



On the Twenty-third Psalm

An address delivered at Salem Chapel, Bristol, at the Weekly Prayer-meeting on Monday Evening, July 24th, 1871.

“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want,” etc

In the measure in which, in our souls, we are enabled to say that Jehovah Himself is our Shepherd, just in that measure our hearts will say, “I shall not want.” The second follows from the first; for it is written, “They that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee.” It is when God is not known that difficulty comes. The great point, therefore, is to acquaint ourselves with God, to know God for ourselves as He has revealed Himself in the Scriptures. And the more we know Him ourselves, the more easy will our hearts find it to say, “I shall not want.” No one yet knew Jehovah without being able to exercise faith in Him.

“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.”

How precious! Not, He leadeth here and there to a dry morsel. Not, now and then He giveth a mouthful of green pasture. Far more than this. Here we have not only abundance of pasture, and green pasture, but lying down in it, that we may leisurely, abundantly, bountifully partake of it. Now this is just the way of our good and gracious Lord. It is His joy and delight not only to give as much as we need, but to give us abundantly. Oh, what joy has our good Shepherd in thus refreshing our hearts!

“He leadeth me beside the still waters.” Not only has each just enough to drink to keep life in them, but they may drink again and again. He leadeth them, not to a noisy stream, where the poor sheep would be frightened, but to the gentle, quiet waters, where they may drink leisurely and calmly.

“He restoreth my soul.”

This is not to be understood as the bringing back of a backslider, to God, for the Hebrew word here translated “restoreth” most assuredly would not bear that interpretation. It must be understood in the sense of refreshing, or strengthening, just as in retiring at night to rest, we lie down and sleep, and awake with our strength renewed. We must understand the restoring to be the renewal of strength. The connection also shows this to be the meaning.

“He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for His name's sake.”

It is the very joy and delight of the heart of God thus to lead us on, to help us forward, to strengthen us more and more. Here again we may betake ourselves to our Shepherd with the greatest confidence, and say, “Now it is for the honour and glory of Thy name that I should be strengthened, that I may walk in Thy ways and to Thine honour.”

“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.”

Very precious! So that, let come what may, all will be well. Let the worst come, as the world would say, all will be well. The Shepherd is with us. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” Why not? The Shepherd is with us. Oh! this Shepherd, this precious Shepherd, loves to accompany the sheep. If only they walk in His ways, whatever their circumstances may be, they may reckon upon His presence.

The sheep will say, as they regard the Shepherd, “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil: my cup runneth over.”

Here the figure ceases. The first four verses speak about the Lord under the figure of a Shepherd. Now He is spoken of under the figure of a Host caring for His guest. And how do we fare in this capacity? "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil: my cup runneth over." Here again how bountifully we are blessed by God - the Host. It is the very joy and delight of the heart of God to honour us. It was a mark of honour when guests were anointed by their host. And then they are not sparingly supplied: "My cup runneth over." Oh! what joy, what happiness should we not have, provided we walked stately, habitually, at all times and under all circumstances, simply in the ways of the Lord, having the single object in life to please Him.

"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 psalm ends with a bright and blessed prospect for us for the little of the future of time that is yet before us: "Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." Let come what may, there will be goodness and mercy. Friends may be taken; I may be sick; I may be tried in my family; I may be tried in my Church position; I may be tried in various ways; yet goodness and mercy follow me. And here in this verse we have our own name. Goodness and mercy shall follow me - so-and-so; we may write our own name, and say to the glory of God regarding ourselves, Goodness and mercy shall follow ME. This is no presumption. This tends to the glory of God. When we take God by His word, we are not going too far. We ought to go so far as to believe what God says regarding His children; and this is a universal promise regarding all the children of God.

"And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

The Host having been so kind towards the guest, having anointed his head with oil, and so abundantly provided for him, the guest now says, "I will remain in the house; I will remain in it, and not be a visitor merely." In our inmost heart we say, "There is no house like the Father's house!" And oh! to dwell in the presence of God; in spirit, to be in the Father's house; in spirit, to be in heaven now, there to abide, - there, not to be a visitor only, a guest merely for a day or two or a week or two, but to say, "I will abide there, in the Father's house." Oh, how blessed! Now this is the present portion of the feeblest and weakest of the children of God; and if we would only have it, it is the very joy and delight of the heart of God to give us this blessed portion.



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