

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

LESSON VII—NOV. 15, 1908.

The Lord Our Shepherd.—Psa. 23: 1-6. Commentary.—1. The shepherd and his sheep (vs. 1-4). 1. My shepherd—Christ is the great Shepherd and his followers are the sheep. As a shepherd, Christ leads the sheep. 2. Supplies every lack. 3. Guards and keeps them. 4. Supports them in times of trouble. Jehovah is often spoken of as the Shepherd of Israel, and Israel as his flock. The title of shepherd is also applied to rulers, and in particular to David. Christ applies the title to himself (John 10; 1; compare Heb. 13, 20; 1 Pet. 2, 25.) To appreciate the force of the image it is necessary to understand the difference between the modern shepherd and the Oriental shepherd of olden times. In that land there is a close attachment between the shepherd and his flock; the shepherd knows each sheep by name. Equally tender relations exist between the good Shepherd and his flock. On the one hand there is an unfathomable affection, and on the other a calm, unlimited confidence. In that land every flock of sheep is under the care of a shepherd, and in David's time the dangers were much greater than now, as wild beasts and robbers were more numerous. Shall not want—The language is partly of experience in the present, and partly of confidence for the future. No of Israel, looking back on the wandering in the wilderness they had lacked nothing (Deut. 2, 7), and looking forward to the promised land the promise was that they would lack nothing (Deut. 8, 9). Cam. Bib. "With Jehovah for my shepherd and guardian, whose hand rests on all the sources of supply, I can lack no temporal or spiritual good. When John Fletcher was asked by George III. if he would accept preferment in the church as an acknowledgment for an able and timely paper he had written on American affairs, he returned the respectful but characteristic reply, "Sire, I want nothing but more grace."—Watkinson.

2. He maketh me—The Lord enables us to see the preciousness of his truth, to feed upon it and rest in it. To lie down—The divine Shepherd gives rest to the weary. The wicked are filled with unrest (Isa. 57, 20, 21), but Christ promises rest to those who come to him (Matt. 11, 28-30). Green pastures—Pastures of budding or tender grass. The original word denotes the tender shoots (Deut. 32, 2) as distinguished from the ripe grass.—Whedon. What are these green pastures but the Scriptures of truth—always fresh, always rich, and never exhausted? There is no fear of biting the bare ground, for the grass is long enough for the flock to lie down in it. Sweet and full are the doctrines of the gospel; fit food for souls.—Spurgeon. From this we see that satisfaction is promised the one who follows the divine guide (Isa. 58, 11). He leadeth me—The Oriental shepherd never drives, but always leads his flock; so our Shepherd leads the way, and never asks us to go where he has not gone before us. The Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth. No one is wise enough to choose his own course in life. "When the shepherd has called his sheep, and is satisfied that none is missing, he starts forth for the pasture; but this is continually changing, for the hillsides and uncultivated plains are practically common land belonging to the village, and shared by all, so no one can retain the best pasture day after day." "But there are some sheep that are always straggling and so always getting into trouble. Sometimes they are torn by dogs and sometimes they lost their way. Those who kept nearest the shepherd are most contented and happy." Still waters—Literally, waters of rest; not gently flowing streams, but streams where rest and refreshment may be found (Isa. 32, 18).—Cam. Bib. But others think it has reference to the quietness of the waters. In either case the figure is most beautiful and suggests the quiet and peacefulness with which the soul is filled when it enters into communion with God.

3. He restoreth—He bringeth back my soul as a sheep that had strayed (Matt. 18, 12, 13; 1 Pet. 2, 25). "The word for 'restoreth' means 'to return,' 'bring back,' or, figuratively, 'convert.' (1) All animals the sheep is least able to defend itself, either by resistance or flight; is most given to wander away, and has the least sagacity in finding its way back to the fold.—Hilbard. my soul—The same Hebrew word is used for both soul and life. "The soul is the seat of life." He converts and cleanses and gives spiritual power and vigor. paths

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of righteousness—"Right paths are opposed to intricate and unsafe ways, and to ways of disobedience and perversity" (Psa. 125, 5). "The sheep are led by many a way, sometimes through sweet meadows, sometimes limping along sharp-flinted, dusty highways, sometimes high up over rough, rocky mountain passes, sometimes down through gloom; but they are ever being led to one place, and when the hot day is over they are gathered into one fold, and the sinking sun sees them safe, where no wolf can come, nor any robber climb up any more, but all shall rest under the shepherd's eye." For his name's sake—"To display the glory of his grace, and not on account of any merit in me."

4. Shadow of death—Being so near to death that its shadow falls over him, for he is not far from the substance. For has come up with the shadow. The "valley of the shadow of death" seems to have been suggested by those deep mountain gorges through which David was sometimes obliged to walk his flocks, though at the hazard of death from the wild beasts. When the leads of duty lie in the midst of dangers which fall around like shadows, then, says the psalmist, I will fear no evil. Such confidence has he in his Shepherd. But the shadow of death may also mean the darkness of the region of the dead, as in Job 10: 21, 22, and this gives an outlook of confident hope upon the dying hour and the future life. This entire psalm must be understood, not of the providential life of David only, but of his spiritual life and relations as well.—Whedon. fear no evil—"The soul fears not to enter the sunless gulfs of sorrow when assured of the supporting presence and protecting care of the good Shepherd. The darkness of death is but a shadow after all. The trusting soul enters the gloomy gorge only to emerge into the brighter day of immortality. The Christian knows that the hand which guides us into the dark valley will guide us through it and up out of it.—Hom. Com. rod and staff—"The emblems of the office of the shepherd and his protection of the sheep." The rod and staff seem to be two names for one instrument, which was used for a double purpose: 1. To drive away wild animals and to direct the sheep. 2. For the purpose of a staff on which to lean. The shepherd walked before his flock, ready to protect them from assault, and they followed gladly and fearlessly wherever he led.

1. The Host and his Guest (vs. 5, 6). 2. Prepared a table—"The figure is changed. Jehovah is now described as the host who bountifully entertains the psalmist at his table, and provides him a lodging in his own house, as Oriental monarchs entertained those to whom they wished to show special favor. Cam. Bib. Although the image is changed, yet we have substantially the same ideas as those given in the earlier portion of the psalm. There are, as before, the food, the guardianship, the peril, the journey. Jehovah is here regarded as a bountiful host and His people as guests at His banqueting table. The verses illustrate certain striking features in the royal banquet: 1. This banquet is provided in the midst of conflict. 2. It is promotive of abundant joy. 3. It will satisfy all the wants of a lifetime. 4. It is the type and pledge of the everlasting feast in the heavenly banquet.—Hom. Com. Mine enemies—Jehovah had prepared this banquet for David as a mark of special honor and favor, and this in the presence of His enemies who looked on but were not invited to partake. This was David's answer to those who in his affliction had said, "There is no help for him in God;" "God hath forsaken him."—Whedon. Special experiences of God's sufficiency are wont to come in seasons of special difficulty, as many a true heart knows. It is no scanty meal that awaits God's soldier under such circumstances, but a banquet accompanied with signs of festivity, namely, the head appointed with an overflowing cup. God's supplies are wont to surpass the narrow limits of need.—Expositor's Bible. Antoinette—"The reference is to the anointing oil which was an emblem of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Cup runneth over—"The overflowing cup suggests a fullness of blessing. Jehovah is a bountiful provider and is able to abundantly satisfy."

6. Surely—"Only."—R. V. margin. "Nothing but goodness and mercy shall pursue me. What a contrast to the lot of the wicked man, pursued by the angel of judgment (Psa. 35, 6), hunted by calamity" (10, 11). Goodness and mercy—"Goodness and mercy are the staple viands of the feast, and give a flavor and virtue to all the rest. Man needs goodness to supply all his wants, and mercy to meet all his sins. The words are expressive of simple and unbounded confidence in God as to every event in our earthly future." Shall follow me—"This goodness and mercy of God shall follow him during his entire lifetime. "Through the changes, in shade and sunshine, its perils and deliverance, its sorrows and joys, to its close. His enemies had pursued him even to the presence of his host, henceforth grace and joy will pursue him and load him with blessings. The most indigent are rich indeed when encompassed with the divine blessing." "What, all this, and feast, too!" said a poor cottager, as she broke a piece of bread and filled a glass with cold water. Will dwell—These words are to be understood figuratively. The psalmist expected to dwell in God's immediate presence forever. For ever—Here is a suggestion of the closest intimacy with God and the ceaseless enjoyment of his favor.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS. Soul transformation. "He restoreth my soul." At the very threshold of our study we meet with the doctrine of regeneration. Naturally we are goats (Matt. 25, 33); and He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. There are only two classes of characters known to God—the "sinner" and the "saint." We are either sheep, under the tender, constant care of the divine Shepherd, or hell-deserving, hell-bound subjects of sin. Now, to be a sheep requires something more than to have a sheep's skin thrown around one's body, conforming perfectly thereto, and being placed in a sheepfold. It is not the perfect obedience of Jesus the Father looks at and counts as ours, at the same time overlooking or ignoring our disobedience; or the righteousness of Christ thrown around us, while we remain a moral leper; but rather the impartation of the divine nature to our

own soul, by which it is quickened and made alive; or to carry out the figure, the nature is changed from that of the goat to the sheep. Then the life very naturally is that of a Christian. Soul rest. "He maketh me to lie down." This is suggestive of rest, and restfulness, which is assuredly what the soul comes to realize as its burden of sin, condemnation and guilt is lifted, and the peace that passeth all understanding is imparted (Matt. 11, 28; Heb. 4, 3). Soul satisfaction. "The pastures of tender grass" suggests a plentiful supply of nutritious food. Green pastures imply an experience in the grace of God which is ever new and hence always fresh. The business of the shepherd is to keep the sheep in the green pastures. In order to do this there must be variety as to scenery and location. This is true of our experience under the great Shepherd. As to circumstances, ecstatic emotions and environment there must be peace that passeth all understanding, or less by outward causes. The criterion by which we should judge our spiritual condition is not how do I feel, but what is my relation to the great Shepherd? Sometimes to climb the mountain steep, at other times to descend into the valley of seeming gloom may be necessary in order to our being kept in "pastures of tender grass."

Soul leadership. "He leadeth me." The Christian life is not one of luxurious idleness. The reclining sheep illustrates one phase of salvation, namely, "soul rest." This part of our lesson emphasizes another phase, namely, the earnest activity and positive aggressiveness in spiritual life under the unerring leadership of our divine Guide. Notice, "He leadeth not 'driveth' or 'draggeth.'" It requires loving, prompt, earnest and continued obedience to keep close to our Guide in Christian living.

Soul instruction. What oil is as a lubricator to the machine, the Spirit's anointing in its gladdening effect is to the soul in its arduous labors for Christ. To be well anointed is to save wear and tear, and prevent cessation of operations. Lack of oil often occasions a hot box, which endangers life and property, retards progress, blocks the way and is in many respects hurtful and damaging. Truth in the hands of one who lacks the anointing may be as a razor in the hands of a mad man. A nail dipped in oil may be driven to the nail without damaging the board. Very many Christian workers break down prematurely because they are without the anointing. Truth in the hands of one who lacks the anointing may be as a razor in the hands of a mad man. A nail dipped in oil may be driven to the nail without damaging the board. Very many Christian workers break down prematurely because they are without the anointing. 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