

The Sure Shepherd

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The Sure Shepherd

THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM.

"The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want" (v. 1).

"The Lord is my shepherd: therefore can I lack nothing" (Prayer Book).

If sheep could talk, and a wise and foolish sheep were holding converse, I fancy the foolish sheep would speak after this fashion: "I know where the crystal brook babbles from the grotto, and I shall never want for drink. I know where the great oaks spreads its leafy branches, and I shall not want for shade. I know the green pastures of tender grass, and I shall never want for food. I know where the door of the fold stands wide open, and I shall never want for refuge. I know these things and I shall never want."

And then I hear the wise sheep answering thus: "Oh! foolish sheep! Suppose the pastures of green and tender grass should dry up, what would you do for food? Suppose the woodman comes and cuts down the spreading oak tree, where would be your shade? Suppose the sun of summer dries up the babbling brook, how would you quench your thirst? Suppose the gaunt gray wolf leaps into the fold, where would you go for protection?" Oh,

foolish sheep! I have a better reason than yours for not wanting. I have the best shepherd in the world, therefore I shall not want. If the brook dries up He will find another for me. If the tree is cut down by the woodman's axe, He will lead me to the shadow of the great rock in a weary land. If the pastures dry up under the summer's sun, He knows how to find others. And when the wolf comes, He will lay down His life, if need be, for His sheep. Oh, foolish sheep! I shall never want; not because I trust in *things* that may change, or *men* that prove false, but in the Shepherd who changeth not, nor doth He ever fail"

We men and women argue a good deal after this same fashion, do we not? We say, "I am keen of brain and skillful of hand, therefore I shall not want. The balance in my bank account is a comfortable one; therefore I shall not want. I have influential friends at court, therefore I shall not want. I am strong in body, and able to make my living, therefore I shall not want." But the bank may break, and the clear head fail, and the skillful hand lose its cunning, and friends play us false, and when these are gone where will we be? Then it is that we need this supreme truth—:

It is not the favorableness of our circumstances, but the fact of the Lord's shepherdship which is the perpetual pledge that we shall not want. "The Lord is my shepherd therefore can I lack nothing" is the way the Prayer-book puts it. Back of all circumstances is God. Circumstances may and do change, but God, never. Neither abundance

nor want can affect *the fact of shepherdship*. The conditions of the sheep may change but the shepherdship of the sheep is eternal. The visible bread may dwindle, but the invisible Bread Maker remains. Your little store of silver and gold may shrink but—you shall not want. Old age with its limitations and infirmities may be creeping upon you, but—you shall not want. Strength may wane, health fail, earthly supply be cut off, but—you shall not want. When you and I say "The Lord is my Shepherd," that means the Lord *stays* my Shepherd amid all the vicissitudes of human favor and fortune.

Therefore, because the Lord is my shepherd—:

I shall not want—when the bread ceases

You remember our Lord's words to Satan in the wilderness temptation: "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Christ here teaches a great dual lesson. First man does live by bread. To deny this would be foolish and fanatical. Our usual everyday bread supply is the means by which God commonly keeps us. But there is another truth. Man does not live by *bread alone*. His life is from God. And God promises to sustain him even when the bread ceases. Those words of promise from the mouth of God are as sure as bread itself. A man may count upon them as certainly as the loaf he can see, touch and taste. "My God shall supply

all your need"—that is as sure as whole-wheat bread. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee"—that is as good as sterling silver and gold. "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want"—that is as certain as green pastures, flowing streams, and full mangers. God does not fail because bread fails.

God sometimes suffers us to come into breadless places. Why? It is for our own spiritual good. For when bread is a plenty, silver and gold without stint, business prospering by leaps and bounds, we forget God. We grow self-dependent. We are getting all these things by our own right hand, our own keen brain, our business skill and foresight. God ceases to be a factor in our lives. Faith in Him grows dim and faint. Second causes have hidden from our sight and faith the shepherd Lord who is back of them all. So we are "led of the Spirit into the wilderness." We come into a desert place where there is no visible supply of bread, that we may be thrown upon God Himself and realize the shepherdship which has been back of these things in our life, yet unrecognized by us.

Christian businessman, are you trusting in God Himself, or trusting the second causes through which God is caring for you? Business has been prospering; all things have been going well with you. But suppose there comes a depression, a break in the bank, a slump in the stock market, a failure in the health. When that happens remember this. The most heart-searching test of your life will come when,

stripped of the ordinary means of support, you come face to face with the fact that instead of trusting God you have been trusting the circumstances through which God ordinarily works. And the failure of these has thrown you into a very panic of fear at the thought of trusting God alone, and every word which proceedeth out of His mouth. And this also will come to pass:—

Satan will tempt you to make stone bread. And what is that? It is the bread of unfaith. It is the unlawful bread. It is the bread you make when you come into a place of pinch and test, and instead of trusting the Shepherd to care for you, you make bread by unlawful means. It is bread made outside of the will of God. When, in time of stress you use false weights, you overreach your fellow; you stoop to fraud and trickiness; you substitute shiftiness and dishonesty for simple faith in your Shepherd Lord—that is making stone-bread. And you *may* make it if you choose, even as Jesus could have made it if He had chosen. But you cannot afford it. And if you do and pile up enough of it to be what men call rich, yet you will not be "rich toward God."

I shall not want—when the toil fails

That was the great lesson the Master taught His disciples in the fishing scene of John 21. Under His direction their catch of fish had been phenomenal. They come to shore dragging the net full to breaking. Naturally they

would expect to make their breakfast from their morning catch. But instead they found it all prepared. They found "a fire, and fish laid thereon, and bread." The Lord had a fire their hands had never kindled. He had fish they never caught. He had bread they had not baked. He stood as a divine Servant whom they never had hired. And that is true today. God has fish we never caught; God has seeds we never sowed; God has bread we never baked; God has silver and gold we never mined. And though there may not now be any seeming need of trusting Him because He is blessing the toil, yet, if some day the toil should fail, does He thereupon cease to be our shepherd? Does the Lord cease to be a Christian businessman's shepherd because dull times have come in the business? Does the care fail because the toil fails?

I well recall one year when the toil had failed for me. Broken health, with its need of an outdoor life, had led me into the wholesale ice business. One winter the ice had come and was ready to cut. I was standing on the river bank directing the operations of my workmen. Suddenly there came a crash; the crunching, and grinding of breaking ice, and the cry of "The ice is going!" The next instant I saw my men fleeing for their lives to the shore. The great field of ice, a mile in width, had broken from its moorings and was rushing down the river. Instantly I realized that a break-up was occurring before my very eyes. At the same moment I overheard one of my men nearby

saying "There goes Mr. McC.'s bread and butter down the river." And from the human standpoint that was true. For all my year's business was being swept away at my feet. The bread had ceased the toil failed. But almost before the consciousness of what was taking place had laid hold of me there swept into my heart a wondrous sense of peace and quiet as though some strong friend had laid hold to keep me in this sudden moment of test. The messengers who are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister to the heirs of glory" seemed very close to me that hour. All that day I walked by the river bank amid the wreckage of my year's business, yet seemingly the most unconcerned man upon the scene. I seemed to be conscious of another Man within, keeping in peace the man who, naturally, would have been torn with disquiet and anxiety. And so there was! And as the year went on God proved to me so beautifully that He could feed me with fish I had not myself caught. In wondrous ways, in ways known only to Himself and me He proved His shepherdship, and taught the sweet lesson that it was eternal and unchangeable even when the ordinary channels through which He had before kept me had failed.

Again, because the Lord is my shepherd:—

I shall not want—when the purse is empty

Christ sent forth His disciples with both purse and scrip, thus caring for them in the

ordinary way. But He sent them out also with neither purse nor scrip. And when they returned they answered His inquiry as to whether they had lacked anything by the single word "Nothing." Our Lord here again teaches the same great, dual lesson. He cares for His children ordinarily through the purse common to all, with its bit of silver or gold. But He is not limited to this. He remains our shepherd when the purse is empty. And to those who trust Him when brought into that place of nothingness His care is just as perfect.

Some of you here tonight have been reading this little book, "The Three-Fold Secret of the Holy Spirit." May I tell you the story of its circulation "without purse or scrip?" Its teaching came to me in a time of much suffering and groping after the truth, in my earlier Christian life. The light it brought was very precious to my soul. I longed to pass on the blessing of it to as many others as possible. As I prayed about this a text was laid heavily upon my heart by the Spirit of God. It was this—"Freely ye have received: freely give." I presumed the "freely" meant "copiously, abundantly." But when I came to look it up I found, somewhat to my surprise, that it meant "without price." "Without price ye have received: without price give." "Surely," I thought, "the gospel of Jesus Christ is without price received, and without price given. I will put it into God's hands to be given freely to all who desire its message." Shortly before I had met a young Christian business-

man who was engaged in the free distribution of religious leaflets. I told him what was upon my heart. He said, "If you give your book to the Lord free, I will give my services free to circulate it." So we two Christian laymen struck up a partnership, I to write books, he to print and scatter them. But we had no fund for this. And we realized that the Lord was sending us out "without purse or scrip," if we were to go at all. So we began to pray that He would give us some earnest of His will and care in this matter. We had prayed about three weeks, when one day there came a letter from a stranger, in a distant state. It ran like this: "These articles have been helpful to me, and I wish to help publish them in a book form. Enclosed please find twenty-five cents." That was our "dew upon the fleece." It encouraged our faith, and intercession, so we prayed on. After about two months there had come from various sources enough funds to issue the first edition of the little book, about one thousand copies. And then began this story. Will you mark its wondrousness? We began to give out the book free, to whomsoever asked. People would write and request it sent to friends and enclose modest offerings to assist in the work. When the thousand books were gone we found ourselves in possession of a little freewill treasury of ninety dollars. With this we were enabled to publish the second edition which numbered fifteen hundred copies. When these were exhausted sufficient funds had accumulated from offerings to publish a third edition of

three thousand copies. These were no sooner distributed than enough money had come to issue a fourth edition of five thousand copies. While these were circulating sufficient funds flowed in for the fifth edition which was seven thousand. The tenth edition numbered thirteen thousand. The book I hold in my hand tonight is a copy of the twenty-fourth edition. With its issue the little book has reached a circulation of one hundred and forty thousand copies. Whenever an edition was exhausted the Lord had sent enough money to publish the next. Whenever a new book was ready there was always enough extra in our treasury to pay for its launching. We never have had overmuch, nor have we ever had too little. Every time God has met the need. And if He were to say today to us, "When I sent you out without purse or scrip . . . lacked ye anything?" We would answer, joyously, and with grateful hearts, "Nothing, Lord, nothing." This is the story of our work as it has gone quietly on for more than fifteen years, with the Lord proving Himself, times without number, to be our Shepherd even when the purse was empty.

Again, because the Lord is my shepherd:—

I shall not want—when the wolf comes

Perhaps the wolf has not come into your fold—yet. The sunlight floods the fields. The summer airs are kissing your cheek. The pastures are sweet and ample for all needs. The flock is still about you without a break, without

a wound, without a sorrow. But friend, some day it will change. Yea, the wolf cometh! The serpent trail of sin may creep across some life near and dear to you and befoul it beyond all seeming hope of purging. The body may go down in a swift, overwhelming physical collapse, which will test every atom of faith in your being. The glitter of the surgeon's knife may leap into your midnight imaginings and fill your shrinking soul with horror at the certainty of its coming realization. The doors of some unspeakable institution may yawn and swallow up some one you would a million fold rather see in the grave and at rest with God. Yet, the wolf cometh but to kill and destroy in every life, and yours will be no exception. But remember when the wolf cometh He who gave His own life for the sheep will still abide your tender, saving, sheltering Shepherd.

I remember, so vividly, when the wolf came to me. My life was steadily slipping away under the stress of burdens too great for physical bearing. The wolf had come to kill and destroy. I realized that I could almost feel his hot breath in my face; almost hear his hoarse growl of assured victory. Day by day the strength kept waning. There came emaciation so extreme that it seemed as though body and soul could scarcely hold together. My work seemed finished. All through the weary weeks and months I stood face to face with the wolf-foe. "The night cometh when no man can work" seemed now to be my daily text. The wolf had come into my life indeed. But how wonderfully

the Shepherd was there too! There was peace so deep it seemed unfathomable, untouchable. There was rest in God's will, as to the end, though knowing it not, that no power seemed able to come at or break

There was such an undergirding by the omnipotent hand of God as kept my soul in a place of unshakable power and victory, while my staggering body was so weak it could scarcely recover itself from a chance mis-step or stumble as it crept out into the needed sunshine. And then came the turn. There was the first glint of assurance as to the mind of God concerning the outcome; the first atom of returning strength: the wondrous, miraculous coming-back, by leaps and bounds to the old health and vigor. And with it all was the joy of seeing that the Shepherd had been with me down into the lowest depths of my weakness; had taught me new and deeper lessons of dependence upon Himself; had once more beaten back the wolf into snarling baffled defeat; and had proven, oh! so wondrously, that the Lord is our Shepherd—*when the wolf cometh!*

Trust Him when the wolf cometh, dear friend. He knows all about the wolf. He Himself was rent by his bloody fangs. He laid down His life for the sheep under the wolf's fierce onslaught. But He came back in resurrection glory and triumph from the gates of seeming defeat. And He will bring you through too, *if you but trust Him.*

It is the old story. You men and women

know it with the head. But I am telling it to you tonight that it may go down into your lives as an everlasting fact. Because God is your Shepherd you shall never want. Whisper it to yourself when the shadow falls: whisper it when business failure is impending: whisper it when awful temptation is stealing into your soul: whisper it to yourself as God's great eternal truth. And as the waves of the sea dash themselves to nothingness upon the granite cliffs that rear themselves against them, so shall all temptations of the adversary dash themselves to pieces against your quiet faith in the Shepherd; and as the enemy comes in like a flood, the spirit of God will uplift this blessed standard for you:

"The Lord is my Shepherd; (therefore) I shall not want."

This message "The Sure Shepherd" was written by Mr. McConkey about 1912.

The circulation of "The Three-Fold Secret of the Holy Spirit" mentioned at the bottom of page 11 has now reached four hundred and eighty thousand (480,000) copies.

(April 1954).

Published and available from:

SILVER PUBLISHING SOCIETY
2700 Stuart Avenue
Richmond, VA 23220

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Printed in U.S.A.
The Continental Press, Philadelphia