

1/2/24

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel Brighton  
on Wednesday evening 29 October 1924

PSALM 23 v 1

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

This word, and its gracious confidence, is the fruit of experience, the outcome of knowledge. It was not that the Psalmist was free from apparent danger; not that he had no enemies; not that he felt he was removed far beyond the reach of want; but his eye was on his God. He knew he had enemies; he speaks of them in this Psalm. He knew that want was stamped upon his nature; that it was as natural to him to have necessities as it was for him to breathe, and there were, no doubt, many hours when he saw his weakness, and his necessities, and his enemies, and their power, and wondered if he should get supplies, and if he should have a victory, but at this moment it was far otherwise with him. His eye was on his Shepherd; he saw his Shepherd; he saw the power, and fullness of his Shepherd. He saw that the Shepherd could lead - believed He would lead - him into green pastures, and beside the still waters. Lead him unto tender grass, and by the side of the waters of quietness. Faith will always keep you quiet when it eyes God. It will always keep your mind, when exercised on God, from dismay. If you have fears you will trust the Lord when your faith is in exercise. What time I am afraid I will trust in the Lord. But I think that the Psalmist got a step beyond that in this Psalm. He could say - "I will trust and not be afraid". That is a great comfort; sometimes given, sweetly felt. I will trust, I will trust the Shepherd; I will trust His wisdom to lead me where He will. I will trust His power to deliver me from the paw of the lion, and from the bear. I will trust Him to restore my soul, and when I faint, to give me strength; when under any necessity, to supply me. I will trust Him and not be afraid. Faith honours God. He will never forget your work of faith. Every act of faith that you are enabled to put forth on Himself, He will honour. Every time you trust Him, He will own that. When you honour Him by putting Him above your wants, weakness, and fears, and the ground of your fears - your sins - He will own you. He is not unrighteous to forget your labour of love

and work of faith. It is a great blessing to have faith. "All men have not faith". The man blessed with faith, the faith of God's elect, the faith of God's operation, has that distinguishing mark of grace; that that separates from the world; that that brings a person from false religion, as much as from profanity. If you have no faith, you are dead. If you have faith, you are living.

True faith's the life of God;  
Deep in the heart it lies;  
It lives and labours under load;  
Though damped, it never dies.

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What a mercy to have faith. Faith always cries up God, always goes out to Him. He is its proper object, He is its great end. His fullness is its delight. His power is its support, O what can faith do, but honour Him who gives it? A grain of it will carry you well through. A grain of it will save your soul, will bring you to the Lord Jesus, will keep you at His footstool. A grain of it will make you a humble man, a faithful man. and you will be on the side of the Lamb. When He makes war, you will be on His side, with those of whom it is said - "And they that are with Him are called, and chosen, and faithful" (Revelation 17 v 14). Faith is a preservative; it will keep you from receiving anything and everything that may be propounded to you for your acceptance. False religion has many claims. It lays claim upon a child of God. He is to believe this, and he is to walk in that; all kinds of fancies. Faith says, No, these savour not of Christ; these do not testify of His power; and faith rejects them. It is a preserving grace. Faith is a voice in the heart, and it is an ear in the soul. It is a voice that says, God is sufficient. It is an ear that listens for the voice of the Shepherd. Your soul will sometimes be in your ears, as Berridge expresses it. What a miracle, a believer is. What a miracle of grace, a believer is. Troubles which, in themselves, would seem sufficient to crush a poor sinner, he can bear. Sometimes he bears them with cheerfulness; sometimes he bears them with sweet, unquestioning submission to God who sends them. It is a patient, labouring grace, this faith is, and O, when the Lord appears to it, and appears in this wonderful, this beautiful character, then faith says - "The Lord is my Shepherd". I want nothing. Did your faith ever get to that point? Did you ever

profess to the Lord that you desired, that you needed, no creature, Himself being with you, and everything to you. I want nothing. That is the word. We want many things; we need them; in the order of God's providence we are to have them, and we do have them. Daily bread, friends, kind providences, but who is all this, as to origin? all this, as to gift and impartation? Why, the Lord is, and faith brings a child of God to say this, sometimes, I want nothing, nothing but what God has to give. No need is there that He cannot supply; no weakness that He cannot meet; no necessity can come to you for which He has not a fullness. No weakness, no fear, no bondage, no enemy, no devil, so that when faith gets a view of Him it says in the heart, I want nothing.

Let us look a little at this. "The Lord is my Shepherd". What can you want beside? It is His business - shall I speak it - it is His business as the great Shepherd of the sheep, to see that they are nourished. Paul speaks of being nourished up in the words of faith and good doctrine. Moses speaks of the doctrine of God dropping as the rain; of His speech distilling as the dew upon the tender herb, and it is prophesied of Christ in the Psalms that He shall come down as rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth. And these expressions set before us a pastoral life and condition, with a Shepherd, the good Shepherd. How good, His life and His death declare. How good, faith has some apprehension of, and longs to receive from it. He is good. Does He lead? Does He act this part of a Shepherd's work, to lead us, and nourish us up? That which nourishes a soul is Himself. I am the good Shepherd, I give My life for the sheep. This is that that nourishes a soul. Nobody is strong without this nourishment; I mean, no child of God. You cannot be strong if you are fed on milk always, and have not your senses exercised to discern between good and evil. If you are always spoon-fed, you cannot be strong. But if you receive and eat by faith the flesh, and drink the blood of Jesus Christ, then you are nourished up in the words of faith, and good doctrine, and you will be "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." And this is what the Good Shepherd does. I give My life. He gives it not only on the cross, but He gives it to faith. He pours His life upon the poor people who often get very faint. "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength". And this is not an act of omnipotence on the

soul, irrespective of anything in it; not mere, if I may use the word, mere omnipotence. It is not that. It is not that omnipotence that brought the world into being out of nothing. Not that omnipotence that formed the body of Adam out of the dust of the earth and then breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, so that he became a living soul. No, it is omnipotence put forth in the gospel, put forth with respect to, and bring in the Person of Jesus Christ crucified to a sinner. O, a man is strong when he receives a little of this flesh, and this blood of Jesus Christ. You will be strong in prayer and supplication. See then, if He does this for you, and in you. Does He give you His flesh to eat? Does He give you His blood to drink? Does He preach the gospel to you, as Isaiah speaks; Himself, rather speaking in the spirit of prophecy by Isaiah, says - "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me; because the LORD hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek: He hath sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound". This gospel, preached as expressed in this passage, is a wonderful gospel, and if the Lord is your Shepherd, if He is my Shepherd, He will do this for us, preach in us, preach the gospel, preach forgiveness, preach healing, and as He preaches these things they will be effectual in us, to do us good, and to perform in us just what there the Lord Himself speaks about. The Shepherd of that church, or in this church, though He is, but not that in the text; He is my Shepherd, comes to me, teaches, guides, and blesses me with nourishment, the green pastures of gospel truth, the doctrines of sovereign grace, preached and opened, explained, and applied, so that the sinner receives them, and all the nourishment that they afford to him he is strengthened by. My brethren, do we get this, or is our complaint an unceasing complaint of leanness? Then something might be said about it. Where is the Shepherd, and where are you with respect to Him? If the enemy is always taking a piece of a leg, and an ear, and the Shepherd does not come and take out of his mouth those mangled members, where is He, and where are you? If He is your Shepherd He will do something for you. It will not always be evil; the lion will not always be tearing you; the wolf will not always be tearing and scattering you. You will not always be lean; you will sometimes get this true nourishment from Himself, from His Person, and His work, His gospel, and His grace. Do you get changes? They do not argue against you. That is the most serious

argument against us, if we never receive anything from Him; if He does not guide, and lead us into green pastures at any time.

"I shall not want" protection. We need it greatly. Wolves are more than sheep. In power, and ferocity, they exceed almost all creatures. And who can keep us from them? "I send you as sheep among wolves". Who can keep us from them, from being devoured? Why, the Good Shepherd. David understood this life. He kept his father's sheep when a youth, and there came a lion, and a bear, and they took a lamb out of the flock, and it was the business of the shepherd to see to it that the lamb should not be thus stolen, and devoured, and so, in the strength of God, he went; he took the lion, and the bear, and destroyed both of them, and delivered the lamb. Will our Shepherd, the great Shepherd of His sheep, will He not do that? Will He be less careful? Is His power less than David's. Well, what a mercy. You must be in some way devoured if the wolf comes near you; if he be permitted to lay hold of you, O what suffering you will have. But then, there is the Shepherd, able, willing, determined to take care of you. Does he seek to devour your faith? Christ will nourish it. Does he seek to darken your hope? Christ will enlighten, and brighten it. Does he seek to cause your love to wax cold? Christ will warm, and inflame it. Does he drive you, or seek to drive you, from the gospel? Christ will drive him away. Does the roaring lion come? Christ will bruise him under your feet. There is protection in Him; He is a sun and a shield. What will He not do to protect a poor sheep? And if we have been protected, and delivered; if the Lord has taken a piece of a leg and an ear out of the mouth of the lion, cannot we say, ought not we to say, must we not say - "The Lord is my Shepherd". I do not doubt that David went back, when he penned this Psalm, in his memory went back to many deliverances; the goodness of God here, and the interference of God there, and a wonderful interposition somewhere else. O what reason had he from his experience to say - "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." Having brought me thus far, and protected, and delivered me from time to time, "I shall not want". He will be with me to the very end. I shall not want any good thing. The Lord is a sun and shield, and He will cover me. He covers His people in the day of battle; with favour He compasses them about, as with a shield, so as that they shall come honourably through, and be delivered from all evil. What a wonderful thing it is

to have this in your spirit, a holy, humble, humbling, strengthening, encouraging confidence in your heart, that the Lord Jesus is your Shepherd to watch over you and protect you. This "not want" has a good deal in it. I have mentioned two things, nourishment, and protection.

Now the Lord's people greatly need another thing; they need to be assured, by hearing the Shepherd's voice. My sheep know My voice; they know My voice; they will not follow a stranger, for they know not the voice of strangers. Just look at this. What do strangers speak for? Why do they address these people of God? To deceive them; that is the end of these strangers. Hirelings, false teachers; the end is to deceive the people of God. What can preserve us? What can preserve you from being deceived? You have a heart as deceitful as anybody's; a mind as blind as anybody's; a disposition as bad as anybody else. What can preserve you? I am in the same case. What can preserve me? The teaching of God, the teaching of His good Spirit. If the enemy whispers that the exercises that you are the subjects of, the fears that distract you, the doubts that torment you, the evils that wound you, and infest you, you should not for a moment entertain; as you are exercised, you wont listen to him; and, as the Lord is with you, you wont receive what he says. If he says, But all the promises of God belong to the church, and therefore you should take them, you wont be deceived. You may say you do believe that all the promises of God belong to the church; that is true in all ages; but you will say, when God told Joshua to go forward and lead the people, He said to him - "Every place that the sole of thy foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you" (Joshua 1 v 3). And you may say to a false teacher, I believe when God gives me a word, that is mine. That is not general, it is particular, it belongs to me; it speaks to me. His voice is in it, to me, and by that I know Him. General promises are beautiful, and it is quite true, they do belong to the whole church of God, and they are in Christ yea and amen to the glory of God by the church. But when you come to a personal experience - and that is what every child of God has to come to - then you will say, That is mine that my Shepherd gives. And when you can join the hymnwriter you will say

My soul with joy attend,  
While Jesus silence breaks (345)

Then the Shepherd is near you; then you are listening to Him; then you do not talk about the promise; the promise talks to you. It tells you something; it tells you of Him who speaks it; it tells you what He intends to do for you, or to give you, or to help you, to bless you; never to leave you nor forsake you. The promise is made over to you. That is how people are kept from being deceived by the enemy. That is how they are preserved from being destroyed and lost, as Bunyan speaks, in generalities. Mind generalities; look on them. If they be general truths that prevail, look on them - if they contain general errors - with distrust and hatred. But O, look for something coming from the Shepherd to you. "My sheep hear my voice"; they know it. Many passages may often be in your mind, may often recur to your memories. What do they do for you? If they are as the small rain upon the tender herb, you will understand something. If they drop as the rain, you will understand something. Mown grass is nourished by the small rain that falls upon it. If the word comes to you, some passage, or passages, and they fall on your mind, recur to your memory as by the Holy Spirit, then they will affect you. They will gather your thoughts, they will nourish your faith, brighten your hope, excite your love, draw out your gratitude, and strengthen your confidence in the Lord. Do not turn away from a passage because it does not come to you with, what you would call, the power that you need. Ask yourself rather, What is power? What is the power of God in His Word? What is it? It may not be, it need not be, that overwhelming power that perhaps once or twice in your life you got. but if it falls into your heart, if it gets your attention, if it softens your spirit, humbles your soul, tells you something about God that is welcome to your troubled heart; if it sets you praying, if it casts your eye on the Lord Jesus, if it teaches you something of His blessed fullness, then you are quite warranted to say, there was real power in it; the power of God was in it. I think the enemy very much tries, in many cases, perhaps in all cases, more or less, to take away the word of God from them by distracting their attention from the word, and fixing it on the manner. If he can only fix your attention on the manner, that might not reach your desire, then he has gained an end for the time. Look at what the word does in your hearts. Then you will say, Why, the Lord has given me this, and given me that. It is good to hear Him speak. My sheep know My voice; they follow Me. Does His voice come in any word in this way? Does it attract? Does it

move your willing feet? Do you walk by faith in it and not by sight of it? Do you feel as if it has a sanctifying influence on you? Does it humble you? Does it gather you up to Himself? Then I say again, you are warranted to say there was divine power in it.

"I shall not want" reproof. Silly sheep get into hedges, they get cast, they get into trouble, they wander where they should not go, and the Shepherd cares for them. You see a professor growing worse, and worse, receiving error constantly, and becoming more and more satisfied that he is right. You see him, he does not get reproof. The Lord does not follow him up, He does not send affliction after him, He does not send reproof into his conscience. See a child of God going astray. His heart gets hard, his mind is distracted, he is exposed to many dangers, but after a time he finds a power coming; he is arrested, there is a reproof spoken to his conscience, and he cannot pull it out. It tells him where he has been wrong, what he has been doing. What is this? The care of the Shepherd, the loving attention of the Shepherd. O, if we rightly understood, and appreciated, the love of God when He sends a reproof, it would make the reproof a great deal more welcome to us. "The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise" (Proverbs 16 v 31). The words of wisdom are as goads, and these words affect the people to whom they are made thus. Do thank the Lord Jesus if He reproves you. Can you thank Him? You say, How can you? Why dear friends, think of what He saves us from when He reproves us, and think of His blessed word about reproof. "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten". Think of it. I shall never be able to express the love of God shown to me many times in reproofing me. I have had great sympathy with James Bourne when he says in one of his letters - "I find much of the Lord's work with me is to find fault with me." The Lord wont find fault where there is no fault. O, how full of fault we are! How many faults break out. Like eruptions in your body will break out in your skin, so the thoughts of our spirits break out in our words, and our tempers, and our evil thoughts, and things, and the Lord finds fault with us. Blessed be His Name - we may say, Blessed be His Name - for finding fault with us.

But then the Lord is my Shepherd in manifesting He is that, because He makes me to lie down in green pastures, pastures of tender



grass. And these green pastures express the gospel; the truth, as the truth is in Jesus; the love of God in its free exercises in choosing whom He will; the love of Christ in His free exercises of love in dying for His sheep - I give My life for the sheep - and the love of the Holy Spirit in teaching and guiding, and blessing, and enlarging, and sealing a sinner, and giving him an earnest of the inheritance. We need the Trinity; we do need the Trinity. The Father, in His eternal love; the Son in his eternal love; and the Spirit in His eternal love, we do need. And when the Lord gives a little of this, then we lie down; we are at rest, for that is what the word intends. We have real rest. "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." Jesus gives this rest, as Paul speaks in the Hebrews, He gives this rest, and one hour of this is an earnest of the eternal rest that is to come. Does He make you lie down sometimes? Do you sometimes find real satisfaction in Christ? I must say that I do believe that that satisfaction that is felt by faith in the Person and work of Christ, is a good part of this rest. When you get a little, you are not at rest - you say, I want more - but when you get full of the favour, filled with His kindness, and love, now you say, for the time I have got enough. You lie down, you are content. The witness of the Spirit satisfies you, the power of love contents your heart, and you feel now you want to go no further for the time. Here you are at rest. You rest in the Lord. And a very beautiful thing this is. He rests in His love. Is it not wonderful that He should stoop, as He does, to the vilest of sinners, and bring them to rest in His love? You rest in Him when you rest in His love. This then is what the Good Shepherd does. He leads them beside waters of quietness, still waters - not roaring torrents that would rather frighten, that are noisy, and splashing, but quiet waters; eternal goodness, eternal redemption, justification, sanctification; the Word of God spoken, whispered, brought in, opened, and explained, and applied; the still waters; and there you are at rest. O, how refreshing it is to be beside, led unto, these still waters of mercy. The mind is quiet, the conscience is contented, the heart is softened, the affections are fixed on the Lord, the will is brought into unison with the will of God; all things are straight. And that passage is made good - "All things work together" - and we know it. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8 v 28). He says, I

will rejoice over you to do you good with all my heart and all my soul. And it is in this way that He secures in the soul the fulfilment of that word - I will give them a heart to know Me, and they shall not turn away from Me. Do not some of us have shamefully to acknowledge, and do we not sometimes tearfully acknowledge, how often we have turned away from Him. Can you go with me in that I often turn from Him. But He says, I will rejoice over them, and they shall not turn away from Me. And there is a sweet way in which this is true. Always at the very bottom of your soul there is a real cleaving to the Lord when a vile heart in you would fain turn away from Him, and you say to Him in affection, and in faith - "To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." How glad we are when we find our hearts cleaving to Him. Do you sometimes wake up early in the morning, or in the middle of the night, and find an affectionate moving toward Christ, and a desire that He would come to you, pay you a love visit? That He would grant you power to hold fast, and to hold on? And do you sometimes - thinking of the dangers that surround you, and all the evils that may come to you, that may come on the church, that may come to the nation - do you find yourself moving this way, to cast yourself, with everything that you may have to experience, upon the Lord? Commit your way and all concerns into His keeping. Who can keep us? God; the Trinity. The Holy Eternal Father, the Holy Eternal Son, and the Holy Eternal Spirit; this One God can keep us, and graciously does Christ speak to that favoured Church in Philadelphia; He says - Thou "hast kept My word, and hast not denied My Name" "I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." (Revelation 3 v 8 and 10). Now you may look forward sometimes to trouble - I do, I believe trouble is coming to this land, and to the church of God. Some fearful judgements may fall on us. It may not be now, but they will come. I do not hesitate to say it, they will come. Do you feel strong? I feel so weak, and am such a coward, and have such infidelity in my nature that I am sure if I am not kept, I shall not stand. Then I cry - "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe", and I commit myself to Him. Poor believer, is not this one of the Lord's ways with you? You commit yourself to Him. And that may be a very sweet attraction to you - "For the Lord God is a sun and shield: The Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Psalm 84 v 11). And when you come to this

in faith, then you lie down. Then you will be beside the waters of quietness, for "When He giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? (Job 34 v 29). And a little of this is so sweet, so beautiful, so affecting, so pervasive, that the soul feels it - it is not something floating in the head - the soul feels it. And the effect is quietness. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee : because he trusteth in Thee"; trusteth in the Lord, the Lord Jehovah, in whom is everlasting strength. This may be what here is said - "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies" We have got plenty of enemies, and if there was not one in the world, outside myself, I have plenty within me to make me afraid. O, what a mercy of mercies it is, to be enabled to cast yourself into the care of this Good Shepherd, and trust Him to keep you at all times, in all circumstances, and deliver you from all evil. May this holy confidence then be given to us, that we may say - "The Lord is my Shepherd". Devil, I have a good God. Sin, I have a good Saviour. World, you hated Christ, and you hate me, but as Christ overcame the world, I hope also, through Him, to overcome. God grant us this sweet mercy for His Name's sake.

AMEN.