

September 21

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Psalm 23:4

THE sheep of the little flock fear no evil because of the Lord's favor, because He is with them, on their side, and has shown

R4278 "THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD"--PSALM 23. -- NOVEMBER 15 -- *Golden Text: -- "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."--Psalm 23:1*

OF ALL the beautiful symbolic pictures which the Lord gave us through the Prophet David, none seems more forceful than that of the Psalm which constitutes our lesson. The eastern shepherd and his love and care for his sheep are given us as an illustration of our heavenly Father's care over us. It is true that our dear Redeemer was sent forth as the Good Shepherd who gave his life for the sheep, and by his death opened the door into the sheep-fold of divine love and favor and rest and peace. This was a favorite picture that our Lord Jesus gave us of himself: "I know my sheep, and am known of mine"; "My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me"; "A stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of a stranger." The Apostle followed the same thought when speaking of our Lord's return. He refers to him as the Good Shepherd of the flock: "For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." (1 Pet. 2:25.) The same thought is maintained when the elders of the Church are referred to as pastors and "overseers of the Church of God."--Acts 20:28.

But while it is refreshing for us to take a comprehensive view of the divine favor and care manifested in provisions made for our welfare as the Lord's sheep, it is well that we should ever keep in mind that the under-shepherds do not own the flock, and that their value to the flock as overseers consists in their faithfulness in making known to the sheep the message of the Great Shepherd and, to the extent of their ability, communicating his tone and his spirit with his Word. The faithful of these, like the Apostle, may urge, "And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord."-- 1 Thess. 1:6.

On the other hand the sheep are called upon to mark the spirit of the under-shepherds, whether or not it comports with that of the Chief Shepherd, so that they be not led astray. They are to try the spirits of those who pose as pastors or under-shepherds, to note whether they be of God or whether they speak of themselves; whether their words and deeds are according to love or according to selfishness. They are enjoined to note these under-shepherds who feed upon the flock, but do not feed the flock...

It is the Father's flock, and his Son, our Redeemer, represents him, as he tells us, "As I hear, I speak"; "I came to do the will of my Father in heaven." Thus the Shepherd's Son fully and completely represents the Great Shepherd; as he says, "All mine are thine, and thine are mine." And again, "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me."

The wealth of our relationship to the "Great Shepherd" and his Son increases in our appreciation in proportion as we grow in knowledge. As our Redeemer said, "This is

His favor in the redemption price already paid. He is with them, too, in His word of promise--His assurance that death shall not mean extinction of life, but merely until the resurrection, an undisturbed sleep in Jesus. What wonder that these can walk through the valley of the shadow of death singing

life eternal, that they might know thee and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."--John 17:3...

Our Lord informed us at the start that following him as his disciples, as his sheep of the Little Flock now being selected, must signify to us, as to him, worldly disfavor and opposition, not only from the prince of darkness, but also from those deluded by him and under the sway of his spirit of anger, malice, hatred, envy, strife, backbiting, slander, evil-speaking, etc. And in addition to these things we are to expect to contend with our own blemishes and weaknesses. Such a picture of the "narrow way" would indeed have terrified us had it not been for our Shepherd's assurance of succor in every time of need, and his assurance that these trials to the flesh rightly received would constitute a part of our development in the spirit and preparation for the "Rest that remaineth for the people of God."

"I shall not want" may be applied to the necessities of the present life. We are assured that "No good thing will he withhold from us;" but he specially means that we shall not want, not lack the disciplines, the trials, the instructions, the encouragements, the reproofs, and the assistance necessary to our attainment to all "The glorious things that God hath in reservation for those that love him." The only condition connected with this promise is that we shall abide in his love, abide in his flock, continue to hearken to his voice and to follow his directions. How dangerous then to all of the true sheep would be any measure of worldly ambition, pride or self-esteem! How necessary that the heart should be right, desirous of knowing and obeying the Shepherd's voice! With what care should the sheep scrutinize the motives which actuate their daily conduct, their words and the thoughts of their hearts!

"GREEN PASTURES AND STILL WATERS"

Professor G. A. Smith says, "A Syrian or an Arabian pasture is very different from the narrow meadows and fenced hillsides with which we are familiar. It is vast, and often virtually boundless. It has to be so, for by far the greater part of it is desert--that is, land not absolutely barren, but refreshed by rain for only a few months, and through the rest of the year abandoned to the pitiless sun that sucks all life out of the soil. The landscape the Psalmist saw seemed to him to reflect the mingled wildness and beauty of his own life. To him human life was just this wilderness of terrible contrasts, where the light is so bright, but the shadows the darker and more treacherous; where the pasture is rich, but scattered in the wrinkles of vast deserts; where the paths are illusive, yet man's passion flies swift and straight to its revenge; where all is separation and disorder, yet law sweeps inexorable, and a man is hunted down to death by his bloodguiltiness."

More and more as "New Creatures" we are learning to appreciate the barrenness of worldly hopes and ambitions and

and making melody in their hearts to the Lord, calling upon their souls with all that is within them to praise and laud and magnify His great and holy name, who loved us and bought us with His precious blood, and has called us to joint-heirship with our dear Redeemer. Z. '03-413 R3269:6

knowledge. And more and more we should be giving heed to the leadings of the "Good Shepherd," who is guiding his flock of "New Creatures" for their spiritual refreshment through the labyrinth of the "present evil world." Those sheep which keep nearest to the Shepherd secure the fattest and richest experiences and refreshments. On the contrary, the sheep which stray looking for pastures green on their own account, or following the voice of false shepherds, are the ones that are likely to become hungry and eat of the poisonous growths and fall into the pitfalls of sin and be devoured by the ravenous beasts of passion and worldliness. Happy is the sheep who learns to know the voice of the true Shepherd, and whose faith is such that he follows closely and not afar off!

LYING DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES

To lie down is to be at rest, to be happy. This is the privilege of all the Lord's true sheep. Outwardly they may be distressed and "on the run," assailed by the world, the flesh and the Adversary, but as "New Creatures" they may be at rest, at peace, because of their nearness to the Lord, the Shepherd, and because of their faith in his overruling providence, which is able to make "all things work together for good." "Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend (stumble) them." These let the "peace of God rule in their hearts...and are thankful." It is to these that our Lord's words apply, "My peace I give unto you....Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

This rest, this peace of heart, is absolutely essential to our development as "New Creatures," even as the crystals are deposited from the liquids when they are quiet and not when they are in agitation. So the crystalline character which God is developing in us absolutely demands that a condition of rest, peace, quietness of heart, shall be attained; and to the attainment of this condition patience, faith and love, the chief graces of the spirit, are necessary.

THE LABYRINTH OF LIFE

"A labyrinth is a species of structure full of intricate passages and windings, so that when once entered it is next to impossible for an individual to extricate himself without a guide. The one in ancient Egypt, near Lake Moeris, was composed of twelve great palaces containing, according to Herodotus, three thousand chambers and halls. The palaces were connected by courts, around which ran a vast number of most intricate passages. Around the whole was a wall with only one entrance."

"Some years ago," writes Hawthorne, "a minister was rambling in the famous labyrinth of Henry VIII, at Hampton Court near London, where the common children's puzzle is wrought out on a large scale by paths between high and thick evergreen hedges. He wandered about it for a time, but when the time for closing drew near, with all his efforts he could not find his way out, and he feared that he might have to remain all night. At last he looked up, and saw a

man in the tower in the center of the labyrinth who had been watching him all the time, and waiting to catch his attention. The eye above could see all so hidden from the man within, and soon guided him out of his difficulties. Visiting this labyrinth with Deacon Olney, we purchased a chart for our guide, remembering my friend's experience. When the time came for us to find our way out, we took the chart, and by careful study and exactness in following the designated way, we threaded the mazes of the labyrinth with success. Life is such a labyrinth. No person knows enough to guide his course unaided. He cannot see where the paths lead. The picture of the future is a sealed book to all."

One of the important lessons for every sheep to learn is need of the Shepherd's care and guidance through the labyrinth of life. "Who is sufficient for these things," writes the Apostle. Then he declares, "Our sufficiency is of God"--in Christ. He who redeemed us has gone the way before us and directed that we walk in his steps. Those who become so wise in their own conceits that they fancy there are nearer ways and shorter cuts and more flowery ways to Paradise are deceiving themselves. If those who recognize the message and are walking in the Master's footsteps and are walking circumspectly, neglect these and become overcharged with the world and earthly ambitions and joys and toys, they are surely unwisely selling the glorious heavenly birthright for a mess of earthly pottage. On the contrary, he who carefully follows the Master, experiences the truth of the declaration, "He restoreth my soul." Some find their spiritual strength refreshed as they walk in the paths of righteousness in which the Lord leads. He leads them "for his name's sake." This is one of the considerations. Our Lord, the Shepherd, has undertaken to do a shepherding work; to gather a flock. His promise is involved; his honor is at stake! We may be sure that not only because of his love for us will he guide us aright, but because it would be a dishonor to him to make the slightest mistake in respect to our guidance. He is the Faithful Shepherd. The angelic hosts are watching and learning lessons in respect to all this shepherding of the flock through the narrow way. "Which things the angels desire to look into."--1 Pet. 1:12.

"THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH"

This valley was entered by our race because of our first parents' disobedience. We have been in the valley more than 6000 years. The shadow of death has been over the human family, and its accompaniments of sickness, pain and sorrow have extended to every creature, so that the Apostle truly said, "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God"--waiting for the uplifting power of the Millennial Age, waiting for the sons of glory, Jesus Christ and his Church, to bring the promised Restitution and uplifting out of "the valley of the shadow of death" back to the heights of light and love and the divine likeness.

The fear of evil, of trouble, of disaster hangs over the world and is accentuated by its ignorance of God and of the future. Satan, taking advantage of this spirit of fear in the fallen race, has so terrorized mankind with horrible pictures of purgatory and eternal torment as to thoroughly separate the

human heart, if possible, from its Creator, while feigning to be its Shepherd. Under the influence of "doctrines of devils," the Adversary has made God's character and his Book repulsive to mankind in general and well-nigh quenched their love, while fanning their fears.

Our text represents the true sheep as saying, "I will fear no evil." How appropriate; how true! Weak and poor and insufficient and surrounded by foes, we nevertheless need not fear, and the developed sheep does not fear what the demons may seek to do, knowing that "all power in heaven and earth" is in the hands of our Shepherd King, and that he is directing our ways, and has guaranteed that our every experience shall work out a blessing, and that in permitting trials he merely designs our correction and instruction in righteousness and to draw us nearer to himself and make us copies of his Son, to the intent that by the First Resurrection change he may take us to himself and give us a share in the Millennial Kingdom. Ah! how true it is that we do not fear -- because the Shepherd is with us! We have his promise, "Lo, I am with you, even to the end of the age." And furthermore we have the light of his Word, showing that the Shepherd is to be present with his sheep and to care for them and develop them.

"THY ROD AND THY STAFF COMFORT ME"

The shepherd's rod or club was of hard wood, sometimes open and preferably of the shape of a golf stick, except that it was shorter and much heavier. With it the shepherd was prepared to defend the flock, combating every foe. The staff was lighter and more like a cane and longer, with a crook at the end. With its point the shepherd at times prodded the sheep that were careless, and with the hook he sometimes helped out one that had stumbled into the ditch, by putting the crook under its forelegs. Our Shepherd, too, has a rod for our enemies and a staff for his sheep--the one for our protection, the other for our relief and assistance and correction. How glad we are to know that all power is committed unto him in heaven and in earth and that under his protecting care nothing shall by any means harm us! What a comfort is here! No wonder that under such circumstances the sheep may enjoy "the peace of God which passeth all understanding," resting themselves, comforting themselves in the assurance that all things shall be overruled for their eternal welfare!

"THOU PREPAREST A TABLE FOR ME"

The picture of the shepherd and the sheep has been gradually fading, and now is in the past. Instead of pastures and the water-brooks we now have the table and the cup. We hear the under-shepherds say, "This is the Bread which came down from heaven, and this cup is the blood of the New Covenant." He whose name is the Truth gave us his flesh to eat. He sacrificed his earthly interests that we might partake of them through faith and be justified thereby and appropriate to ourselves more and more the benefits of his sacrifice. He passes to us the cup of his suffering, his shame, his ignominy, his death, saying, "Drink ye all"--drink it all. By thus appropriating the merits of his sacrifice and participating with him in his sufferings we are his sheep; or, in another figure, we are the branches of the True Vine; or, under another figure, we are members of his Body and he the Head; or, under

another figure, he is our Bridegroom and we his Bride. This provision is made for us in the presence of our enemies.

"Marvel not if the world hate you," said our Master. Yet even in the presence of the opposition of the world and our Adversary and all of the besetments of the hosts of demons, we are privileged to partake of these rich blessings and privileges! Yea, even in the presence of our besetments of the flesh, which are also our enemies, we can feast with our Lord and naught can make us afraid. All this has been true throughout the Gospel Age, but it is all accentuated now in this harvest time by reason of our Lord's presence in the consummation of the age.

In harmony with this promise of the Scriptures, to all who open their hearts to receive him, he comes in and sympathizes with them. Yea, he girds himself as a servant and comes in and serves us, setting before us rich things from his storehouse--things new and old. Under this service all the old truths become fresh and appetizing, refreshing and strengthening. And new truths are ours, fitting to the peculiar time in which we are living and the special trials and tests now due to come upon the Lord's faithful brethren. They are ushered into the eternal Father's presence, where is fullness of joy forevermore.

MY HEAD ANOINTED, MY CUP OVERRUNS

Let us not spoil this beautiful picture with any thought of anointing a sheep's head, etc., but rather take the higher and grander and nobler view that our Lord Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed; and that his anointing was typified by the anointing of Aaron with precious oil (which typified the holy Spirit), which ran down his beard and unto the skirts of his garment. Let us think of this as the holy Spirit of Pentecost, which has anointed all the sheep which have come into the fold and the Body of Christ. Let us appreciate this anointing and abide under it, allowing it more and more to be what the Apostle terms an unction from the Holy One, affecting our every talent and power and bringing them all into subjection to the divine law of love.

{6} "Let my eyes see Jesus only;

Let my feet run in his ways;

Let my hands perform his bidding;

Let my tongue speak forth his praise."

"My cup runneth over." Our Master's cup was one of suffering, ignominy, shame and death. We partake of it. It becomes our cup also; but he promises us a new cup of joy and rejoicing, which he will share with us fully in the Kingdom. That cup of joy and peace and divine favor and blessing our Master partook of by faith. And we now also have the same cup full to overflowing; but we cannot appreciate it fully until we shall be changed and made like our Head and share his glory. By faith we can enjoy it now and realize that it is full to overflowing. And our joys in the eternal future will be exceedingly and abundantly more than we could have asked or thought.

"GOODNESS AND MERCY PURSUE ME"

"Surely goodness and mercy shall pursue me all the days of my life." This appears to be the stricter translation and it contains a

{6} Hymn 8

beautiful thought. These sheep of the Lord's "little flock"--these "New Creatures" of Christ Jesus, instead of being pursued by fears and terrors and trapped and ensnared, are following the Good Shepherd and hearkening to his voice; and, according to his promise, God's goodness and mercy are pursuing them, keeping after them, watching over them, assisting them, caring for them, upholding them in trials. These are the messengers of the Lord, of which the Apostle wrote, "Are they not all ministering

spirits, sent forth to minister unto those who shall be heirs of salvation?" Surely this is so. Looking back we can praise the way in which goodness and mercy have pursued us, never leaving us!

"Angels watch him on his way
And aid with kindly arm;
And Satan, seeking out his prey,
May hate, but cannot harm.
O, child of God; O, glory's heir;
How rich a lot is thine!"
The conclusion of the whole matter--

the end of the journey, is what? To occupy a place in the heavenly mansions in our Father's house! What a glorious consummation to the grandest of all hopes! Why should we murmur or complain at the roughness of the journey which will bring us to such a glorious goal? Let us say with the Psalmist:--

"What shall I render unto the Lord my God for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Most High!"

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"THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD"

Psalm 23.--Nov. 15.

JEHOVAH is my Shepherd, is the Prophet's sentiment, and our Lord's explanation of the matter further is that the great Shepherd's Son has been given full charge of the sheep. (John 10:1-16.) Not all mankind, however, are sheep, or have the Shepherd's care. In the present time only those who have heard the Shepherd's voice and responded to his call to become his sheep are of his flock, and his word on the subject is that it is a little flock, to whom it will be the Father's good pleasure eventually to give the kingdom in joint-heirship with his Son, their "Chief Shepherd." Then will come the time referred to by our Lord when "other sheep" will be found. The entire Millennial age, with all the forces and blessings of the heavenly kingdom, will be devoted to the finding of the other sheep. Our Lord's words are,--"Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold [not of the little flock of this Gospel age]; them also I must bring [in due time to a knowledge of the Truth and to the full privileges of sheep], and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." (John 10:16.) Eventually all of God's creatures on various planes of being shall be recognized as one family of God, as it is written of our Lord, "In whom the whole family of God both in heaven and in earth are named." (Eph. 3:15.) And again, "He shall gather together in one all things in Christ both in heaven and on earth." (Eph. 1:10.) However, though it may be interesting and helpful and profitable to understand something of our great Shepherd's generous plans for the future, our interest centers chiefly in the little flock of the present time, to which alone this lesson refers in many of its particulars.

Professor George Adam Smith gives the following interesting description of the difference between the shepherds of sheep in olden times in Palestine and the care of sheep as is known to us of the present day. This is an important point to be remembered, as it was the eastern shepherd who illustrated our heavenly Shepherd's care for his little flock. Prof. Smith says:--

"An Eastern pasture is very different from the narrow meadows and dyked hillsides with which we are familiar at home. It is vast and often practically boundless; it has to be extensive, for the greater part of it is barren--in fact the Hebrew word for desert and for pasture is the same. The most of it consists of dry, stony soil, out of which, for the great part of the year the sun has sucked all life. In this monotony the breaks are few, and consist of paths more or less fitful, gorges or thickets where wild beasts lurk, and oases of pleasant grass and water. Now in such a landscape of mirage, illusive paths, lurking terrors, and infrequent herbage, it is evident that the person and character of the shepherd must mean a great deal more to the sheep than it means to sheep with us. With us a flock of sheep without a shepherd is a common experience: every day we may see them left to themselves in a secure field or scattered over a side hill, with a far-traveling wire fence to keep them from straying. But I do not remember ever to have seen in the East a flock of sheep without a shepherd."

Doubtless as the Prophet David penned this Psalm, his mind went back to his father's flock and to his own experience as its shepherd, concerning which we incidentally have the mention that while protecting it he slew a lion and a bear. Under heavenly inspiration the prophet pictures the Almighty One as the great caretaker watching over and protecting from harm all whom he recognizes as his "sheep." Nothing can be farther from the sentiment of this prophecy and illustration than the growing prevalent sentiment which recognizes Jehovah God as the shepherd and father of all mankind, and which is frequently voiced in the words, "Fatherhood of God, and brotherhood of man." This view ignores man's will and also ignores the Lord's Word, which declares that there are goats and wolves as well as sheep; that while some have become children of God, it is through faith and "adoption," and that many from the divine standpoint, so far from being recognized as children of God, are referred

to as "of your father, the devil, for his works you do." (John 8:44.) Originally our race, represented by father Adam in sinless perfection, was recognized as related to Jehovah, but the breaking of this relationship by man's wilful disobedience and departure from God is clearly recognized in the Scripture, so that none are recognized as sons of God today unless they have been begotten again, begotten from above. Nor is it our hope that any in the future will be recognized as sons of God or as sheep of the Lord's fold except as they shall heartily renounce sin, and, being granted knowledge of divine grace, shall heartily accept the same and "follow on to know the Lord."

Applying the psalm to the little flock, all of its provisions fit most minutely. Because the Lord is our Shepherd, we shall not want. Those who are proper sheep will submit their wills to the shepherd's will and trust wholly to his guidance, and so doing are relieved of that anxious craving so common to the children of the world and which is never satisfied, but the more it gets the more it wants. The Lord's sheep appreciate the heavenly things more than the earthly, and their wants in this respect are more than supplied when they accept by faith the divine assurance that

⁽¹⁾"No good thing will He withhold

From sheep which stray not from His fold."

They have given up every earthly interest in exchange for the heavenly, and, realizing their own insufficiency and lack of judgment, they are trusting to the Lord to grant them such experiences, leadings, trials, difficulties, blessings, etc., in this present life as will be for their highest good, and as would work out for them a share of the glorious things of the future to which they have been called. The wants of this class are not of the kind after which the Gentiles seek, and for which they are anxious and strive. They in their hearts rejoice in the sentiment expressed by the poet, ⁽²⁾"Jesus has satisfied, Jesus is mine." Matt. 6:32.

Although the experiences of the Lord's sheep include many trials in the parched wilderness of sin, yet he graciously gives them restful experiences in oases of divine favor. These are not always accompanied with immunities from trial, as the world would view the matter, but certainly are seasons of rest and refreshment--to such an extent that the Lord's sheep may truthfully say that they have "the peace of God which passeth all understanding" ruling in their hearts, notwithstanding outward trials, difficulties, perplexities and adversities. Which of the Lord's sheep has not found such green pasturage of spiritual refreshment in his private devotions and studies of divine things? which of them has not experienced similar refreshment and rest and nourishment from the Master's provision that his sheep shall not forsake the assembling of themselves together as the manner of some is--for the study of the Word, for prayer, for testimonies of the Lord's goodness and mercy? All these opportunities and privileges, whether personally experienced or whether they are yet only in the mind through the medium of the printed page, are provisions made for the sheep by the great Shepherd. Those sheep which find no enjoyment in such privileges and blessings and refreshments have reason to question their faithfulness in following the lead of the Shepherd. And those sheep which, finding such opportunities, decline to use them, thus give evidence of lack of harmony with the Shepherd's gracious intentions and wisdom.

The "still waters" are contrasted with the rushing torrent of the mountain slope--still, not in the sense of stagnancy, but rather smooth flowing. At the latter only could the sheep receive proper refreshment. So applying the thought to the little flock, we find that

⁽¹⁾ Hymn 273

⁽²⁾ Hymn 47

the great Shepherd leads us away from the strifes of worldly ambition, from greatness and power and riches and honors highly esteemed amongst men, but does not lead us to stagnancy-- rather to spiritual ambitions which bring with them a restfulness and refreshment of soul obtainable from no other source. The streams of truth and grace are living, but comparatively quiet, waters. As the Prophet intimates, these are not to be found by the sheep alone; to find them requires the leading of the Spirit. Let us give diligence to his voice, remembering his Word--that his sheep hear his voice and follow him. Let us discriminate, discern his voice, with its truthful accent, so different from the voice of error. Strangers true sheep will not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers. They do not like its money ring, or its worldly ambition ring, or its priestcraft tone, or its contradiction of the spirit of the divine message and method.

"He restoreth my soul." The prophet does not refer to a restoration of body or of physical health, but a restoration of soul, being. Some of the Lord's most precious saints have been weary and faint and troubled--even the dear Redeemer fainted under his cross, and was neither kept whole or made whole miraculously on the occasion. The application of the Prophet's words to the Christian experience would make these experiences, called restoring of soul or being, to correspond with our justification to life. All our lives were forfeited under the divine sentence, and by faith a complete restitution or restoration of soul is granted to the believer, that he might have something to offer in sacrifice to the Lord, "holy, acceptable" (Rom. 12:1), and that in this sacrifice service he may walk in the footsteps of the great Shepherd who lay down his life for the sheep. Thus are the true sheep led in right paths, in proper paths, advantageous to their spiritual development, though frequently trying and difficult to them according to the flesh. This favor and blessing and opportunity comes to them not for their own sakes or worthiness but through the Lord's grace-- "for his name's sake."

The whole world is walking in the valley of the shadow of death. Mountain tops of life, of affection, were left by the race six thousand years ago, when Father Adam fell from his harmony with God to the plane of sin and death. The valley of sin carries with it the shadow of death, the penalty of sin. In the broad road the whole human family still walks; and even though the Shepherd leads his flock upward, and in the reverse direction from the course of the world, nevertheless, according to the flesh, they are still in the world, in this valley of the shadow of death. However, the true sheep, hearing the voice of the good Shepherd who gave his life for the sheep, have learned to be neither careless and indifferent as are some, nor to be in fear and doubt and perplexity as are the majority. These on the contrary fear no evil. They realize indeed that the penalty of sin is upon the race, but they realize also that divine love has provided a redemption. They realize that the whole world is going down to sheol, to hades, but that God has made provision that the good Shepherd shall deliver his little flock from the power of the grave in the First Resurrection, and that subsequently all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man and shall come forth to a full, fair, reasonable, proper judgment-- the testing respecting their willingness to be his sheep and to follow him and to attain everlasting life through him. ⁽³⁾The sheep of the little flock fear no evil because of the Lord's favor, because he is with them, on their side, and has shown his favor in the redemption price already paid. He is with them, too, in his word of promise--his assurance that death shall not mean extinction of life, but merely, until the resurrection, an undisturbed sleep in Jesus. What wonder that these can walk through the valley of the shadow of death singing and making melody in their hearts to the Lord, calling upon their souls with all that is within them to praise and laud and magnify his great and holy name, who loved us and bought us with his precious blood, and has called us to joint-heirship with our dear Redeemer.

"His rod and his staff, they comfort me." As the Shepherd's crook was used to assist the sheep out of difficulties, to defend it from its too powerful enemies and to chasten it when inattentive, and as all of these uses of the rod were for the sheep's interest and welfare, so with the Lord's little flock and their Shepherd and his rod of help, defense and chastisement. The true sheep learn to love the providences of the Shepherd and are comforted by them. Knowing the Shepherd's power and his watchful care, they realize that all things are working together for good to them because they are his sheep. Why should they not be comforted, strengthened, encouraged?

The Psalm diverges here and leaves the figure of the sheep and the Shepherd, adopting instead the illustration of a mighty lord who

spreads a sumptuous feast for his humbler friend. In olden times an active hospitality meant much, and for a nobleman to receive one as his guest meant responsibility for his safety; and so the thought is that we, as the Lord's people, are accepted of him, counted as friends, are made to sit down to a bountiful feast, secure from the enmity of those who would injure us--secure from the great Adversary and all the wicked spirits in high places mentioned by the Apostle (Eph. 6:12)--secure so long as we are under the care of our great friend, our heavenly Father. The bounties of our table may indeed include some earthly good things, better or worse than those of the natural average man; but all of these, whatever they may be, accepted with joy and thanksgiving, are appreciated by those who recognize them as part and parcel of the bounties of the Friend above all others.

All religious people make more or less claim to spiritual food, and the various parts and factions of Christendom especially boast that they have much advantage every way, and that their tables are spread with divine truth, promises, etc., food from which they claim to receive their strength. But what a variety of these tables there are and how different are the viands, doctrinally. The food on most of them seems to have been spoiled in the preparation. Some of it is sad, some of it is sour, and much of it is musty. For the most part it originated in "the dark ages," and the dear friends who sit down to these tables find that they have little appetite for such food, and we do not blame them. Rather, we would attract their attention to the generous, bountiful supply of divine Truth which the Lord himself is dispensing to the household of faith, "things new and old," but all of them pure, sweet, delicious, grand. This table is open to all those who love the Lord with all their heart, mind, soul and strength--better than they love houses or lands, parents or children, husband or wife, lodge or society or sectarian system or self.

Is it strange that those so highly favored of the Lord and recognized as his guests and fed at his table should be hated by enemies? It would seem strange to us if it were not for the assurance of the Master himself, that whosoever will live godly will suffer persecution in this present time, and for the illustration of this in the Master's own experience, that it was the professedly godly, influential, great and nominally religious that persecuted him to death. We are not surprised, then, to find that our table is spread in the midst of enemies that now surround us on every hand.

The anointing of the head of the guest with oil was a part of the hospitality of olden times. The antitype of this with us is the outpouring of the holy Spirit upon all this class--this little flock, the body of Christ, of which he is the Head, Chief, the Shepherd, the Leader.

⁽⁴⁾The fulness of the cup, running over, has a double signification. It is a cup of joy and a cup of sorrow, and in both respects it overflows. He who would partake of the joys of the Lord must also partake of his cup of suffering; we must suffer with him if we would reign with him. But we count the sufferings of this present time as not worthy to be compared with the glories that shall be revealed in us, and hence we are enabled to rejoice in tribulation, so that as the tribulations will overflow the rejoicing likewise overflows, and with the Apostle we can say, Rejoice, and again I say rejoice!

⁽⁵⁾The goodness and mercy which we anticipate beyond the veil has its beginning here already and is thus to be appreciated. Whoever knows nothing of the joys of the Lord in the present time will evidently not be prepared for the joys of the Lord in the Kingdom, whatever blessings and joys he may attain to under the administration of the Kingdom during the Millennial age. There is then joy and rejoicing granted to the Lord's faithful ones, not a momentary matter connected with their first acceptance of the Lord and their consecration of themselves to him. The goodness and mercy of the Lord is not to be looked back to as a thing of the remote past, but is to be recognized and appreciated as a thing of the present. Day by day God's goodness and mercy follow us, refresh us, strengthen us, bless us.

The highest hope to which we dare aspire is that of final union with our great Shepherd, our heavenly Father, and the good Shepherd his Son, in the heavenly state, in our Father's house on high, one mansion or plane of which is intended for the little flock, separate and distinct from the mansion or plane provided for the restitution class of the Millennial age. The end of all our highest ambitions will be attained, and far more than realized, when we shall be like our Lord, see him as he is, and share his glory in the Father's house.

⁽⁴⁾ May 10 Manna, Psa. 23:5

⁽⁵⁾ Sept. 22 Manna, Psa. 23:6

⁽³⁾ Sept. 21 Manna, Psa. 23:4