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THE CHURCH LIFE AND WORK

On the Twenty-third Psalm

An Address delivered at Salem Chapel, Bristol, at the Weekly Prayer-meeting on Monday Evening, July 24th, 1871.

“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want,” etc.

IN the measure in which, in our souls, we are enabled to say that Jehovah Himself is our Shepherd, just in that measure our hearts will say, “I shall not want.” The second follows from the first; for it is written, “They that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee.” It is when God is not known that difficulty comes. The great point, therefore, is to acquaint ourselves with God, to know God for ourselves as He has revealed Himself in the Scriptures. And the more we know Him ourselves, the more easy will our hearts find it to say, “I shall not want.”

No one yet knew Jehovah without being able to exercise faith in Him.

“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.”

How precious! Not, He leadeth here and there to a dry morsel. Not, now and then He giveth a mouthful of green pasture. Far more than this. Here we have not only abundance of pasture, and green pasture, but lying down in it, that we may leisurely, abundantly, bountifully partake of it. Now this is just the way of our good and gracious Lord. It is His joy and delight not only to give as much as we need, but to give us abundantly. Oh, what joy has our good Shepherd in thus refreshing our hearts!

“He leadeth me beside the still waters.” Not only has each just enough to drink to keep life in them, but they may drink again and again. He leadeth them, not to a noisy stream, where the poor sheep would be frightened, but to the gentle, quiet waters, where they may drink leisurely and calmly.

“He restoreth my soul.”

This is not to be understood as the bringing back of a backslider to God, for the Hebrew word here translated “restoreth” most assuredly would not bear that interpretation. It must be

understood in the sense of refreshing, or strengthening, just as in retiring at night to rest, we lie down and sleep, and awake with our strength renewed. We must understand the restoring to be the renewal of strength. The connection also shows this to be the meaning.

“He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for His name’s sake.”

It is the very joy and delight of the heart of God thus to lead us on, to help us forward, to strengthen us more and more. Here again we may betake ourselves to our Shepherd with the greatest confidence, and say, “Now it is for the honour and glory of Thy name that I should be strengthened, that I may walk in Thy ways and to Thine honour.”

“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.”

Very precious! So that, let come what may, all will be well. Let the worst come, as the world would say, all will be well. The Shepherd is with us. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” Why not? The Shepherd is with us. Oh! this Shepherd, this precious Shepherd, loves to accompany the sheep. If only they walk in His ways, whatever their circumstances may be, they may reckon upon His presence.

The sheep will say, as they regard the Shepherd, “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil: my cup runneth over.”

Here the figure ceases. The first four verses speak about the Lord under the figure of a Shepherd. Now He is spoken of under the figure of a Host caring for His guest. And how do we fare in this capacity? “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil: my cup runneth over.” Here again how bountifully we are blessed by God—the Host. It is the very joy and delight of the heart of God to honour us.

It was a mark of honour when guests were anointed by their host. And then they are not sparingly supplied: “My cup runneth over.” Oh! what joy, what happiness should we not have, provided we walked stately, habitually, at all times and under all circumstances, simply in the ways of the Lord, having the single object in life to please Him.

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”

The psalm ends with a bright and blessed prospect for us for the little of the future of time that is yet before us: “Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” Let come what may, there will be goodness and mercy. Friends may be taken; I may be sick; I may be tried in my family; I may be tried in my Church position; I may be tried in various ways; yet

goodness and mercy follow me. And here in this verse we have our own name. Goodness and mercy shall follow me—so-and-so; we p 137 may write our own name, and say to the glory of God regarding ourselves, Goodness and mercy shall follow ME. This is no presumption. This tends to the glory of God. When we take God by His word, we are not going too far. We ought to go so far as to believe what God says regarding His children; and this is a universal promise regarding all the children of God.

“And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”

The Host having been so kind towards the guest, having anointed his head with oil, and so abundantly provided for him, the guest now says, “I will remain in the house; I will remain in it, and not be a visitor merely.” In our inmost heart we say, “There is no house like the Father’s house.” And oh! to dwell in the presence of God; in spirit, to be in the Father’s house; in spirit, to be in heaven now, there to abide,—there, not to be a visitor only, a guest merely for a day or two or a week or two, but to say, “I will abide there, in the Father’s house.” Oh, how blessed! Now this is the present portion of the feeblest and weakest of the children of God; and if we would only have it, it is the very joy and delight of the heart of God to give us this blessed portion.

Müller, George. Jehovah Magnified: Addresses. Bristol, England: The Bible and Tract Depot of the Scriptural Knowledge Institution, 1876. Print.

In chronicling the church work of George Müller and Henry Craik in Bristol, Pierson notes that “*foundations needed to be relaid.*” What is meant by that phrase?

How did Müller and Craik approach the task of laying again the foundations of the church in Bristol?

Pierson lists two reasons that the work was a “*work of time*.” What are those two reasons?

Do you agree with the reasons Pierson states above? How have you seen this worked out in your own past church experiences? How have you seen it not worked out?

Müller and Craik did not tarry in making any changes at all. Instead, certain changes were prerequisites of them accepting the call to minister to this church. What were those changes that they required at the outset?

Since they seemed to clearly understand the need for taking things slow as they made changes, why did they insist on these changes from the beginning?

Within two years of Bethesda Chapel united in fellowship, Müller and Craik instituted a significant change. That change was to dismiss from the Sunday-schools and the Dorcas Societies all unbelievers. Why was this change made?

When disputes arose concerning doctrine or church practice, how were they resolved?

Pierson goes on to analyze one of Müller's addresses in America concerning pastoral ministry. He lists eight qualifications a man must possess in order to be qualified for ministry. The first is that he needs to be a converted man. Why is this important?

Which Mark of a Healthy Church Member does this correspond to?

The second qualification is "*an intimate knowledge of the Lord Jesus.*" Why is that necessary? How is that different from the first qualification?

Which Mark of a Healthy Church Member does this correspond to?

Third, is "*growth in happiness and love.*" What is meant by this and why is it so important?

In connection with this qualification, Pierson states that the first business of every day is to do what?

Next, Müller called attention to a pastor's need to "*feed his own soul.*" Why is this necessary?

How does one "*feed his own soul?*"

Fifthly, Müller states the necessity of holiness in a minister. Why is that important?

How does Pierson define holiness?

Next, Müller calls attention to the need for humility. Why is that indispensable?

Which Mark of a Healthy Church Member does this correspond to?

What does Pierson say the praise of man accomplishes?

The seventh qualification is that a minister must get his message from God. Why is this important?

Lastly, Müller laid special stress on the need for the exposition of Scripture? How does this differ from the last point? Why is it necessary?

Pierson calls attention to a statement made many years before by Martin Luther wherein he states that, “Luther’s rule was to speak so that an ignorant maid-servant could understand.” What was the rationale behind Luther’s statement?

Do any of these qualifications have implications for those that are not called to pastoral ministry? If not, why not? If so, why?

NEXT LESSON:
A GLANCE AT THE GIFTS AND THE GIVERS

George Müller's Report for 1867–68

WE bless God that his servant George Müller is led every year to publish a brief narrative of facts connected with the Lord's providential dealings with his Orphan-houses and other enterprises. We feel refreshed and encouraged in our own work, and at the same time ashamed of our own little faith and slender attainments. Every believer ought to read this blessed sixpennyworth of experimental testimony to the living God. Our own modes of action are distinct from those of this revered man of God; it would be vain presumption to try to imitate him, each man must walk as he feels led in the service of his Master. For him his plans are beyond all criticism, they are clearly of the Lord, and his Lord approves them by signs following.† We too have endeavoured, after our small ability, to follow the leadings of our Lord, and have had a most abundant recompense, and shall have in the future yet more. We cull a few extracts from the present report to induce our readers to purchase it.

Thus this good steward begins his story:—

“My soul does magnify the Lord for the help which he has so graciously been pleased to grant to me during another year! Difficulties, greater than ever I had them for the previous thirty-three years, have been overcome during the past year, by prayer and faith; work, which is increasing with every year more and more, has not been allowed to overwhelm me, and expenses greater than during any previous year, amounting altogether, from May 27, 1867, to May 26, 1868, to £41,310 16s. 8½d., have been met without my ever being unable to satisfy to the full at once all demands, though sometimes amounting to more than £3,000 at a time. We are now going on in the thirty-fifth year of this Institution, proving, day by day, that the living God of the Bible is still the living God. Elijah has long since been taken up into heaven, but the God of Elijah lives; and all who truly depend upon him will find him ever ready to help them.”

Among the donations acknowledged are notable cases such as these:—

“From Scotland, £22, with the following letter: ‘Dear Sir, enclosed is £20, which I send to you as a thank-offering, to the Lord, to be disposed of by you as you may deem most proper. Last year I sent you £10, this year I feel satisfied it is my duty to send you £20, being persuaded there is a withholding more than is meet, which tendeth to poverty,’ etc. July 24. From the neighbourhood of Bath, £500, from a gentleman who had in May also sent me £500. I have never seen this kind donor, as is the case with perhaps 19 out of 20 of the donors; but the Lord spoke to him, thus to help me to accomplish this enlargement of the Orphan work. May 23.—All the glass, needed for the New Orphan Houses No. 4 and No. 5, was given gratuitously. The glass for No. 4 was kindly given by the senior partner of a large firm, and the glass for No. 5 by the same firm conjointly. The promise to do so had been given nearly two years since: but now I learnt from the clerk of the works, that all the glass

had been actually supplied. The greatness of the gift will be seen, by its being remembered that there are above 700 large windows in these two houses.

“June 3. Received to-day £51 5s., with the following letter: ‘My dear Sir, I enclose my cheque, value £51 5s., to be applied £20 for missions, £20 for the dear children under your care, and the balance for yourself, £11 5s. I send this in acknowledgment of God’s mercies, having had great losses in business, and feeling truly thankful that I am in a position to bear them, and still to carry on my business as usual, with the prayer that God may keep me humble at the foot of the cross of Christ,’ etc. One or the other of the readers of this report may derive benefit from this letter, Observe: 1. The donor takes his losses out of the hand of God. So should all do, under similar circumstances. It is deeply important to his own hand in all that befalls us. 2. He is grateful that not all is taken from him, as might have been the case. In this the donor should be imitated by all under similar circumstances. We are entirely dependent upon God, and therefore not only a part of what we have might be taken, but all. 3. The writer of the letter brings his thank-offering to God. For what? Not for a large increase of his means, but that the Lord has not taken all from him, and that, notwithstanding great losses, he is able to carry on his business as usual. Think of this, esteemed reader. In this many Christians in business fail. When difficulties and losses come, instead of cleaving the more to God, and being the more grateful to him that they are even as well off as they are, he is rather less remembered; and as to being the more faithful in the stewardship, while it is continued, the losses are only dwelt on, and nothing, or but exceedingly little, can now be afforded for the poor or the work of God. Well, and what is the result? The losses increase yet more and more. O that the saints would be wise, and learn! but they frequently act so as to oblige God, in very love to them, to take by thousands and tens of thousands that from them of which they were unwilling to give to him in tens or hundreds.

“March 21. To-day I received from Belgium £1 13s. for Missions, with 14s. 6d. for the Orphans. ‘Of this amount, 18 francs 57 cents,’ the missionary who sends the money writes, ‘come from the box of our brother the tinker. This box is in a dark corner of a very small shop, crowded with broken pots and pans, etc. When I broke the box this morning to take out the money (for it must be broken), this money was so covered with dust and damp that it needed to be washed; but it is not less precious on that account, for it comes from a heart which sincerely loves the Lord.’ ”

Mr. Müller’s daily dependence upon God, and the Lord’s daily remembrance of his servant, are illustrated by his statement that he prays every day, and many times a day, for help in his benevolent work of feeding 1,299 children and building houses for more, making in all 2,050 orphans, and are set in clear relief by the details of the first five days of his financial year:—

We began the year on May 27, 1867, with £90 3s. 1½d. in hand for these objects, which was indeed little for our requirements; but we called upon the Lord, and before this balance was expended, we received far more than the amount with which we began the year. On May 27, came in £2 5s. On May 28, altogether in ten donations, £9 8s. 5d. One of these ten donations was from a Christian shopkeeper, who sent 3s. 5d., being one penny in the pound of the sum which he had taken during the previous week. In like manner has this donor sent, week by week, about the same sum. One penny in the pound seems little, and yet, little as it appears, even this little, because it was systematically given, amounted in the end to about £8 during the year. I refer to this to show how important it is to give as the Lord prospers, us, even though we are only able to give according to a very low rate. On May 29th we received from London £50, and £20s. 4d. besides. On May 30th, £11 14s. 6d. Of this amount £10 was sent by a Christian mercantile gentleman, who, month after month, during the whole year, sent £10, or £15, or £20, I suppose just as God was pleased to prosper him. On May 31st, from Kent, £100, and £5 14s. 10d. besides. And as it pleased God to supply our need during the first five days of the year, so did he also during the whole period, for the sake of our Lord Jesus, listen to our supplications, and give unto us continually the needed help.”

The new houses required £58,000 to build and furnish; and we rejoice to notice the following paragraph:—

“When the last year commenced on May 27, 1867, I needed yet about £6,000, to meet, as far as I could see, all the expenses connected with fitting up and furnishing the two new houses; but the Lord was pleased to give me, altogether for this object, £6,633 17s. 5¼d. during the year. I have, therefore, reason to believe, as far as at present the expenses can be calculated, that the amount required is in hand.

What hath God wrought? And this God is our God also. Therefore by faith we commit to him our far smaller work at the Stockwell Orphanage, at our College, and in the Colportage, saying with Abraham, JEHOVAH-JIREH. Our work was not of our seeking, but was laid on our shoulder even as the cross was placed upon Simon: will not the Lord give us strength to carry it? Hitherto we have received great and memorable help, and usually in large sums; surely he who has done so much will not leave us now! “Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.”

Spurgeon, C. H. The Sword and Trowel: 1868. London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1867. Print.