

"JEHOVAH IS MY SHEPHERD"

– APRIL 18. – PSALM 23. –

THE INFLUENCE OF THE PSALMS – THE MOST TOUCHING OF THEM ALL – DAVID A SHEPHERD – HIS INTEREST IN HIS SHEEP – SUGGESTIVE OF THE HEAVENLY SHEPHERD'S INTEREST IN HIS FLOCK – HIS SHEEP SHALL NOT LACK – HE GIVES THEM REST – HE FEEDS THEM – HE REFRESHES THEM WITH THE WATER OF LIFE – HE RESTORETH MY SOUL – HE LEADETH ME – EVEN THROUGH THE DARK VALLEY I WILL FEAR NO EVIL – HIS ROD AND HIS STAFF – HIS TABLE FOR HIS PEOPLE – THE ANOINTING HE GIVES – GOODNESS AND MERCY EVER.

"Jehovah is my Shepherd." – Psalm 23:1.

IT IS safe to say that no other collection of poems has accomplished as much good as the Book of Psalms. Its sentiments seem to touch the soul at every turn – in joy, in sorrow. Referring to the Twenty-third Psalm, Beecher wrote, "It is the nightingale among the Psalms. It is small, of a homely feather, singing shyly out of obscurity; but it has filled the air of the whole world with melodious joy"; and Spurgeon said, "This is the Pearl of Psalms, whose soft and pure radiance delights every eye."

Only the people of God, in covenant relationship with Him, can properly appreciate this Psalm and apply its gracious sentiments to themselves. The Psalmist David could do this, because he belonged to the favored nation which God had taken into covenant relationship with Himself at Mount Sinai. The Israelites had covenanted to walk in the Lord's way and to obey His statutes; and God in turn had covenanted with them that He

would, in proportion as they would do this, bestow His blessing upon their every interest. And perfect obedience to that Covenant and its Law would have been rewarded with everlasting life. We see, as the Apostle explains, that such a complete obedience was impossible. "By the deeds of the Law shall no flesh be justified in Thy sight."

Comparatively few of the Jews even did their best to live up to the requirements of the Law; but the Prophet David evidently was one of these, however far short he came of perfection; for the Lord declared him "a man after His own heart." If he made failures, he confessed them, repented, received his punishment, and rejoiced in restoration to the Lord's favor, striving the more in the future to maintain his fellowship with God. It is interesting for us to note the kind of man with whom the Lord is well pleased – the kind of sheep in which the Great Shepherd is interested. And of this same class, of course, were others – the Prophets and lesser personages – all who endeavored to live godly.

THE GREAT SHEPHERD AND HIS FLOCK

In an important sense this Psalm is applicable to our Lord Jesus and His Church. All the features of the Psalm are applicable to our Redeemer Himself as well as to His followers, whom He styles the sheep of His flock. To His Church He is the Representative of the Father, so fully, so completely, that He could say truthfully, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." No human being could see the Heavenly Father and live, as the Scriptures declare; and those who saw and understood Jesus to be the Son of God, caught the best possible glimpse of the Heavenly Father. And so we all see Jesus as the Representative of the Father, the Son of the great King, the Son of the great Shepherd, Jehovah.

Jesus and His Church are more particularly the sheep of Jehovah's flock than were the Israelites of the Jewish Age; for the relationship of the Jews was through Moses, while the relationship

of the Church is through Christ and the superior Covenant which centers in Him. It is well that we see this clearly; else how could we know whether or not we might apply the gracious sentiments of this Psalm to ourselves? It would not be right for a worldly person to apply this Psalm to himself. He would be deceiving himself; for he is not one of Jehovah's sheep. Nothing is more clear than this. Jesus declared that there is only one way of entering the sheepfold; namely, through **[R5654 : page 90]** the door. And He declared Himself to be the Door.

HOW TO BECOME A TRUE SHEEP

By nature we are sinners under Jehovah's sentence of death, and not His sheep. He has purposed a great Plan for the world in general, which will begin to operate as soon as Messiah's Kingdom is established. However, in the interim He is receiving special sheep – during this Gospel Age; and Jesus tells how, saying, "If any man will come after Me [be My disciple, My follower, My sheep], let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." Self-denial is the first step – self-renunciation, giving up of the will to God. The Covenant reads, "Gather My saints together unto Me; those who have made a Covenant with Me by sacrifice." All who would be the Lord's sheep must make this Covenant of Sacrifice; it is the condition under which they may be accepted.

Moreover, as the Jews could come only through their appointed mediator, Moses, so we can come into this higher sheepfold only under the antitypical, greater Moses, Christ. There is none other name given. Once having taken this step, once having come into the sheepfold by the Door – in the approved manner – we have the Message of God, saying, "All things are yours; for ye are Christ's **[R5654 : page 91]** and Christ is God's." What this means is described in this Psalm. – 1 Corinthians 3:22,23.

ALL WANTS ABUNDANTLY SUPPLIED

The Lord's sheep, abiding in perfection of relationship with Him, will lack nothing. Their every need will be supplied. This may not mean greater earthly wealth or name or fame or luxury. The Lord's sheep are New Creatures, spirit beings, who are temporarily dwelling in the flesh like other people, but who really are waiting for their change, to be completed by a share in the First Resurrection. The Lord's blessings to Natural Israel were earthly blessings, supplying their every earthly need; but His blessings to Spiritual Israel are spiritual favors. "No good thing will He withhold" from these – yea, even chastisements and sorrowful experiences that may be necessary for their spiritual development.

The Psalm assures us that, as the Lord's sheep, we shall be provided with green pastures and the cool, refreshing waters of Truth. Moreover, while thus being spiritually fed and refreshed, we shall have the peace of God, as is implied in the suggestion that the sheep will lie down in the green pastures. But alas! Not all of the sheep have full confidence in the Shepherd and are fully resigned to have no will but His. Some are continually getting into difficulty, because they neglect the green pastures and cool, refreshing waters of Truth found in the Word of God – because, goat-like, they sometimes wander off into the desert, straying far from the Shepherd and attempting to feed themselves on the indigestible things of the present life, on which no spiritual nature can thrive.

Yet even such straying sheep the Shepherd will not leave, if they have become truly His. He goes after them, as the Psalm represents. His rod and His staff are their comfort. With the rod he beats off their enemies, the wolves that would injure; and with the crook of His staff He wisely and carefully assists the entangled sheep out of its difficulties – out from amongst the cares of this life, the entanglements and deceitfulness of riches, and the

besetments of sin and of Satan. Many of the sheep of the Lord's flock thus can sing, "He restoreth my soul" – He brings me back to Himself; He makes me again to know, to appreciate, to enjoy His provision for me and to see how much better it is than anything I could have provided for myself.

A further experience is next brought to our view – the Shepherd's leading. "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness." He causes me, even by my own stumblings and difficulties, to learn to appreciate the desirableness of His ways and the undesirableness of every other way. All His ways are perfect, are righteous. He leads us not contrary to our wills, but in harmony therewith, to prove what is the good, next the acceptable, and finally the perfect will of God. – Romans 12:2.

THE VALLEY OF DEATH'S SHADOW

All of our lives we have been in the shadow of this great Valley of Death. Only father Adam was ever on the mountain-tops of life. He lost his footing there, and descended gradually the slopes into this Valley of the Shadow of Death. We, his children, were all born here. We are dying daily; we are surrounded by dying conditions. We have merely the hope that the Lord will lead His sheep back to the heights of life. He is now leading His sheep of this Gospel Age – the Church, the Body of Christ. By and by He will lead the world, during His Millennial Kingdom; as He declared, "Other sheep I have, that are not of this fold; them also must I bring,...and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd." – John 10:16.

"Oh, sometimes the shadows are deep,
And rough seems the path to the goal!"

The end of this Valley of Shadow is near, not merely in the sense that we shall soon reach the end of life's journey, but especially in the sense that the New Day is about to dawn, of which

the Lord, our Shepherd, declared the result: "The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His beams." (Malachi 4:2.) The final result will be that there shall be no more sighing, no more crying, no more dying; but the whole world will begin to emerge from the Valley of the Shadow of Death. For a thousand years they will be rising again to the glorious heights of human perfection from which Adam fell, and the right to return to which is secured for all by the death of Jesus, "the Just for the unjust."

THE CHURCH'S BETTER TABLE

But this precious Psalm seems especially to apply to the Church, as we have said. Thus we appropriately read that the Lord's people of the present time have an especially prepared table, where they may partake even in the presence of their enemies. That will not be true in the future; for no enemies nor anything to hurt or injure shall then be permitted. (Isaiah 11:9.) But how true it is that the Lord's consecrated people, even when misunderstood, misrepresented, defamed and opposed, are still privileged to feast at the Lord's Table! The table represents God's provision for their needs – the promises of God, the assurances of His favor, etc.

Another evidence that the Psalm belongs especially to the Church of this Age is the statement, "Thou anointest my Head with oil." Jesus, the Head of the Church, was anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows. That holy anointing oil used on the priests and kings of Israel typified the Holy Spirit, which came upon the Church representatively in Jesus. And this same anointing oil has come down over all the members of the Church, which is the Body of Christ, as we read in Psalm 133:2.

THE CUP BOTH SWEET AND BITTER

"My cup runneth over." The word cup is used in the Scriptures to represent a draft, sometimes sweet, sometimes bitter, sometimes both. The intimation is that the Lord's Cup signifies bitter

experiences and trials in the present time; as Jesus said, "The Cup which My Father hath poured for Me, shall I not drink it?" And this was the Cup – His Cup – which He offered to His disciples and which we, in becoming His disciples, propose to share with Him, and which is symbolically represented in the Communion Cup. – 1 Corinthians 10:15-17.

It is sweet and precious, in many senses of the word to be privileged to participate in the sufferings of Christ, in any sacrifices or services for the Lord and His Cause. The sweet mingles freely with the bitter. But the Lord promises that in the future the Cup of new wine in the Kingdom shall more than compensate for any bitterness of the present time. Our Cup is full, but we would not wish it one drop less.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." How precious the thought – God's goodness, God's mercy, with all those who are truly His in Christ – following us day by day, moment by moment, and according to the Scriptures making all things work together for our good! Then the grand finale is signified, "I shall dwell in the House of the Lord forever" – in the Heavenly House, of which the Redeemer said, "In My Father's House are many mansions;...I go to prepare a place for you," and "I will come again and receive you unto Myself." Then, at His Second Coming, with our glorious change, we shall enter the Father's House in the **[R5654 : page 92]** fullest sense of the word, on the spirit plane, which flesh and blood does not inherit.

This shall be the everlasting portion of God's Elect – the Church. The great blessings subsequently to come to the world – earthly blessings – will in no sense interfere with, but enhance, the glory of the Church; for she will be engaged with her Lord in dispensing blessings to the earthly sheep. – Galatians 3:29.

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