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THE SHEPHERD PSALM

By Joshua Stauffer

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INTRODUCTION

I found the following material on a trimmed page from the Pilgrim Holiness Advocate tucked inside of a booklet by Joshua Stauffer, entitled "The Psalms of the Cross the Crook and the Crown." It appears to be a Sunday School Lesson, and it is a beautiful exposition by Joshua Stauffer on the 23rd Psalm. I have decided to publish it in this file, separately from the booklet in which it was found. -- Duane V. Maxey

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THE SHEPHERD PSALM

Lesson 4
October 28, 1956

Background Scripture: Psalm 23.
Devotional Reading: Ezekiel 34:11-16.
Key Verse: The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. Psalm 23:1.
Lesson Text: Psalm 23.

THOUGHTS ON THE LESSON

By Joshua Stauffer

The author of Psalm 23. David was a shepherd lad. God called him while he was herding sheep. He was called from leading sheep to leading people. The art of herding sheep forms a good background for leading people. People are such like sheep and sheep are much like people. Both need to be led and cared for by a good leader. God calls busy men. David was a good shepherd and busy, therefore, God called him to lead his people Israel.

The simplicity of Psalm 23. Much has been written on Psalm 23, probably more than on any other Psalm. This Psalm is great by reason of its simplicity. It contains only 118 words, and 93 words are monosyllables... Several years ago this Psalm appeared in some of the second and third Readers. Though it is very simple, yet it has depth and truth so profound that readers and expositors have not discovered nor exhausted its riches in three thousand years.

The rich quality of Psalm 23. God is concerned more with quality than with quantity. Little is much when God is in it. This Psalm can easily be repeated in two minutes. In these words of two minutes duration in recitation there has been so much comfort, cheer, help and hope that all saints have been blessed through three thousand years' time. It still reads the same as it always has. It has never changed.

A great factor of Psalm 23. The pronouns of this Psalm make it so rich, real, and comforting. There are 28 personal pronouns in it and all except one are singular in number. Nine of these pronouns are in the possessive case. It does not read in the plural, "our," "we," or "us," but "I", "me," "my," and "mine." The Lord gives personal and individual care to each individual sheep.

The Shepherd of Psalm 23. The Shepherd of this Psalm is the Lord. It gives a beautiful picture of Christ who declared he was the good Shepherd. This Psalm is a beautiful exposition and counterpart of John, chapter ten. The Shepherd of the Psalm leads his sheep beside peaceful waters; makes them lie down in green pastures; restores their souls; leads them in paths of righteousness; is ever present with them; his rod and staff comfort them; he prepares a table of good things for them and that in the presence of their enemies; he anoints their heads with oil; he makes their cups to run over with joy; he makes goodness and mercy to follow them through life even to the end of their journey, then when this life is over he will receive them into his own heavenly home where they will dwell with him forever. He is the best Shepherd in the world.

The sheep of Psalm 23. The sheep of the good Shepherd hear his voice, follow where he leads, pasture where he feeds, lie down at his bidding, do not listen to the voice of a stranger. They walk in paths of righteousness, follow him through the valley of the shadow of death, rejoice in their Shepherd and when this life is over, they will dwell with him in heaven forever.

The beginning and ending of Psalm 23. This Psalm begins, "The Lord is my Shepherd," and ends "in the house of the Lord for ever." It begins with the sheep in the "green pastures" and ends with the sheep "in the house of the Lord for ever." It begins with the Shepherd being present with the sheep on earth and ends with the sheep being present with the Shepherd in heaven.

The center of Psalm 23. Verses two to five, which constitute the center come between verses one and six. In these four verses there are eleven personal pronouns of the Lord. Five are in the second person, or being addressed to the Lord, and five are in the third person singular, even being spoken of the Lord. It is good to hear directly from the Lord, that is, he speaking to us. Then it is good to speak to him and also to speak to others of the Lord.

An outline of Psalm 23. This rich Psalm may be outlined in the following manner, employing the first clause as the key -- "The Lord is my shepherd," therefore, I shall not want. I shall not want rest -- "He maketh me to lie down." I shall not want food -- "In green pastures." I shall not want drink -- "Beside the still waters." I shall not want restoration -- "He restoreth my soul." I shall not want guidance -- "He leadeth me." I shall not want companionship -- "Thou art with me." I shall not want comfort -- "They comfort me." I shall not want a feast -- "Thou preparest a table before me." I shall not want victory -- "In the presence of mine enemies." I shall not want joy -- "thou anointest my head with oil." I shall not want anything -- "My cup runneth over." I shall not want anything in time -- "All the days of my life." I shall not want anything in eternity -- "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

The fullness of Psalm 23. When a person has the Lord and all he has, there is no room for wants. The writer says, "My cup runneth over." This represents a fullness and more than a fullness. A cup full is enough, all a person can hold. A cup running over is more than enough. When the cup or capacity is only full there is enough only for self. When it runs over there will be more than enough and that will be for others. The cup is to run over with that he gives us, namely, love, joy, peace, victory, and praise. Our part is to carry our cups right side up. His part is to fill and overflow them. Our cups may not hold much, but they may overflow much. The Lord has an entire fountain available for our overflow.

Christian life illustrated in Psalm 23. This Psalm beautifully illustrates Christian experience after a believer has entered into the sanctifying grace of Christ the good Shepherd. He tenderly leads and cares for his sheep. As the Christian follows, he shall have no wants. The Christian will then be led in green pastures, beside peaceful waters, experience continual restoration, walk in paths of righteousness, glorify the name of the Lord, be supported by his rod and staff, enjoy feasts in the presence of enemies, be surrounded by goodness and mercy through life and in eternity will be forever with him.

Key Verse: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1). "The Lord is my shepherd" is in the first person, singular in number, present in tense and possessive in case. This is what makes it so rich and precious to the possessor. The Lord deals personally and individually with each sheep. For this reason each one of Christ's sheep shall not want. He is the best shepherd in the world. He gave his life for the sheep. Since he died to redeem them, and he lives to intercede for them, he will also freely provide for them all that pertains to life, victory, food and success.

Practical Points on the Lesson: People are much like sheep and sheep are much like people. Both are led astray so easily, therefore, both need a shepherd. The 23rd Psalm is one of the most simple portions of scripture and has been cherished by all saints ever since it has been written. In the Old Testament the sheep died for the shepherd. In the New Testament the Good Shepherd died for the sheep.

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THE END