

Contents

CHAPTER	PAGE
Foreword	5
Preface	7
1. An Introduction to the Psalm	9
2. Introduction Continued	20
3. Rest	27
4. Refreshment	40
5. Restoration	50
6. Guidance	57
7. Courage	67
8. Comfort	78
9. Supply	84
10. Protection	96
11. Power	108
12. Mercy	117
13. Forever	124

I

An Introduction to the Psalm

THERE IS PERHAPS no more familiar passage of Scripture than the Twenty-third Psalm. It is one of the earliest extended portions committed to memory in childhood. Verse 1 of the psalm presents a very present help in time of trouble when, on prayer meeting night, the pastor suddenly asks his congregation for a verse of Scripture. Immediately someone will spring up and say, "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want," before someone else can get to it.

It is this very familiarity with the psalm which constitutes its peril. Someone has said, "Familiarity breeds contempt." I assume that this is intended to indicate that either appreciation of or dislike for certain situations may be gradually modified by constant association. Certainly long familiarity with a passage of Scripture, such as the Twenty-third Psalm, may cause one to lose the keen edge of appreciation and just take it for granted. This has been the fate of this wonderful portion of Scripture at the hands of thousands of really born-again believers.

During nearly sixty years in the ministry I have

heard hundreds of people quote the first verse of Psalm 23 even though it was obvious that the verse had almost no application to their daily experience. They could quote the words, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want," but I knew their life was a wilderness of "want." What they really meant was, "The Lord is my *Saviour*, and I am glad He is." They had failed utterly to realize that there is a vast difference between the *saviourhood* of Jesus Christ and the *shepherdhood* of Jesus Christ. One may know the Lord as *Saviour* and know almost nothing of Him as *Shepherd*, as revealed in this marvelous psalm.

The New Testament presents the Lord Jesus as exercising a threefold shepherd ministry. In John 10:11 He calls Himself the "good shepherd" and declares that "the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." In Hebrews 13:20 the inspired writer calls the Lord "that great shepherd of the sheep" and says that He became the great Shepherd through being "brought again from the dead." In 1 Peter 5:4 the Lord Jesus is called "the chief shepherd" and Peter declares that He becomes the chief Shepherd in His second advent when He shall give to His own "a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

Here, then, the Lord Jesus is placed before us as the good Shepherd, the great Shepherd, and the chief Shepherd. As the good Shepherd, He *dies* for the sheep. As the great Shepherd, He *lives* for the sheep. As the chief Shepherd, He *comes* for the sheep.

It is the relationship of the *good Shepherd* to the sheep rather than the relationship of the great Shepherd to the sheep that is referred to by many people when they quote verse 1 of Psalm 23. They are thinking of the ministry of the good Shepherd who died for them on Calvary's cross, and who, for that matter, is also living in heaven and whom they are sure they will meet someday. The glorious truth that they should be meeting Him *every day* in green pastures and beside still waters has never dawned upon them, or at least has never become a blessed, daily experience in their Christian life. True it is that one cannot know Christ as *Shepherd* without knowing Him as *Saviour*, but the tragedy is that born-again believers who know Him as Saviour may never know Him in their daily experience as a blessed present Shepherd.

This threefold shepherd ministry of Christ is beautifully set forth in the triplet psalms, namely, Psalms 22, 23 and 24. Psalm 22 presents Him as the good Shepherd in death. Psalm 23 presents Him as the great Shepherd in life. Psalm 24 presents Him as the chief Shepherd in His sure return.

The opening sentence of Psalm 22 is the very dictation of Calvary's cry of rejection—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" These words are not primarily a quotation from Matthew 27:46, but Matthew 27:46 is the Lord Jesus Himself quoting from Psalm 22:1—quoting in awful, literal and terrible fulfillment all of the black and overwhelming portent of these words!

Psalm 22 is a literal word picture of the experi-

ences of death by crucifixion; but more than that, *the death of the Son of God* by crucifixion. Even the details of garments parted, lots cast upon vesture, and pierced hands and feet, are here laid bare before us. Surely this is the good Shepherd giving His life for His sheep.

I cannot accept the view that Psalm 22 has reference to a particular, personal experience of David. There are some things in this psalm which David never experienced. For instance, look at verses 16 and 18, "They pierced my hands and my feet. . . . They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture." This was never done to David. I recognize that in many of the prophetic psalms there is a near and a remote fulfillment. For instance, when David said in Psalm 41:9, "Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me", he certainly was referring to his own experience. But in John 13:18 we discover that the Lord Jesus Christ reaches back over the centuries and lifts that little, almost forgotten, expression of David out of its ancient setting, and says "that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me," and applied it to His experience with Judas. In this case the great camera focus in this prophecy was not directed particularly on David. He was simply caught on the sidelines. The eye of the camera was really on the Lord Jesus and Judas. This gives us the well-known principle of near and remote fulfillments in connection with the same prophecy, but this is not the case in Psalm

22. Here there is but one individual who walks in the terrible picture. It is none other than the good Shepherd moving into the place of death for His sheep.

Psalm 23 sets the Lord forth in His *present* ministry. Every verb in the psalm is in the present tense. It is something that the Lord Jesus is doing for us *now*. It is the good Shepherd whom we just saw dying in Psalm 22 who is now living as the *great Shepherd* in Psalm 23.

Yes, Psalm 23 presents the Lord Jesus as doing something for me *right now*. In Psalm 22 He did something for me once and forever that He will never have to do again—He died for my sins. But there is something about this old sinful heart of mine that makes it necessary to have Somebody up in heaven to keep it right. Every day and every hour and every moment I have to have Someone living *for* me and *in* me who can crucify every unholy thought, every unholy act, and keep me in a place of usability before a holy God. And that is exactly what we see Him doing in Psalm 23.

Let us never cease to stand with Paul in the presence of that lone Sufferer on Calvary's cross and say, "He loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*." Blessed occupation! But not blessed enough if that is as far as our vision and conception of Calvary extends. Divine urgency is upon us not to engage in this blessed occupation *less*, but to engage in an *additional* occupation which will eventuate in a glorious life of daily victory. Do not *leave* Psalm

22, but do not fail to enter Psalm 23 in daily Christian experience.

It was this progression to new and deeper depths in Christian experience without forsaking the fundamentals and rudiments of that Christian experience which Paul had in mind when he said in Hebrews 6:1-2, "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment." At first glance this looks like an appeal from Paul for the Christian to *desert* the rudimentary fundamentals and foundations of the Christian faith and go on unto perfection. But a careful examination of the passage discloses that it is exactly the opposite. It is an appeal to go to the perfection of a full, rounded, victorious Christian life based upon these very foundations which he here enumerates.

We see this principle—of progression without forsaking—all around us. The house, in its building, leaves the foundation without forsaking it. The book, in its writing, leaves the alphabet without forsaking it. The anthem leaves the scale without forsaking it. The foundation remains an essential part of the house, but the superstructure is essential also. The alphabet remains a part of the book, but it must be arranged into orderly literature. The scale remains a part of the anthem, but who would want an anthem of all scales and no oratorio? So the Christian, in going on to perfection, leaves some of

the first principles without forsaking them. He is not forever to live solely in the glorious realization of sins forgiven through the crucifixion of the good Shepherd. The appeal is to move on from that blessed vantage point into a fuller, richer, deeper, sweeter experience of an increasing knowledge of what the risen Shepherd wants to do for him here and now. This is the story of Psalm 23.

In Psalm 24 we are introduced to the same blessed Person again, but in His ministry as the *chief* Shepherd. The psalmist cries, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye 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" (vv. 7-10).

Some expositors have felt that this was the song of the angels welcoming the Lord Jesus back to heaven in the hour of His ascension. But this view does not seem acceptable. The Lord Jesus did not go back to heaven as "the King" and He is not now enjoying the "glory" which shall be His as the King. He went back to heaven not as the *King* but as the *Priest*. Here again we find this same beautiful ministry of Christ represented in the titles Prophet, Priest and King. As the Prophet, He came from God to the people. As the Priest, He went back from the people to God. As the King, He will reign some day. As the Prophet, He told the people the story of God's love in scarlet letters of agony written in the crimson of His own precious blood. This is the story of Psalm 22. As the Priest, He went into the presence of God for His people, there to

live for them and in them, and to lead them into the fullness of daily supply. This is the story of Psalm 23. As the King of glory, He will be coming one of these days. What a King He will be and what glory will be His!

It might be of profit for us to examine a little more closely our reasons for rejecting the "welcome" theory to which we have already referred. It seems that the very titles used in the closing verses of Psalm 24 are not those which are applicable to the Lord Jesus in the hour of His ascension, or during the centuries which have passed into history since. He is called in these closing verses, "The King of glory and the Lord of hosts." His prowess on the field of battle is indicated in the title "Lord of hosts." It is true, of course, that the Lord Jesus did engage in a battle on Calvary and in the tomb, but the title here used applies more specifically to His victories in the field of what might be called military conquests. It is the title which pictures Him in furious action and devastating victories in conquest over the kingdoms and schemes of men rather than the great spiritual conquests of Calvary. The demonstration of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Lord of hosts awaits that day when as the King of glory He rides forth on the white steed of heaven to implement His decree which He uttered in Psalm 2 when He declared that He would break the nations "with a rod of iron" and "dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

One of these days the Priest will arise from the mercy seat in heaven and will lay aside His priestly

robes. His priestly ministry will be over. The two-edged sword will flash from His mouth, fire will leap from His eyes, His feet will become like burnished brass, and upon His thigh will be written the name "King of kings and Lord of lords." As He sits upon the white horse of the skies, poised, ready for the downward rush in all the fury and wrath of God upon a world that has said of Him and His Father, "Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us," it seems I can see the mighty angel chorus ready at the signal to burst out in mighty song, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors." In other words, roll back the mighty doors and gates of heaven in order that the King of glory, the Lord of hosts, may ride forth in mighty triumph and come into possession of His own kingdom.

Indeed, He will be the King of glory then. That will be the day when the little kings of earth will cry for rocks and mountains to hide them from the wrath of His face. That will be the day when proud, boasting, self-sufficient kingdoms of earth will crumble like dust. That will be the day when every high and haughty imagination of wicked men will burn in the blaze of His fierce anger like a moth caught in the blaze of a blowtorch. That will be the day when even the imaginations of sin will be turned to ashes in the white heat of His holy anger. What a day!

Now it was not a king who went from the tomb to the skies—it was a Priest. There He is to plead His own precious blood on behalf of every trusting

soul, there to wash and cleanse every born-again child of God, there to live and lead His people in green pastures and beside still waters. From those same heavens He will come again as the everlasting doors are lifted up. He will come forth as King of glory and Lord of hosts.

The virgin womb opened and gave us the good Shepherd. The virgin tomb opened and gave us the great Shepherd. The virgin skies will open and give us the chief Shepherd.

It is because of all this revelation in Psalm 23 of such abundant blessing and supply for daily, victorious Christian living that we were led to say in the beginning that the psalm sets forth an experience with the Lord Jesus sadly unknown to thousands of born-again believers, *Psalm 23 is the highest, widest, most glorious experience into which it is possible for God to lead a born-again believer this side of heaven.*

Let us look at these triplet psalms (22, 23 and 24) in outline form:

I. In Psalm 22—Christ forsaken by His Father and despised by the people.

In Psalm 23—Christ, the living Shepherd.

In Psalm 24—Christ, the coming King of glory.

II. In Psalm 22—the cross with its shame.

In Psalm 23—the crook with its care.

In Psalm 24—the King with His crown.

III. In Psalm 22—the *good Shepherd in death for His sheep.*

- In Psalm 23—the *great* Shepherd *living for* His sheep.
In Psalm 24—the *chief* Shepherd *coming for* His sheep.
- IV. In Psalm 22—Christ's *yesterday* of suffering.
In Psalm 23—Christ's *today* of grace.
In Psalm 24—Christ's *forever* of splendor.
- V. In Psalm 22—Christ strengthless.
In Psalm 23—Christ strengthening.
In Psalm 24—Christ strong.
- VI. In Psalm 22—Christ's cry.
In Psalm 23—Christ's comfort.
In Psalm 24—Christ's claim.
- VII. In Psalm 22—Christ brought low.
In Psalm 23—Christ bringing home.
In Psalm 24—Christ at home.
- VIII. In Psalm 22—Christ dishonored.
In Psalm 23—Christ honoring.
In Psalm 24—Christ honored.