, the words mean, "He refresheth my soul," or "He invigorates my soul; "just as by means of a very good night's rest we are invigorated and refreshed, or as a cooling draught of water given at the time of harvest on a hot summer's day to the labourer would refresh him, so, spiritually, we, who are the children of God, are refreshed by our Precious Shepherd.

It is the very joy and delight of the heart of our precious Lord Jesus Christ to refresh us spiritually. If at any time we are cast down, through trials and difficulties, or through sore temptations, which we have to encounter, and we find that we are not being refreshed, what we should do is to remind the Lord Jesus Christ that to Him "hath been given the tongue of the learned, that He might know how to speak a word in season to them that are weary," to them who have need to be refreshed, to comfort them, to encourage them, to strengthen their hands in God. This precious word we have brought before us regarding the Lord Jesus Christ in the 4th verse of the 50th chapter of Isaiah, and I advise all my beloved brethren and sisters in Christ to make much more use than they have yet done of this blessed word.

"He refresheth my soul." O let us make use of this! O let us, in childlike simplicity, trust our precious, precious Lord Jesus Christ! Whenever you are cast down, whenever you are greatly tried spiritually, open your heart to the precious Jesus, as your Friend. I have done it for many a long year, and it is just this which upholds me, which comforts me, which makes me a happy man. I deal with my precious Lord Jesus as a bosom Friend. I pour out my whole heart to Him, and tell Him all, everything; and beg and entreat Him. whenever I need it, to speak to me a word in season, that the weariness may pass away, and that I may be refreshed spiritually. And I find Him ever ready to help me. "He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake." The Lord brings us into the right road, into "the paths of righteousness," and we are depending on Him to be led along in the same road, for we should soon wander away from Him and go back again to our own foolish, sinful desires. This second part of the verse shows what is meant by "He restoreth my soul;" that is, "He refresheth my soul, He leads me along in the right road."

"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." Here we find the Psalmist supposing himself to be brought to meet the

greatest trial, the greatest affliction; nay, to be brought to the very close of life, to pass through the ordeal of death. Yet his language is, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil," How comes this? Is it because we have so much medical power? Surely not! When we are brought to the very brink of the grave, is it because we have so much physical power and strength? No! But quite the reverse. The reason is this: because we have the Lord Jesus with us! "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for *Thou art with me.*" O how precious! The Lord caring for us, by His passing with us through the Vale of Tears.

When we are brought to the condition that more than ever we need Him, as a Friend, as a Helper, as a Support, there He is, never leaving us, nor forsaking us! What we have to say individually to ourselves when the heaviest and greatest trials come, and when we are brought even to the very brink of the grave, and when heart and flesh fail, is, "*Thou art with me; Thou, my precious Lord Jesus, art with me; Thou hast not forsaken me, Thou art now with me, in my utter weakness and helplessness; I have Thee as my Almighty Friend and Upholder, and Comforter and Strength.*" O how precious! "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." Some of the dear children of God, the real, true children of God, have fear regarding the hour of death. "How will it be when I come to die?" they think to say to yourself, "I will fear no evil!" Not because we are anything in ourselves, or can do anything by ourselves; but simply because it is written, "*Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.*"

Now the last two verses place before us the intimate connection between God and His children, under another figure—under the figure of a host inviting guests. "Thou preparest a table before me, in the presence of mine enemies; Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over." Taking this verse, what is the meaning? It consists in two things. Trusting the Lord Jesus Christ, the one on whom we have to feed; seeking to enter into what God has given us in Jesus Christ, as the Law Fulfiller, as the Atoner for our sins, and on Whom we have to feed spiritually. That is the table which God has prepared for us. Secondly, the Word of God, the revealed Will of God, as we have it in the Holy Scriptures, that is what God gives to us for our food; and this notwithstanding all the hatred of Satan, notwithstanding all the opposition of our enemies. "Thou preparest a table before me, in the presence of mine enemies"

But now comes the practical question, "Do we feed practically on Christ? Do we seek at large to ponder what the Lord Jesus Christ is to us, as our Redeemer, as our Great High Priest, as the one who is coming again to take us to Himself, that where He is we may be also? What the Lord Jesus Christ

is to us as our Friend, as our Counsellor, as our Strength? Now do we seek in Him an interest, and do we day by day put in (to use the figure that is used in Scripture) the helmet of our salvation; that is, seek to enter into what is connected with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ? Do we comfort ourselves day by day with all this? “O how deeply important to attend to it that we may have peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, that the world may see what a blessed thing it is to be a child of God—that thus we may not only glorify Him, but strengthen the hands of our fellow-men.

“Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.” In the east, when a great one invited any one of his friends to take a meal with him, to spend a day with him, one of the first things was not only that the servants should hand him water to wash his feet, but oil to anoint his head. As a mark of respect and reverence this was done. That was the welcome, so to speak, given to the guest who came to the house of the great one. Now, we have no such thing done to us, but something infinitely more precious. The Holy Spirit is given to us—the Holy Spirit again and again represented under the figure of oil. And as assuredly as we have the Holy Ghost given to us, so surely shall we get to Heaven, so surely shall we share the glory of Christ, so surely shall we become like Christ and have our glorified bodies. These are the things which are implied in the gift of the Holy Spirit! O how precious these things are!

If the heart habitually were given to these things, it would be full of joy! We should be exceedingly happy; and therefore my affectionate counsel and advice to my beloved fellow-believers is, seek more and more to ponder all this, with application to your own hearts, in order that your joy may increase more abundantly. And what will come of it at last? You will be able to say with the Psalmist, “My cup runneth over”—“I am so happy a man that I can scarcely bear it; I not only have something in my cup, and a good deal in my cup, and have my cup full; but my cup runneth over.” O the blessed position of a child of God, not as to pounds, shillings, and pence, not as to the possession of many houses, not as to the possession of a great many hundreds of acres of land, not because he has an enormous sum in the Funds—not on these accounts. There may be little, or nothing at all, of all this found in his possession. But as to peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, as to the blessedness of having this brought down into his heart. O, my friends, how precious this!

Now comes the last verse, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.” The poor one has been invited as a guest by the Rich One. He goes, and finds it very pleasant there, and is happy. All that is just what he desires naturally. Now, what conclusion does he come to? “I find it so very pleasant to

be here, I will remain here, I will not go away any more.” This brings before us what the child of God finds, in acquaintance with Christ. Not merely entering into what God has given him in Christ Jesus; not merely having to say, “My cup runneth over; I am brimful of happiness” But, “I have almost more than I can bear. I find it so pleasant, so exceedingly pleasant, this way of going on, I can never get into another position any more. I will remain in the house of my Heavenly Father for ever.”

That is the position into which we are brought as believers in Christ! And as assuredly as we are honestly walking in the ways of the Lord, and truly surrendering the heart to God, this is the result to which we come. We find it so pleasant, so precious, even for this life, that we have no desire to depart from the ways of the Lord. In our natural, worldly condition, we seek after happiness; but we do not get it. Nothing but disappointment is the result, for after a few hours all this worldly happiness is gone. But the position in which we are brought by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ not only insures us happiness for a few days, or a few months, or a few years, but for ever and ever. So that our heart says, “I will remain in this way; I am so happy in this way; I will never forsake this way.”

Not merely so. But “Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” I shall now be for ever and ever a happy man, and I will remain in the presence of my Father; I will not leave His House any more, because I have found it so very, very precious to be a child of God.” Now, this has been my own happy experience for seventy-one years and a half, and therefore I commend this plan, which is according to the Holy Scriptures, to any and every one who has not yet had it. It is not merely for this one, or another one; but God is willing to bestow the blessing upon any and every one who is desirous of having it. All we have to do is, just like mere beggars, to open our hands and to receive what God is willing to give to us. We have to own that we deserve nothing but punishment; we have to own that we are sinners who, on account of our natural sinfulness, are entirely unworthy of all the blessings which God is willing to bestow upon us; and owning to this, and then putting our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, ensures to us these gifts.

Will you not accept them if you have not accepted them yet? Will you all who have not yet put your trust in Jesus, do so now? O what unspeakable blessedness is here! I remember well the very first evening after my conversion lying peacefully on my bed, knowing that my sins were forgiven, that Heaven was my Home, that I was now regenerated, brought on the road to Heaven, and my heart was ready to leap for joy. And ever since matters have gone on in the same way, and this is the blessedness I desire for every-

one who is yet without it. God give the blessing, and abundant blessing, for Christ's sake.