

The Blessedness Of Christians.

Text: Psalm 23

Suggested Hymns:

422, 387, 184, 602, 607

1) The Lord Is Our Shepherd

2) He Feeds, Leads, and Protects Us

3) We will Dwell in the House of the Lord Forever

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Psalm 23:1-6, *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.* ² *He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.* ³ *He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.*

⁴ *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*

⁵ *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.* 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.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Scripture says in Psalm 145:9 that ⁹ *The LORD is good to all, And His tender mercies are over all His works.* And in Matthew 5:45 that God *makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*

Whether people are conscious of, and thankful for, God's goodness or not, the Lord is good to all. Yes, sometimes the lot of the unbeliever in this present life seems more desirable than that of the Christian. Often he is more prosperous, has less sickness, and finds his path much smoother than the believer.

Besides afflictions common to all people the disciple of Christ is called upon to bear the cross of Christ. This may include ridicule, scorn, and persecution.

This leads the enemies of the Church of Christ to conclude: It does not pay to be a member of the Church. We fare better than the Christians do.¹

Nevertheless it is true that only the Christian can be truly happy because only the believer in Christ fares well in time and in eternity. As Christians, we enjoy the best of care and infinitely greater blessings than those who reject the Lord's salvation.

Our psalm pictures the lot of the Christian. What a precious hymn it is! How many tears it has dried! How many hearts it has filled with confidence! How many fears it has dispelled! May it lead us, too, to a better understanding and a greater appreciation of *The Blessedness of Christians*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Lord Is Our Shepherd.

David by inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote this psalm. David himself had been a shepherd. He was taking care of his flock when the Lord sent His prophet to anoint him king of His people.

This psalm seems to rise directly out of his own experiences. He says, — and every true Christian will happily say it with him, — ***“The Lord is my Shepherd.”***

Who is this Lord? It is Jehovah, the living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It was the God who ***was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.***² It was the Lord to whom David turned when he had fallen: ***Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, The God of my salvation.***³

God is not only the One who has created us, but the One who has redeemed us. Of Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, the psalmists say: He shall suffer, die, rise again,⁴ ascend into heaven,⁵ and sit at the right hand of God.⁶ This Lord is speaking to us in today's Gospel lesson, John 10:11, ***“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.***

Of this Lord, David and every Christian says: ***“The Lord is my Shepherd.”*** If the Lord is the Shepherd of all believers, then they are His sheep. How did this come about? Did they choose this Shepherd, because they knew how greatly blessed the sheep of His flock are?

No. Certainly not! ***“They were dead in trespasses and sins, ... and were by nature children of wrath.”***⁷ He has chosen them as we read in John 15:16, ¹⁶ ***“You did not choose Me, but I chose you. We read in Ephesians 2:1, And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins.***

What a blessing - to the dead He gave life! Scripture says in Ephesians 2:4-5 that ***God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).*** Yes, The grace of the Lord has made us members of His flock and taught us to say, ***“The Lord is my Shepherd.”***

Friend, are you a member of the Lord’s flock? Does not the love, goodness, and mercy of this Good Shepherd move you to turn to Him in repentance and faith?

2. He Feeds, Leads, And Protects Us

Knowing who this Lord, our Shepherd, is, is it any wonder that Christians continue with David: ***“I shall not want”***? How could we lack anything that is good?

² ***He makes me to lie down in green pastures.*** He gives us all that we need for the support and wants of the body, according to His promise in Matthew 6:33, ³³ ***“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.***

The Christian looks on all earthly things he receives as gifts from the hand of God. But these temporal blessings the Lord showers upon all people. The green pastures in which He provides food for His own are the means of grace, His Word and Sacraments. The Word of Life kindles faith and nourishes this new life in us. This Word is a green pasture, never parched, never consumed, and always in rich abundance. We have these green pastures today. Oh, let us not look for “something better”! Let us feed in them, lie down in them, and abide in them.

He leads me beside the still waters. There are stagnant waters. They corrupt and gather filth. There are troubled seas, with their waves rising high. Great floods rush down into the sea. But the waters to which the good Shepherd leads His sheep flow gently and softly. They are the streams of His grace,

flowing in the Gospel. In the green pastures beside the still waters the sheep receive all the gifts of God's love procured for man by the Shepherd Himself.

³ ***He restores my soul.*** Sin is a heavy weight, a burden upon the soul. The afflictions of this world cause the spirit to droop. He restores the soul, He relieves it of its burden and lets it taste the sweetness of Christ's love in adversity. He regenerates the poor, sinful soul.

He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. He leads! Like a shepherd, he chooses the path. The sheep may not think that this path is the best, but it is. The paths where danger threatens the sheep are avoided. The sheep know that this is true, that His path leads to heaven, and that all things must work together for their good. Therefore they place complete confidence in the Shepherd and follow Him also when the countryside through which He leads takes on a rougher appearance. We read in Romans 8:32, ³² ***He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?***

⁴ ***Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.*** Yes, ***“We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”***⁸ The path to heaven often leads through dark valleys. The sun is hidden from the traveller's eyes, deep darkness surrounds him, and death casts its shadow across the way.

Sickness visits the Christian, old age creeps upon him, and by reason of sin he is a dying man. But although death is the king of terrors to others, it is not that to the Christian. It is in reality but a shadow. ***“The shadow of a serpent will not sting, nor the shadow of a sword kill.”***⁹ Scripture says in 1 Corinthians 15:55-57, ⁵⁵ ***“O Death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?”*** ⁵⁶ ***The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.*** ⁵⁷ ***But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.***

Christians are not led into the valley to stay, but merely to walk through. The Shepherd will not lose them in the valley, but will safely lead them to the other side. ***I will fear no evil; For You are with me.*** He is always at our side. ***Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*** The Lord's power, coming to us through the means of grace, sustains and protects us and offers the right consolation in every trouble.

⁵ *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.* Enemies surround the Christian. The devil, the world, and our own flesh seek our destruction, but the Lord sets a table before us in spite of all our enemies, This means that the Christian is secure and sure of refreshing and satisfying joys after all afflictions.

The Lord *“anoints my head with oil.”* We are a welcome guest at the feast God has prepared for us. *“My cup runs over.”* The spiritual blessings God pours into our cup fill it, and yes, even causes it to run over, and we share it with others.

My friends, the Lord does take care of His own. Through the means of grace He gives us all that we need for time and eternity. How necessary these means of grace! How important to use them diligently!

3. We Will Dwell In The House Of The Lord Forever

The Lord being our Shepherd tells us ⁶ *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life.* The Lord leads His Christians on the path to heaven. Let them turn around and look back. What do they see? The goodness and mercy of God is following them. The goodness and mercy which pardons, protects, supplies us with all we need for body and soul.

The path turns to the right, turns to the left, passes through dark places, over high mountains, — goodness and mercy are still there. We grow older, sickness and weakness come, death approaches; but all the days of our life *“goodness and mercy”* follow us. *“Surely.”* As sure as His promises are.

And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever. He is mine, and I am His. With Him I will remain. I shall be His own forever. Here on earth He has made me His own and has kept me with His flock. When this life is ended, He will move me into another world, where I shall dwell in the house of many mansions forever. Fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore await me in heaven. We read in Psalm 16:11, ¹¹ *You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*¹⁰

Can you afford to stand idly at the wayside and see the happy flock led by the Shepherd passing by? Soon they will be around the bend and out of sight, and the opportunity to join them gone.

Oh, seek the Lord while He may be found! Call upon Him while He is near! Acknowledge your sinfulness, ask Him for forgiveness, and cast yourself upon His mercy! He will not reject you. You will receive His pardon. He will be your Shepherd, and truly you shall not be in want.

Let us close with the words of the hymnist,¹¹

How blest the flock of Jesus Christ, the Saviour,
The sheep that hear and heed His loving voice!
Blest by their heavenly shepherd's grace and favour,
They ever in their Lord and God rejoice. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Compare to Psalm 73

² 2 Corinthians 5:19

³ Psalm 51:14

⁴ Psa. 16:22

⁵ Psa. 47

⁶ Psa. 110

⁷ Eph. 2:1-3

⁸ Acts 14:22

⁹ Matthew Henry, Psalm 23:1-6

¹⁰ See also Psalm 17:15

¹¹ Hymn 184