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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Wednesday evening 5 October 1921

PSALM 23 v 1

"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

This is a very great word, and when it falls on the heart in the power of the Spirit, it says to a frightened creature, you will be protected. It says to a sick soul, you will be healed. It says to a hungry soul, you will be provided for. You must know the power of this to understand it. You may gather beautiful scriptures and admire them, and think you believe them, and yet be destitute of life and faith. But you may be sensibly poor, distracted, ready to perish, hungry; you may perceive a lion, hear his roaring; you may hear the barking of a dog going round about the city, and be frightened, and then in a moment find your soul filled with sweet hope, holy courage, genuine humility, humble confidence in your God. "Behold" says Christ "I make all things new." And when you get this renewing you can find that this Psalm expresses exactly your experience and your confidence and your prospects. It is a beautiful Psalm, but the way to know that it is beautiful is to find it in some measure fulfilled in your experience; to be made to lie down in the provisions of the gospel; to be led by the pure river of the water of life, which is as clear as crystal; to be restored from your fainting and your withered condition; to be restored by forgiveness; to have a new summer in your heart by a divine smile; to be led into the paths of righteousness - not only in the righteousness of Christ wherein you are justified, but in the righteous dealings of God, and in a righteous walk in your own soul, and also among men. I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of uprightness, and truth and grace, is Christ's word, and this He does for His Name's sake. And when you get all this mercy, then you look forward and say - "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil", whereas, before this restoring came, you shook at the least motion of the wind, at the least appearance of trouble; wondered what the Lord would do, and how you would get through, and greatly feared, shaking like a leaf. But now, no roaring lion, no barking dog, no

temptation, no wave of affliction, no moving earth, no shaking mountains, no roaring sea can disquiet your heart, or shake your confidence. A few minutes of this experience will make a great mark on your spirit. The Lord give it to you and to me. And the reason of this great confidence, of this strength that rises above all distractions that may come and threaten, is: "For Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; Thou anointest my head with oil;" - a fresh outpouring of the Spirit - "My cup runneth over" with the mercy of God. Then, as to the future, the confidence is continued. "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." And you are not anxious to have many days added to the days you have lived when you are under this fresh anointing. To get away quickly, to sin no more, to be shut in for ever with the Lord, that is your desire. Well, the Psalm opens with this gracious word - "The Lord is my Shepherd". Christ is the Shepherd, the great Shepherd, and Bishop of the souls of His people, and perhaps some of you can say that if you could use this word for yourselves and as your own, nothing would afflict you. That is quite true; for the time you would be so favoured, so full, so happy, so broken, so at liberty, as that you would say, there is no trouble. Death is removed, no penal, no legal wrath at all in your bitter sorrows. Everything is right. "The Lord is my Shepherd". You do not make Him your Shepherd. People can no more make Christ their Shepherd than they can make themselves sheep. It is He who makes Himself, discovers Himself, to be the Shepherd of His children, but it is very sweet when this falls upon your heart, and you are not able to doubt it. When He whispers sweetly, and with a power that all know who find and hear that whisper in their hearts; a power that puts all doubt out for the moment, and you embrace Him in the arms of your faith as your own. "The Lord is my Shepherd" My Shepherd. Why would He make you a sheep and constitute Himself your Shepherd when He passed millions by? Perhaps came to your house, your family, and took you, the worst of the whole as you judge, and left them. And why should He bring you to His fold, and let you have the great mercy that He has shown you in making you one of His sheep? Distinguishing grace known, is humbling grace. A manifestation of Christ as your Shepherd will fill you with humble confidence, and put His high praises both into your heart and into your mouth, and lead you to trust Him and commit

your way and yourself and your circumstances, your body and your soul, into His keeping. We were as sheep going astray, but are now returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. A bigger blessing we could not have this evening than this, to be comfortably assured that the Lord is our Shepherd; and the knowledge of which is so comfortable begets a confidence that stretches out over all future wants, and makes you say, He will supply every want that I may have.

Now there are three points that I want to just name to you, and I can only name them this evening. The three wants are these - food, healing, protection.

First, food. The Lord leads His people and He makes them to lie down in green pastures. He stands and feeds in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God (Micah 5 v 4). He spreads a table or, to keep to the metaphor of the sheep, the Shepherd leads into green pastures. We need nourishing my friends. Christ does not give a start to His people and leave them to provide for themselves afterwards. He makes them know that they are dependent and He gives them grace to depend, and He sets before them food, or leads them into truth. What a wonderful thing this is to get a feast of divine love, for God to tell you in your own heart, that He has loved you with an everlasting love. Not leaving you to suppose it, or imagine it, or be satisfied with thinking about the love of God, but really tells you in your own soul, so as that you have no doubt about it for the moment, that He has loved you, that He has singled you out in the act of eternal election, that He made a difference between you and others in that wonderful act of His own election, that He made you one of His own; so made you one of His own that nothing can ever destroy you. And when He leads you into this love, it is a leading of you into green pastures. Love never decayed, never burned up by drought, never altered by sin, never turned away by sin. It will turn sin away, and pull you out of sin, and forgive your sin, but sin will never turn it away. It is an infinite mercy, and when you feel this, it will make you sing

On such love my soul still ponder,
Love so great, so rich, so free;
Say whilst lost in holy wonder
Why O Lord such love to me?

And if you want to see the man who is the humblest man in the world you will see him when he is filled with the love of God, and is sure of heaven. Nothing humbles a sinner more than the love of God shed abroad in his heart. Nothing more satisfies the longings of his soul than divine love; nothing more sweetly answers his oft repeated prayer to know the love of God, than the shedding abroad of it in his heart by the Holy Ghost. And O, if he could get lower than another, he gladly would. He can enter into Paul's language - with, as he can feel and say, much more reason than Paul had - when Paul said, "Less than the least of all saints". You may be very proud when God is away from you. You may think highly of yourself, a great deal more highly of yourself than you ought to think, in His absence, but you wont think so when you have His presence, His love in your soul. You will never want this; you will lack the feeling of it sometimes; perhaps more often than you have the feeling of it; but you will never, the love. He leads you into righteousness. "I lead in the way of righteousness". What is this but His own righteousness? The way of free and eternal and complete justification, that is never added to by the deepest, and richest experience the Holy Ghost can work in you. It is so complete as that nothing can be added to it. It was complete on the thief on the cross ere he went to heaven. He never did a good work except to pray and then he gets the answer and was carried to heaven. God justifies the ungodly that believeth in Jesus, and you will find, whenever you are led in this path of righteousness, that you are walking with God, that God is your friend, that He condescends to speak friendly to you; He has no quarrel with you; that He sees you pure, sees you just according to His requirements, that He can ask nothing further or more of you; that He has received such absolute satisfaction on your behalf in His beloved Son, and the vicarious death of His beloved Son Jesus Christ as that you are really righteous. "Thy people shall be all righteous", and they shall be wholly righteous, absolutely righteous, and when faith feeds on this the soul is nourished. The first revelation of this is wonderful, but after manifestations of it appear to be more wonderful. It stretches

out, it covers them entirely, and all their failings, after the first revelation of this, all their failings do not alter this. And they are brought to see that justification does not depend on their ebbings and flowings, their risings and fallings, their occasional experiences of God's goodness and their frequent experience of His absence; that, in itself, it is absolute. O what a righteousness this is, what a justification this is. Well, faith feeds on this. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." No drought in your experience will make this withered and brown; it will always be green. Though not always perceived by you as being your own, yet it will always be there. He will lead you sometimes into the truth of your sanctification; that this is unchanged; that though one day you are a mass of sin and pollution in your own experience, so as that you can hardly bear yourself, and another day you get a sweet feeling of being sanctified in Jesus Christ, these changes neither add to, nor take from, this precious sanctification; that it is ever the same; and faith feeds on this. It is a great truth, that Christ is made sanctification as well as, and as much as, redemption to His children. Sometimes He leads them into promises, that is, He speaks some promise or promises to them. He tells them He wont leave them nor forsake them; that He will guide them with His eye; that He will reprove them because He loves them; that the weak shall be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand; that his ignorance is no bar in the way to heaven, as to God's purpose and ability to lead him and bring him honourably through, and he gets into these promises, or perhaps it might be better to say they get into him in the power of the Holy Ghost. If they get into him he gets into them, and he lies down there. It is these words, these good words: "Thy words were found and I did eat them and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" Yes, it is a great thing to get a word of God. Sometimes it comes unexpectedly. You hardly were asking for anything when it fell upon your spirit, like this word of the text. It may come to you in a moment, when something has made you fearful, some affliction has weakened you, and made you wonder what the Lord intends to do, and in a moment you say, why I shall not want. You lie down and you feed on the blessed promise that the Lord speaks to your heart. "Thy words were found". Where have you found them? Ah, one says, I found them in the Bible and I rejoice in them because they are there. If you never find them anywhere else, I would not have your joy for all the world.

Why, where else are they to be found? In a sinner's heart. "The words Thou hast given Me I have given them", says Christ. The words put into the mouth of Christ to speak, He spoke to them. He said I have given them and they have received them. Notice that point my friends. Plenty of people think they love the Bible; plenty of people you will find who can talk about it and who perhaps have more understanding in certain ways, certain critical knowledge of Scripture, than you yourself, but this is the thing, for the fool, and the ploughman, and the illiterate person to find God's word speaking to him, so that he has more knowledge and understanding than the ancients, and than his teachers, for he gets a sight of God's glory, a sight of the Person of Christ, of the provision made for the church, and for his own soul, so that he again and again says, "Thy words were found", I found them here. Hart has a word concerning Christ which we may adapt to this point. He says, let the Christian descend into his heart and find his Saviour there. And one would say, let a poor, weak, helpless, alarmed creature, without provision, without protection, and often very sick, let him - and he will do it when God speaks - descend into his heart and find the word of God there. "I have given them Thy words and they have received them and have known surely that I came out from Thee."

Sometimes they are led into the Covenant of Grace, wherein they see ample provision for time and eternity. Provision for their soul's necessities; life, and love and pardon, and grace. Grace that is needed, grace to hold up, grace to make a person in trouble know that no temptation has overtaken but such as is common to man, and particularly he will find it common to the saints of the Most High, and that God is faithful who will not suffer him to be tempted above that he is able to bear, but with the temptation will always make a way of escape. And then you would not find this person willing to accept any sort of deliverance; he will have just the spirit that they had of old, of whom it is said that in their affliction and in their death they would not accept deliverance, but chose rather to suffer any sort of martyrdom than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. And sometimes a sinner is led into this green pasture, namely to look by precious faith into the Person of Christ, in whom he sees are lodged all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell, and there he sees

ample provision. Then he sings

How can I want if He provide

"He leadeth me". "The Lord is My Shepherd, I shall not want" nourishment; not lack it. I shall not lack food; He will give me enough to nourish my soul. If He gives reproof it will be nourishment. You will prove what Rutherford said to be true, "the Lord's wise love feeds His people with hunger and makes them fat with desertion" and when God reproves a sinner there is that in the reproof that nourishes his faith. "The ear that heareth the reproofs of life abideth among the wise."

Secondly let me name that which is frequently wanted - healing. The sheep may get the scab, may get trouble with its feet, may get cast. Common troubles these, to sheep, and they need the Shepherd's care. If you have seen a sheep cast, you know this - and if you have not seen it, you may believe it if you hear it - that the sheep that is cast can never get itself on its legs; it dies if the shepherd does not come and put it right. It is not long since I was on a farm and in the night one of the sheep got cast and was dead in the morning. And a poor sheep may get cast; this sin may cast you on your back; that temptation may throw you over; some abomination in your nature may bring you down, and who can put you right? who can heal you? who can put you on your feet? You will want the Shepherd and it is the Shepherd's part to look after the sheep, and because they are the Shepherd's own in this case, He does not neglect them. I will go after them, says He, by Ezekiel. "I will seek and search them out in the cloudy and dark day". I will go to the mountains where they have been driven, and to the places where they have been wounded and dragged and hurt. O what a Shepherd He is to heal us and to put us on our feet. What a Shepherd He is. I bless the Lord that He is such a Shepherd as this; that He wont leave a poor sheep to himself. And when the devil frightens you, and you rush to the hedge and even try to scramble through it, thinking to get out of his way, or sometimes sin roars and threatens to be your destruction, and you do not know what to do or where to fly, O then for the Good Shepherd to come to your assistance with His friendly rod and crook and lay hold of you. When, as I said, you get cast into some sin and are ready to perish, O

the love of this Good Shepherd, the care of this Good Shepherd, to come and put you straight once more and put you on your feet, that again you can walk by faith and not by sight; again look to Him and believe He will not leave you nor forsake you. I will bring again that which was driven away, and heal that which was sick, and bind up that which was broken. May the Lord make out and fulfil in us these blessed words as we may need them from time to time.

And thirdly, we need protection. Why, the sight of a dog will frighten you sometimes. The sight of trouble will make you say, I shall not stand; will make you feel as David felt in his trouble. "As the Lord liveth there is but a step between me and death", but he did not take that step. No, he was protected, he was cared for. We need protection in two or three particular respects. First, in respect of self. If you are not protected against yourself you are undone for ever. You need no devil to tempt you, you will ruin yourself if grace protect you not. If God do not save you from yourself, woe to you; you will never get to heaven. But if the Good Shepherd is your Good Shepherd, even though perhaps you may not often be able to say - "The Lord is my Shepherd", yet, if He is your Shepherd, without your having the comfortable knowledge of it, He will protect you against yourself. See the care He exercised to the godly in the seven churches in Asia. He sent messages by their angels to them. He sent reproofs; He discovered to them where they were wrong, what kind of apostacy they were in here and there; how they had left their first love; and He gives them suitable council, in each case protecting His own against themselves. Why, we should sleep ourselves to death if Christ did not awaken us. We should leave our first love and everything else we have had, and be, in a sense, ruined, but for this great care that He exercises. The care of the Good Shepherd in protecting His sheep and saving them from themselves can never be adequately expressed. Have you been saved from yourself? I believe one great evil today among professors of God's electing love and the distinguishing doctrines of grace is this, that they have not had a thorough quarrel with themselves; they are too friendly with themselves, and they are too ready to say, I could not do this, and I could not behave so, and I could not do the other, whereas they are all the while doing these very things in the spirit of them. He who thinks he could not do a thing is doing it, while he is thinking it,

in his spirit. You will need to be protected from self. And secondly in this regard we need to be protected from the natural and, if I may so say, the proper effect of trouble. Reflect for a moment; trouble comes because sin is in us, and has been done by us. If God did not restrain the trouble, in itself, left to take its own ends, and compass - which, by God's justice, it should, - it would make an end of us. You will never be able to say of any trouble I did not deserve this. The man who says that is in a bad case. O, but I have never done this, or that; I have never brought this on me. Properly, you may look at a second cause, and say, I have not deserved this at the hand of that second cause, but if the Holy Ghost teaches you, and takes you beyond the second cause, and turns your eye on yourself, and on your own sin, then you will have your mouth closed. You will be like the Psalmist who said: "I was as a man in whose mouth are no reproofs". "I was dumb, I held my peace." And that is just what you will understand; as God is with you, teaching you in and by the means of trouble, you will say, I have no complaint except against myself. And I think one of the healthiest things, one of the most wholesome exercises, that we can have in affliction is to be led to see what we deserve at the hand of God. I know the wholesomeness of this; I know what it is to be brought to this. "I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred". "I was as a man in whose mouth are no reproofs". And when you are judging yourselves, you will find this is God's chastening. Then He will enable you to believe that when the pit is digged for the wicked you will escape. "If we judge ourselves we are chastened of the Lord". But this is not an open way for everybody in the world to look on and walk in; it belongs to one of the secrets that the Lord teaches His children, and here it is that He turns affliction into a token for good, into an evidence of sonship. "If ye endure chastening God dealeth with you as with sons." You are protected then against yourself. Pharisaism, self-justification, self-strength, self-direction, self-wisdom, why they are killed in this way from time to time.

We need, in the next place, protection against the devil. You wont rail against him. The Archangel durst not bring a railing accusation against him but said "The Lord rebuke thee O Satan." Joshua could not manage the case for he was dumb before the Lord. What had he to say to his accuser? The accuser of the brethren is not

cast down by the brethren, but by Him before whom their accusation is brought, namely by God Himself. If the accuser accuses you before God, God will cast him down. "The Lord rebuke thee O Satan" was the word. "God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly". "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." He wont let the enemy devour you. He may frighten - often will - may inject such awful things, and do it so slyly as that you will think they really are from yourself, and you have no suspicion that the devil is in the business till God comes and opens the matter, and then you will see Satan fall as lightning. Even as Christ saw him fall, so you will be permitted to see him fall. "I saw Satan as lightning fall from heaven." You wont lack heaven; if God is your Shepherd you will get there. There may be a good deal between us and heaven, Many troubles, many long days of affliction, many sore temptations, and dark seasons, but what can shut us out of heaven if our blessed Lord Jesus Christ has gone before as our forerunner. O what can overcome that mighty arm, that divine protection which He affords His helpless people? Well, may the Lord tell us that He is our Shepherd, then we shall believe it, then we shall look up to Him, then with sweet simplicity, in faith, we shall say, do take care of us. Do not let us break through a hedge. When we are frightened bid us stand, bid us come to Thee; come to us, hold us up and we shall be safe.

AMEN.