Psalms - Commentaries by Andrew Miller

Meditations On The Twenty-Third Psalm, Psalm 23:5 Continued: Chapter 14

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VERSE 5 (CONTINUED)

The practice of anointing is frequently spoken of in Scripture. The holy oil was largely used in the Jewish worship. Their prophets, priests and kings were consecrated and inaugurated with it. It formed an important ingredient in the offerings; even the vessels of the tabernacle were to be anointed with the "holy anointing oil." Ex. 30:25. As compounded according to divine directions it was, no doubt, an expressive type of the Holy Spirit in His many and various operations; and in its noiseless flow through the golden pipes (Zech. 4:12) may represent His silent, unseen working in the soul.

But the anointing of the head, as in our beautiful Psalm, is more the emblem of a personal blessing than of a ceremonial observance. The man of God in the beginning of the Psalm, under the similitude of the sheep and its shepherd, speaks of his perfect confidence in Jehovah; and that confidence never fails him: it characterizes this Psalm. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." He is led forth by his Shepherd's hand to the green pastures and beside the still waters. But a day comes when a dark cloud passes over the whole scene. He goes through sorrow and suffering, though the hand that strikes may be unseen. Death crosses his path and leaves its dark shadow behind. The once joyous, peaceful, happy scene is turned into a vale of tears. Still, the Lord is there and His presence is enjoyed. "Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." And now the figure is changed—changed from the emblem of a sheep confiding in a Shepherd to an invited guest at the King's entertainment.

“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over." The "table" may be the symbol of the soul's communion with the Lord Himself. It may be employed here to set forth a richer, fuller character of communion with Him. As He says elsewhere, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." Rev. 3:20.

The anointing of the head seems to partake more of an open, public expression of the Lord's favor; and, in this distinguishing blessing, the anointed one is brought into blessed fellowship with the Master Himself. He was anointed, not with the oil of the sanctuary, but with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. "And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him." Matt. 3:16. We elsewhere read that "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power." Acts 10:38. And again, "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows." Heb. 1:9.

Most marvelous, indeed, is the blessing to our souls that shines under the emblem of anointing. Here we are said to be the "fellows" of Christ; and as man, we know, He is addressed as the "fellow" of the Jehovah of hosts! (Zech. 13:7.) What a link! Thou mayest well exclaim, O my soul, what a link between us and the living God! It is also said of all Christians, "But ye have an unction from the Holy One." 1 John 2:20. (See also 2 Cor. 1:21.) True, most true, He is anointed with the oil of gladness above His "fellows"; still we are His "fellows." The Spirit of truth affirms it, we believe it and the day will declare it.

As the anointed kings and priests of our God and Father we shall, ere long, be associated with our blessed Lord in His dominion and glory. We shall then be the public companions of Him under whose hand will be the whole government of the heavens and the earth. "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them.... They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." Rev. 20:4,6. But let it not be thought that our reigning, or companionship, with Christ terminates with the thousand years. True, that will be the end of the time-period of the reign; and then Christ will deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. "For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet." 1 Cor. 15:25. But our reigning with Christ will just be, as it were, commencing then; for we "shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." Rom. 5:17. Our eternal life and our reign with Christ are coequal.

Blessed Lord! What love! What a prospect! What can we say? Oh, give us to walk worthy of the holy oil of our God that is upon us! Meantime, we can only worship and adore in the presence of such grace. In truth we may say, "My cup runneth over.”

“Hail to the Lord's Anointed,Great David's greater Son;When, to the time appointed,The rolling years have run.“He comes to break oppression,To set the captive free;To take away transgression,And rule in equity.

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“For Him shall praise unceasing,And daily vows ascend,His kingdom still increasing—A kingdom without end.“The tide of time shall neverHis covenant remove;His name shall stand forever,His great, best name of love.”

Meditations On The Twenty-Third Psalm, Psalm 23:6: Chapter 18

VERSE 6

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." We have just seen that in the riches of Christian experience the pilgrim saint becomes intimately acquainted both with joy and sorrow. This we have been taught both in the school of God and by His written Word.

And here please carefully note that the pilgrim is now seen, not, as it were, with a cup in each hand, but with a guardian angel on each side. "Surely," he says, "goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." And mark well the first word he utters in this bursting forth of the heart's fullness: "Surely." Is not this an appropriate, a triumphant note of faith, after such deep and varied experience? There are no doubts, no fears, no uncertainty here. A quiet happy confidence fills the soul; it is the full assurance of faith. It reminds one of the last words of the blessed Lord dropped into the ear of His bride before He went away. "Surely," He says, "Surely I come quickly." Rev. 22:20. Oh, that it had dropped into her heart and maintained its right place there until His return! The Word of the Lord in the heart and the Person of the Lord before the mind will alone give the experience, faith and victory of the twenty-third Psalm.

How conscious the man of God is, as he journeys along, of the dignity of his companions. He is accompanied with royal honors. Not, indeed, the earth's mighty ones, with steel-clad attendants, which dazzle the human eye; but with the goodness and mercy of the living God. Such, we may say, is the pilgrim's bodyguard as he journeys through the wilderness. And when faith has said this, what more can it say? Could heaven itself furnish more suitable companions for this checkered scene? Impossible! They are ever in attendance, always ready, equal to every emergency, more than a match for every foe; they are noble, highborn, invincible, yet gentle and kindly as the pure love of heaven. And this is no fancy picture; nothing can be more real to faith. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."

Do think of this! Here pause a little! Meditate! Let our thoughts dwell on this blessed truth. Beware of thinking too much of thine own condition—thine own circumstances; but think rather of these heavenly attendants: "goodness and mercy;" and still more, think of Him who sends them and for so long a time— all the days of thy life. Can we speak of feeling alone, as it were, in this world? Faith sees these messengers of love sent down from heaven to guard and follow us all our pilgrim days. But why, you ask, choose goodness and mercy? Because "goodness" meets all our need; and "mercy" meets all our faults. It is only with such we can get along. The Good Shepherd has trodden the sheep's path Himself, and He knows best what they need: not that He needed in all respects what we need; no, He was "without sin." Heb. 4:15. But, as a man, He has walked the path, under Jehovah's care, along which His sheep and lambs are now passing. He goes before His flock; they follow Him.

There are three things connected with the Lord our Shepherd which all the sheep of His pasture should know well. (1) He has gone through in experience the bitterest trials of the wilderness so that He knows every step, every difficulty, every danger of the way from having walked it Himself. (2) He dies for the sheep. Having first gone over their path, He laid down His life for the sheep. (3) He rose again from the dead to fold, watch over and nourish the flock for which He died.

Thus He is qualified in every way to be the Shepherd of God's sheep. Hence the beautiful doxology: "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." Heb. 13:20-21.

In this beautiful sixth verse—the closing verse of our Psalm—the pilgrim (whom we have followed so far) seems to have reached a special place from whence he may view all the pathway, past, present and future. In this privileged place, the believer speaks only of goodness and mercy as to the whole of his wilderness journey. He knows what joy and sorrow are, He knows the green pastures and the quiet waters. He has tasted, too, the bitter waters of Marah. He has trodden also the valley of the shadow of death and knows how dark that shadow can be. But he knows also the rich provision of the King's table—the royal banquet—the anointed head and the overflowing cup. Nevertheless, in looking over both the past and the present, he can truly say, "Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life." And in looking on to the future, the affection of the child, the love of home, can only see the Father's house: "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

"Goodness and mercy all my lifeShall surely follow me:And in God's house for evermoreMy dwelling place shall be."

Our fellow pilgrim is now nearing the end of the journey: calmly and triumphantly he awaits his last change. His heart overflows with joy and praise at the prospect. All is bright, but the looked-for hour of departure is the brightest of all and the happiest. "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Thus should it be with all Christians, and especially should it be with those who have been taught of God "TO WAIT FOR HIS SON FROM HEAVEN." 1 Thess. 1:10. This is the true hope of the church; not death, though that may take place before the Lord comes. When the great truth of the Lord's second coming has its right place in the heart, the desire to depart becomes more the power of affection than the bare belief of the doctrine. The Lord Himself, personally, is known and loved; and the heart longs to be with Him. It matters little whether the way be through the portals of death or with all the saints to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. (1 Thess. 1:9-10; 4:13-18.) Those who are taken home before the Lord returns for His own have the privilege of knowing Him in that separate state, and they are caught up first.

The position of the waiting Christian in this world may be one of great interest and usefulness, and the ties which bind him to it may be many and tender; still when the eye of faith looks across the boundary line and sees who are there and what is there, the heart instinctively longs to join the happy throng. The loved one, or the many loved ones, who have gone before are especially thought of, though the joy of each will be the joy of all. True, there will be individuality—perfect identity, but a perfect blessedness common to all.

"We look to meet our brethrenFrom every distant shore;Not one shall seem a stranger,Though never seen before:With angel hosts attending,In myriads, through the sky;Yet 'midst them all Thou only,O Lord, wilt fix the eye!"

And what grace, we may say, notwithstanding all our murmurings, to make the closing scene of our wilderness journey the happiest, the calmest and the brightest! Here the soul is near the Lord and grace shines—faith triumphs—glory dawns—and praise abounds. Placed, as it were, on the margin of the two worlds and seeing everything in the light of God's presence, divine goodness—unmixed goodness— crowns the whole path. Even in his darkest earthly days, the pilgrim can see nothing now but the goodness and mercy of God. Everything is now lost sight of but the constant, unfailing care of the Lord our Shepherd. He speaks only of the goodness that so wonderfully met all his daily need, and of the mercy that met all his daily failure.

But now the end comes—the scene closes—the Father's house is full in view. "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." As one not long ago said to a tenderhearted parent who was greatly overcome with what seemed a last farewell: "Father—can't you—spare me? —I am only going—to Jesus—and you— shall soon follow." Such were the soothing and remarkable words of a dear daughter, who had reached the interesting age of nineteen, to an affectionate father. But who was calm—who was bright in that touching scene? She only; and many other similar words she said, but these were uttered with a look of tender sympathy for her dear father, as she observed him sink down in his chair to give vent to a flood of tears. She now sought to comfort him who had so often read and prayed by her bedside. What grace from God! What mercy to a father—to a family! His be all the praise. It is but the deep, tender sympathy of the Good Shepherd as He folds the lamb in His bosom.

And now, after many an hour's meditation with deep and mingled feelings over our beautiful twenty-third Psalm, we must leave it for other themes; but its lessons, in connection with a Father's hand, remain. He can engrave on the tablets of the heart that which the wasting hand of time can never efface. The recollections of the past may draw a shade over the present, but the future is all and only bright. The great thought in the closing words of the Psalm is Home. All the vicissitudes of the wilderness are over and the only thought that fills the mind is Home—an eternal, happy Home. "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." There the worn and weary pilgrim finds his perfect rest; there the one who was a stranger on earth finds his heavenly home; and there the servant, whose work is finished, enters into the joy of his Lord.

“There at our Savior's side,In heaven our home!We shall be glorified;Heaven is our home!There with the good and blest,Those we love most and best,We shall forever rest,In heaven our home!”

The Lord grant that both reader and writer may, in due time, reach that happy home! Of all thoughts— of all words—what can be sweeter to the heart than "Home, sweet home," especially as it is presented to us by the divine Bridegroom Himself in John 14, "In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also"? John 14:2-3. And now, even now, may all who have followed us in our meditations through the Psalm be able in blessed experience to say, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Meditations On The Twenty-Third Psalm, Psalm 23:5 Continued: Chapter 17

VERSE 5 (CONTINUED)

Having briefly dwelt in our meditations on the only foundation of worship—the sacrifice of Christ— we will now refer to the only power of worship—the Holy Spirit. When "born again" we receive a new nature which is holy and suited to the presence of God. It is also capable of enjoying Him, which truth surely gives us the highest thought of creature-happiness; and yet, as the apostle says, that blessed state may be enjoyed even now. "But we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Rom. 5:11. Without this new nature there could be no worship. It is the children that the Father seeks to worship Him. Sonship is essential to worship. But the Father delights in the worship of His children. Not only does He accept it, but He seeks it. Wondrous, gracious truth, O my soul! Our God and Father seeking worshipers! "For the Father seeketh such to worship Him." John 4:23.

But besides the accomplished work of redemption, the new birth and our union with the risen Christ, the gift of the Holy Spirit is indispensable to Christian worship. Nothing can be plainer than our Lord's own teaching to the woman of Samaria on this subject. "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." John 4:23-24. Here our Lord insists on the moral necessity of the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit in Christian worship. And surely He knows best what suits the Father, from whose bosom He came, and even then He was "in the bosom of the Father." John 1:18. It is by the Spirit, though children of God, that we understand, enjoy and worship Him. God being a Spirit, He must be worshiped in His own nature—"in spirit." A son is the same nature as his father.

As children we are feeble and dependent, but we are "strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man." Eph. 3:16. As children we are ignorant and foolish, but the Holy Spirit communicates to us the mind of God and gives us an understanding in divine things so that we can draw near to Him in thought and feeling suited to His holy presence. It is the Holy Spirit dwelling in us that gives us the consciousness of our oneness with Christ and our nearness to God. He is the seal of redemption and the earnest of the inheritance. The anointing of the head with oil is like "the unction" that we receive of God, whereby we may know all things. (See 1 John 2:20; 1 Cor. 2:12.) And it is by the same Spirit that the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts (Rom. 5:5), which love, we may say, is the source of all our blessing and the spring of all our worship. If, then, the Holy Spirit be thus absolutely necessary to the worship of Christians, surely it becomes a matter of first importance that He should have His right place in the assemblies of the saints. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." 1 Cor. 12:13. How can we render to God the glory due unto His name if the Spirit, by any means, be quenched or practically displaced? This is a solemn question. Would not the contrast, so strongly drawn by the apostle, be in some way applicable in such a case? "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." Phil. 3:3.

Here it is not the sin of the flesh but th3 religion of the flesh which the apostle warns against. In God's sight the one is as bad as the other. The true worshipers are known by worshiping God in the Spirit and rejoicing in Christ Jesus. The flesh can be very pious in its own way and can be largely occupied with good works; but it will never "rejoice in Christ Jesus." It knows nothing of Christ as despised on earth and honored in heaven; nor of setting our affections on things above. But even when Christ has His right place in the heart and the Holy Spirit is owned as the alone power of worship, we have need to watch against mingling the thoughts of the flesh with the guidance of the Spirit. It will be the constant aim of the enemy, where he cannot substitute flesh for spirit, to mingle the two.

One solemn question, one grand test, remains for each, for all: Do I rejoice in Christ Jesus alone? This is the true standard to judge by—the touchstone of spiritual worship. Do I answer to this standard? Is Christ my all in all? Do I come before God? Do I stand in His holy presence—rejoicing in Christ Jesus alone? He is the delight of the Father's heart—the Object of the Spirit's testimony—the joy and glory of His people. Happy, thrice happy, they who in this day of widespread fleshly pietism "worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and

have no confidence in the flesh.”

“O God, we come with singing,Because Thy great High PriestOur names to Thee is bringing,Nor e'er forgets the least:For us He wears the miter,Where 'holiness' shines bright,For us His robes are whiterThan heaven's unsullied light.”

It may be well, before closing our meditation on the cup of joy, to dwell a little on its contrast, the cup of sorrow. In the saint's experience the latter often goes before and accompanies the former. The one being natural and the other spiritual, both may be full at the same time. It is only while in the body, and on the earth, that we can meet with the cup of sorrow. It will be unmingled joy in heaven. There we shall be met at the threshold with, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Matt. 25:21. Then we shall drink, and drink forever, of the Master's own cup. We shall drink from the same fountain as Christ Himself. Having the same life we shall have the same relish for the joys, the employment and the blessedness of heaven, though not, of course, to the same degree.

Without this divine nature there can be no relish for divine things. To mere human nature the light of heaven would be more intolerable than the darkness of hell. Oh, what a thought! An immortal soul so driven to despair, through a sense of guilt in the presence of holiness, as to seek a shelter in the depths of darkness—as to cry "to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." Rev. 6:16. But even now, when the gospel of God's grace is preached to sinners, it is said of such, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." John 3:19. Oh that all such might be induced now to come to the light—the light of eternal love—the light of the cross of Jesus—the light of the boundless grace of God! Come, O sinner, come! Better far be revealed now in the light of the glorious gospel, where all is grace and love—where thy many sins can be pardoned and where eternal life is received as the gift of God, than be revealed before the face of the Judge when the door of mercy is closed. Why not come? Is there not a terrible sting in sin, even now, when the pleasure of it is past? Hast thou not tasted this, O my fellow sinner? How many are maddened to deeds of violence through the remorse and bitterness of sin, when the pleasure that led onto it is turned into gall and wormwood! But what must its bitterness be in that place where hopeless despair seizes the soul in all its dread reality? There nothing but sin and the sting remain, with the fearful conviction that no relief can ever come.

Why not then, my fellow sinner, be entreated to come to Jesus now—just now? If so guilty, so far down in the social scale that thou art ashamed of thyself in the presence of others—yet thou mayest freely, trustingly, come to Jesus. Thou wilt be welcome there. And rest assured of a present pardon, salvation and acceptance through His precious blood. Such was the experience of the woman that was a sinner and of the penitent thief on the cross; and such may be thine. He who died on the cross for thee and me is surely fit to be trusted. And say, would He have died for us if He had not loved us? Oh, lift thine eyes to that cross and see His unquenchable love bleeding there! Seekest thou another sign save the sign of the cross? God forbid! The great reality in the universe is the love of Jesus! For a time, all were against the sinner's Substitute. All refuge failed Him. (Psa. 142:4.) But then it was that His love burst forth through every weight and pressure in all its native strength and glory. Many waters could not quench His love, no floods could drown it (SoS. 8:7), though He could say in spirit, "The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head." Jonah 2:5.

Again and again we would ask thee, Wilt thou, dost thou value the love that willingly passed through all this suffering for the chief of sinners? And with what end in view, thinkest thou? That sinners might one day share with Him His throne in glory. Do lean all thy weight on Jesus—trust all to Him. His eye can never grow dim—His arm can never become feeble—His heart can never turn cold. For time and for eternity, thou art only safe and happy in trusting Him.

But see, O my soul, how far thou hast wandered from the footsteps of the flock—from their joys and sorrows. Well, be it so. The Good Shepherd was content to leave the ninety-and-nine that were secure and go far into the wilderness after a single lost sheep and seek until He found it.

We were speaking of the twofold aspect of the Christian's experience: the cup of natural sorrow and the cup of spiritual joy. He may know at times what it is to have both cups filled to overflowing. The poor human heart may be so broken with sorrow that it cannot look up; strength, motive, object, as to this life, may be gone. At such a moment he feels a pressure as if he were down and could never rise up again. And surely, but for the Lord's helping hand, he must have gone a step beyond the rallying point. Such is the crushing, exhausting weight of human sorrow—and such the Lord's loved ones may be allowed to experience. The blessed Lord Himself, as the Man of Sorrows, had deeper experience therein than any of His people ever can have. And now as the living Head, the great High Priest of His people, He knows how to succor and raise up the sorrow-stricken soul.

Just at this point the Lord may so reveal Himself to the soul as to draw the eye away from its own sorrow and turn aside the keen edge of its anguish. Not that the trial is removed or made less; nay, it may be deepening and that which is dreaded may be unmistakably drawing near. But the soul, we may say, is now in two regions, two states of being: in nature, amidst the desolations of earth; in faith, amidst the unchangeable realities of heaven. Both are real; but the spiritual joy changes the character of the earthly sorrow and strengthens to bear it. Quietness of soul being restored, it now remembers that the happy soul is only called up to wait with the Lord and to enjoy a quiet time with Him before the public display of His glory. But, oh! What experience, and how real! To have poured out at the same moment a full cup of joy and a full cup of sorrow, too! The latter we know shall ere long be clean forgotten; but the former will be remembered throughout eternity as one of the strongest, sweetest expressions of the Savior's compassion, love and tender sympathy.

In Rom. 5:1-11 we have this line of Christian experience clearly set before us. It may be profitable to glance at it. It is a rich inheritance to the soul to have a personal and spiritual acquaintance with these eleven verses. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Rom. 5:1-2. In these two verses the full blessing of the soul with reference to the past, the present and the future is summed up. The work of Christ is the basis of it all. "Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification." Rom. 4:25.

As to the past, in the case of every believer, all is blotted out—all connected with the old man came to its end, in God's sight, on the cross. Both the root and fruit of sin were judged there. All that needed putting away was put away, according to the claims of God's glory and the sinner's need. Hence, the Christian is now one with Christ in resurrection. Death, judgment, the world, sin and Satan are behind him. On this ground, the ground of death and resurrection, there is perfect peace for the Christian, peace with God. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." As to the present, we are introduced to the full favor of God. Our standing is in grace. "We have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." And as to the future, we "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." We are placed between the cross and the crown; our

yesterday was Calvary, our tomorrow is glory.

This is true Christian condition; not experience, but faith. Being justified, having peace, standing in grace, waiting for glory. Experience flows from this condition. The Spirit of God having conducted the Christian to the very height of his condition, as a new man in Christ, and even given him a glimpse of the glory behind the veil, He brings him back, as it were, to taste, in experience, the trials of this life. Still he can glory. He glories in the depths as well as on the heights. None can glory in tribulation as those who are rejoicing in the immediate hope of the glory of God. So it was with the great apostle who was "caught up to the third heaven." 2 Cor. 12:2. There he found Christ as the only ground of his glorying; but when down here again and in tribulation through "a thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7), he found the same Christ in the depths with him. "Most gladly therefore," he exclaims, "will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." 2 Cor. 12:9. And such experience we also find in the eleven verses before us. "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Rom. 5:3-5. Thus the wheels of his soul are set in motion, and through deep exercise he again, we may say, reaches the heights. He has now the blessed enjoyment of the love of God shed abroad in his heart and the gift of the Holy Ghost. What a blessed state of soul to be in, though under the very shadow of death! But this is not all; he has more to learn in this vale of tears, he must go through another kind of experience. The Christian is again brought back, not to the lesson of tribulation, but to an experimental acquaintance with the depths of his own moral ruin. What he was, as without strength, ungodly, a sinner, and an enemy he is now taught; but he learns these humiliating truths in the light of God's perfect love and the Savior's perfect work and the Holy Spirit's presence. And mark now the point he reaches by this process; higher he can never be raised. "But we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Rom. 5:11. Surely joying in God Himself surpasses all our enjoyment of the things He gives.

Well may we wonder at what may be known, experienced and enjoyed by the poor pilgrim saint in the wilderness. In the eyes of men he may appear a poor, heartless inhabitant of the earth. But oh, what depths he penetrates! To what heights he rises! What sights he sees! What power he commands! And what glory gilds his path! With him it is glory on the threshold of heaven and glory in the valley of humiliation. He knows the history of the future better than the past, and divine light sheds its rays on the present. The poor blind world knows nothing of this. Oh that they would come to Him who is the light of life and the light of men. Grace has no evil thoughts; what it has, it longs for thee to share. It preaches, prays, watches that thou mayest know and love the only Friend of sinners. Were one candle to light a dozen its own light would be not the less, but the united light would be far greater.

Now, just now, cast in thy lot with those who are walking in the light of the Lord; and may thine own path be as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. (Prov. 4:18.)

Meditations On The Twenty-Third Psalm, Psalm 23:5 Continued: Chapter 16

VERSE 5 (CONTINUED)

It may be well to notice the difference between prayer and worship, however nearly allied they may be to each other, and even suitably mingled together, as "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks." 1 Tim. 2:1. We have always much to be thankful for; still, the two things in themselves are quite distinct. We bring our empty cups to the prayer meeting, and beg and beseech our God and Father to fill them. This shows our knowledge of God and our confidence in Him; and if we pray in faith, the oil may flow until every vessel be filled. (2 Kings 4.) Thus prayer may lead to worship, as preaching the gospel to the world and teaching God's people may do. Nevertheless, it is well to understand the difference between prayer, preaching, teaching and worship. They are each most important in themselves, and all of God, and ought not to be confounded. In the preaching of the gospel God is addressing the world; in teaching, He is speaking to His saints; but in worship we address God, we render adoration to Him. Ministry is from God to man, worship is from man to God. Hardly any two things could be more distinct, and yet the distinction is rarely seen. True worship may be produced by any of the three named services, and even a spirit of worship may be enjoyed when engaged in them, and so much the better when it is so; but in Christian worship we draw near to God as our Father in Christ Jesus and address ourselves to Him. When we know God as He has revealed Himself in the Person and work of Christ, we have holy liberty in His presence and render the praise, adoration and thanksgiving of an overflowing heart.

The term "cup" is frequently and variously used in Scripture: sometimes it is the symbol of joy and sometimes of sorrow, but in the verse before us the "cup running over" is the expression of overflowing joy and is in full harmony with the position of the anointed believer. The table which Jehovah had prepared for His weary pilgrim more than supplied all his need. Nothing was wanting. The provision was full and divinely suited to his condition. There was no need to remind the Host of something that had been forgotten. Asking for this or for that at such a table would be contrary to every feeling of the satisfied guest: unless it were, in heart, for more gratitude, more suited thanksgiving. Ought we not to be filled with this spirit when at the Lord's Supper? Most surely, and in the highest sense. May we not, at least, say that in this beautiful verse we have an illustration of the Lord's supper, the presence of the Holy Spirit and the worship of the assembly of God? Surely we may; for the idea of worship is more in connection with the assembly than with a single Christian. The joy of others increases our joy and strengthens our worship.

This truth is so beautifully and touchingly set before us in Deut. 26 that we must notice it. The worshiper, already in the land promised to the fathers, brings his basket of first fruits—the growth of the holy land—and the priest presents it before the Lord his God. He worships in the land and only presents to Jehovah the fruits of the land. Canaan is the type of heaven, and we can only worship God when there, in spirit, and with the growth of that happy land. Love, joy, holiness, praise, adoration and thanksgiving grow abundantly in our heavenly Canaan. But the joy of the redeemed Israelite in the land was shared with others. He did not forget his own, once miserable condition in the land of Egypt, though now redeemed out of it. "A Syrian ready to perish was my father; and he went down into Egypt." Deut. 26:5. In his new joy he invites the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless and the widow to share his abundance. But this was not all; he maintained a walk of practical holiness, without which there can be no worship. "I have not eaten thereof in my mourning, neither have I taken away aught thereof for any unclean use, nor given aught thereof for the dead: but I have hearkened to the voice of the Lord my God, and have done according to all that thou hast commanded me." Deut. 26:14. And now, in the largeness of his heart, he embraces all Israel. "Look down from Thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Thy people Israel, and the land which Thou hast given us, as Thou swarest unto our fathers, a land that floweth with milk

and honey." Deut. 26:15. True benevolence, largeness of heart, is sure to accompany a spirit of heavenly worship. "By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." Heb. 13:15-16.

The sacrifice of Christ, which is commemorated in the breaking of bread, is the only foundation of true worship; and the Holy Spirit, present in the assembly, is the alone power by which God can be worshiped acceptably. It would be the most daring presumption for anyone to draw near to God as a worshiper unless he knew that all his guilt was removed and that he was a new creature in Christ Jesus. But when we know that the blessed Lord, by the blood of His cross, has fully glorified God, blotted out all our sins and cleansed us from all defilement, we have holy boldness to draw near to God as our Father. But for the cross, all must be judgment; but by means of the cross, all is grace, boundless grace. The rending of the veil from the top to the bottom is the divine witness to us that Christ put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself and opened up the way for us into the holiest of all. In virtue of His atoning sacrifice there is now, glory be to God, no question of sin between the worshiper and God. That question was fully gone into on the cross and there settled—there closed forever. The same stroke which slew the Lamb rent the veil and laid open the way into the presence of infinite holiness, where the worshiper now stands without spot and rejoices before the Lord his God.

Still meditate, O my soul, for the deepening and the elevation of thy worship, on that wondrous cross-the great center of God's moral universe! To this center God ever pointed, and the eye of faith ever looked forward, until the Savior came. And now we must ever turn to that cross as the center of all our blessing and the basis of all our worship, both on earth and in heaven-in time and throughout eternity. The "new song" never could have been sung in heaven, and no hymn of praise could ever have been sung on earth by fallen man, but for the cross of Jesus; and, but for that same cross, ours must have been forever a cup of trembling in place of an overflowing cup of rejoicing.

“O what a debt I oweTo Him who shed His blood,And cleansed my soul, and gave me powerTo stand before His God.“Savior and Lord! I ownThe riches of Thy grace;For I can call Thy God, my God—Can bow before His face.“Thy heavenly Father, too,I worship as my own,Who gave with Thee the Spirit's cry,To me, a son foreknown.”

Meditations On The Twenty-Third Psalm, Psalm 23:5 Continued: Chapter 15

VERSE 5 (CONTINUED)

“My cup runneth over." What a happy state to be in! The blessing of the King's guest is now unmeasured. He who was a little while ago amidst the deepest shades of the valley is now in the scene of highest joy and receiving the most public assurance of the Lord's favor. Nevertheless, we must not forget that the valley may be as strong an expression of the Lord's favor as the banquet, though the results in experience be so widely different. Now, the cup of joy is running over. But this joy is only in the Lord. The whole scene below may be as joyless as ever. These two things are perfectly consistent in Christian experience and well known to many. Earth's scenes may henceforth be joyless though full of mercies, while the heart is in the boundless joys of the Lord. Everything around may be tinged with the dark shade of disappointment, bereavement, or with the most crushing, abiding trial; while all above is calm, cloudless, unmingled joy; standing before God in the full credit of Christ, and in the sweet confidence that we are the children whom He loves, the heart overflows with joyous praise.

This is the genuine fruit, O my soul, of being at the King's entertainment. But how could it be otherwise? Seated at the King's table—partaking of the repast which His own hand had dressed—the head anointed with the fragrant oil—the cup filled to overflowing with the King's choicest wine; what else, tell me, could a soul say in such circumstances than "my cup runneth over"? My joy, my blessing and my happiness are full—yea, more than full: I can only love and praise.

From this expressive image thou mayest learn, O my soul, what worship is. And rest assured that nothing is of more importance to the Christian and nothing more honoring to God. He is robbed of His glory when His children fail to worship Him. The true principle and character of worship are seen here. How full and instructive is this remarkable Psalm! And in how many points it applies to the blessed Lord Himself. Oh! How full was His cup of joy, and of sorrow too, when down here as the dependent Man, confiding in Jehovah's care! But what wonderful experience for a sinner saved by grace to say, when in deep, deep waters, "My cup of joy is full, my cup of sorrow too." Such was always the portion of the Lord's cup as the Man of Sorrows. But He knew both perfectly. What a blessing to have fellowship with Him! What a privilege, however painful for the present, to taste His cup of sorrow, as well as His cup of joy—to know something of His earthly sorrows and of His heavenly joys. Of the cup of wrath, which He drank for us, we can never taste: "It is finished" (John 19:30); it is drained to its dregs: but of His cup of joy we shall drink forever. Hallelujah! "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. 25:21) will surely be His welcome greeting by-and-by. Not merely, observe, my soul, into the joy of heaven or of angels, but into the joy of thy Lord.

“Thou art my joy, Lord Jesus!Thou art my glorious sun!In the light that shineth fromThee, I gladly journey on.There is a hidden beauty,A healing, holy light,In Thy countenance uplifted,Upon the inward sight.“Oh, purer than the morning,And brighter than the noon,And sweeter than the evening,A thousand joys in one;Thou Brightness of God's glory,And Lord of all above.Son of the Father's bosom,And Image of His love.”

What then is the spiritual meaning of this emblem in our Psalm? We believe it represents a soul in the true spirit and act of worshiping. We know no other four words in Scripture which so emphatically express the true idea of worship.

The Master has so filled the vessel that it overflows. When the heart is filled with the truth, as it is in Jesus (Eph. 4:21), and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, it overflows in thanksgiving and praise—it worships God, who is a Spirit, in spirit and in truth. The heart of the guest responds to the kindness of the Host. But, plainly, that which comes down from God to the soul in grace re-ascends from the soul to Him in grateful praise. Like the smoke from the golden altar, it ascends in sweet odors of acceptable worship.

It is perfectly clear that a cup running over can hold no more; that which is poured in only increases its overflow. But what are the spiritual feelings of a soul that answers to this figure? They are heavenly in their character and produced by the Holy Spirit. Nothing on earth comes so near the employment of heaven as worship. It will be our happy employment throughout eternity. But the soul must, in spirit, be in heaven—in the holy of holies—before it reaches this condition; and that is where the Christian should always be. He is in Christ, and Christ fills

all heaven with His glory. In God's account there is no outer-court worship now; it must be priestly and inside the veil. When the heart of the worshiper answers to the overflowing cup, it is evidently completely filled up—not a corner is left empty. This is the main thought. It feels spiritually that every wish is met—every desire is satisfied, and all the longings of the soul perfectly answered.

True, the worshiper is not as yet in resurrection-glory, but he knows and feels that he has everything excepting glory. That he waits for, but not uncertainly. "For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." Gal. 5:5. The hope which properly belongs to righteousness is glory. We have the righteousness now in Christ; we wait for the glory. And yet, in another sense, we have the glory, too, as the Lord Himself says, "And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them." John 17:22. And even in a still closer way we may say that we have it now, according to what the apostle says to the Colossians: "Which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Col. 1:27. Here it may be said that we are already linked with the glory. "Christ in you, the hope of glory." But we wait for the glory of God in full manifestation.

Meditations On The Twenty-Third Psalm, Psalm 23:5 Continued: Chapter 13

VERSE 5 (CONTINUED)

"Thou anointest my head with oil." How sweetly conscious the pilgrim is of the Lord's nearness to him!

This is the strength of his heart. The honor conferred is great and may be duly esteemed; but that which the heart loves most is the presence of the Lord. Comparatively it matters little who may be at a distance, or even opposed to us, when the Lord is near. In His presence we enjoy a rest from all that surrounds us which we can find nowhere else and which, we doubt not, partakes of the perfect rest above.

Is this, O my soul, thine own experience? Knowest thou the sweet peace and the quiet confidence which conscious nearness to the Lord gives? Surely those who have experienced the power of that presence in days of weakness and trial can never forget it. There is a way of learning such things which neither time nor change of circumstances can efface and which will be remembered with profit throughout eternity. But before the Lord teaches thus, the soul must be stripped of all self-dependence and of everything that has its roots in nature. A destitution must be felt that looks to the Lord alone and welcomes the supplies as coming directly from Himself. Then, the arms that enfold the fainting one, the power that raises the stricken one and the fullness that fills the emptied one must ever be remembered with adoring gratitude.

But may not a soul enjoy great nearness to the Lord without having passed through trial or known much of the difficulties of this present life? These, most surely, form no ground, but are often the occasion, of great conscious nearness. It is the happy privilege of all who, through grace, believe to enjoy spiritual nearness to God in Christ through the power of the Holy Ghost. This is their birthright. "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." 1 John 1:3. We are not only pardoned but reconciled. Though, strange to say, I have talked with many who knew their pardon, but were strangers to reconciliation. Such, of course, knew nothing of that personal nearness to Christ of which we are speaking. The sweet, happy home feeling of reconciliation is unknown.

But, it may be asked, Why? Because the truth is not fully apprehended. And, it may be further asked, What is the truth? As we are merely referring to the fact at present, we cannot go into the subject; but the reception of the prodigal son may be taken as an answer to the question and as the divine illustration of the doctrine of reconciliation. The first thing the prodigal received from his father was the kiss of peace— of reconciliation. He is the living picture of a soul quickened, pardoned, sealed, accepted, reconciled, worshiping. Was there one in all the father's house that felt more at home than the prodigal? Not one. He was there in the full credit of Christ-radiant in His beauty—exalted in His dignity and adorned with the jewels of heaven. The Father in His love, we may say, knows not how much to make of him. But how few, alas, drink deeply at the fountain of the Father's love—a love that is unchangeable, and that is infinitely above robes and rings and fatted calves! O Father—Father of the Lord Jesus—give us to know more of the love that so receives and so welcomes every returning prodigal! Oh, give us to taste of this perfect peace—this perfect reconciliation—this happy, joyous worship!

But may every truly converted sinner now read, in the prodigal's reception, the history of his own? He ought to. The Father is not changed. And he may also connect with the love that receives the love that seeks. So that he ought to rejoice in the love of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. And with the additional light of the epistles, we see even something more than in that ever fresh, ever precious story of Luke 15. The new ground—namely, the death and resurrection of Christ and His exaltation to the right hand of God—is unfolded and expounded in the epistles. This is the entirely new ground on which the believer is placed in reconciliation with God. Hence the doctrine so fully taught in the epistles of our oneness with Christ as the risen and exalted Man in glory. There we read that the Christian is in Christ Jesus—joined unto the Lord—seated together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 8:1; 1 Cor. 6:17; Eph. 2:6.)

But we return to the question of our experimental nearness to the Lord. True enough, it is our blessed privilege to know our place of nearness to Him spiritually and His presence with us at all times and under all circumstances; but who can speak of it? Rather let us meditate on the experience of the man of faith, as recorded by the Holy Spirit. Much of the experience of this Psalm will apply to Christ Himself, in His path down here, and to those in all ages who follow His footsteps. It is the path of a godly man, under the eye of the unfailing care of Jehovah. There is suffering and humiliation, honor and glory, in the way. The former for a time, the latter forever.

But however much the Lord may be known and enjoyed in the simplicity of faith, it was by the way of Marah's bitter waters and the dark shadows of death that our pilgrim reached the King's table and became an honored guest in His banqueting house. It is better that the sufferings should be first and the glory after than that the glory should be first and the sufferings after.

While the pilgrim is still seated at the table which the Lord prepared for his refreshment, new honors and richer blessings await him. The host, we may say, according to eastern custom, now rises from his seat and pours the fragrant oil on the head of his guest. In oriental nations this is esteemed a mark of the very highest honor and is usually reserved for distinguished guests and strangers. The oil is mingled with the most costly perfumes so that the banqueting hall is filled with its sweet odors. It is not unusual, on certain occasions, for the servant to anoint the head of each guest; but when the master himself performs this service on some favored one, what must his honor be! Yet faith can say of Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords, "Thou anointest my head with oil." No servant is employed on this occasion; the royal Host takes the place of servant Himself.

It is quite evident, from what our Lord says in the house of Simon, that this custom prevailed amongst the Jews: "My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed My feet with ointment." Luke 7:46. What self-righteousness so ungraciously withheld, the poor penitent supplied. The Pharisee did not think He was worthy of a little water for His feet, far less the costly oil for His head. But who ever heard of self-righteousness having either oil for the head, water for the feet or a kiss of gracious welcome for the lowly Son of man? But the humble penitent finds them all. The fountains of her heart are broken up to bathe His feet with tears. Like a man who once said to the writer, after the Word had reached his heart, and who could scarcely speak from emotion, "I seem to have got a well in my heart, and it is constantly springing up to my head." This woman, too, found a well—a springing well in her heart; and also the means of finding the costly ointment and every other tribute of respect for the Savior of her soul. Oh, what a scene, what a lesson! A poor, fallen, degraded sinner—an outward breaker of the law—enters the abode of man's righteousness, bows at the feet of the son of David, and carries off the blessing in the very face, and from the very center, of the Pharisee's vain glory. She is enriched with the noblest prize that soul ever found, while the chiefs of the people, who refused to bow to Jesus, are left poor and miserable and blind and naked. "For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Luke 18:14.

Meditations On The Twenty-Third Psalm, Psalm 23:5 Continued: Chapter 12

VERSE 5 (CONTINUED)

Take an illustration from Scripture of His present watchful care over His people: an illustration, too, which is the result of His rejection on earth. (See Matt. 14:22-36; also Mark 6 and John 6.) "And straightway Jesus constrained His disciples to get into a ship, and to go before Him unto the other side, while He sent the multitudes away." Matt. 14:22. It turned out to be a dark and stormy night and, to outward appearance, the disciples were left alone in the midst of the raging billows. "The ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary." Matt. 14:24. But there was no Jesus in the ship with them—no blessed Master to compose their troubled minds or encourage their drooping hearts. "And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them." John 6:17. Had the night been calm and clear they would not have felt His absence in the same way. But now everything seemed against them. The troubled sea, the stormy wind, the darkness of the night, the difficulty in rowing and the Lord's absence made their position one of perplexity and distress. No doubt they were ready to conclude that not only had their Master forsaken them but that the elements has conspired against them.

But where is the Lord all this time and whither has He gone? Has He ceased to care for His disciples? Or is He not aware of their distress? He has gone to the place of power, and that power He is using on their behalf. From the mountain, whither He had gone to pray, His all-seeing eye is following them unweariedly. Not a single wave has touched the vessel without His measuring hand; and not a breath of wind that He has not sent forth from its chambers. He is at the helm, we may say, of the winds, the waves and the vessel. His hand lays hold on everything—He rules over all. Never was He more near to His people, or they more dear to Him, than when they were passing through the storm, apparently alone.

The whole scene is a living picture of the richest instruction and sweetest comfort, and of what has actually taken place. Personally, of course, the Lord and His disciples were apart, but in spirit and in power He was present with them. He permitted the storm to arise in His absence for the trial of their faith. And who does not find it hard now to pull against a strong head wind? But so it is with the people of God in the present period. The world has crucified their Lord, and they have to cross the troubled sea of life alone. The church is to keep up the remembrance of her Lord's death and her own identification with Him in it, according to His will, "till He come." 1 Cor. 11:26. Her lonely path is never to be forgotten. To deny it would be to deny that her Lord was slain.

But let us return for a moment to the exquisite scene before us. Towards the close of that interesting day the ancient prediction was fulfilled: "I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread.”

Psa. 132:15. Thousands of the people were miraculously fed, and, as we read in John, they wanted to take Him by force and make Him a king. But Jesus perceiving this "departed again into a mountain Himself alone." John 6:15. The hour was not come yet for the crown of David to flourish on the head of his Son and Lord. The people were in unbelief, and He would not be made a king to gratify their worldly desires. He departs from them and goes up to a mountain to pray alone. He refuses to be king by the will of man, but He takes the place of priest before God. Blessed fruit of His rejection!

But here carefully observe, and mark well, the hand of the Master is drawing this beautiful picture. Before He ascends up on high He dismisses the multitude, or the unbelieving nation. Then He gathers His disciples, or the believing remnant, into a ship and launches them on a tempestuous sea alone. And now He goes Himself to a mountain to make intercession for them. "And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, He was there alone." Matt. 14:23. But during the long, dark night of His absence His eye of love, which neither slumbers nor sleeps, followed His loved, though tossed and tried, ones all the way through the deep. O blessed Lord, what a night that was to Thee! Its silent watches must have pictured to Thy far-seeing eye these last nineteen hundred years and more. During the long dark night of man's day Thy beloved ones have had to meet an opposing current in this evil age, which is indeed hard to strive against. But the morning watch brings relief. This dark and dreary night, with its toiling and rowing, will soon be past. "Surely I come quickly" (Rev. 22:20) is the word of Jesus; and the Spirit speaks as if we could count on nothing more than "the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:52) between us and the coming of the Lord. "And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water. And He said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped Him, saying, Of a truth Thou art the Son of God." Matt. 14:25-33. Peter may represent the church. He leaves the position of the Jewish remnant and goes out in faith to meet the Lord without the support of nature. But he fails, as the church has done; he fails, as she has done, through not keeping Christ and His Word before him. He looked at the waves—the circumstances—in place of looking to the Lord. So long as Christ filled his eye he imitated Him and walked on the sea as He did. But the

moment his eye is off Christ and on the billows, he begins to sink. Faith can walk on rough waters as well as smooth if the eye is kept on the Lord. The Lord had said, "Come," to Peter, and that was enough. He who created the elements could make the sea a pavement for His servant. When Christ and His Word are kept before the soul, we can walk on the rough sea of life as well as on the smooth waters.

But, oh, gracious Lord, Thou art as ready to answer the cry of distress as the voice of faith! But the honor that belongs to the walk of faith is lost. "And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased." The Lord, in company with Peter, rejoins His disciples in the ship and immediately the troubled waters are at rest. When the Lord and His heavenly bride return to Israel, all their troubles and persecutions will be at an end. He will be owned and worshiped as their own Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of God. "Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped Him, saying, Of a truth Thou art the Son of God." But the blessing flows out unto all the earth.

“And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret. And when the men of that place had knowledge of Him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto Him all that were diseased; and besought Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole." Matt. 14:34-36. Here we have a bright millennial scene. The Lord is received joyfully. He has come down from the place of His intercession. His ancient people, who were in deep waters, He immediately brings to a peaceful shore. In the world, which is filled with the works of Satan, He exercises His power in healing and blessing. He relieves a distressed and groaning creation. The trail of the serpent disappears, and joy and gladness, health and beauty, fill all lands. Hasten, O Lord, hasten in Thy time, that promised, coming, happy day.

But, meanwhile, may those who are now toiling through the deep waters in patience possess their souls. (Luke 21:19.) Surely we know Thee better than did Thy disciples of old. Thy love has been fully manifested, and we know Thine unfailing intercession for us at God's right hand in heaven. The night may be dark, the billows high, the wind boisterous; circumstances may be cheerless, joyless and gloomy, but "the night is far spent, the day is at hand." Rom. 13:12. "The coming of the Lord draweth nigh." James 5:8. "Yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Heb. 10:37. The tempest-tossed vessel will soon reach the shores of eternal rest and be welcomed by many who have been safely landed there before. Till then, O most gracious Lord, may our hands be kept steady at the oars and our hearts confiding in Thee, while we sleeplessly watch for the first radiance of the Morning Star.

“Go not far from me, O my strength,Whom all my times obey;Take from me anything Thou wilt,But go not Thou away.So let the storm that bears me home,Deal with me as it may.“On Thy compassion I repose,In weakness and distress;I will not ask for greater ease,Lest I should love Thee less.Oh! 'tis a blessed thing for me,To NEED Thy tenderness.“Thy love hath many a hidden path,.No outward eye can trace;And, through the darkest night, my heartLeaps to behold Thy face;And communes with Thee 'mid the storm,As in a quiet place.“'Deep unto deep' may call, but IWith peaceful heart will say,Thy loving-kindness has a chargeNo wave can take away.So let the storm that speeds me home,Deal with me as it may.”

(A.L.W.)

Meditations On The Twenty-Third Psalm, Psalm 23:4 Continued: Chapter 10

VERSE 4 (CONTINUED)

The fourth state being connected with the Lord's coming, we have much more light and definite teaching on it than on the intermediate state. Comparatively little is said on the third, or separate, state of the soul. A veil, we doubt not, has been purposely drawn over it so that it might not come between our hearts and our Lord's return. Had the soul's blessedness with Jesus during the present period been fully revealed, we might have been selfish enough to have thought so much about it and to have longed so much after it that the hope of His coming might have lost its proper place and power in our hearts. The Holy Spirit guards the hope of the church on all sides and with special care. But enough is revealed to satisfy the heart of faith as to our dear departed ones. Further light is, in love, withheld. Let us meditate deeply on what is revealed and be subject thereto. And knowing the love of Jesus and the unchangeableness of our divine life amidst all changes, the interpretation will be easy.

“For to me to live is Christ," says the apostle, "and to die is gain." Phil. 1:21. This is a contrast. To live is Christ-to die would be a gain upon that. And further, he adds, "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." Phil. 1:23. "With Christ" would be his "gain." This would be "far better." But first of all, carefully note the blessedness of the state with which he contrasts departing "to be with Christ.”

“For to me to live is Christ." What nearness to Christ, what communion with Him, the servant must have that can say this! It includes the idea, first of all, of having Christ for his object, his motive, his joy, his strength; and, also, of great love for the church, a deep and tender interest in all that concerned the name and glory of Christ and the well-being of His people. "For to me to live is Christ" tells of the energy of the Spirit that would sum up all of that mighty heart, that bright light, that noble servant, in these few words. And now comes the important question: How much would such a one gain by death? He would be "WITH CHRIST"—in the enjoyment of Christ personally in heaven. And this tells of the energy of the Spirit as to the other side—the consummation of all blessedness—"with Christ." But would the soul not lose much of its interest in all these lower things, now that it has reached the higher? Most assuredly not! It has the higher things in addition. This is the point of great interest as to "the unclothed" state. We can never lose anything that we now have, in fellowship with Christ, because He is already risen and glorified. He is our life—that life has no trial to go through. It only loses in death the poor cumbersome body in which it groaned, being burdened. All that we now know and enter into through the teaching of the Spirit must abide forever. We only lose that which belongs to the first Adam, but nothing of that which belongs to the last Adam. There is immense force in the apostle's words of contrast, far better— FAR BETTER!

This would be true as to everything touching the soul's connection with the blessed Lord, both as to the higher and the lower things.

It is no longer in our power to communicate to the dear departed soul that which we know would have given it joy here; but being present with the Lord, everything that is worthy of His love and fitted to deepen the joy and elevate the worship of the dear departed one we can

happily trust Him to communicate. All is well! How well! Absent from the body, present with the Lord. (2 Cor. 5:8.) How far the soul apart from the body (its own proper instrument of expression) can express itself, we venture not to say, but in its bright consciousness, it remembers and it loves. It thinks of the past and present, it anticipates the future. It waits in patience, with Christ, for the morning of the first resurrection; but its present and blessed feast is His unchanging, never-ending love.

“There are our loved ones in their rest;They've crossed time's river; now no moreThey heed the troubles on its breast,Nor feel the storms that sweep its shore.But 'there' pure love can live, can last;They look for us their home to share:When we, in turn, away have passed,What joyful greetings wait us there—Across the river!”

There is only one other passage I would refer to on this point. It has always been a favorite with the weary pilgrim. I mean the Lord's own words to the penitent thief, "To-day shalt thou be WITH ME in paradise." Luke 23:43. The sweetness, the comfort, the rest of heart which this assurance gives is beyond all expression. There "with the Lord" and with loved ones who have gone before, the soul rests, clothed in light and breathing the air of heaven. The mother has found her child, long, long gone before her, but never forgotten. And oh, what a fresh spring to her worship! "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together" (Psa. 34:3) will now be their joyous song. And there, too, the husband meets the wife of his youth, who was early called, but whose hearts were formed to love, not only for time but for eternity. True, human relationships will be unknown there, but hearts and loves remain forever.

But lest we should anticipate the resurrection-state, we leave—most contentedly leave—our dear departed ones "with the Lord" and with each other in that blooming garden of heaven's choicest delights. Now we often travel by faith between the dark valley and that bright. Eden above, but soon the Lord will come. Lord, Lord of that happy land, how soon? When shall the cloudless morning dawn? "A LITTLE WHILE" (John 16:16-19) is the Master's own measure of His absence. Then, when that happy morning dawns, we too shall say farewell to this vale of tears. Faith's work shall then be done, "for we shall see Him as He is." 1 John 3:2. Hope, too, shall then be realized in the Person of the Lord, as it is written, "And they shall see His face." Rev. 22:4. These all-important companions of the valley are no more needed. Faith, so long accustomed to the flight, shall then, and forever, "fold her wings." Farewell, "precious faith," but, oh, how much I owe thee! Hope, "blessed hope," soul-sustaining hope, shall then be lost amidst the glories of the Jerusalem above; but love remains; yes, love, eternal love, prevails through all the ransomed throng.

But what of the poor body that lies moldering in the grave? The now-humbled body shall, ere long, share eternal glory with the soul. Scripture is plain on this point. But I will do little more than quote two or three passages.

“What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?" 2 Cor. 6:19. Here, observe, the Holy Ghost has taken possession of the body. He thus appropriated the body to God. Had the text said, "your heart is the temple of the Holy Ghost,” the question of affection might have been raised; but it is your body—which plainly assures us that the body, living or dead, is in the custody of the Holy Ghost—that henceforward He is the custodian of the believer's body. Again, "But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you." Rom. 8:11. Here it is said not merely "your bodies," but "your mortal bodies," which meets the heart in sweetest grace. But what a volume of truth we have on this subject in 1 Cor. 15 "It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body... And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." vv. 42-44, 49.

Do we need anything more to set the heart having the strongest affection at rest forever? "Let patience have her perfect work" (James 1:4)-the "little while" will soon be past. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." Psa. 30:5.

“The resurrection-morn will break,And every sleeping saint awake,Brought forth in light again:O morn, too bright for mortal eyes!When all the ransomed church shall rise,And wing their way to yonder skies—Called up with Christ to reign.”

Meditations On The Twenty-Third Psalm, Psalm 23:4 Continued: Chapter 9

VERSE 4 (CONTINUED)

It is well, indeed, to plead earnestly with sinners who are unprepared for death: but now for a little while let us contemplate the triumph of the saint in the solemn hour of death. We have spoken of the human side, the dark valley; now look at the heavenly side—the way of the glory.

Suppose then the messenger of peace is come—come to close in quiet sleep the pilgrim days of one who has been many years in the wilderness. Of one, we will suppose, who had become foot-weary, but whose sympathies were all with Christ and His people, and who cared for the testimony of Jesus on the earth. But the Lord's appointed hour has come. The tie is dissolved; the body is left behind; the happy soul is liberated—it is present with the Lord.

Here let us pause one moment. Pray what tie is it that is dissolved? The tie that binds the divine life in the earthen vessel. "For we know that, if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." 2 Cor. 5:1. Here the apostle speaks on behalf of all Christians. "We know." There is no thought whatever, in such a case, of death being "the wages of sin." Rom. 6:23. Christ, our Surety, paid the penalty in full—so full, we may say, that it is not necessary that the Christian should die at all. And certain it is that all Christians shall not die. "We shall not all sleep," says the apostle plainly, "but we shall all be changed." 1 Cor. 15:51. And again, "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." 1 Thess. 4:17. The dissolving of the tabernacle, gently or roughly, touches not our eternal life in the risen Jesus. It simply dissolves its connection with the earthen vessel. The new man in Christ can never taste of death.

But here it may be profitable to dwell a little on the blessed and comforting truth just alluded to, namely, that all Christians shall not die—that many shall be changed and caught up with the dead who have been raised to meet the Lord in the air. It is quite evident from the passages already quoted that those who are alive on the earth when the Lord comes shall not pass through death at all. In their case, as the apostle says, "Mortality shall be swallowed up of life." (2 Cor. 5:4.) Such will be the power of life in the Son of the living God that every trace of

mortality in their human nature shall instantly disappear from His presence. It will be swallowed up—annihilated. And observe, it is mortality, not death, that is here said to be swallowed up of life. Death, too, we know shall be swallowed up in victory. In the one case the apostle speaks of those who have fallen asleep in Jesus; in the other, to those who are alive on the earth at His coming. How beautiful and interesting is the perfect accuracy of Scripture! If a word is changed, there is an important reason for the change. The same truths and their distinctiveness are taught by the Lord when speaking of Himself as the resurrection and the life.

“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." John 11:25-26.

But need we wonder at this manifestation of the power of life in the coming Lord? Sin, we may say, is an accidental thing. It is no part of the divine arrangements. It was introduced by an enemy. But every particle of the poison of sin, with all its baneful effects, shall be completely expelled from the living saints when the Lord comes for them. There is no need that they should die: Christ had died for them. And, oh, how sweet the thought! It will be the same body still, but without the sin and its effects. Then shall our bodies of humiliation be fashioned like unto His body of glory (Phil. 3:21); yet the perfect identity of each shall be preserved. And all this shall be accomplished by the power of a life which we now see in the risen Jesus; and, oh, wondrous truth: This life is ours—ours now—ours in Him, where all is victory!

He had spoken in 2 Cor. 3 of the gospel in contrast with law—of the ministration of righteousness and the Spirit in contrast with the ministration of death and condemnation. The law, as presenting God's claims on man, condemns him because he breaks it. But the gospel reveals a righteousness on God's part in place of requiring it from man. Christ Himself is the righteousness. When He is received by faith, we are made the righteousness of God in Him and are sealed with the Holy Spirit. "And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17)—liberty from the pressure of law and from the fear of death.

Christ glorified is the foundation of the whole argument. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." 2 Cor. 3:18. The Man Christ Jesus, who bore our sins in His own body on the tree, is now on the throne. Blessed proof to the heart of the perfect and eternal settlement of the whole question of sin. One who is truly man is now on the throne of God. The divine glory is fully displayed in the risen Man. He is also the blessed manifestation of our place and portion in the same glory. And, oh, precious truth! In meditating on this glory, as it shines in the face of Jesus, we are changed into His likeness through the power of the Holy Ghost. Lord, grant me this grace that I may indeed meditate, with delight and intelligence, on Thy glory, and become here, on earth, its true reflection.

The apostle preached to the world the good news of Christ in glory. "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord." 2 Cor. 4:5. He preached Christ victorious over sin and Satan, death and the grave. He invited and entreated sinners to believe on a glorified Christ—to come to Him by faith and enjoy the love and share the blessings and glories of the Savior. Christ has established righteousness for the sinner in the presence of God so that there need be no doubting and fearing. The full blessing is promised to all who trust in Him. "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." Psa. 2:12. What an immense power there is in such a gospel; but what weakness must characterize every other! All who believe the gospel Paul preached are introduced into the pure light of the glory as it is revealed in Christ. Those who reject the light are, alas, blinded by Satan, the god of this world. Refusing the glorified Savior, they fall into the hands of the enemy.

The explanation is given in 2 Cor. 4:6 of what we call the first state: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The heart is the vessel of the light. A light from the glory is kindled in the human heart. Divine life, through faith in a glorified Christ, being thus communicated, we are responsible for its manifestation as a light shining in a dark place. It is the light of life. It comes direct from God. He who at first commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts. Christ is our life, our light, our glory. In this dark world, before the eyes of man, we are called to be the reflection of our absent Lord. This is the first state of the new life. And how important! What a place it gives us here! The men of this world, who will neither read the Bible nor religious books, will sure read the lives of Christians. Oh, to be an epistle of Christ, known and read of all men! (2 Cor. 3:2.) As the Jew could read the Ten Commandments when he looked on the tables of stone, so may the eyes of those around us be able to read Christ in our daily walk and conversation.

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." 2 Cor. 4:7. This is the second state. The divine life is viewed in near contact with the mortal body and with all the infirmities and evils connected therewith. But no evil can ever touch the life of Christ in the soul. The more the vessel was troubled on every side, the more evident it became that the power of God was there. It rose above the workings of death in the apostle and triumphed over all the difficulties of his thorny path. "For we which live," he says, "are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." 2 Cor. 4:11. This "daily dying" caused the life of Jesus to shine forth more brightly. Like Gideon's pitchers, the light was manifested when the vessel was broken. But what experience! What conflict! What service! His many and heavy afflictions he calls light and but for a moment in view of that eternal weight of glory which he saw before him. Encourage, Lord, and strengthen the hearts of Thy weak and sorrowing ones now, who come so far short of the example of Thy servant Paul.

We now come to the third state—the "unclothed" state—the one more immediately under our meditation.

Paul was "willing rather" (2 Cor. 5:8) to be in this state; although at the same time he saw in the Man, Christ glorified in heaven, the perfect, or resurrection, state. This is the fourth state, when the person, complete, shall be glorified after the image of Christ in glory. This was the grand object before the apostle's mind. "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." 2 Cor. 5:4. (See also Phil. 3.)

Meditations On The Twenty-Third Psalm, Psalm 23:4 Continued: Chapter 8

VERSE 4 (CONTINUED)

“My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone." Sol. 2:10-11.

Here meditate, O my soul, on this wondrous revelation—bursting forth of light, and living strength from the dark, and hitherto unknown, regions of the tomb. The victory is complete! Christ has personally gone through the straits of death and cleared the passage, for all His followers, of every difficulty and danger. He who was in the lowest parts of the earth is now in glory. And from that glory—the glory of God in the risen Man—divine light now shines in these low and lonely depths. The gloom of death is dissipated, the darkness of the grave illuminated, the shadows of death are only on the human side and felt by our poor hearts.

Death itself, justly styled "king of terrors" (Job 18:14) for man, is completely vanquished! Every circumstance of death and the grave is mastered forever. The Lord is risen from among the dead and associates us with Himself in resurrection-life, power and glory. What a blessed position to be brought into! We stand on the same triumphant ground as the Conqueror Himself and enjoy, with Him, the spoils of His victories.

What is death? What is the passage of death? What are the issues of death? These are questions that had never been fully answered in Scripture until now. Up till the time the blessed Lord appeared, died, rose again and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, comparatively little was known on these solemn subjects. No doubt godly souls in Old Testament times, who had been taught of the Spirit of God to trust God through all their pilgrim days, could quietly trust Him in the hour of their departure. The last glimpse we have of Jacob is truly beautiful. We see him as an aged pilgrim, leaning on his staff, worshiping the living God. And the picture of Joseph is that of peace and victory. "By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones." Heb. 11:21-22.

But to the Jew, as such, the subject of death was necessarily a more gloomy one than it is to the Christian; consequently, the application of verse 4 (Psa. 23) would be somewhat different to the latter. It is of the Jews that the apostle speaks when he says, "Who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Heb. 2:15. Christians may get into this state of mind, and some may never have been in any other, but it is certainly contrary to the cheering light and happy liberty of the gospel. Such, we fear, have never seen or understood the death and resurrection of Christ as God's great principle of blessing to the Christian. This is the only ground of peace with God, oneness with Christ, and of full liberty from the fear of death.

Again, to the Jew as such, this world was the land of the living. It was the place of his blessing; and the great promise to obedience was, "That thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Ex. 20:12. "I had fainted," said the psalmist, "unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." Psa. 27:13. But to the Christian, we may say, it is the land of the dying. "I protest," says Paul, "I die daily." 1 Cor. 15:31. It is also the land of death—the death of the Lord Jesus Christ; consequently it is the valley of the shadow of death. The cross has thrown its dark shadow over the whole scene. And where is the place of the Christian's joy and blessing? In heavenly places in Christ.

Heaven is the Christian's home; he is away from home in this world. As men, we speak of the place where we were born as our natural place; then is the Christian entitled to speak of heaven as his natural place. He is born of God, born from above. And the place, circumstances and company that are suited and proper to his nature as a child of God are on high. And never, until he reaches the shores of his fatherland, shall he breathe his native air or know what the feeling of home means. Hence the instinctive longings and desires of the heart to reach his Father's house are only natural.

“My cheerful soul now all the daySits waiting here and sings;Looks through the ruin of her clay,And practices her wings.“Faith almost changes into sight,While from afar she spiesHer fair inheritance in light,Above created skies.“Some rays of heaven break sweetly inAt all the opening flaws;Visions of endless bliss are seen,And native air she draws.”

Here, in this body of sin and death, and sojourning in a world of evil where Christ was crucified, we may have much and most blessed fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Ghost. But this is the effect of grace in the midst of evil and of the Holy Ghost's presence in the believer. The Father cares for the children, the Shepherd cares for the sheep, and the Holy Ghost's presence on the earth is the power by which we enjoy our inheritance on high.

This is a great truth, my soul; the truth, I mean, as to thy new birth, thy new life, that thou art born of God, an heir of God, a joint-heir with Christ, and placed in Him, far, far above the power of death and the grave. Meditate, I repeat, O meditate deeply, patiently, on what is involved in this most marvelous truth. The knowledge thereof will go far to explain thy wilderness experience, relieve thee of thy wilderness burdens and shed a flood of light over the dark valley.

Beyond all question all who have been quickened since death entered by sin have received their new life through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. The apostle, referring to Old Testament saints, speaks of "the Spirit of Christ which was in them." 1 Peter 1:11. He is that eternal life which was in the Father and was, in due time, manifested unto us. There is no other life—no life anywhere else for the soul dead in sin. "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." 1 John 5:11-12. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." John 3:36. But although, from the beginning, life could only be found in and by Christ, still it appears quite evident that the condition of the life enjoyed by the Christian is quite different to that enjoyed by the Old Testament saint. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." John 10:10. This abundant life, we doubt not, is life in resurrection. (John 20:22.)

Not only is the Christian a child of God, but he is said to be quickened together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:5-6.) Now mark into what blessed scenes this great truth, this union with Christ, introduces the believer. United to Him, the risen Head, He communicates to us the privileges of His own position before God. He is the wellspring of the believer's new life; it is fed by Him every moment. Neither sin, Satan nor death can ever touch it. The Christian by faith has begun his eternity with Christ. He needs not to wait for death or the coming of the Lord to relieve him.

The foundation of all this great truth for the soul is the death and resurrection of Christ; He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. In the greatness of His love He bore the burden of our sins in His own body on the tree. Death in all its bitterness He tasted for us and put away sin, the source and sting of death, by the sacrifice of Himself. But God raised up that blessed One and quickened us together with Him. And now, blessed be His name, we know of a truth that our evil nature has been judged, our

sins all blotted out—we know that righteousness has been divinely accomplished—that our peace with God is made—and that we are one with the risen Jesus in an entirely new sphere where no evil can ever come and where the light of God's countenance shines on us perfectly and forever. (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24; Heb. 2:9, 9:26; Col. 2:12-13; Eph. 2; 1 Cor. 15.)

This, the death and resurrection of Christ, is the only position from which death can be fairly and calmly viewed. Like Joshua of old who, from Canaan's side of Jordan, returned to its center and there planted his twelve stones of victory. From the heavenly side he could calmly contemplate the river of death and go down into its depths. But the priests were there before him with the Ark of the Covenant, and with "the Lord of the whole earth" (Josh. 3:11) it was as easy to pass the Jordan as the Red Sea.

But to the merely natural man who knows he is unpardoned—unsaved—death must be a fearful thing. If he thinks at all about it and is intelligent and honest, the very thought of it must be dreadful. Death and judgment, the fruit of sin, are the two great objects of men's fears. And so they may be. Terrible indeed to an immortal soul must be the consequences of death and judgment. And how humbling, too, is death to the natural man. He must succumb. The strong man must bow to it. The proud man must humble himself to it. The wise and the rich are alike unable to avoid it or resist it. It is an implacable enemy that cannot be appeased or turned aside; that cannot be guarded against; that will not be sent away; that is relentless, rapacious, insatiable.

Can I prevail on my reader, if this be his state, to give this subject a serious thought? And, oh, let it be now—just now. Delay not! Time is on the wing—thy days are flying fast—already they may be few. And what then? The eternal ages—an eternity of unmingled blessedness or unutterable woe.

In the whole field of fallen human nature there is nothing to be found more awful than death. For as in the forest, so in this field: "As the tree falls, so it lies." (Eccl. 11:3.) How solemn—how eternally solemn! As death finds the soul, so will the judgment seat, and so will a long, long eternity. Beyond death there is no repentance. As breath leaves the body, the state is unalterably fixed. This is man's last change-a change which admits of no succeeding one forever. Oh then, my reader, listen to the affectionate entreaties of one who loves thy soul and would earnestly warn thee against neglecting its salvation! "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”

Mark 8:36. The whole material world, in the Savior's estimation, is of less value than one human soul. And it may be that the well-being of thy precious soul has never cost thee a serious thought. The most ordinary things of this life, or some ornament for thy person, may have cost thee more thought than thy soul's eternal destiny or the sufferings and death of Christ by which alone it can be saved.

Do think, I pray thee, my fellow sinner, on this all-important subject! At all costs yield to its pressing claims. If it should involve the breaking of many engagements as to this life and the blasting of all thy prospects therein, care not; suffer not such considerations to detain thee on the world's enchanted ground or hinder thy decision for Christ. Remember this—and this is plain—that he who sides not with Christ sides with Satan and must share with him the lake of fire. This is the second death. (Rev. 20:10, 14.) Oh, dreadful thought! What shall I say to thee? How shall I plead with thee? Shall I fall down at thy feet and shed the beseeching tear? Shall I be as a fool in thy sight? Shall my loud and bitter cry be to thee as the noise of some fanatic or of one who is righteous overmuch? Well, be it so; all these and more. I speak from feeling, not by rule. I am content if only thou wilt bethink thyself and flee at once to Jesus, who has paid the ransom-price of the sinner's redemption. To see thee at last as a jewel in the Savior's crown or as a monument of grace on the plains of eternal glory would be a rich compensation for being reckoned a fool or madman in this world. But, soberly, tears of blood, could I shed them, would not be too much to shed over a soul that refuses the provision God has made for His own glory in our eternal happiness.

Jesus, God's blessed Son "was made a little lower than the angels... that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man." Heb. 2:9. Here all is plain. Scripture never exaggerates, even if preachers do. What does this text teach us? This truth, plainly, that sin, un-repented of, brings the sinner to the place that the grace of God took Christ. In grace and love He took the sinner's place, the place of the curse, the forsaken place, where it was not possible that the cup of wrath should pass from Him. Now we see, in the cross, where sin leads to—what sin deserves—and how God deals with it. Doubtless sin was measured and dealt with in the holy Person of Jesus in a way that never can be done even in the lake of fire. God's hatred of sin was perfectly expressed on the cross. One drop of that cup which He drained, one stroke of that judgment which He exhausted, would sink a world of rebellious sinners in the depths of woe. But there, alas, the cup will never be drained, the judgment never exhausted.

Truly, may we not say, "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" Luke 23:31. If the true and living tree so felt the fires of holy justice, what must become of the dry and rotten tree? If He who had not a particle of sin in Himself was thus dealt with when sin was imputed to Him, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? What, my friend, would the rotten branch of thy good deeds avail thee in the swellings of Jordan? One thing seems perfectly plain—he who rejects God's green tree now, can have nothing to say at last when God rejects the dry.

The Lord grant that this may never be the case with thee, my reader, or with any soul who has ever read or heard that beautiful text: Jesus "was made a little lower than the angels... that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man." Heb. 2:9. What a revelation of the heart of God for us! "By the grace of God;" and what a blessed work by the Son! He tasted death that we might never taste it. Oh, believe it—rest in Jesus—trust all to His finished work! Glory in the fact that the God of all grace loves thee, that He spared from His bosom His well-beloved Son, that He might taste death for thee a sinner. And now can I hear thee saying, "Bless the Lord, He has tasted death for me a sinner.

Now I believe it: the bitterness of death is past: had I a hundred hearts He should have them all"?

“Descending from glory on high,With men Thy delight was to dwell,Contented, our Surety to die,By dying to save us from hell;Enduring the grief and the shame,And bearing our sins on the cross,Oh! who would not boast of such love,And count the world's glory but loss?”

Meditations On The Twenty-Third Psalm, Psalm 23:4: Chapter 7

VERSE 4

“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.”

This verse of the beautiful Psalm is generally spoken of as descriptive of the believer's experience in the passage of death—the death of the body. "The valley" is generally viewed as the path that lies between the two regions of life; and, though it may be dark and dismal, the saint of God, having the Shepherd's rod to guide and His staff to comfort him, need fear no evil.

Most truly there is every reason for the departing soul calmly to trust the Lord at that solemn moment, and during that brief but mysterious passage; but we do not think that the text refers, merely, to the believer's experience in his own death, but also to the dark shadow which the death of another may cast on our path. To the departing one all shadows flee away. To those left behind they may be dark and heavy.

For example: A dear and loved fellow pilgrim has been called up higher. His or her place is empty. The broken circle is overwhelmed in sorrow. The whole scene below is clouded. The pallor of death shades everything to the eye and, in the felt loneliness of the bereaved heart, the path, once so bright and joyous, has been turned into "the valley of the shadow of death." But the happy soul of the dear departed rests in the pure light of God and in the unmingled blessedness of His presence.

“No shadows yonder—all light and song;Each day I wander; and say, How longShall time me sunder from that dear throng?“No weeping yonder—all fled away!While here I wander each dreary day,And sigh, as I ponder my long, long stay.“No partings yonder! —time and space neverAgain shall sunder—hearts cannot severDearer and fonder, hands clasp forever.“None wanting yonder;-bought by the Lamb,All gathered under the ever green palm,Loud as night's thunder ascends the glad psalm.”

Yet, the dark impenetrable veil that separates the two states of being must not be passed. Faith alone may cross the threshold and see the dear departed one resting—at home—with Jesus—in the paradise of God. Here everything save the blessed Lord Himself may seem gone; but He is near, very near, blessed be His name. "Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.”

“Be still, my soul! when dearest friends depart,And all is darkened in the vale of tears,Then shalt thou better know His love, His heart,Who comes to soothe thy sorrow and thy fears.Be still, my soul! thy Jesus can repayFrom His own fullness all He takes away.”

To those left behind it is "the valley of the shadow of death." And so dense is that shadow sometimes in this weary wilderness that even the heavenly orbs seem changed and shine differently.

At such a time the enemy is sure to assail the distressed soul from all points with his fiery darts. A thousand thoughts may be suggested from the past. A lifetime may be reviewed in a moment by a mind in agony. Time misspent—precious opportunities allowed to pass may be the accusations of the foe. In such overwhelming circumstances nothing but the firm footing of God's own plain statement of truth could bear up the stricken soul. But the Good and Great Shepherd is near. He causes His voice to be heard. The eye is turned to Him. He lifts the fainting soul, folds it in His bosom, and bears it far above, away from its mere human feelings and spiritual foes. What would such trials and conflicts be, could we not say in truth, "Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me"?

Nothing can now be known of the condition and occupation of the loved, departed one, save that which Holy Scripture reveals. But oh, blessed be the God of all grace! The light of a cloudless sky rests on the whole scene, the beams of divine light break through the darkness of these darkest of earthly days—we can see behind the veil. From the chamber of death to the house of many mansions, a bright pathway has been consecrated for the believer by the risen and victorious Christ. The light of the glory "is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." 2 Tim. 1:10.

Glorious truth! Precious certainty for every believer in Christ Jesus—death was abolished on the cross and triumphed over in the resurrection of Jesus; and by the gospel eternal life to the soul and incorruptibility to the body have been brought into the clearest, fullest light. There may be great feebleness on the part of many Christians in apprehending these all-precious truths but the blessed facts remain the same. They are all connected with the Person of Christ: and the moment that He is received and trusted, the believer is associated with Him beyond the power of death and the grave. "I know," says the apostle, "whom I have believed [trusted, margin], and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." 2 Tim. 1:12. Christ, personally, was the apostle's one object. All that was dear to him, right on to the glory, was committed to Him.

What truths—what comfort for the soul that is passing through the dark valley! Death annulled—the eternal life of the soul possessed—the incorruptibility of the body secured. Such is the sure portion of all who have fallen asleep in Jesus—of all who can say with the apostle, "I know whom I have trusted," of all who are simply looking by faith to Jesus and resting on Him alone for salvation.

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“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.”

“What lies beyond the valley?... What saith the Scriptures? Listen again, 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.' Thank God, for the Christian, it is not walking into the valley, which would suggest that the valley is the end; but through the valley, which eloquently witnesses that its deep shadows are not the terminus of our pilgrimage. There is something beyond." (G.M.L.)

“Beyond the smiling and the weeping,Beyond the waking and the sleeping,Beyond the sowing and the reaping,I shall be soon.”

(H.B.)

Meditations On The Twenty-Third Psalm, Psalm 23:3 Continued: Chapter 6

VERSE 3 (CONTINUED)

Before passing on to the fourth verse of our Psalm, which gives a still deeper shade of wilderness trials and sorrows, we would turn for a moment to another use and application of "a tree," which may be for our edification.

In 2 Kings 6:1-7 we have an account of "the sons of the prophets" going to the banks of Jordan to cut down trees to make beams for the purpose of enlarging their dwelling place. "And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye." The young prophets, very wisely, secure the presence of Elisha with them. He consents to go, and works a miracle there, which saves them from the loss of the head of the borrowed ax. "And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants. And he answered, I will go. So he went with them. And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood. But as one was felling a beam, the ax head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed. And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he showed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim. Therefore said he, Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it."

Some have thought that there is a deep typical meaning in this apparently unimportant incident; others have been afraid to press it as such. But surely, at any rate, it is a striking illustration of resurrection-life and power. As to the typical meaning of Jordan, all are agreed. It is the type of death. And as to "the ax head," it lay as lost and dead in its depths. And what is deeply interesting, and instructive too, in connection with this miracle, is that Elisha was, typically, the resurrection-life prophet. He passed through the river of death in company with Elijah and started on his ministry of grace and resurrection-power from the point of the ascended prophet. (2 Kings 2.) Elijah's ministry, on the contrary, was judicial in its character. He started, we may say, from Sinai, which stamped its character on his miracles. He shut the heavens over a rebellious people, "and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months." James 5:17. And he called down fire from heaven on the captains of the idolatrous king of Israel. At Horeb he became linked up with the broken law, and the responsibility of the people, so that his ministry called for judgment.

But Elisha starts from resurrection-ground and with his eye, as it were, on the ascended man. This is the place of God's measureless grace—the place of the risen Christ Himself and the saved myriads that joyfully cluster around Him. Scarcely had the two prophets crossed the Jordan when Elijah proposed blessing to Elisha, according to the desires of his heart. Not now, observe, according to law or earthly promise, but according to his heart's desire. "And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." 2 Kings 2:9. They had left the land of law and earthly promise behind them; and death, the judgment of God against sin, was past, so that He was free to bless. This is grace, and most significant as to the character of Elisha's mission, and of God's way in grace, through the death and resurrection of Christ down to the present time.

Here pause for a moment and meditate on this instructive scene. God begins His work where sin, Satan and all evil cease from theirs. He quickens the dead. No evil can ever cross the grave of Christ. The path of life, and holy, happy liberty, is beyond the domain of death. Elisha, observe, now returns to Israel; but all is changed. He acts in grace, according to the new condition of things. Sweet foreshadowing of the risen Jesus, who died for us and for God's glory so that His grace flows forth freely to the children of men now and will do so abundantly to Israel in the latter day. Elisha tarries at Jericho, the place of the curse; but he brings in the power of God in blessing and removes the curse and heals the spring of waters so that there would be no more death or barren land. "And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth: but the water is naught, and the ground barren. And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land. So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake." 2 Kings 2:19-22.

Salt is a well-known symbol in Scripture. Here it represents the healing power of grace, as flowing through the death and resurrection of Christ. The whole scene is richly and permanently blessed. Evil is overcome; the curse is removed from the ground—the world—and especially from His people Israel; and the spring of waters—the fountain of blessing—secured forever. The "new cruse" may shadow forth the renewed condition of all things under Christ in the latter day. The prophet next proceeds to Bethel, which, we know, speaks of God's unchangeable faithfulness to Jacob and to his seed forever. Now he links the people with the sovereign counsels of God's love and grace towards them. From thence the prophet goes to Carmel, which tells us of the fruitful land, thus connecting the people with the faithfulness of Jehovah and the abundance of the land. What grace! The curse removed—evil put away—the scene purified—the spring of waters healed—the God of Bethel known and enjoyed; and the blessings of Carmel covering the land like a fruitful field. Nevertheless—oh, most solemn and weighty warning for the present moment, as well as for all time—if the testimony of the grace of God be despised and His messengers mocked, judgment must take its course. (vv. 23-24.)

Thus, in my meditations, have my thoughts traced, and retraced, the mystic path of these two great servants of God in this wonderful second chapter, though professedly meditating on the miracle in the sixth. But the ground we have gone over sheds wondrous light on the miracle. It now looks more like a passage in Ephesians or in 1 Peter. "And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." Eph. 2:1. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." 1 Peter 1:3.

There is no power to save the lost or to quicken the dead soul but the cross of Christ. When the tree is cast into the waters, the iron swims. The moment the cross is seen by faith and applied by the Holy Spirit, the soul is quickened together with Christ, raised up together and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. All this takes place in virtue of our union with Christ, when we believe in His name and trust in His cross. But, alas, till then, the soul, however light, gay and active or otherwise, is morally and spiritually in the place of death. Oh, that poor, thoughtless, Christ-less souls would think of that now! What a condition to be in! The place of death—the cold depths of the river of death! What a lowering, what a sinking, of an immortal soul—a soul that grace can render capable of enjoying God and His Son and the full glories of heavenly blessedness forever.

Where, O where, let me ask, is my reader at this moment? In the depths or on the heights? It must be either the one or the other. There is no middle place. To die in the former state is to be there forever, in the depths of anguish and despair. There can be no change after death. And wilt thou, O thoughtless one, sell thy eternal happiness for a moment's present gratification? Why be so unreasonable, so cruel to thine own soul? Was it wise for Esau to sell the whole land of Canaan for a mess of pottage, because he could enjoy the latter at the moment? Wouldst thou call this manly, noble or high-spirited? And is it wise for thee to sell the heavenly Canaan for that which can be enjoyed only for a moment in this world? Do think of all this, my dear fellow sinner. Thy present life is most uncertain; and what an agony to those left behind were there no hope in thy death! And what an eternity thine—! What could sweeten such a bitter cup as this, or change its wormwood and its

gall? Oh, then, from every consideration, look to Jesus now—just now—before laying down this book. Let thine eyes and thine heart be lifted up to Him. "Look unto Me," He says, "and be ye saved." Isa. 45:22. The great work of redemption was finished on the cross; there is nothing for thee to wait for. "It is finished!" John 19:30. Only look to Him believing this, and thou art surely and forever saved.

“When the harvest is past, and the summer is gone,And sermons and prayers shall be o'er:When the beams cease to break of the sweet Lord's Daymorn,And Jesus invites thee no more;“When the rich gales of mercy no longer shall blow,The gospel no message declare;Sinner, how canst thou bear the deep wailings of woe?How suffer the night of despair?“When the holy have gone to the region of peace,To dwell in the mansions above;When their harmony wakes, in the fullness of bliss,Their song to the Savior they love;“Say, O sinner, that livest at rest and secure,Who fearest no evil to come,Can thy spirit the wailings of sorrow endure,Or bear the impenitent's doom?”

But some, I know, are ready to say, by way of excusing themselves, that if they are as dead as the iron at the bottom of the river they must be entirely passive in the work of conversion. There is some truth in this remark, but it is far from being the whole truth. The soul is dead as regards God and spiritual things, but it is all alive as regards this world. There is no heart or energy for Christ and His salvation, but there is plenty of both for present things; and Scripture presses, in innumerable places, the responsibility of the sinner. It assures him that the work by which alone he can be saved is finished and that he has only to believe it on the sure testimony of God Himself; and, thus believing it, he is saved and finds present and eternal rest in Jesus. "Wilt thou go with this man?" (Gen. 24:58) is a plain question. And where is the sinner—active and intelligent as to present things—who cannot answer, "Yes," or "No"?

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Acts 16:31. "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." John 3:19. "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which He hath testified of His Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness [or, testimony] in himself: he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son." 1 John 5:9-10. "WHOSOEVER shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Rom. 10:13.

Thus we find in types and shadows, truths and substance, that there is no virtue for the soul apart from Christ—from Christ crucified. The knowledge of Jesus, His love, His cross, quickens the dead sinner and gives him a place with the risen Jesus. It strengthens the weak saint—upholds the fainting spirit— comforts those that are in trouble and bowed down. It destroys the power of the waters of Jordan and sweetens the waters of Marah.

Meditations On The Twenty-Third Psalm, Psalm 23:3 Continued: Chapter 5

VERSE 3 (CONTINUED)

But we will return to our lesson. What kind of a tree, we may ask, can this be that changes the bitter waters into sweet? In all the forests of the universe there is but one tree to be found that can do this. But this tree is a divine specific, it never fails. It is enough to sweeten the bitterest cup that ever was pressed to human lips and to turn all the bitterness of wilderness experience into the most delectable cup of heavenly blessedness. It was on that tree that Jesus died—that divine love triumphed over human hatred—that God was fully glorified—that sin was utterly abolished—that Satan was completely overthrown—that death was made stingless—that the grave was made powerless—that eternal peace was made for the feeblest of the flock—that the gloomy gates of hell were forever shut—and the glorious gates of heaven thrown wide open for all who believe in Him who died upon this tree. This tree, rooted in Calvary, sends its boughs of rich blessing into all the earth and fills the highest heavens with its ripened fruits. It stands as the moral center of the universe and is the brightest display of God's moral glories that can ever be seen or known. Oh, who would not accept the wilderness cup, to be taught thereby the many glories of the Savior's cross?

“We are by Christ redeemed:The cost—His precious blood;Be nothing by our souls esteemedLike this great good.“To Him our weakness clingsThrough tribulation sore,And seeks the covert of His wingsTill all be o'er.”

It is always true—true at all times and true of all saints—that when the Good Shepherd "putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him: for they know His voice." John 10:4. This is a truth—a divine principle—of immense value; it has a deep and wide practical bearing. It assures our hearts that, whatever betide, He is at hand—always near; within sight, as we may say, and within the sound of His voice. Yes, and the believer finds in the scene through which the Lord has passed before him such a fragrance of His presence as not only strengthens but enriches the soul therein. When—at what time soever—He putteth forth His own sheep, HE goeth before them. See that thou understandest well this precious truth, O my soul; it is the great truth for the sheep of Christ. It affects everything as to thy path through the world. It is thy safeguard in danger—thy victory in conflict—thy light in darkness—thy strength in weakness—thy comfort in sorrow—thy fellowship in solitude—thy brightest hope amidst the deepest gloom. He who is with thee and before thee has tasted the bitterest sorrows of the wilderness and has passed through the darkest night into the brightest day: and so shalt thou, only follow Him.

This truth, so blessed to the pilgrim, assures us of the Shepherd's care in every step, rough or smooth, of our wilderness journey. He is ever present—He never leaves nor forsakes. And through His perfect knowledge of the way, He confounds the enemy, turning all his hostility to the account of our blessing and His own glory. Blessed fruit, through His grace, of all that befalls poor human nature, when traveling through the deep sand of the desert.

“The Shepherd's bosom bears each lambO'er rock, and waste, and wild;The object of that love I am—And carried like a child.”

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“If any man serve Me," says the Lord, "let him follow Me." John 12:26. He does not say, observe, "let him do this for Me, or do that," but, "let him follow Me." Quietly to wait on the Lord that we may know His will and faithfully to follow Him, hearkening to the voice of His Word, is the most pleasing service we can render to the Lord. Some He may lead into more public, others into more private, paths of service; but closely to follow the directions of His Word, while looking, by faith, to Himself, is our most acceptable service. And for all such as follow Him He has left His richest promise: "And where I am, there shall also My servant be: if any man serve Me, him will My Father honor." John 12:26.

These weighty and solemn truths were uttered when the dark shadows of Gethsemane and Calvary were crossing His path. It is comparatively easy to be active for the Lord and, as it were, to be doing some great thing for Him in a bright and sunny day; but, oh, how difficult to follow Him through the solitudes of His rejection in a homeless world! Who of us can endure, it may be, to be separated from our dearest friends on earth and to be thought weak and unstable? Who can endure to be in the outside place for the reproach of Christ? These waters are often very bitter. But His love desires that we should know something experimentally of His own path through this world and the fellowship of His sufferings. It was not enough for the Lord's great love to Abel that he should bear testimony, by his slain lamb, to the truth that death had come by sin; but he was honored to bear witness in a more solemn way in his own death. Not only was the blood of his lamb shed, but his own blood as God's witness on the earth. How much more Abel had to do with death in this world than Cain! How significant and solemnly instructive to all who follow with Abel! But after all, it was the Lord's love to Abel and the Lord's honor conferred on him.

We have the same great principle, in type, at the waters of Marah. The people knew the value of the blood of the lamb in Egypt, as their safeguard from judgment and their complete redemption in virtue of that blood. And now the Lord would have them further to know, in their own experience, the unfailing power of the blood for all the vicissitudes of the wilderness. In this way they had to do with death in all their journeys. They were marching through the wilderness under the shelter of the blood—the expressive symbol of death. It was on this ground alone that Jehovah could say to Balaam, "I have not seen iniquity in Jacob, nor perverseness in Israel." (Num. 23:21.) He does not say, "There is none there," but, "I have not seen it." True, it was all in type, but we can easily see what was always uppermost in the Lord's mind: "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." Ex. 12:13. As if the Lord had said, "When I see the blood of the lamb, I see that which glorified Me—blotted out sin—destroyed the power of the enemy, and obtained eternal redemption for My beloved people." It left Jehovah free, in all circumstances, to act in pure grace towards the people. They had only to LOOK UP, however naughty they had been, or however sorely they were distressed, and grace flowed-the need was met—the bitter cup was sweetened and they were freely forgiven.

The blood of the lamb was their divine passport from Egypt to Canaan. Nothing could stand before it; everything yields to its power. If the hosts of Egypt attempt to stop the journeys of the blood-sprinkled people, they are cast into the depths of the sea; and if all the nations of the earth had sided with them, they must have shared the same fate. "I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee." Isa. 43:3. The deep waters of the Red Sea must make a way for the ransomed of the Lord to pass over; not an hoof was left behind. The manna, the cloud and the living stream from the flinty rocks are supplied, all enemies are subdued and every need is met in virtue of the same precious blood. And though the river of death, at the end of their journeys, overflowed all its banks and Jericho walled to heaven as the threatening rage of the enemy and the tokens of his power, they present no barrier to the infinite power of the blood. But where is its power not felt and owned, willingly or unwillingly? It rent the veil of heaven and unlocked the portals of the grave. (Matt. 27:50-53.) What is higher than heaven? What is deeper than hell? (Job 11:8.)

But we are all prone to forget, like Israel of old, what the Lord has done for us—what bitter cup He drank for us—and that we carry through the wilderness with us the same "token" of His unchanging love. Hence, we often need to get a taste of the bitter in order to remind us of that which alone can sweeten; and that all the difficulties, trials and temptations of this life are to be borne in fellowship with Him. This His love desires. He has gone through them all for us, and that with infinite patience, meekness and wisdom, as an example to us. And, oh, wondrous grace, He allows to us in our afflictions a ministry of love, sympathy and kindness which He allowed not to Himself. He was forsaken of God in His sore distress— He was surrounded by the violence and rage of His shameless enemies, who gaped upon Him with their mouths like ravening and roaring lions. (Psa. 22:1-21.) All refuge failed Him, comforters there were none. (Psa. 142:4; 69:20.)

This was for us; there He drank the bitter cup of God's wrath against sin. And He will have us to know Him there in love for us. And we have to learn by experience, however painful the lesson, that nothing but the bitter cup of Calvary can sweeten the bitter cup of Marah. In other words, the sympathies of His heart who died there are alone sufficient to soothe the sorrows of ours. But glory be to God, who gave His Son, we find all in Jesus. His cross is ours—His heart is ours. The full value of the cross is ours; the tender, boundless sympathies of His heart are ours—ours now—ours forever. Oh, wonderful, precious, blessed truth! What more do we need? The cross and heart of Jesus—ours. Eternal springs of all blessing! The blest though bitter waters of Marah lead to a deeper knowledge of Calvary; and the deep and painful need of a broken heart to deeper fellowship with His. He could say, and in truth, as none else ever could, "Reproach hath broken My heart." Yes, and more, in place of the tender sympathies of fellow pilgrims, which His people so abundantly enjoy, He had to add, "And I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none." Psa. 69:20. Oh, what a refuge we have in the once broken and desolate heart of Jesus!

“Jesus, my All in all Thou art,My rest in toil, my ease in pain;The medicine of my broken heart;'Mid storms, my peace; in loss, my gain;My smile beneath the tyrant's frown;In shame, my glory and my crown.“In want my plentiful supply;In weakness, my almighty power;In bonds, my perfect liberty;My refuge in temptation's hour;My comfort 'midst all grief and thrall,My life in death, my All in all.”

When the Lord has thus brought us down to a true sense of our own weakness, and to more real dependence on His unfailing strength and constant care, the purposes of His tender love are answered. The deeper the trial, the stronger the expression of His love. And now we can say, in the rich experience of our souls, "He restoreth my soul." Not the green pastures and the still waters, pleasant and excellent as these are—no; but the Lord Himself. The path becomes more and more individualized; there must be greater nearness to the Lord as our Shepherd, and more direct fellowship with Himself. "HE restoreth my soul: HE leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.”

Meditations On The Twenty-Third Psalm, Psalm 23:3: Chapter 4

VERSE 3

"He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." Though under the faithful care and watchful eye of the Good Shepherd, we have to pass through a world in which many powerful foes surround us and closely beset our path. "The god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4), we are sure, hates us, because he knows full well that when he is chained in the bottomless pit we shall be in the full liberty of the glory with Christ. There is no book in all the Bible he tries to keep people from reading, or dislikes so much, as the book of Revelation. And why? Because therein his own complete overthrow and eternal misery are plainly foretold. He wants to conceal this from the eyes of men; and, alas, how wonderfully he has succeeded as to this precious and profitable book! Many think it cannot be understood and

that it is unprofitable to read it; whereas the Lord has connected a special blessing with the reading and the understanding of this book. "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand." Rev. 1:3. The Lord's judicial dealings, not only with Satan, the source of all evil, but with the Jew, the Gentile and the Church of God, are herein unfolded. He shows us how He will square accounts with each. There can be no millennium until these judgments are past. "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with Thee?" Psa. 94:20. It is all important to see the final results of the rise and progress of these three great divisions of mankind. Other books show us the failure; Revelation, the fall and the setting aside of these bodies, or classes, as the responsible witnesses of God in the earth. But more than that, Revelation shows us the Lord Jesus Christ taking the place of the faithful and true witness on the failure of all others, and re-establishing all things on a new footing, that God may be fully glorified in the scene wherein He has been dishonored. "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God." Rev. 3:14. "Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first-begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth." Rev. 1:5.

But we cannot yet say, in the language of the twenty-fourth Psalm, which is strictly millennial, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." v.1. No; we are still on the ground of the twenty-third Psalm, as the sheep of Christ, in much weakness; and Satan still is "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4), "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." Eph. 2:2. Hence the many trials and sorrows by the way, and hence the need of the Lord's refreshing, restoring grace. Satan does all in his power to injure and terrify the sheep of Christ as they pass through his territory. He lays many snares for their feet, and he gilds many a scene that he may attract the eye and take it off the Good Shepherd who goes before them. Well the enemy knows that if they follow closely after Him, all his own snares and attractions are unsuccessful. He who goes before His flock meets the danger or the difficulty and removes it before they come up to it, blessed be His name. All difficulties vanish from His presence, and all enemies are powerless before Him. The great lesson to be learned in the wilderness is entire dependence on the Lord.

When Israel had safely passed through the deep and stood in triumph, as the Lord's redeemed, on the margin of the desert, their redemption was complete but Canaan was not reached. The wilderness, with all its temptations and difficulties, lay between. The Lord had many lessons to teach His people there. But before they were called to this character of experience, God had made Himself known to them in His grace and power as the great "I AM." Ex. 3:14. In their glorious deliverance out of the land of Egypt, He had acted for them, in pure grace, through the blood of the Lamb. Thus far it was grace, without rebuke; so that they ought to have known Him worthy of all their trust.

As characteristic of the wilderness, the first thing that meets them is a difficulty. "In which direction does our way to Canaan lie?" they might say to each other. There were no roads to be seen; nothing but a trackless desert lay before them. What was now to be done? Just what they were always to do and what the Lord's redeemed should ever do—LOOK UP. There they would see Jehovah Himself, the true Shepherd of Israel, in His cloudy chariot, moving on before them. They were only safe in following Him; having no will, no wish, no way of their own, only to follow Him in the full assurance that He would lead them by the best way to the promised land. Oh, how happy for Israel had this been the case then! And how happy for us now were we always content thus closely to follow the Lord, "the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls"! 1 Peter 2:25.

But another and deeper trial for Israel soon came. The knowledge of accomplished redemption, the full assurance of forgiveness and the enjoyment of God's favor never exempt us from trials and disappointments in this world. We have many profitable though painful lessons to learn in the wilderness. But if we never knew want, we could never know relief; and the value of a divine restorative is best known to a fainting soul. "So Moses brought Israel from the Red sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter." Ex. 15:22-23. What a disappointment! At the end of a three days' journey in the wilderness to find no water, and when they did find it, it was bitter. What a trial! But Jehovah, the great "I AM," was there; and faith could say, even in these circumstances, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul." If I forget and fail, "He restoreth my soul." Yes, and more, "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." Gracious Lord! He maintains my soul, in spite of my weakness, in the paths of true holiness. Such is the language of a calm and patient faith. But, on the other hand, the natural heart would reason within itself and say, Can this be love? Does the Lord not care for His people, after redeeming them out of the hand of the enemy? Most assuredly He does: only have patience. He is about to teach them a lesson, which is of present, future and eternal value—a lesson which, when learned, is worth all the disappointments of the desert to know. This is the object of His perfect love in the present trial.

“And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?" Ex. 15:24. And what. we may ask, could the man Moses do in such a state of things? Only, as before said, LOOK UP. "And he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet." Ex. 15:25. Thus the Lord sweetens the bitter waters. It was not their murmurings that sweetened them, nor any means of their own devising, but the Lord's own remedy and applied according to His own directions. He only can sweeten the bitter cup, but He always can and He always does— blessed be His name. Better have a bitter cup and the Lord to sweeten it, than have no bitter cup at all; better far be cast, bound hand and foot, into the fiery furnace and have the honor and blessing of walking there, in perfect liberty, with "the Son of God" (Dan. 3:25), than be saved from going into the furnace. Oh, what a field, my soul, for meditation, is the rich field of experience! Like the hind let loose, roam through it and feed in it. Shepherds tell us that "variety of pasture is good for the flocks"! And sure thou art that to be occupied with only a part of God's Word, and not with the whole, is to see only one side of the truth and not the truth of God generally. It is thus that many become narrow and confused in their views, and faulty in their faith and practice. In our beautiful and highly instructive Psalm we have the wide, wide field of wilderness life spread out before us.

Meditations On The Twenty-Third Psalm, Psalm 23:2: Chapter 3

VERSE 2

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters." The effect of the knowledge of Jesus as the Good and Great Shepherd is rest of soul in Himself and the quiet enjoyment of His love and grace. To know Himself is life—eternal life. To know His work is peace—perfect peace. "He maketh me to lie down." To sit down is to rest, but to lie down gives the idea of full, perfect, refreshing

rest—complete repose. This is what the Shepherd provides—what He leads to; not, alas, what we always accept. We often wander in fields wherein is no pasture, and beside the troubled, not the quiet, waters. But this comes from occupation with self and unbelief, not from the Shepherd's hand and care. He would have the feeblest of His flock to be free from all anxiety as to the future. The Shepherd's thoughtful love is enough. He has charged Himself with the entire care of all who follow Him. We have only to watch the direction of the Shepherd's eye and confide in His unfailing care. "I will guide thee with Mine eye" (Psa. 32:8) and "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5) are His own words. His sheep cannot want. They may often be greatly tried in their journeys through the wilderness, and often be ready to faint and fail because of the way; but we must remember that the Lord's grace never fails and that we must ever count on Him and what we have in Him. He is with us always, even unto the end. We may quietly rest in Him. He maketh us to lie down in “green pastures"—in the midst of plenty—we rest in the abundance of His grace; and He ever leads beside the still waters.

“The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want,He makes me down to lieIn pastures green; He leadeth meThe quiet waters by.”

Peace, plenty and security characterize the portion of the Lord's beloved flock. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Rev. 7:16-17. This beautiful passage, which so touchingly represents the Lord's delight in the sealed remnant of the Gentiles, will be literally true during the millennium of all who are faithful to "the King of glory." Psa. 24:10. (Compare Isa. 49 with Rev. 7.) But it is also true now, in a spiritual sense, of every sheep and lamb in the highly favored flock of Christ. But knowest thou this blessed truth, O my soul, for thyself—is it thine own experience? It can only be known by the Word of God, and enjoyed in the heart by faith. "For we walk by faith, not by sight." 2 Cor. 5:7. Our rest and plenty are not natural and worldly, but spiritual and heavenly.

When the heart is simple all is plain and easy. We have heard the feeblest sing in the joyous sense of deliverance and with amazing heart, even before the pangs of the new birth were well over:

“He took me from a fearful pit,And from the miry clay,And on a rock He set my feet,Establishing my way.“He put a new song in my mouth,Our God to magnify;Many shall see it, and shall fear,And on the Lord rely.”

Further on we learn the measure of our blessing is the Lord's own measure. "Because as He is, so are we in this world." 1 John 4:17. "Whosoever drinketh of this water," pointing to Jacob's well, "shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst." John 4:13-14. The deepest well of human bliss may soon run dry, but the "living fountains of waters" have their spring in the heart of God, which can never fail. And again, "Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst." John 6:35. And further still, as the foreign shoot that is grafted into the olive tree drinks of its richness and fatness or as the members of the body have nourishment ministered from the head, so are we vitally united to Christ and we feed on Him, both as to our heavenly and our time condition.

But in the passage before us it is rather the Lamb feeding us than we feeding on Him. "For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters." Rev. 7:17. Both are blessedly true; but the former agrees more fully with the strains of the twenty-third Psalm. He who laid down His life for the sheep and washed them from their sins in His own blood now feeds them and leads them with His own hand. What grace! What gentleness! To be protected and nourished, in our journey through the wilderness, by the very hand that was pierced for our sins, should fill our hearts with perfect confidence in our Shepherd, notwithstanding the manifold trials and difficulties of the way.

The great thing, undoubtedly, is to know Himself, and to know what we are to Him and what He is to us. What has He done in the past, what is He doing in the present and what will He do in the future to manifest His love? May not His great work be briefly summed up in this? When we had lost all—the soul, holiness, happiness and God—He not only brings the lost one back to God, but, oh, wondrous truth—truth fraught with complete blessedness—He recovers God for the soul! And this is all, for "God is love." 1 John 4:8. He is the living God, the only source of the soul's life, holiness and happiness. Oh, what a truth! Who can estimate its blessedness? Dwell upon it, O my soul; only think—the soul recovered for God, and God recovered for the soul! What a recovery! Not, observe, that God needed to be reconciled to us; no, God never was man's enemy; on the contrary, He so loved us when we were in our sins that He gave His Son to die for us. And it is plainly stated that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." 2 Cor. 5:19. Nothing was needed to turn God's heart to us, blessed be His name! But the cross was needed that by it God might bring us to Himself. We, alas, were enemies to God in our minds by wicked works (Col. 1:21); but love triumphed in the cross; for thereby righteous reconciliation was accomplished, and man's enmity to God was slain. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." 1 Peter 3:18.

And now, mark well, my soul, in thy meditations, this inviting aspect of God's love toward us; it is well-fitted to quiet many a fear and comfort thee in any trouble—to fill thee, even now, "with joy unspeakable and full of glory." 1 Peter 1:8. And mark, too, that word of exquisite tenderness which refers to the end of the weary journey through this vale of tears: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Rev. 21:4. With His own hand He wipes away the last tear that shall ever dim the pilgrim's eye. And it has been said, It is better to have tears for Him to wipe away, than no tears at all. May we not call this the privilege of love, which the Father claims for all the children?

Meditations On The Twenty-Third Psalm, Psalm 23:1: Chapter 2

VERSE 1

But now we return to our beautiful Psalm; and it may be we shall find that however early we were taught to repeat, "The Lord is my shepherd," we have yet to learn its meaning and application.

“THE LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want." This is surely the expression of a heart that is filled and occupied with the Lord Himself. It may be the expression of one who only knew the Lord as Jehovah, revealed to Israel; or, of one who knows Him as Jehovah Jesus, who saves His people from their sins; but it is evidently the language of one who is truly godly, whether Jew or Christian, and who makes the Lord his only

trust. The soul, under all circumstances, is here viewed as resting on the unfailing care and quietly enjoying the varied resources of the well-known Shepherd of the sheep. And that, not only for the present time, but for all times and forever.

This is most precious faith! Mark it well, O my soul, and patiently meditate thereon. It is most practical; "the Lord is my shepherd." It rises, observe, above what He gives, what He does, what He promises, blessed as these are, and calmly rests on what He is Himself. As the eye of Abraham rested not on the promises, when he put forth his hand to slay his son, but on Him from whom the promises came; so here, with the eye resting on the Lord, the pilgrim can say, "I shall not want." When such confidence fills the heart, peace and quietness will characterize the life.

But knowest thou, my soul, the secret spring of such a blessed state? How is it that so few rise to this measure? Hast thou? Hast thou this rejoicing and confidence in the Lord, in the midst of wilderness circumstances? "The Lord is my shepherd" sounds like the voice of one rejoicing; "I shall not want" like that of quiet confidence.

When we have learned the deep lessons of the twenty-second Psalm and the resurrection triumph of the twenty-first Psalm, we shall understand the path of the twenty-third Psalm. And further, we shall rejoice in hope of the twenty-fourth Psalm. The four psalms are linked together. It was because of the joy that was set before Him that He endured the cross (Heb. 12:2): so we see the twenty-first Psalm, the resurrection psalm, comes before the twenty-second Psalm, the psalm of the cross. But the twenty-second and the twenty-first must be learned first. To know the grace that shines on the pilgrim's path in the twenty-third, and on the pilgrim resting in glory in the twenty-fourth, we must know the grace that shines in the sufferings of Christ in the twenty-second, and the power of His resurrection in the twenty-first.

The grace and the glory are due to Him who suffered there, and to all who own Him in the day of His rejection. We must travel in faith through the twenty-first and twenty-second to reach the twenty-third; there is no other path to it; and, when there, we find that the next thing is the glory. The Christian is thus, in spirit, between the sufferings and the glory—the cross and the crown. He looks back on the one, and onward to the other. Sin, death, judgment, the grave, the world and Satan are all behind him. Victory over every foe is stamped on our life in resurrection: a life we may know in measure even now down here.

The three grand aspects of the Lord's Shepherd-character, as revealed in the New Testament, teach the same blessed truths. (1) As the "Good Shepherd" who laid down His life for the sheep. (Compare John 10 and Psa. 22.) (2) As the "Great Shepherd" risen from the dead He takes charge of the sheep as they journey through "that great and terrible wilderness." Deut. 1:19. (Compare Heb. 13 and Psa. 23.) (3) As the "Chief Shepherd" who will give a crown of glory to all His under-shepherds at His appearing and kingdom. (Compare 1 Peter 5 and Psa. 24.) Surely if we know the Lord thus, our confidence in Him must be without a question. We shall know His love, care, power, grace and goodness as the Shepherd of the sheep. And having gone through the wilderness Himself, He knows all the dangers and difficulties of the way.

The immediate occasion of the blessed Lord taking this place of care and responsibility is also worthy of special note. In John 8 He is rejected as the light and the truth. In chapter 9 He is rejected in His work, and He formally takes His place in chapter 10 outside the Jewish fold, as the "Good Shepherd." Now, He gathers the "poor of the flock" (Zech. 11:7) around Himself, as the new Center. "They shall hear My voice; and there shall be one flock [flock it should be, not fold], and one shepherd." John 10:16. They are a "little flock" (Luke 12:32) with Himself, outside the Jewish fold. They have been cast out of the synagogue, but they have all blessing in Him. Appearances may be against them, but His Word assures them of a present salvation and happy liberty. "I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." John 10:9. How unlike the narrow limits of Israel, the place of bondage!

Now they have the full assurance of salvation; and, also, they can "go in" to the sanctuary of God's holy presence to worship and "out" in service to a perishing world. But this is not all: grace abounds; His heart overflows with deepest interest and tenderness for those who leave all and follow Him—who follow Him in His rejection; or, as the apostle expresses it, who "go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach" (Heb. 13:13)—sharing His rejection. For all such that wonderful revelation of grace was especially given. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one." John 10:27-30.

These verses will be read with tenfold more interest when we understand the circumstances in which they were first uttered; and still more if we are in similar circumstances ourselves.

But it may be said by some that since David, the writer of the Psalm, lived long before the humiliation and cross of Christ, he could know nothing of these things. True, so far; but he knew what it was to be rejected by man and cast upon God, even after he was the Lord's anointed. David and his companions in "the cave of Adullam" (2 Sam. 23:13) typify Christ and those that gather around Him. But we doubt not that "the Spirit of Christ" (1 Peter 1:11) in David so guided him in writing the Psalm that it applies to both Jew and Christian and may be the truthful expression of the experience of both; only, in a much higher and more spiritual way with us.

“The Jews' religion" (Gal. 1:13-14) had its place and day before the cross; Christianity after it. This makes all the difference. We know not Messiah after the flesh but a risen Christ in glory. We are associated with Him there. Judaism was earthly in its character; it had "divine service" and a "worldly sanctuary." Heb. 9:1. Christianity is heavenly. Christians are seated together in heavenly places in Christ. (Eph. 2:6.) Our place is to be outside the camp with Christ as witnesses (Heb. 13:13), and inside the veil with Him as worshipers. (Heb. 10:19-22.) And now, from this heavenly point of view, it is our happy privilege to meditate on the rich experience of this delightful Psalm in the full light of gospel truth.

“My Shepherd is the Lamb,The living Lord, who died;With all good things I ever amBy Him supplied.“He richly feeds my soulWith blessings from above,He leads me where the river rollsOf endless love.”

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