

Psalm 23

by F. Crossley Morgan

F. Crossley Morgan's sermon on Psalm 23 explores God's role as our shepherd and the profound implications of His name and care in our lives.

Duration: 1:13:42

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 3:16, Romans 8:28, Ephesians 2:8-9, Revelation 21:4

Topics: "Psalm Interpretation", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the four stages of life: infancy, childhood, adolescence, and maturity. He relates these stages to the needs of a baby, which are shelter and sustenance, and the needs of an adolescent, which are comfort and abundance. The speaker suggests that these stages and needs may have been inspired by the spirit of God, even if the original author, David, did not realize it. The speaker then addresses the fifth verse of Psalm 23, which talks about God preparing a table and anointing the head with oil. He acknowledges that scholars have struggled to interpret this verse, as it doesn't fit with the shepherd and sheep metaphor used in the previous verses.

Transcript

Let us sing the Amen every morning. That hymn is a prayer, and I like the Amen at the end. It simply is the Hebrew word meaning, so be it.

And when we agree with the sentiment of a good hymn, it's well to sing Amen. I think I must have some Methodists in me. And incidentally, I want to ask Mr. John what's the matter with the picture.

The first I have made, incidentally, since I was with you last year, I have another grandson. So I'm now debating whether to develop a handle by a moustache or maybe add another few inches. I think it's a jolly good picture.

Incidentally, by my watch, we can say that I've run over about twenty minutes. I'd like to remind you, these are hours we have set apart for very definite teaching and study. As distinct from mere devotional meditation and as distinct from evening services.

And we are reconsidering and re-examining together some great representative sounds. We began yesterday morning, those of us who gathered, with one of a group of sounds we speak of as messianic sounds. And now today and tomorrow, we will consider two sounds that belong to a group that we might

possibly speak of as the best known of all the sounds.

As I intimated yesterday, today we will be studying that which I think is unquestionably the best known of all the sounds. As we turn together, please, to Psalm 23. And in preparation for our studies this morning, I will read that sound.

Jehovah is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside still waters.

He restores my soul. He guideth me in the path of righteousness, for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.

Thou hast anointed my head with oil, my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and lovingkindness shall follow me all the days of my life. And I shall dwell in the house of Jehovah forever.

I think everyone here probably would agree with that which I said yesterday, that that psalm is the best known of all the psalms. Indeed I dare say most of us would be willing to agree to go even further than that. And speak of that psalm as the best known chapter in all the Bible.

Certainly wherever the sacred writings have gone, that psalm has made a universal appeal to the human heart. Whenever I think of it, if I may bring apparently contradictory adjectives together. I think of it as a great little psalm.

For surely it is indeed great in so many ways, and little just in its length. And like all truly great things, it is simple. Sublimely simple.

And indeed simply sublime. Now as we get down to work on the psalm as students this morning. First let me ask you to look at your Bible, and I hope many of you have yet.

And if you look at your Bible, I think at the head of the psalm. Before the psalm proper begins you will see certain words. In my Bible the words, a psalm of David.

And my friends there seems no reason to question the Davidic authorship of this psalm. All the greatest scholars down through the centuries have agreed that this psalm must be numbered among those written by David. But I have found some little difference of opinion among the great commentators.

As to whether David wrote this psalm when he was a young man. Actually a shepherd, the keeper of his father's sheep. Or whether possibly he wrote it when he was well advanced in years.

After he had become the shepherd of God's people Israel, the king. Now as between those two possibilities, personally I feel constrained to the conclusion that the psalm must have been written by David when he was well advanced in years. And the line of thought that forces me to that conclusion is a quiet contemplation of the wealth of experience.

Which in my judgment so very evidently lies at the back of this psalm. I think no one can read and re-read and ponder this psalm without sensing that there does indeed lie at the back of it. Such a wealth of experience as one can hardly associate with a young man.

Consequently as I have said I am constrained to the conclusion it must have been written when David was well on in years. But while I feel perfectly sure about that in my own mind I feel equally certain. The psalm must have been born in some hour of reminiscing.

If I may put it thus, we caught the old shepherd reminiscing. He's thinking way back across the years. Thinking back across the years to those days when he was actually a shepherd.

He's remembering the things he used to do for the sheep in those days now so long ago. He's recalling experiences he had with the sheep. And as the old shepherd thus reminisced there came into his mind a thought that probably had come many many times across the years.

Namely this, that everything that he was to the sheep in those days so long ago. Of God had been to him down through the years of the pilgrimage. And in some such moment of reminiscing this little psalm was born.

For he began to write, Jehovah is to me what I was to the sheep in those days. Jehovah is my shepherd. I shall not want, he maketh me to lie down in green pastures just like I did the sheep.

He leadeth me besides still waters. And so on right the way through the psalm we caught the old shepherd reminiscing. Thinking back across the years remembering the things he did for the sheep.

The experiences he had with them and seeing so clearly. That everything that he had once been to the sheep. God had been to him.

Now if we view the psalm from that standpoint. Then as I suggested in the diagram in your hand. There is discoverable within the psalm a threefold movement.

You notice at the head of the psalm we are speaking of the psalm as a psalm of an old shepherd. But with that threefold movement first in the opening verse. There is a revelation of the sanctuary of this old shepherd's soul.

Then in verses 2, 3, 4 and 5 there follows a record of the musings of the old shepherd's mind. As he reminisced. As he thought of the things he had once done for the sheep.

And sees so clearly God had done all those things for him. And then in that last verse, verse 6 there is a reflection of the happiness and the hope of the old shepherd's heart. That last verse is like a mirror and as you look into it and consider it.

You surely cannot fail to see reflected in it the happiness and the hope of the old shepherd's heart. The threefold movement within the psalm. But first we go back to this opening verse.

And we consider it with a good deal of care. Because that first verse is fundamental to everything else in the psalm as I hope to make clear. Fundamental at least in this sense.

If you and I can say honestly. And of course we must underline the word honestly in our thinking. But if you and I can say honestly with David that which he says in verse 1. Then there's every reason to believe we should be able to say with David that which he says in all the other verses.

However if quite honestly we are not able to say with David that which he says in verse 1. Then there's no reason to think we should be able to say with David that which he says in the remainder of the psalm. In

that sense at least this first verse is basic and we do take some time and care with it. Now as you read that opening verse.

You will notice it contains two great affirmations. Jehovah is my shepherd. There's one great affirmation.

I shall not want. There's the other. But as you sit down and think your way through those two affirmations.

You will notice that the latter affirmation is of the nature of a deduction from the former. Actually the word therefore does not occur in that first verse. But it's understood.

The thought is Jehovah is my shepherd. Therefore I shall not want. So that we might say I think with accuracy in that opening verse there is a great declaration.

Followed by a deduction. And we begin by looking with care into that great opening declaration. And let me say it once.

That opening declaration is a sort of double declaration. There are two lines of thinking in it. And in order to bring out the former line of thinking.

I want to begin by placing our emphasis upon the very first word in the psalm. Jehovah is my shepherd. Now I know I've got to pause.

Because I can see written in your faces. That which I've seen in the faces of people all over the United States. A look of surprise almost of disappointment.

Because I keep on saying Jehovah is my shepherd. You don't quite like it now do you? I mean that isn't how you learnt this psalm when you were a little child. That's not the way you've been accustomed to hear this psalm across the years.

It's always been the Lord is my shepherd. And you don't quite like it when a man comes along. And keeps on saying Jehovah is my shepherd.

I remember years ago. When I was pastor of the old Presbyterian church in Augusta Georgia. One morning I had to speak over the brief morning devotional hour.

Over the radio. And I read this psalm. And I read it as I read it to you this morning.

Jehovah is my shepherd. And I think it was the very next day I got a long letter. From some dear good woman who was very angry with me.

For reading the psalm like that over the air. I think she thought I was some dangerous species of modernist. Well you know when you get a woman after you like that.

You'd better not begin writing letters. If you do you'll go on writing till the crack of doom. Very fortunately for me she lived near enough.

I was able to jump into my car and go and have a talk to her. And believe it or not as Mr. Ripley might say. I had to talk to that woman for a solid hour.

Before the light even began to filter through. Into the abysmal darkness of her mind. Now I hope it won't take me an hour with you.

But because we're here to study. I do want to take time with you. And so let me begin by telling you.

Running all through these sacred writings of the Hebrew people. The Old Testament. There are three outstandingly great Hebrew terms used of God.

Oh there are far more than three. But there are three outstandingly great Hebrew terms used of God. With far greater frequency than any of the others.

To begin with there is the great Hebrew word Elohim. Then there's another great Hebrew word Adonai. And then there is a third great Hebrew word Yahweh.

Now back in the year 1611 or thereabouts. When those great scholars were doing their work of translation in England. Preparing what we speak of as the old beloved King James Version.

Whenever they came to this third great Hebrew term Elohim. They translated it by our English word God. When they came across either of these other two.

Entirely different Hebrew words. Adonai, Yahweh, they translated the Lord. So that in that old and beloved King James Version.

You do have one English expression doing service in translation. For two entire different Hebrew words. Now when the American scholars around the year 1901 were doing their work.

They said in effect among themselves. Now all the way through these sacred writings. We have these three entirely different Hebrew words.

If we are going to do a good job in translating into English. We ought to have three corresponding English words. So whenever they came across that first great word Elohim.

They also translated it God. When they came across this second great Hebrew word Adonai. Which is a title.

They also translated it the Lord. But when they came across this third Hebrew word Yahweh. Which is not a title at all.

But which is God's sacred name. They rendered it Jehovah. It may interest some of you as students.

To know just exactly what the American revisers of 1901 said about this matter. For they realized lots of people wouldn't like this change. And this is what they wrote in the preface to the American revision of 1901.

The change first proposed. That which substitutes Jehovah for Lord is one. Which will be unwelcome to many.

Because of the frequency and familiarity of the terms it's placed. But the American revisers after a careful consideration. Were brought to the unanimous conviction.

That a Jewish superstition. Which regarded the divine name as too sacred to be uttered. Ought no longer to dominate in the English or any other version of the Old Testament.

As it fortunately does not. In the numerous versions being made by modern missionaries. That gives us a sort of a peek behind the scenes.

In ancient times devout Jews regarded God's sacred name. With such superstitious awe they never uttered it. As a matter of fact there have come down to us across the centuries.

Some almost amusing stories. Concerning the superstitious awe with which they regarded God's sacred name. For example there's the story of the old scribes.

When they were copying the ancient manuscripts. Of course centuries before the invention of the printing press. Everything had to be done by hand.

Whenever they came across the sacred name Yahweh. They stopped their work. And they took the equivalent of the pen.

And very carefully cleaned it off. Before they'd ever even write the sacred name. And other scribes being even more superstitious about this whole matter.

Whenever they came to the sacred name. If you please. They also would stop work.

They also would take the equivalent of the pen. And carefully clean it off. And then if you please.

Laying it down. They themselves would go and take a bath. Before they'd ever write the sacred name.

Well it does become almost amusing. One wonders how many baths they had to take some days. When they were copying certain portions where the sacred name occurred so frequently.

Now that's what lies at the back of this. And those great scholars in England. Doing their work in the year 1611.

They knew about that superstitious awe. And you know in England they're very conservative. They said we'd better go slow about this.

We'd better not translate it. We'll just put the law. But they were serious students.

And careful scholars. And they did want you. The readers to know.

When you came to the sacred name. So what they did was to print the word law differently. If it's the sacred name.

Yahweh. Then they capitalized every letter of the word law. Now if you have the old beloved familiar King James Version.

Have a look at it. And tell me if every letter of the word Lord is not a capital. Has anybody here got a Bible in which that is not true? Very seldom you come across one.

If it's not true then you've got a poor copy of the Bible. Because you've got to be very careful. And the printers have to be most careful about this.

Just as a matter of interest. If you have the old King James Version. Turn over and have a look at Psalm 110.

And the first verse. And I think there you'll find the word law printed in both ways. First time it occurs every letter is capitalized.

The next time it occurs only the letter L. The first letter. I think in your Bible it begins. The Lord saith unto my Lord.

The Lord. Every letter capitalized. Saith unto my Lord.

Only the letter L. Of course in my American Revised it begins off. Jehovah saith unto my Lord. They did want you to know.

When you came across the sacred name. And so that's what they did. That was as I've said.

The American scholars in 1901 said we ought to get away from that. We ought to have some special word in the English language. To suggest Yahweh.

And so they fastened upon Jehovah. I'm not saying that that's particularly satisfactory. I think just Yahweh would be even better.

But still at least in this American Revised Version. We do have a separate English word. For a separate Hebrew word.

I regret to say in the new standard revision. They've got. I don't know.

I may be wrong about this. But it always seems to me. Merely a catering for failures.

Because people. Lots of people didn't like the Jehovah. They may have felt it won't tell us well.

We'd better go back. But as students. We do need the best translation.

We can get our hands on. And I think we ought to have three different English words. For three different Hebrew words.

Now I'm taking time with it my friends. Because it's just the sacred name. That meant everything to David.

It would not have been the same at all. For David to have written Adonai. The Lord is my shepherd.

No no. It was that sacred name. I wonder if you remember.

Where the sacred name first clearly emerges. In the word of God. It emerged in the connection with God's call of Moses.

At the time Moses was a shepherd. And God calls him to go back to Egypt. And become the shepherd of his people.

The leader of his people who were in circumstances of bondage. And you may remember that Moses didn't want the job. And he made all sorts of excuses to try and get out of it.

And Moses said unto God. Behold when I come unto the children of Israel. And shall say unto them.

The God of your fathers has sent me unto you. And they shall say to me. What is his name? What shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses.

I am that I am. Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel. I am.

Has sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses. Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel.

Yahweh. The God of your fathers. The God of Abraham.

The God of Isaac. The God of Jacob. Has sent me unto you.

This is my name. Forever this is my memorial. Unto all generations.

Now there at least you have suggested the significance. The meaning of the sacred name. Yahweh.

Jehovah. Suggesting the fact that God is the great I am. And that to his people.

He is the becoming one. Becoming whatever his people may need. Of course for the full understanding.

We have to turn from the old to the new testament. And in the fullness of the times. Jehovah.

Yahweh. The great I am. The becoming one.

Became flesh. That we might behold his glory. He became full.

That we through his poverty might become rich. He became sin. On our behalf.

That we might become the righteousness of God in him. Now that's the suggestion of this sacred name. That meant everything today.

Suggesting that God to his own people. Is the becoming one. The great pledged to become.

Whatever his people might need. And let me but remind you. That that sacred name.

Is in the name Jesus. Jesus is simply the Greek form of the old Hebrew Joshua. You remember of course Joshua.

The one appointed to succeed Moses. But wait a minute. That had not always been his name.

His name was Hoshea. Meaning salvation. And when he was appointed to succeed Moses.

Moses took some of the syllables. Out of the divine name Yahweh, Jehovah. Some of the syllables out of the.

Jehovah, Hoshea, I am salvation. Joshua, Jesus. That's what the angel meant.

Announcing the mystery of the birth to Joseph. When the angel said thou shall call his name Jesus. Joshua.

Jehovah, Hoshea. I am salvation. For he shall save his people from their sins.

Now I've taken time with that. Because we're students here. And it is an interesting matter.

And it's that sacred name that meant everything to David. That's the whole point. Jehovah.

The great I am. The one that his name suggests. Pleased to become whatever his people need.

Is my shepherd. Obviously therefore. I shall not want.

My friends I remember dealing with this psalm. Some years ago now in Knoxville, Tennessee. And every day in Knoxville.

There was a dear old lady. I think she was 93 years old. She sit just down in front in a wheel chair.

And after I've dealt with this psalm. The friend, her companion who brought her every morning. Told me that on the way home.

The dear old lady had turned to her companion. Oh she said I did enjoy that. I did enjoy that.

Oh but she said the Lord's to my shepherd. And surely when we realize the meaning of the sacred name. It does indeed become very precious to us.

But now I said this opening declaration is a double declaration. So far we've been putting our emphasis. And if you place the emphasis there.

Then David is just singing out of his sense. Of the all sufficiency of his shepherd. But now let's change the emphasis.

To get the other line of thinking out of this double declaration. Let's put it this way. Jehovah is my shepherd.

My shepherd. What I want you to sense is. That in that word shepherd.

There's the thought of rule. Authority. It was Homer I think.

The great Greek poet. Who said on one occasion. All kings are shepherds of the people.

Now maybe if we read history. We'd like to amend that. And say all kings ought to be shepherds of the people.

But of course he was speaking ideally. And ideally he was perfectly accurate. The kingly ideal is the shepherd ideal.

Ideally. But in this word shepherd. There's the thought of authority.

What I want you to perceive is. That David was not merely singing. Out of his sense of the all sufficiency of his shepherd.

He was doing that. But he was also bearing testimony. To his personal allegiance.

He is my shepherd. That is to say he is the one. Whose authority I recognize.

And to whose authority I am yielded. Now. Upon his ability to make that double declaration.

Those two things being true. He was able to make his deduction. As he added.

I shall not want. Jehovah. The great I am.

As his name suggests. Pledged to become whatever his people need. Is my shepherd.
And he is my shepherd. He's pledged to me. I am yielded to him.
Those things being true. I shall not want. You will remember those two lines of thinking.
Are beautifully brought out in that old hymn. By Sir Henry Baker. The king of love.
My shepherd is. Whose goodness faileth never. I nothing lack is.
I am his. And. He is mine forever.
I nothing lack. Those two things being true. Very well now.
We must hurry on into the. Remainder of the psalm. And as we've already said.
In the next verses. Two, three, four and five. We follow the musings.
Of the old shepherd's mind. As he reminisces. Let me remind you.
Of what I said at the beginning. We've caught the old shepherd. Remembering things he did for the sheep.
And as he remembers. One thing after another. He sees so clearly.
All those things he's done for the sheep. God has been doing for him. If you keep that in mind.
I think it's quite easy. In the case of verse two. To read between the lines.
So to speak. And follow the reminiscing. Of the old shepherd's mind.
Just listen. He. Maketh me.
To lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me. Besides clear waters.
Very evidently surely. The old shepherd was thinking way back. To one of those lovely occasions.
When he. Took the sheep to green. The Hebrew word is springing.
Sprouting pastures. Which of course are the green pastures. Where there is an abundance of food.
For the satisfaction of hunger. And where consequently the sheep would lie down. You know no sheep will lie down hungry.
If you see a sheep lying down. It means it has eaten a sufficiency. So there is a source of food.
For the satisfaction of hunger. And also. Water for the assuaging of thirst.
He leadeth me. Besides clear water. The only kind from which sheep will drink.
If you follow the shepherds over the hills of Palestine. When the flock wants watering. They may draw from a living well and pour out.
Hold it while the pouring is being done. But when it becomes still. Then the timid creatures will come up and drink.

Or if the shepherd in Palestine. Finds himself out on the hill. Where there is no well he can draw from.

Or some place where there is nothing but a noisy babbling. The noise of the water scares them. And they can go for three months.

Without any water. Other than the dew on the grass in the early hours of the morning. And the natural juices in the grass.

But if the flock really needed watering. And there was nothing but a noisy brook. Then the shepherd in Palestine will construct a little dam.

So the water will flow around. And come in and be still. Then they will come and drink.

There is the thought of food for the satisfaction of hunger. Water for the assuaging of thirst. And personally I can never read those words.

He leadeth me beside pure water. Without the thought coming into my mind. Of a lovely quiet sheltered spot.

As I suggested in the diagram in your hand. The ideas emerging. Are those of shelter and sustenance.

And as the old shepherd remembered from such lovely occasion. He said to himself that which I did for the sheep. God has done for me.

All down through the years of the pilgrimage. Always. There has been a sufficiency of shelter.

And of sustenance. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside still water.

But we hurry on into that third verse. And I admit at first it may not be quite so easy. To read between the lines.

And follow the reminiscing of the old shepherd's mind. But when I take a moment or two. With pure of the words.

I think you will see the picture in a flash. He restoreth my soul. He guideth me in the path of righteousness.

For his name's sake. And the two words I want to take a moment with. Are those two verbs.

Restoreth. Guideth. My friends I shall never forget.

Years ago now. When for the first time. I got down to a microscopic study of this old psalm.

By that I mean taking every word in the psalm. One of the psalms. And so to speak.

Putting it under the microscope. And looking up the Hebrews. When I put that word restoreth under the microscope.

I discovered that that word restoreth. Is not translation. It's interpretation.

The Hebrew verb there literally is. To turn back. Keep that in mind a moment.

And then when I put that word guideth. Under the microscope. I was disappointed.

It's a lovely word. The word guideth. But the Hebrew verb at that point.

Has got more bite to it. More granite. More strength.

And we've got a verb in the English language. That has just about the same strength. As the Hebrew word.

And the word I would prefer to use. Is driveth. You sense the difference in a minute don't you.

Guideth. It's a beautiful word. But it's a sort of a gentle word.

Driveth. That's got more granite. More bite in it.

Now make those two changes. And you can read between the lines. And follow the reminiscing of the old shepherd's mind.

Very evidently. He suddenly thought of another occasion. When he was walking at the head of the flock.

As the shepherd always does in the east. And happened to turn. And he noticed.

One of the sheep straying away. Walking right towards danger. Maybe heading towards a dangerous pestilence.

And he the shepherd had to leave the ninety and nine. And run. And get between that straying sheep and the danger.

As I suggested in the diagram. The ideas emerging. Are those of discipline.

Turning back. And so restoring. I grant you.

But that's interpretation. Not translation. Turning back.

Exercising discipline. Driving to the right track. He turns back my soul.

He drives me in the path of righteousness. For his name's sake. What is his name? Well we spent several minutes with it.

Yahweh. What's it mean? It suggests that God is to be coming. David is saying in effect.

In those hours in my life. When the crying need was for discipline. And the giving of direction.

He didn't fail me. He didn't let me down. He exercised discipline.

Turning back. He gave direction. Driving me into the right track.

And he did these things. In order to be true to his name. He's pledged to become whatever I need.

And when the crying need was for discipline. And direction. He didn't fail me.

And so we hurry on into the next verse. And now I think it's quite easy to read between the lines. And follow the reminiscing of the old shepherd.

Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. I will fear no evil. For thou art with me thy rod and thy staff.

They comfort me. Very evidently. Continuing to reminisce.

Suddenly the old shepherd thought of other occasions. When he ledst the flock. Not to green pastures.

Nor besides still waters. But down through some ravines. Towering cliffs on either side.

Chutting out much of the light and the warmth of the sun. Nothing but rocks and boulders. And behind some of the boulders.

Dens wherein lurk beasts of prey. Waiting to pounce right upon the sheep. But as the old shepherd remembered.

He said in effect. There was never any need for the sheep to be fearful. I was always with them.

Why wouldn't they dreamt of letting the flock. Go down through a ravine like that all alone. I was always with them.

And I always had my rod and my staff. And there again I was interested. When I put that word rod under the microscope.

The Hebrew word there means a club. A weighted nail knob club. That the shepherd always carried.

To smite down any beast of prey. That might pounce out on the sheep. There was no need for the sheep to fear.

I always had my club for their enemies. And my staff. I remember hearing Dr. McLachlan.

Some of you will remember him. Now at home with our Lord. He did so much in our southern branch of the church.

For country church work. I remember hearing old Dr. McLachlan. Tell of an experience he had in Palestine.

He got into conversation with a shepherd. He noticed he had the staff. The staff.

And of course he was thinking of this farm. He didn't tell the shepherd. But he said tell me in what sense is that staff.

For the comfort of the sheep. And then the old shepherd went into a long explanation. Oh he said the staff speaks to the sheep of my presence with them.

He says usually I just carry it if they see it. They know the shepherd's near. It's a comfort.

But he said it's more important if we get caught out. In a thick mountain mist. Where they can no longer see it.

He said then as I walk I lower it. And just tap on the ground over stones. And then not by sight.

But then by hearing. It's a comfort to the timid creatures. It speaks of the presence still with them of the shepherd.

Of course David was a shepherd. He knew these things. And he was reminiscing.

And then he said yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. I will fear no evil. For thou art with me it would be unreasonable for me to suppose.

God would do less for me than I did for the sheep. I wouldn't have dreamt of letting them go down a ravine all alone. I was always with them.

Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. I have courage drawing out of comradeship. For thou art with me.

Thy club and thy staff they comfort me. It would be silly. It would be unreasonable.

For me to imagine God had less for me than I had for the sheep. Where was the smite down their enemies? I always had the staff for their comfort. The ideas emerge.

Courage and comfort. Drawing out of comradeship. Oh it makes me think of a bit of poetry someone once sent me at Christmas.

A funny time to send it. But it's beautiful. It runs like this.

In pastures green. Not always. Sometimes he who knoweth best in kindness Leadeth me in weary ways.

Where heavy shadows be. Out of the sunshine warm and soft and bright. Out of the sunshine into darkest night.

I oft would faint with sorrow and a fright. Only for this. I know he holds my hand.

So whether in a green or desert land I trust. Although I may not understand. And by still waters.

No, not always so. Oft times the heavy tempest round me blow. And o'er my soul the waves and the billows go.

But when the storm beats loudest and I cry aloud for help. The shout and whispers to my soul. Above the tempest wild I hear him say.

Beyond this darkness lies the perfect day. So whether on the hilltop high and fair I dwell. Or in that sunless valley where the shadows lie.

What matters? He is there. And more than this. Where'er the pathway lead.

He gives to me no helpless broken reed. But his own right hand sufficient for my need. So where he leadeth I can faithfully go.

And in that blessed hereafter I shall know. Why in his wisdom he hath led me so. But we hurry on into the fifth verse.

Thou preparest a table before me. In the presence of my name. Thou hast anointed my head with oil.

My cup runneth over. My friends, it's been somewhat amusing to me. To notice the difficulties great scholars have had with that fifth verse.

And the ingenious ways in which they've tried to get round the difficulties. I think we've sensed it's sort of difficult. I mean there's no question.

From the first verse right down to the fourth. The figure all the way through. Is that of the shepherd with the sheep.

But this is awkward. It doesn't fit so well. Thou preparest a table before me.

Now I know the ingenious ways in which some scholars have tried to get round. But both they and you and anyone else. You've got to admit to me.

You've never yet seen a sheep sit down at a table have you? It just doesn't fit as nicely does it? And then my cup runneth over. Well again I know how they try and get round the difficulties. But they and you and anyone else.

You've got to admit to me. You've never yet seen a sheep take hold of a cup and have a good drink. You see it's a bit odd.

But in my judgement the difficulty vanishes. When you keep in mind that which I've said from the beginning. We've caught the old shepherd reminiscing.

Now you know when you reminisce. Sometimes for no apparent reason. Your mind will skip right over a period of ten years, twenty years.

And you go on reminiscing. It was only a summer or two ago I remember. I was over in England.

One of my brothers happened to be over that same summer. And we met in London. And one evening we sat there reminiscing.

You know they say it's a sign you get old. Well maybe it is. But we that as it may we were reminiscing.

And I remember he reminded me of something we'd done when we were just little boys. Well we sat roaring about that. But when finally the laughter subsided.

I turned to him and I said. And do you remember. But the thing I was reminding him of happened at least fifteen years later.

Your mind does that. Isn't that what happened today. Up to the end of verse four.

And he's reminiscing way back, way back across the years. To that time when he was actually a shepherd. And then his mind jumped right over to the period in his life when he became shepherd.

But now king. Shepherd of God's people Israel. Do you remember one of the first things David did when he became king.

Oh we should all remember the lovely stories of the friendship of David and Jonathan. Oh but when he came to the throne. Jonathan had been slain upon the field of battle.

And one of the first things David did. Was to command that search should be made throughout the land. To see if any descendant of his dear friend was still living.

Do you remember what happened. They found little lame Mephibosheth. Now I've no time to turn to it.

You make a note if you're taking notes. Just read through the second book of Samuel chapter 9. And I think you'll discover in that one chapter. Four times these words occur.

David the king commanded that Mephibosheth should eat bread at the king's table. Eat bread at the king's table. Eat bread at the king's table.

Four times. Isn't that the key that unlocks it. His mind has jumped over.

He's become king. Oh Jonathan God. Ah we found Mephibosheth.

Yes and I did. I commanded the land should eat bread at the king's table. And that meant eating bread in the presence of his enemies.

For there had been war between the house of Saul and the house of David. And don't you know. David whispers to the king.

Chamberlain. You see to it that the head of that lad is kept anointed with the choices of the king's oil. And don't you know he whispered to the king.

Cup bearer. You see the cup of that lad. He's the son of my dear friend.

See that it's kept full to overflowing with the choices of the king's wine. He's still reminiscing. But he's thinking of his friend.

Mephibosheth. The idea is emerging as we suggested in the diagram. Socket.

Solids. Superabundant. The overflowing cup.

Now my friends let me just take one moment longer with those four verses. Two, three, four and five. To suggest a line of thinking.

I doubt whether this were ever in the mind of David. But as I study this God breathed literature. I can never allow myself to forget that these men wrote.

As they were born along by the spirit. And even though this line of thinking I'm about to suggest. Were never in the mind of David.

I wonder if it were not in the mind of the spirit. The point is as I read and ponder those four verses. It seems to me I can see all life suggested.

Our modern psychologists I believe are dividing life up now into four periods. First what we used to call babyhood. We now call infancy.

Then there comes childhood. What they now call adolescence. And then maturity.

And then old age. All right now think of the first two. Little babies.

Infancy. What are the supreme needs? Shelter and sustenance. Every little baby must have shelter and sustenance or it perishes.

All right you come out of that period now into adolescence. That wonderful period. Dangerous but wonderful.

Now what are the supreme needs? Well there might be difference of opinion. But let it not be forgotten you parents. In certain senses the supreme need then.

Discipline and direction. And you're not fair to your child if when the prime need is for discipline you fail to exercise it. You're not a bit like God.

Not a bit. He turns back his wife who does it to be true to his name. He's loaned you his name of father and mother.

And you're not true to those names. If when the prime need is for discipline and the giving direction. You let your child down.

Well then you come out of that into maturity. Now the burdens of life are heavier. What are the great needs? Courage.

Comfort. Growing out of comradeship. That's why holy matrimony can mean so much to a man.

To have at his side a running mate. From comradeship with whom he derives courage to go out and meet the world. From comradeship with whom at eventide he finds comfort.

The great needs. And then we come to the last stretch of the pilgrimage. Old age.

Now what are the needs? Tucker. Talent. And if not super abundance at least a sense of security.

It seems to me I can see all life suggested in those four words. But very well we must get into the last verse. Having looked back the old shepherd faced the future.

And I love that first word that crossed his lips. Surely such a magnificent ring of assurance. Goodness and loving kindness shall follow me.

Literally run after me. Pursue me all the days of my life. What makes me think of the words of that old hymn.

And his love in time past. Forbids me to think he'll leave me at last. In trouble to think.

Ye sweet Ebenezer. I have in review confirmed his good pleasure. To help me right through.

Surely goodness and loving kindness. Shall follow me all the days of my life. And there's another word I like.

And. I'm inclined to say to David. Haven't you got to the end yet? You've spoken about all the days of your life.

Can there be anything more? I think David would say. What's that you say? The end. Don't be silly.

Don't be ridiculous. I've just got to the great graduation. The great commencement not the end.

These things all the days of my life. And. I shall dwell.

I shall literally sit down settle. In the house of Jehovah forever. What a glorious conception.

It's the Christian conception. Of the ending of life. In a beginning.

In a beginning that won't have any ending. Not life dying out like a candle. Self consuming.

But life that ends in a beginning. A beginning that won't have any ending. Oh it does make me think of this.

And I must pass it on to you. This came folded up in a letter. From my mother in England.

She was in her eighties. You know the way mothers have. Finding things they like.

And flipping them into letters. I don't know where she got hold of it. But it evidently appealed to her.

And so it came in a letter from her. When she was over eighty. And it runs like this.

You tell me that I'm getting old. Now I never told her anything of the sort. It's just something she came across.

And it appealed to her. So she tucked it into a letter. You tell me I'm getting old.

But that's not really so. The house I live in may be worn. And that of course I know.

It's been in use a good long while. And I'm surprised to find it's getting somewhat frail. You tell me I'm getting old.

You mixed my house with me. You're looking at the outside. That's all most folks see.

The dweller in the little house is young and bright and gay. Just starting on a life that lasts too long. Eternal day.

Oh the colour's changing on the roof. The window's looking dim. The wall's a bit transparent.

And getting rather thin. The foundation's not so steady as once it used to be. And that's all that you observe.

But that's not really me. Oh I patched the old house up a bit to make it last the night. But soon I shall be flitting to my home of endless light.

I'm going to live forever there. Now you do not understand. These few short years can't make me old.

I feel I'm in my youth. Eternity lies just ahead. Full life, joy and truth.

Oh we will not fret to see this house grow shabby day by day. But look ahead to our new home. Which never will decay.

Oh I want to be made fit to dwell in that blessed house above. Cleansed in the precious blood of Christ. And growing still in love.

The beauty of that glorious home. No words can ever say. It's hidden from these mortal eyes.

But it's kept for us some day. Within three months mother was home. Did I get down and weep? What in the name of God for? I felt more like standing and singing the Hallelujah Chorus.

At home with our Lord. At home with my Dad. Who had preceded her into His presence.

Into the presence of our Lord by about a year. Well that's the Christian. Life done itself.

You mean life that ends in the beginning. A beginning that won't have any ending. Life that ends in the palace of the King.

And if you can say with David honestly. That which he said in verse one. It's all yours.

Jehovah the great I am. The one pledged to become whatever His people need. Is my shepherd.

He's pledged to me. I'm here with Him. I shall not want.

The King of love my shepherd is. Whose goodness faileth never. I'm nothing like.

Is. I am His. And He is mine.

Forever. Let us stand for the benediction. May the grace of our Lord.

The love of God our Heavenly Father. And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit our Comforter. Abide with you.

With your loved ones today. Yea and forever more.

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