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The Lord Is My Shepherd

Becky Combee

I love studying and teaching Psalm 23. The blessings of redemption are unveiled in this magnificent psalm, the work of a shepherd. It was not written by a lawyer, a doctor, or a great chef. It is the profound insight of a young shepherd, the future king of Israel.

Each word of this psalm is significant because it draws a line to the multitude of blessings that belong to every Christian. When we declare Jesus as our Savior and risen Lord, we become God's children and heirs. We are heirs who surrender our lives in service to our great King.

Our life of love and service is easily explained by the songwriter Fanny Crosby. She pens, "I am thine, O Lord, I have heard thy voice, and it told Thy love to me; but I long to rise in the arms of faith, and be closer drawn to Thee." Fanny Crosby died in 1915 and was the author of over 8,500 songs. I love this hymn when she writes, "[Let] my will be lost in thine."

When I am lost in God's will, I experience His ABUNDANT PROVISION. Jesus said if we seek first the kingdom and His righteousness, all things will be added to us. The apostle Paul said God would supply all our need. He also wrote that he was content when hungry or full because Christ strengthened him.¹ The psalmist simply says, "I shall not want."

In God's will is PERFECT PEACE. When I read of the work of shepherds, I learned that sheep will not lie down when afraid or disturbed, when restless or apprehensive. The psalmist said the shepherd invited them to lie down! This means

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Suzanne D. Williams

There is but one voice I hear. The Shepherd. And whenever I hear it my heart leaps. Strong yet gentle, He bids me comfort, to settle at His feet and abide. There is but one heartbeat in my senses, that of the Father. The gentle rhythm lulls me. Lifts me. For I know He is steady, faithful, and sure. His love for me is matchless and uncontainable. There is but one strength that rises within me, one wisdom which guides me, that of the Spirit. There, by the stream that is His, I put down roots, and stretch toward the sky.

There is but one God, living and active. One God in three persons, whose care of me is beyond comprehension. Despite my flaws and foibles, my piles of mistakes, though I am weak at times, though I speak ill, they run after me, in faithful pursuit, their goodness and mercy desperate for my salvation, hungry for my voice, my laughter.

The Good Shepherd seeks out the one lost sheep. You. Me. The Father sends Him in the power of His Holy Presence desiring to find us, and having found where we've fallen, they rescue, they bind up our wounds, pouring in the oil and the wine, and carry us, beloved, home for a celebration.

We are one lost sheep to others; we are most valuable to them. One cherished sheep restored into a bountiful fold, in a green pasture where there will never be any lack, never be an animal neglected, its peace of mind stolen. We are many sheep bought with most precious blood and placed on righteous paths, the love of God poured into our souls, so deep and wide and expansive that

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that in his care, they could be calm and undisturbed. He also promised them still water to drink. Moving water distresses the sheep, and they will not drink.

PEACE is a dominate promise of the scriptures. In Isaiah 9:6, Jesus is called THE PRINCE OF PEACE. In Isaiah 53:4 the prophet wrote that Jesus was punished so that we could have PEACE. He also declared that God would keep us in PERFECT PEACE when we trust Him.² What glorious promises! Jesus Himself told the disciples that He was leaving them HIS PEACE.³

The will of God not only gives us PERFECT PEACE, but it also includes God's CONTINUAL PRESENCE. In this great Psalm, the shepherd reminds us that we do not fear evil because God is with us.⁴ Similarly we read Isaiah 41:10, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee." In the New Testament, we read, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. The CONTINUAL PRESENCE of God is with us.

God is with us to help us. He is working. From the Old Testament that declares, "I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee,"⁵ to the New Testament that states, "The Lord is my helper,"⁶ we can be sure that God is working. If we have any doubts, we could ask Daniel as he sat in the lions' den, "Is God working?" We could also ask Elijah who was fed by the ravens at the brook Cherith, "Did God help you?" We might interview David as he faced the giant Goliath, or Paul and Silas after their release from prison by an earthquake. Certainly, God is always with us to help us! The CONTINUAL PRESENCE of God is here to help us!

As we order our footsteps in the will of God, we rest assured of His CONTINUAL PRESENCE AND HIS MAGNIFICENT PROTECTION. In the presence of our enemies, we are safe and secure.

There are many enemies that confront sheep, but the shepherd works diligently to protect them. In the spring of the year, he moves the sheep to the top of mountain, where there is new grass. Before he moves the sheep, he sends a crew up the mountain to destroy poisonous plants, to quiet moving streams (remember we need still water) and to provide a safe resting place. According to the psalmist, he prepares a table before them in the presence of their enemies.

Our great God will provide this same MAGNIFICENT PROTECTION for each of us. He will prepare our table and anoint our head with oil. Because sheep are subject to a small insect that lodges in their nose and ears, they are anointed with oil. The oil protects them from death and disease. The HEALING POWER of this oil prevents their death.

The Lord is our Healer. The Scripture declares that He will take sickness and disease away from us.⁷ He will anoint us with the oil of the Spirit, enabling us to be satisfied with long life.⁸ He has provided HEALING POWER!

Now I suppose there is one last thing we should mention before we read this psalm again and shout Hallelujah. Goodness and mercy are always with us. They are with us "all the days of our life." We must never forget that God is good, and His mercy endures forever. What a GOOD SHEPHERD He is!

¹Php 4:11-13 ²Is 26:3 ³Jn 14:27 ⁴Ps 23:4 ⁵Is 41:10 ⁶Heb 13:6 ⁷Ex 23:25 ⁸Ps 91:16

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even though there might be shadows around us, all we see is the hem of the Shepherd's long robe. We follow His gentle voice as He walks daily, minute-by-minute with us toward the valley's bright end.

Here He's set a banquet, one which overflows. More than enough provision for any who would come, though lame or blind or faltering. He bids the weak to rest. And there, more than fed, abundantly treasured, His anointing flows over us. We are all blessed in that moment. No one left hungry. No one neglected. No one left out. But enfolded in His refuge, His presence covering us, our lives are satisfied by Him, filled with Him, held by Him close.

I was lost with no place to stand. I have been found and carried safe to a wide-open pasture. Not because of anything that I have done. There is no self-effort that could have saved me. But I sit here, leaned upon His breast, because He looked for me. Gave His all for me without one regret. Not the lack of a throne, nor the mockery of men, nor the filthiness of the water. Though He had streets of gold, He drank from a bitter cup, and this blessing I now have within is the result.