

THE SHEPHERD PSALM

by

William Evans

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CHAPTER FIVE

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over."

There is a variety of senses in which the truth of this verse may be understood.

It is said that in the ancient days a shepherd's tent was a kind of city of refuge. The man who had unwittingly slain another could find refuge in a shepherd's tent from the avenger of blood. The fugitive was permitted to stay a given length of time within the shepherd's care, during which time he was as safe from the pursuer as though he were in the actual city of refuge. The pursuer might be raging with fury outside of the door of the tent, but the fugitive could eat with perfect safety and peace in the presence of his enemy. How like CHRIST in His relation to the believer!

One day Charles Wesley stood looking out of a partly open window at the fierce storm howling without, when a young robin, quickly passing some other birds, flew to his breast, seeking shelter from its foes. It was then he wrote that wonderful hymn, the opening words of which are:

"JESUS, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly!"

Is not this a picture of this verse of the Psalm? **"And a man [JESUS CHRIST] shall be for a hiding place and a refuge from the storm."** Are we not safe in Him from all our foes? **"There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."**

We are told that in David's day it was the custom of conquering kings and princes to bring the royal captives of the contending defeated army into a large banqueting house. To each pillar in the house a prisoner of royal blood or a commanding officer was chained. The banquet tables were heavily laden with good things of which the victors partook. Feasting and jollification were indulged in, and joy and gladness were manifest in the presence of defeated and chained enemies. Are we not made **"always to triumph"** over all our foes in CHRIST? Are we not made **"more than conquerors"** in Him who hath **"led captivity captive"**? **"Ye shall eat your meat in quietness, and nothing shall make you afraid."**

Or, again, it may be that reference is made in this verse to the grazing of sheep in fields full of snakeholes or of poisonous plants. A sheep raiser in Texas once told the writer that he lost a great many sheep because snakes would come up through holes in the ground and bite the sheep as they grazed, poisoning them. After losing many of the flock he finally discovered a remedy. A mixture of some kind was poured down the holes, which killed the snakes, and after that the

sheep were able to graze in peace and safety. Hath not CHRIST abolished death for the believer? Has He not deprived death of its sting and stripped the grave of its victim? Hath He not overcome that old serpent, the Devil? Do we not overcome the dragon, that old serpent, the Devil and Satan, the accuser of the brethren day and night -- do we not overcome him by the blood of the LAMB?

Whichever of these meanings may be adopted as indicating the teaching of this verse, we may be certain that the truth the Psalmist desires to express is this: That GOD gives His children victory over all their foes, and makes them more than conquerors over all their enemies. Thus shall we **"eat our meat in peace and quietness, and nothing shall make us afraid."** **"Why do the heathen rage? . . . He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh"** -- and so shall we.

"On the Rock of Ages founded,
Who can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation's walls surrounded,
Thou mayest smile at all thy foes."

--- John Newton

"THOU ANOINTEST MY HEAD WITH OIL: MY CUP RUNNETH OVER"

A shepherd must needs be a physician also. In the belt of the shepherd medicines are always carried. Sheep are very susceptible to sicknesses of many kinds, particularly fevers. Ofttimes at night as the sheep passed into the fold, the shepherd's knowing eye would detect that one or another of them was sick and feverish. Perhaps it had been bitten by a serpent or torn by some wild animal. He would take the feverish sheep and plunge its head into clear, cold water, plunging the head so far into the pail that the water would run over, or anoint the bruise with mollifying ointment. Doubtless David is thinking of this experience of his shepherd life.

Or again, David may be referring to the bountiful water supply provided for the sheep and applying it to the rich provision GOD has made for the believer. Not only is there grace enough for oneself, but with the believer as a channel, an abundance for others.

"Thou, O CHRIST, art all I want;
More than all in Thee I find!"

-- Charles Wesley

This is the wonderful truth taught by JESUS in the Temple: "Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, from within him shall flow rivers of living water." Here we see how the believer may come to CHRIST for the quenching of his own thirst, and then draw on, or drink more deeply of CHRIST for the quenching of the thirst of others. "Thou, O CHRIST, are all I want; more than all in Thee I find." Here we have the personal and relative side of a consecrated life of service.

My cup is to "run over." No selfish religion must I claim. I am to be satisfied with CHRIST first

myself, then I am to take from Him so large a supply that others with whom I come into contact may also partake of His fulness. No hermit, no ascetic, monk, or recluse would the Master have me be.

"There are hermit souls that live withdrawn
In the peace of their self-content;
There are souls, like stars, that dwell apart
In a fellowless firmament.
There are pioneer souls that blaze their paths
Where highways never ran --
But let me live by the side of the road
And be a friend of man.

"Let me live in my house by the side of the road
Where the race of men go by --
The men who are good and the men who are bad,
As good or as bad as I,
I would not sit in the scorner's seat,
Or hurl the cynic's ban --
Let me live in the house by the side of the road
And be a friend to man.

I see from my house by the side of the road,
By the side of the highway of life,
The men who press with the ardor of hope,
The men who are faint with the strife;
But I turn not away from their smiles nor their tears --
Both parts of an infinite plan --
Let me live in a house by the side of the road
And be a friend to man."

-- Sam Walter Foss

~ end of chapter 5 ~
