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"THE LORD

IS

MY SHEPHERD"

5 DN Broadcast Address

by

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(Revision of Trinity Sermon No. 1).

"THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD"

"The Lord is my Shepherd;
I have everything I need.
He lets me rest in fields of green grass:
and leads me to quiet pools of fresh water."

That is how the recently published Today's English Version of the famous 23rd Psalm brings its message to modern man.

This ancient Psalm is better known than any other part of the Scriptures.

At Weddings it expresses the joyful confidence of the newly-married.

At times of crisis it brings words of deep assurance.

At funerals it conveys a message of hope for the bereaved.

Is there a time when its words are not relevant, or a place where it is not applicable, or a person who may not be inspired?

I first preached on the 23rd Psalm twelve years ago in this Church. It was printed as the first Sermon in our Trinity Sermon series, of which there are now 79 titles. 75,000 copies of these Sermons have been distributed to English-speaking pastors and teachers in 23 overseas countries, as well as to places in all States of the Commonwealth. The Sermon entitled "The Shepherd Psalm", of which 3,500 have been issued, has been used for hospital and prison visiting in this City, translated into Indonesia and Swahili, as well as transcribed into braille. It has been included as a chapter in a book published in the United States.

Let me again bring you a message from this widely-appealing passage of Scripture. My words in this Sermon may be different from those used previously, but the Shepherd of whom this Psalm speaks, is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Traditionally David has been considered the author of the 23rd Psalm. During his turbulent reign as King of Israel, his son, Absalom, was guilty of treason. Ahithophel, his counsellor, betrayed him. Joab, his army chief, deserted him. Adonijah, his favourite son, tried to steal the throne. His wife, Michal, chided him for his humility. Shimee, his neighbour, cursed him and threw stones at him. His own brother's anger was kindled against him. But David, in spite of all, and perhaps because of

all this, could say, "The Lord is my Shepherd. He never fails." The Prayer Book version puts it, "The Lord is my Shepherd; therefore can I lack nothing." Today's English version says simply, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I have everything I need."

I have everything I need for rest;

"He lets me rest in fields of green grass".

I have everything I need for refreshment;

He "leads me to quiet pools of fresh water."

I have everything I need for restoration;

"He gives me new strength".

I have everything I need for guidance;

"He guides me in the right way as He has promised."

I have everything I need for companionship;

"Even if that way goes through deepest darkness, I will not be afraid, Lord, because you are with me."

I have everything I need for comfort;

"Your shepherd's rod and staff keep me safe."

I have everything I need for sustenance;

"You prepare a banquet for me, where all my enemies can see me."

I have everything I need for joy;

"You welcome me by pouring ointment on my head and filling my cup to the brim."

I have everything I need for this life;

"Certainly your goodness and love will be with me as long as I live."

I have everything I need for eternity;

"And your house will be my home for ever."

The Eastern shepherd occupied a unique position in relation to his flock, so different from that of the drover of sheep in our country. In the early morning the Eastern shepherd would lead his flock from their fold to the pasture lands. All day he must closely watch lest harm should come to them from prowling beasts of prey, or robber hordes. At night he must conduct them back to the security of the fold. Should one of the lambs be unable to keep pace with the rest of the flock, he must carry it in his bosom. Should one of his flock go astray, he must search for it until he finds it. The shepherd and his flock are friends. The sheep know their shepherd and answer to their names.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, that Great Shepherd of the Sheep, has a shepherd's Heart beating with pure and generous love. He has

a shepherd's eye that takes in the whole flock, missing not even the least. He has a shepherd's faithfulness that never forsakes in times of trial and danger. He has a shepherd's strength for He is well able to deliver the one who has fallen.

The prophet Isaiah said, "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way:" but the Psalmist reminds us that the Lord is my Shepherd. Jesus is not content to be merely a shepherd, or even the shepherd. He wants you to say, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

It is not sufficient for us in everyday language to speak about the son, or the daughter, or the wife, or the husband - how much deeper is the relationship when it is expressed, my son, my daughter, my wife, or my husband. The Lord is my Shepherd expresses ownership and love. I wonder is that how we feel towards the Lord Jesus Christ?

"HE MAKETH ME TO LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES. HE LEADETH ME BESIDE THE STILL WATERS".

It is the scorching hour of an Eastern noon. You will know what I mean if you have lived in Eastern countries. The air is stifling with fever heat; and all the landscape is baking in the awful glare. The stones upon the hills burn the feet that touch them. But the good shepherd makes full provision. He leads the sheep to sheltered pastures where they may drink of the still waters, where they may have rest. We all need rest. Notice that the Psalmist says that the Shepherd makes me to lie down in green pastures. You may be going through times of enforced inactivity through circumstances beyond your control, through sickness or suffering, but you may be sure of this - that the Good Shepherd can provide for you there. He wants to bring you to a place of rest and peace where you may have a consciousness of safety in His hands and the sufficiency of supply from His provision.

"HE RESTORETH MY SOUL"

The Shepherd delights in restoring His sheep. He does not mind how long He spends in searching, or at what cost.

We may not recognise it but restoration is one of our main needs. We get worried and weary, and we think what we need is simply a holiday or a change of occupation. Things begin to play upon our minds, and we find that we are unable to cope with life. Even the small things worry us and everything gets

on our nerves. We become more confused by close self-examination and morbid introspection. We look in upon ourselves. We pity ourselves, and think everybody else is against us. We try to run away from our problems but there is nowhere to go - we go round and round in circles, and feel that we are heading for a nervous breakdown; and then there comes to mind the words of the Psalm as the strong Hand of the Good Shepherd firmly grips us, and we know "He restoreth my soul."

Does our soul need to be restored today? What set us wandering away from God?

Was it rebellion against God? We have been caught up in circumstances beyond our control which have brought doubts and difficulties, and we say: "How could a God of love do that to me?"

Was it disappointment in another person? We have made another person our standard of right and wrong, but we have been let down and we say, "If that's Christianity, then I don't want anything to do with it!"

Was it neglect of a clear command of God? Our conscience has told us certain things which are wrong but we have continued in them. Our conscience has told us other things which are right but we have neglected them.

Is it some unconfessed sin? David, the writer of this Psalm, was a great lover of God, but he was also a great sinner. He fell into one of the most shameful acts of immorality - the dual sins of murder and adultery. It was not until he was ready to confess his sin that the restoration came. You listen to his confession in Psalm 51:

- Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.
- Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
- Restore unto me the joy of salvation.

The Good Shepherd has made provision for your restoration so that you may say right now - "He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." He leadeth me. The shepherd is interested in each one - He leadeth

me. Notice it is led - not dragged - there is no compulsion in it. Our will is the foundation and seat of our personality - it is the secret of our individuality. We are like God in that we also may choose. God will not violate our will. He will not make us do things. He respects our likeness to Him and the freedom which He has given us. We so often want to go our own way - we want to please ourselves. Our Good Shepherd wants to lead us along the paths of righteousness, but are we willing to be led? Paul said, "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

"YEA, THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH, I WILL FEAR NO EVIL: THY ROD AND THY STAFF COMFORT ME."

I believe there is an actual Valley of the Shadow of Death in Palestine. It is south of the Jericho Road leading from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea, and is a narrow passage through a mountain range. Climatic and grazing conditions make it necessary for the sheep to be moved through this Valley for seasonal feeding each year. The Valley is $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles long. Its side walls are over 1500 feet high in places, and it is only 10 or 12 feet wide at the bottom. Travel through the Valley is dangerous because its floor, badly eroded by cloud-bursts, has gullies 7 or 8 feet deep.

About half-way through the Valley, the walk crosses from one side to the other at a place where the path is cut in two by an 8 feet gully. One section of the pass is about 18 inches higher than the other. The sheep must jump across it. The shepherd stands at this break, and coaxes or forces the sheep to make the leap. If a sheep slips and lands in the Valley, the shepherd's rod is brought into play. The old-style crook is encircled around a large sheep's neck or a small sheep's chest, and it is lifted to safety.

Many wild dogs lurk in the shadows of the Valley, waiting for prey. After a band of sheep has entered the passage the leader may come upon such a dog. Unable to retreat, the leader baa's a warning. The shepherd, skilled in throwing his staff, hurls it at the dog. So the sheep have learned to fear no evil even in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, for their master is there to aid them and to protect them from harm.

We do not all know when we are approaching the Valley of the shadow of death. Those who do not know the Good Shepherd

fear this experience, but the Christian notices that it is a walk through the valley - he does not remain in it. The Christian knows that it is the valley of the shadow - not darkness. There is light on either side. It is the shadow of death - not death itself. Our Lord Jesus Christ met the real thing and robbed it of its sting, its fear and its terror. Shadows cannot stop man's way. The shadow of a wolf cannot bite, it can't even growl. The shadow of a giant cannot slay, and the shadow of the King of Terrors, death, cannot destroy. Where there is shadow, there must be light to cast it. The light of heaven shines upon death as it stands by the wayside and casts its shadow across our path.

The Christian can say with St. Paul: "O Death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? - the sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law, but thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The Good Shepherd wants to say to you and to me if we will listen, "Fear no evil, for my rod and my staff comfort you."

"THOU PREPAREST A TABLE BEFORE ME IN THE PRESENCE OF MINE ENEMIES: THOU ANOINTEST MY HEAD WITH OIL: MY CUP RUNNETH OVER."

God has fully provided for all our needs even in the presence of our enemies. There are many enemies of the Christian life. There have always been the persecutors of those who have claimed faith in God.

In the early Church the Christians were thrown to the lions to provide sport for the Roman Emperors. In the 15th and 16th centuries they were burned at the stake. In our day some have been brainwashed into mental submission to a materialistic creed. In our society the Christian must be prepared to be ridiculed and suffer the misunderstanding of those who do not share a common experience of the love and power of God. If he is concerned about the moral welfare of others, he is told to mind his own business. If he tries to bring the light of the Gospel to bear on any subject, he is called a 'puritanical wowsler.' But throughout all the attacks of the world, the flesh and the devil, the Christian knows that his God can provide assurance, hope, peace, joy and victory.

I believe that in every sheepfold there is a big earthen bowl of olive oil and a large stone jar of water. As the sheep come in for the night they are led to a gate. The shepherd lays his rod across the tope of the gateway, just higher than the

backs of the sheep. As each sheep passes through in single file, he quickly examines it for briars in the ears, snags in the cheek, or weeping of the eyes from dust or scratches. When such conditions are found, he drops his rod across the sheep's back, and it steps out of the line. Then each sheep's wounds are carefully cleaned. The shepherd dips his hand into the olive oil, and anoints the wound.

A large cup is dipped into the jar of water, kept cool by evaporation in the unglazed pottery, and is brought out, never half-full but always over-flowing. The sheep will sink its nose into the water up to the eyes, and drink until fully refreshed. When all the sheep are at rest, the shepherd lays his staff on the ground. He keeps it within reach just in case it is needed to protect the flock during the night. He wraps himself in his heavy woollen robe, and lies down across the gateway.

Jesus said, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." It is wonderful for us to realise that Jesus is our Shepherd, who cares enough to give His life for the sheep. When we put ourselves under His care, then we can re-echo the words of the Psalmist, when he said, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

That can be your assurance today by personal experience. The 23rd Psalm then for you will not be just a lot of lovely words drawn together in beautiful prose, but the expression of a deep experience of the love of God.

Two people were once reciting this familiar Psalm. The first was a well-known actor, whose beautifully modulated voice did full justice to the music and poetry of the words. The second was an elderly clergyman, whose recitation could not compare with the actor's for diction and polish, and yet its effect upon the audience was altogether more powerful. There was silence for a moment when he had finished, and then the actor said, "The difference between us is that while I know the Psalm, you know the Shepherd."

I wonder today is it the words of the Psalm which we know, or is it the Shepherd whose words they are? We cannot really appreciate the words until we know the person. How true we find this in human relationships. The words of a loved one mean more than the words of anyone else. So it must be with the words of

Christ. He said: "I am the good Shepherd, and I know and recognise my own, and my own know and recognise me; even as truly as the Father knows me, I also know the Father, and I am giving my very own life, and laying it down on behalf of the sheep."

Has the message of the 23rd Psalm been fulfilled in your personal experience of the presence and the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, who said, "I am the Good Shepherd".?

- You shall not want for rest:
"Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matt. 11:28).
- You shall not want for refreshment:
"If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink".
(John 7:37).
- You shall not lack restoration:
"The Son of Man has authority to forgive sins". (Matt. 9:6).
- You shall not lack for guidance:
"I am the way, the truth, and the life". (John 14:6).
- You shall not lack for companionship:
"Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age".
(Matt. 28:20).
- You shall not lack for comfort:
"The Father....shall give you another Comforter".
- You shall not lack for sustenance:
"I am the bread of life, he who comes to me shall never hunger." (John 6:35).
- You shall not lack for joy:
"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."
(John 15:11).
- You shall not lack for anything in this life:
"If you ask anything in my name, I will do it". (John 14:14).
- You shall not lack for anything in eternity:
Christ said, "I go to 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).

May you by faith be enabled to say here and now,
The Lord is my Shepherd, I have everything I need.

THE LORD OUR SHEPHERD

PSALM 23

The Lord is my shepherd;
I have everything I need.
He lets me rest in fields of green grass
and leads me to quiet pools of fresh water.
He gives me new strength.

He guides me in the right way,
as he has promised.
Even if that way goes through deepest darkness,
I will not be afraid, Lord,
because you are with me!
Your shepherd's rod and staff keep me safe.

You prepare a banquet for me,
where all my enemies can see me;
you welcome me by pouring ointment on my head
and filling my cup to the brim.
Certainly your goodness and love will be
with me as long as I live;
and your house will be my home forever.

--ooOoo--