

“I Shall Not Want”

*“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”
—Psalm 23:1*

THE APOSTLE PAUL WROTE:

“My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

(Phil. 4:19) These words of the New Testament verify David’s testimony, “I shall not want.” The word “want” as used in our opening text means to be lacking that which is needful. In David’s expression of confidence that he lacked nothing, he used the word Jehovah, translated LORD. Paul also asserts that it is God, our Heavenly Father, who supplies our needs, and that he does so “by Christ Jesus.” Thus we can appreciate that Jehovah is our Great Shepherd, and his Son is “the good shepherd.”—John 10:11

How great our Heavenly Father has been to give us so many assurances of his love and watch care over us. The many straightforward statements of this fact as we find them in the divine promises are comforting and satisfying. However, in order that we might understand his promises better and appreciate their significance more fully, he has

presented them upon various backgrounds of illustration. One of the most beautiful and meaningful of these is that of a shepherd caring for his sheep.

“The LORD is my shepherd.” How wonderfully this helps us to grasp the reality of the Heavenly Father’s love! David, a man after God’s own heart, drew from his own background and experience as a shepherd this wonderful lesson of divine interest and care. Jehovah, in his loving providence, permitted his beloved David to reflect on his own individual experiences in penning this comforting assurance of the Great Shepherd’s care over his people.

“I shall not want.” In the Jewish Age, God promised in certain cases to supply the material needs of his people, and to bless them. He provided such sustenance in proportion to their faithfulness. (Exod. 6:7; Deut. 28:1-6; Jer. 7:23) These, like many other promises of the Old Testament, were also written for the benefit of the Lord’s sheep of the present Gospel Age. Hence, their fulfillment is also to be looked for along spiritual lines. To us, his disciples, Jesus says, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness,” and concerning our material necessities he adds that his Heavenly Father knows we have need of these. (Matt. 6:32,33) Jesus here places the material needs of the Christian in a position of secondary importance.

While God knows that his consecrated people of this age do, of course, need food and clothing, he has not promised to supply these in such abundance as we at times may desire or believe to be necessary. The Apostle Paul, with reference to material things, testified that he learned “both

to abound and to suffer need.” (Phil. 4:12) At times the Heavenly Father in his wisdom may discern that our greatest need as New Creatures is to experience a more meager, though adequate, supply of what may be considered necessary for our physical well-being, that the inner, spiritual man can better grow rich in grace and knowledge.

As consecrated followers of the Master we can rejoice in the assurance of the psalmist, and with him declare in our heart, “I shall not want,” for we know that “no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” (Ps. 84:11) To have this assurance, however, it is essential to exercise full faith in the Lord’s wisdom as to just what is best for us as New Creatures. From this standpoint one of the “good things” which will not be withheld from us might be the realization that whatever our circumstances in life may be, if our faith is strong, we will be able to take comfort in the divine promise, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”—Deut. 31:6; Heb.13:5

“I SHALL NOT WANT”—REST

“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.” (Ps. 23:2) While we might properly think of the “green pastures” as suggesting an abundant supply of enriching spiritual food, the thought seems more particularly to be that of rest. The psalmist did not write that God made him to eat in the green pastures, but to “lie down,” to rest. Nevertheless, it is true that to lie down in green pastures also suggests the thought of being satisfied, and of not being hungry, especially spiritually.

Bringing this thought down to the present, how true it is that the satisfying portion of Truth

available today, based upon an understanding of God's plan, is enabling his people to especially enjoy that blessed rest of faith which belongs to those who are obediently following the voice and example of the Good Shepherd. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish."—John 10:27,28

To lie down or rest as New Creatures does not imply inactivity, but rather a blessed contentment based upon the assurance that in following the Good Shepherd we have nothing to fear. Let us remember that we are striving to develop perfect love, and "perfect love casteth out fear." (I John 4:18) Abiding in green pastures is a marvelous symbol of the rest of faith into which we have the privilege of entering and in which we may abide if we continue to put our trust in God and in his Son, Christ Jesus.

Now, perhaps more than ever, it is a wonderful manifestation of God's goodness to be blessed by a knowledge of his loving plan and its glorious outcome of blessing to all mankind in these dark days of world distress and chaos. One of the great blessings of Truth, especially in this time of trouble, is the confidence it gives us and the great peace of heart and mind that is ours if we keep it as our chief focus.

The Prophet Isaiah wrote, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever." (Isa. 26:3,4) If our mind is "stayed on" God, we can say with the psalmist that "God is our refuge and strength," and we will not "fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea."—Ps. 46:1,2

“I SHALL NOT WANT”—REFRESHMENT

“He leadeth me beside the still waters.” (Ps. 23:2) Here is clearly the thought of refreshment. For New Creatures in Christ Jesus, it refers to the refreshment of the pure waters of Truth. These refreshing waters are for those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness,” and concerning whom Jesus said, “they shall be filled.”—Matt. 5:6

In another psalm David wrote: “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.” (Ps. 42:1,2) David again writes, “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.” (Ps. 63:1) In these two beautifully phrased longings of his heart, David testifies of his “thirst” for God, and in the 23rd Psalm he exults in the fact that the Great Shepherd leads him beside the “still waters” of Truth. Thus, David was refreshed by a knowledge of God. To us likewise, the glorious attributes of God’s character and plan have been revealed to us through an understanding of his Word of Truth. How satisfying are these still waters of refreshment!

“I SHALL NOT WANT”—RESTORATION

“He restoreth my soul.” (Ps. 23:3) He “returns back my life,” is the literal meaning of this expression. Each soul or person is a living being. In the case of the true Christian, however, it is the new, spiritual life, the “New Creature,” to which we are begotten by God. (II Cor. 5:17) Before we could have an opportunity to become a New Creature, a means had to be provided whereby we could come out from

under condemnation to death on account of Adamic sin. A provision was made for that condemnation to be lifted for those who would hear and accept the invitation to become followers of the Good Shepherd. This restoration of life is upon the basis of faith in the atoning blood of Christ. God has made these “accepted in the beloved [Jesus]. In whom we have redemption through his blood.”—Eph. 1:6,7

We may also properly think of the restoration which David mentions as applying to the blessings we enjoy of daily experiencing God’s “mercy” and his “grace to help in time of need.” (Heb. 4:16) This is especially important to realize at those times when we fall short of meeting the divine requirements of the narrow way in which we walk. (Matt. 7:14) Apart from the loving, daily provisions made for us through the Good Shepherd, these shortcomings would surely hinder us from being faithful to our vow of consecration.

Shepherds in ancient times were constantly on the alert so that they could rescue their sheep from prowling enemies and from other dangers with which they were surrounded. Chief among our enemies is the devil himself, who goes about “as a roaring lion, ... seeking whom he may devour.” He operates in conjunction with our fallen flesh, and with the spirit of the world. To the extent that we follow the leadings of the Good Shepherd, we will not be overcome by these dangers.—I Pet. 5:8-10

“I SHALL NOT WANT”—GUIDANCE

“He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” (Ps. 23:3) In that rugged country where the shepherd boy David tended his father’s

sheep, it was essential, in leading the flock from one feeding ground to another, to follow paths which had been previously used or determined upon. It was the shepherd's business to be acquainted with these paths, to know those which were safe, and those which might bring harm. It was also essential to the well-being of the sheep that they follow the leading of the shepherd, whether to new pastures or to a place of safety for the night.

There is a pathway of sure progress out of the wilderness of this present evil world, but we cannot walk in it except as we follow the leadership of our Good Shepherd. (Gal. 1:4) However, it is not an easy thing to follow him, for the "paths of righteousness" which he chooses for us are seldom wide and smooth. They are often narrow, rugged and uphill. It is possible to walk in these only if we keep our eyes fixed on our leader and depend upon him for guidance through the power and influence of "the Spirit of truth."—John 16:13

The psalmist's use of the term "paths" in the plural suggests divine leadings in all the individual aspects of our lives. The Lord leads his individual sheep through one experience after another, overruling each one for their eternal good. Each one of the Lord's sheep may have different experiences. However, whether the way is smooth or rough, depending upon our spiritual needs, it is always a path of righteousness, if we continue to follow the leadings of the Good Shepherd. David prayed: "Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not." (Ps. 17:5) How wonderful it is to know that God will indeed lead us, if we listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd.—John 10:27-29

“I SHALL NOT WANT”—PEACE

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.” (Ps. 23:4) Peace as a quality of heart and mind is the opposite of fear. It is the Christian’s privilege to not only enjoy “peace with God” by means of our justified standing with him through Christ, but also to have the “peace of God, which passeth all understanding.” (Rom. 5:1; Phil. 4:7) The peace of God is not based on the incorrect assumption that we will see or know of no trouble or disturbing influence that might disrupt our serenity. Rather, the peace of God is based upon our consciousness that our Heavenly Father has the ability to meet every emergency in our life, and that no evil can extend beyond the limit which divine wisdom decrees. With God there is no doubt concerning the outcome of our experiences, no matter how threatening they may appear to be.

Thus it should be with us, and so it will be, in proportion to our faith in the promises of God. “I will fear no evil: for thou art with me,” wrote David. This does not mean that we will not be surrounded with evil at times. We “walk through the valley of the shadow of death,” which means that almost constantly we are threatened with harm, especially as it has to do with our flesh. The Lord, however, is more powerful than all our enemies; and if we keep close to him, we will enjoy peace of mind and heart, a peace which the world can neither give nor take away.—Ps. 119:165; John 14:27

“I SHALL NOT WANT”—COMFORT

“Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” (Ps. 23:4) Here David expresses himself in a more intimate

way toward the heavenly Shepherd than is apparent in the opening verses of this beautiful song of praise. Instead of telling us merely about the goodness of the Lord, he speaks directly to Jehovah, and the psalm changes from a testimony to a prayer. It seems that as David thought of the Great Shepherd's loving care, there came a special sense of nearness to him which prompted a pouring out of his heart directly to God in prayer.

We should rejoice if we, like David, can see in our Lord's "rod" and "staff" the evidence of his special presence, a nearness which prompts us to go to him in prayer and thanksgiving for the wonderful manner in which he is supplying all our needs. The symbolism of the rod and staff seems to have reference particularly to the chastening of the Lord, which the apostle tells us is a special evidence of his love. (Heb. 12:6,7) The word "chastening" as used in these verses is derived from a Greek word meaning to train or educate. Thus we are not to think of them as punishments for wrongdoing, but rather as measures designed to train and direct us in the right paths. There is no greater evidence of God's love for us than this.

"I SHALL NOT WANT"—SPIRITUAL FOOD

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." (Ps. 23:5) While the "green pastures" in which we can "lie down" imply an abundance of sustenance, the supply of our spiritual food seems particularly emphasized by the "table" which the Good Shepherd prepares for his sheep. By this promise we are assured that we shall not want for that "meat in due season," which the

Lord has specially provided for his people in this end of the age.—Ps. 145:15; Matt. 24:45

The table prepared for us consists of all the precious truths of God's Word: his promises, his instructions, and the opportunity afforded to us of understanding his plans and purposes. We live "by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (Matt. 4:4) In a very special way, and in fulfillment of his own promise, the Good Shepherd has prepared a table for his sheep, and they have been feasting at this table throughout the present harvest period.—Luke 12:37

"I SHALL NOT WANT"—JOY

"Thou anointest my head with oil." (Ps. 23:5) Pouring oil on the head seems far removed from shepherding sheep, but this was the custom of some shepherds, particularly at the close of the day, or when the sheep were weary from travel. To the sheep it was a refreshing and welcome service. In this custom we find another beautiful illustration of our Good Shepherd's care and the blessings he bestows upon us. The Apostle Paul says of Jesus that he was anointed with "the oil of gladness" above his fellows. (Heb. 1:9) Oil is used in the Scriptures to symbolize the Holy Spirit. It came first upon our Head, Christ Jesus, and we receive it from him. It is one of the many blessings we receive from the Heavenly Father through our Good Shepherd.—Acts 2:32,33

The Holy Spirit is referred to as the "oil of gladness" because it is the medium of so much joy in our lives. Through the Word of God, we are enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and can then

participate in the joys of the Truth. By the Holy Spirit we are anointed to serve as “ambassadors for Christ.” (II Cor. 5:20) What joy there is in witnessing for Jesus and for the Word of God! We have been begotten by the Holy Spirit to a new hope of life, and how we should rejoice in that also. When we are weary, and perhaps a little discouraged, how refreshing it is to recall one or more of the joys which our enlightenment through the Holy Spirit has brought to us, and the unspeakable blessings which are ours as members of the body of Christ, because our Head has been anointed with the “oil of gladness.”

“I SHALL NOT WANT”—DIVINE GRACE

“My cup runneth over.” (Ps. 23:5) While the Scriptures use the “cup” in various symbolic senses, the special thought here seems to be the provisions of divine grace in whatsoever ways the Good Shepherd may manifest his love and care. The provisions of the cup may vary according to individual needs. The shepherds of old used a cup at times in connection with their care of the sheep, often at the close of the day. When, as frequently was the case, the shepherd found a sheep that had become wearied and needed special attention, it would be given a refreshing drink from the shepherd’s cup.

In the cup symbolism, we see a provision which shows the special personal and individual care over the sheep by the shepherd, suggesting a tenderness and warmth of love which is almost beyond our ability to grasp. We have the assurance that “the LORD God is a sun and shield: ... no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”—Ps. 84:11

“I SHALL NOT WANT”—CONSTANT LOVE AND CARE

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” (Ps. 23:6) We do not need to fear that any of the loving and abundant provisions outlined by the psalmist are merely of a temporary nature, for we have been told that they will “follow us,” or as the Hebrew text indicates, they will “pursue” or “follow after” us.

Both the goodness and mercy of the Lord are manifestations of his love for us. While these two principles are closely related, their operation is along different lines. In the use of the two expressions, David evidently had in mind the many ways in which the Great Shepherd was caring for him. God’s “goodness” was illustrated by the green pastures, still waters, the table prepared before him, his being led in the paths of righteousness and the anointing of his head. God’s “mercy” was present in the restoration of David’s soul, in the valley of the shadow of death, and in the use of the rod and staff of instruction. All of this spoke to David of God’s love and care over him; and he had confidence that all of this would be true “all the days” of his life. For our own comfort and joy, we need to remember that all these things happened “for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition.”—I Cor. 10:11

“I SHALL NOT WANT”—A FUTURE HOME

“And I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.” (Ps. 23:6) When possible, shepherds would lead their flocks at the end of the day into a place where they could dwell in safety for the night. To us this lesson is that as we experience the various circumstances of life, the ups and downs of our

Christian experience, we look forward to the end of the way, encouraged by the hope of an abundant entrance “into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”—II Pet. 1:11

Jesus said to his disciples; “In my Father’s house are many mansions: ... I go to prepare a place for you.” (John 14:2) There is a special sweetness in this promise. It is as though Jesus was saying that while there were already many symbolic “mansions” in the vast expanse of his Father’s house, none of them was good enough for his sheep, so a special place was to be prepared for them. It is impossible for us to grasp what conditions will be like in that place which Jesus has prepared, but we know that it will be glorious. What a prospect—to be with Jesus, to dwell where he dwells, to share his home—to dwell in God’s house forever!

A glorious ending is promised to all the experiences of the narrow way if we are faithful. Divine goodness and mercy have pursued us all the way. The crowning manifestation of the Good Shepherd’s love will be when he exalts us to be with him and with the Father. (I John 3:2) All of our labors and trials will then be over. There will be no more sorrow, sighing or tears. However, there will be work to do—that glorious kingdom work of blessing all the families of the earth. (Gen. 12:3; 22:18) Together with him who is now our Good Shepherd, we will assist those “other sheep,” the world of mankind, who in the next age will be restored back into the fold of God’s favor, through the kingdom prepared for them “from the foundation of the world.”—John 10:16; Matt. 25:34

