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Sermon preached by Mr. Harwood on Monday 6th. June 1960 at "Ebenezer"  
Clapham

Hymns 1, 345, 667

Reading John 10

Text: Psalm 23.3

"He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness  
for His name's sake."

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True comfort lies in a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and what He is to us in our souls' salvation. This is a foundation for the confidence of faith. This realisation will enable the believer as it did the Apostle to say "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." Although David probably wrote this Psalm in his later life, he never forgot his early experiences as a shepherd, having the care of his father's flock, nor yet the encounter that he had with the lion and the bear in rescuing the lambs of the flock. He was led by the Spirit of God to draw upon his early experiences, with which he was so intimate, to set forth the suitability of the Lord Jesus Christ as the true shepherd, the good shepherd, and as the Apostle said, the chief shepherd. David, knowing what he did of the heart of a shepherd, felt he could say of the Lord Jesus Christ "The Lord is my shepherd". Not at all times is a child of God able so to speak, but there is that in his heart which would enable him to say "I hope the Lord is my shepherd, because I know from what I have experienced that, unless He is, I am lost." From what they have already tasted they are encouraged to hope the shepherd cares for their souls. Where faith is in exercise they view Christ as the shepherd of His people. They can then say "I shall not want", that is "I shall not really want anything that is essential to my soul's salvation".

There is no doubt that this title that David gave to Christ is a correct one, borne out by Scripture in many places. The Saviour Himself said, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd

giveth His life for the sheep". Naturally speaking, the shepherd would not expose his life unnecessarily because his flock would require his presence. By so much more is the grace of Christ our shepherd revealed when the Lord lay down His life to provide them with salvation and a sure and safe way to everlasting glory. I very much like the lines of Watts' hymn:

"I asked them whence their victory came  
They with united breath  
Ascribed their conquest to the Lamb,  
Their triumph to His death. "

The death of Christ is the life of the Church, and He has a flock which He has in much mercy loved with an everlasting love. They were given to Him by the will of the Father in the Covenant of grace. The Saviour acknowledged this. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." The flock is His because He has redeemed it. The ransom-price was His precious blood.

"That was compassion like a God  
That when the Saviour knew  
The price of pardon was His blood,  
He pity ne'er withdrew."

What a happy man that is who, having wandered as far from God as sheep can run, hears His voice, and that with power and authority, drawing him to His sacred feet, so that he can now sing:

"Jesus sought me when a stranger,  
Wandering from the fold of God."

It is an unspeakable mercy to be one of this flock. Unworthy that we are, that which is magnified is the grace of Christ and nothing of our own. When we look at ourselves in our circumstances and our affairs, we may feel to be full of wants, wants of various kinds; neither can we say at such a time "I shall not want", because that seems to be our very case. We have to remember what the Word of God says: "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." Writing to the Philippians the Apostle says, "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." When things are mysterious, confounding to sense and reason, we need to remember the word of God by the Apostle, "All things work together for good to them

that are the called according to His purpose." These Scriptures, with many others, support what David said, "I shall not want". We shall want for nothing that is essential to our enduring in the things of God and the perfecting of the work of grace in the hour and article of death.

None will ever suffer a loss because the Saviour has forgotten them. He will never relinquish His interest in them though they feel that He has cause to do so. He is faithful to His promise: He will never leave nor forsake His people and they shall never want for errands to a Throne of Grace, for discipline and correction, which sanctified are the means by which our wants are supplied. They lead us to see that in Christ our Shepherd we have all and abound. David, recollecting the condition of the flock in his earlier days remembered how the flock, when it was well, may have been caused to lie down in green pastures and beside the still waters. This was an indication that the shepherd not only feeds his flock with the bread of life, not only supplies their needs from the river of life, but causes them to lie down, that is to say, to have peace and experience satisfaction and want for nothing that the Lord is pleased to bestow upon them. The ways of God are ways of blessedness to His people when they are thus favoured and I like the way David expresses it, "He maketh me - yes, unworthy me - to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me beside the still waters." It is a blessing to have food for our souls, but a greater blessing to have real satisfaction, so that we realise His favour and love shed abroad in our hearts. You may sometimes be in that place where you question whether you will ever know the experience that David represents here. You would not if it were left to yourself, but the shepherd maketh you to lie down. He has that grace and love which accomplishes it, not by the terrors of the law, but the influence of His love and grace in your soul.

In the words which I have read as my text David speaks of the shepherd as restoring and leading in paths of righteousness. A word or two in the first place about the shepherd restoring his people, the sheep of His choice. This implies that life is theirs,

but on account of various influences that life is feeble in their souls. "My people have forgotten their resting-place" and cannot return to their rest. David says of the shepherd, "He restoreth my soul". The grace that God gives in regeneration and sealing with the pardon of our sins will never be lost, but He will perfect that work of grace. Have we not read this evening where the Saviour said, "I give unto my sheep eternal life and they shall never perish".

"Grace will complete what grace begins  
And save from sorrow, death and sins."

This is the mercy of the shepherd: between the inception of the life of God in our souls and its consummation when that work is finished, lies many a painful, bitter experience; for instance, are there not many painful, bitter conflicts in the souls of God's people as to their state and condition before God? Are there not solemn conflicts as to their interest in the things of God, conflicts with the enemy of souls, self within and sin without, with the world and with adversity in various forms, all of which are calculated to weaken our strength. The path of the sheep of Christ may well be described at times as a wilderness path in which they have wilderness mercies sufficient to keep alive their souls. Who can describe the many phases of sin, the many forms that it takes, the many way that it affects. Sin does much in a child of God which damps his enjoyment, which stamps death upon all that he experiences. He wonders, after all this, whether he has life at all in his soul, and says with the hymnwriter,

"Ye that love the Lord indeed,  
Tell me, is it thus with you?"

Because of this, sin, which boils up in our nature, and unless mercifully controlled breaks out to cause dishonour, will bring us into trouble and darkness; but the Shepherd knows His people, and He will never suffer one of His people to sin beyond the reach of His love or of His power to recover and to save. I say that deliberately, but I would add this, let no child of God think for a moment that is a reason why he may settle down upon his lees and trifle with sin. Sin is a most hateful thing. It is desolating, dishonouring, and while it is true that the Shepherd will save His people, it is to humble us and to teach us that our safety lies not in any fatalism,

but in a humble dependence upon Him, Who can tell the distress of mind the people of God experience because of unbelieving fears, which often crowd upon them with Satan supporting them and seeking to put things in such a light that it almost seems that we could not be in a worse case. It weakens us of our strength and robs us of our comfort, so that we are certainly not in the place where the Shepherd makes His people to lie down in green pastures, that is not the present experience of the believer whose case I have mentioned. But it does show to us the suitability of the Shepherd, that can restore such a child of God in the spirit of his mind.

I mentioned that the question of restoration implies a possibility of backsliding, forgetfulness of our restingplaces. Backsliding is something never to be trifled with. It does not begin all at once. It is here a little and there a little, throwing off one restraint after another, including the means of grace, and then thinking more hopefully than the Scriptures warrant about themselves. This backsliding begins in the heart, in a neglect of prayer, a lack of self-examination, bringing our matters and exercises to the Lord; because if we are enabled to do that, it will discover the error or the truth. It is very sad to forget our resting places. What a resting place that was when the Lord favoured our souls with the pardon of sin. No service was too long, nor were there too many services then. We found pleasure in the ways of God. But sometimes the Lord pulls us up with a start and makes us sensible that we have lost our comforts and we cannot regain them. If a poor sinner ever needed the office of a Shepherd, it is ourselves. "He restoreth my soul." There is no other who can but the Lord; ministers of the gospel speak as enabled of a precious Christ; but that of itself cannot restore your soul; it must be applied. Nothing we can do will help. It is the office of the Shepherd of our souls to restore our souls. Are there not those here this evening who gladly say with devout gratitude amidst sad memories of their unworthiness, He has restored my soul, and I need Him to restore me yet again and again. The Lord does restore the souls of His people. He brings them back experimentally into the exercise and enjoyment of the ways they have neglected.

But how does He do this? "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity". What mercy there is in that word. Let Him speak it home to our hearts. Let us hear Him say we are a covenant people, and He will not relinquish His interest in us. That will put our sins before our eyes and make us realise how sadly we have departed from Him; and it puts this into the heart, "Take with you words, and turn unto the Lord; say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously". A word often used this, but oh what a mercy to realise it - "Take away all our iniquities" - the love of sinning, the tendency to sin; take away the guilt and shame; take away the pain and distress by the application of Thy precious blood. For if the Lord receives us, it must be graciously, for on no other ground can He ever receive us, except in a way of mercy. Then His people will say "What have I to do any more with idols?". Yes, we have seen the folly of them and the Lord says "From all your idols will I cleanse you". That is the way He restoreth the soul. If it is that our strength is weak, and the ways of God a burden to our spirit because we cannot get near to Him, the Lord will restore the souls of His people, shed abroad His love in our souls, bring to humble repentance, give access at a throne of grace, put arguments into our souls by which we may plead with Him; and as He returns to us and pardons our sins and heals our backslidings, binds up our broken hearts, He restoreth our souls. Is this something that we seek after? I hope we are not in the place or condition when it is a matter of indifference whether He restores us or not. The people of God do come into some sad places, so sad that one could hardly believe, unless they had satisfaction, that there was any good thing in their heart toward the Lord God of Israel. It is a mercy to know that we need restoration, to be kept alive in a sense of our need of it, and to seek that He will preserve us from going astray and keep us lively and fruitful in the fear of His name.

David says something else of the Shepherd, "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." The flock of Christ need feeding; they need restoration; they need leading from time to time. We have some sad proofs of this in our own experience. What sad mistakes we have made when left to ourselves and to our own

judgement instead of waiting upon God. We have judged by appearances. We have gone astray, and what a sad experience it is, what trouble it brings and what a stumbling-block to others. We certainly discover at times all the stupidity of a sheep. We know that a sheep, if it sees a gap will go through it, and all the other sheep will follow one after the other, with the greatest haste possible. And so with the people of God. It is very needful to us to be on our guard about following others. Follow the people of God as far as they follow the Shepherd, to be sure; but do not follow others and do things because they do them. Are you sure they are doing right? Are you sure of their motives? You may say, they are God's people. Yes, but God's people make mistakes. It is a sad temptation when we are left to do things like a sheep, because others do it. The Shepherd will make us know by one means or another our utter helplessness, our entire dependence upon Him; but He will be faithful to the word that is attributed to Him - He leads them in paths of righteousness. He never leaves His people to all the consequences of their folly. He will bring them to repentance and healing. Look at this, how desirable, how attractive it is. "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness." There is only one way of salvation and that is through faith in the blood and obedience of God's dear Son, in that righteousness which God imputes and faith puts on. Sinners taught of God to know their utter ruin and taught of Christ is the only way of salvation will long to be led in this way, will long to experience the benefits of this faith; and the Lord will sooner or later lead each of His children in the faith of Christ's righteousness in which they will find pardon, justification, perseverance and ultimately everlasting glory. I like what Hart says,

"Here's my claim, and here alone;  
None a Saviour more can need;  
Deeds of righteousness I've none.  
No, not one good work to plead.  
Not a glimpse of hope for me,  
Only in Gethsemane."

It was necessary for the Shepherd to go before His flock, not only to lead them to places of pasture, but also to prevent them from going into peril. This is applicable in the experience of God's people; it is necessary for the Shepherd to lead some, if not all His people, in

paths that are difficult, painful and frustrating. The reason why it seems so to us is that we cannot see the end, we cannot see the perils in the way before the end. The Shepherd knows; and He leads His people in a path of righteousness. These mysterious ways of affliction, disappointment, are in His hands paths of righteousness. There is no unrighteousness in His leading; there is no unfaithfulness in His way; but what we know not now we shall know hereafter. It is a mercy to be led; and the Shepherd only leads His people where they may safely abide. He leads in paths of righteousness. I hope there are none here this evening who say or who think, as it has been said and thought in days that are past, It does not matter what I do I shall get to heaven because I am a chosen vessel of mercy. This is a terrible blasphemy and I have trembled when I have read or heard what others have said in this direction. The Lord never leads His people in paths such as this. We may think the Lord has led us; we may think He has given us a word, and when we have come into trouble because of misunderstanding or mis-appropriating a portion of His Word we may say to justify ourselves, "The Lord led me". Never let us ascribe to the Lord anything that will not glorify His name. When we go astray that does not glorify Him. O for a tender conscience and a spirit to watch our ways and examine our motives. A minister, of whom you have heard doubtless, some years ago in London said, "If there are two ways and one must be chosen choose the way that is most crucifying to the flesh." That is what he said. What I would rather say is this, "Seek for grace to fall at His footstool, although surrounded with many a fear and many things to confuse; ask Him to lead you in paths of righteousness. Said the Apostle to Titus, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." That is the path of righteousness in which the Shepherd leads His people, and these paths are paths of pleasantness; they will never tarnish the conscience. They may bring you persecution and ridicule; but what of that if the Lord smiles; His smile is worth more than all that



men can say against you. But mark this, the Shepherd leads His people, leads His flock in paths of righteousness; and may we in our jealousy for His glory be careful never to attribute something of our own as coming from Himself. The meritorious reason for this is as David said, "For Thy name's sake". We can never think, of course, that the Lord will do all these things for us because of some merit in us, for our best is stained and dyed with sin, our all is nothing worth. The wonder of grace is that He remembers His people at all after such ingratitude and such provocations as He received at our hands; but all that He does is for His name's sake. "For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it". Not for yours or for mine, but for His own honour and glory's sake. When we read in the Old Testament about His name's sake it has just the same value and preciousness as in the New Testament when we read for Christ's sake. It is a wonderful truth that every blessing the Shepherd grants His sheep is for His name's sake. How it magnifies the grace of Christ. We have nothing that earns His esteem, but He does it for His own sake and therefore the praise is His. The Shepherd is God and God cannot change, which means that He will still do it for His name's sake, He will soon perform His work, He will still carry on His office, He will still be to His people a Shepherd to restore and to lead and to bless for His own sake, for there is no change in Him. As the Psalmist says in the conclusion of the Psalm, "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". Amen