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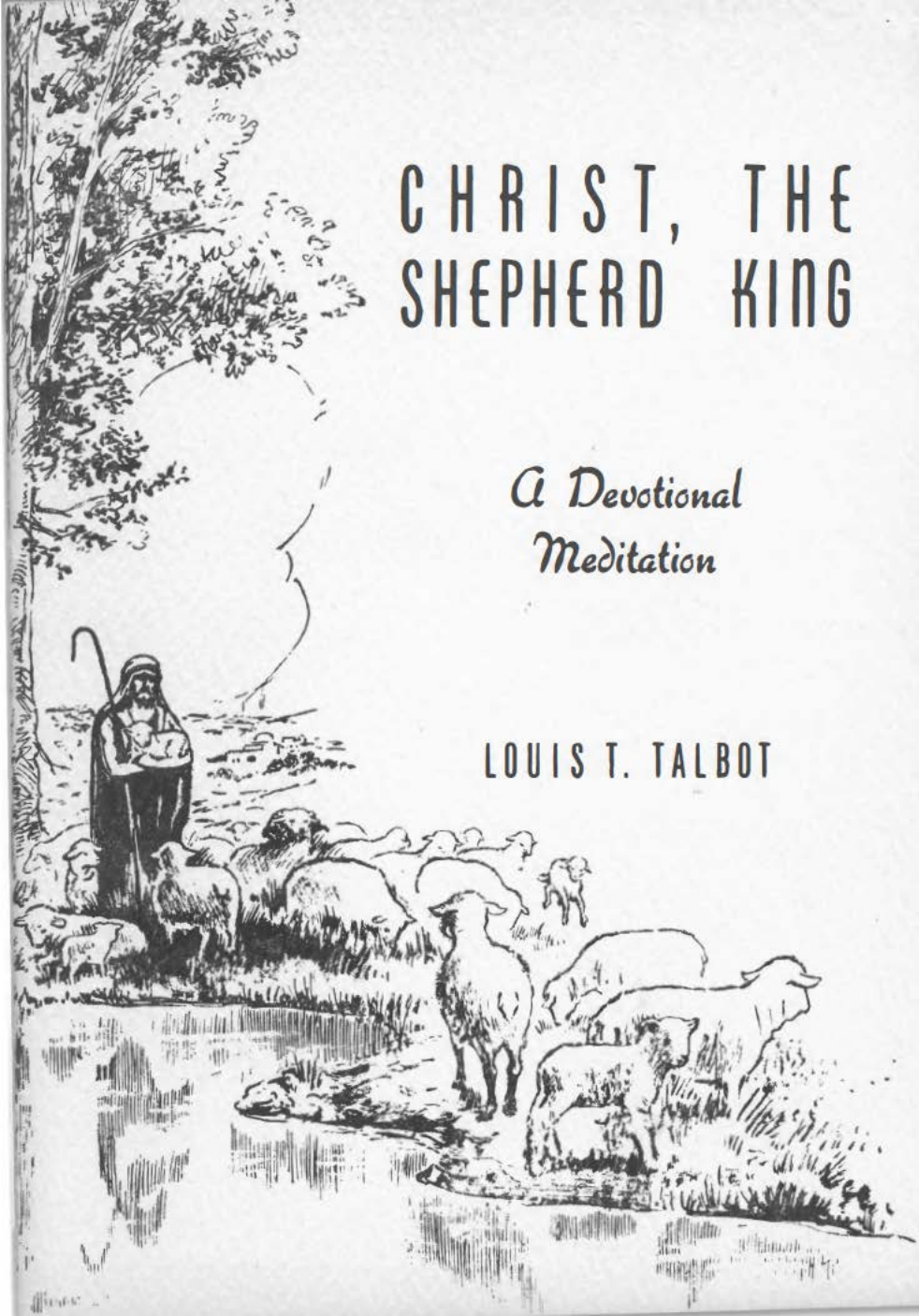
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CHRIST, THE SHEPHERD KING

*A Devotional
Meditation*

LOUIS T. TALBOT



CHRIST, THE
SHEPHERD KING

A Devotional Meditation



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A PRAYER

May you have *rest*—"rest in the Lord." Can there be a choicer gift?

It is my hope that as you listen to the daily radio talks representing the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, or to the message from the pulpit of the Church of the Open Door, or to the voice that speaks to you through the following pages, you may be found:

"Resting in the pastures, and beneath the Rock;
Resting by the waters where He leads His flock;
Resting, while you listen, at His glorious feet;
Resting in His very arms! O rest complete!"

May He who is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" answer our prayer for His own glory.

Louis T. Talbot.

Christ, the Shepherd King

"While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground,
The angel of the Lord came down,
And glory shown around."

It was to shepherds that the first announcement of the birth of Christ was made in Bethlehem of Judea. Not to men of wealth, or of royal distinction, or of intellectual achievement was the good news of the Saviour first given, but to those of lowliest rank.

Not only was the greatest event in history announced to shepherds, but Christ Himself also is portrayed in the Word of God as a Shepherd. In the stress of our modern days, it will do us good to consider these facts anew, and to meditate on the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich.

THE SHEPHERD'S PROMINENCE

The relationship that the Lord Jesus Christ bears to those who trust in Him must be of supreme importance, for the Spirit of God has emphasized it throughout the Word. In the Old Testament, prom-

inence is given to men whose occupation was the care of sheep—men like Abel, Moses, Joseph, David, and Amos. The reason for this is plain: In various aspects of their life and work these men foreshadowed the Lord Jesus Christ in His love and care for His people.

The Word of God presents Christ as:

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

THE GREAT SHEPHERD

THE CHIEF SHEPHERD

As the Good Shepherd, He lays down His life for the sheep: "I am the *good shepherd*" (John 10:11).

As the Great Shepherd, He intercedes for His people, as the ever-living Lord at the right hand of God: "That *great shepherd* of the sheep" (Heb. 13:20).

As the Chief Shepherd, He is coming again to this earth, first to receive His church, the "members of his body," and then to rule over the nations in power and majesty: "When the *chief shepherd* shall appear . . . to him be glory for ever" (1 Pet. 5:4, 11).

These three aspects of Christ's shepherd ministry are set forth also in Psalms 22, 23, and 24.

IN PSALM 22, Christ is the Good Shepherd, laying down His life for the sheep. Note the opening words:

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The Psalm gives a detailed description of the crucifixion of our Lord, even to the piercing of His hands and feet (v. 16).

IN PSALM 24, Christ is the Chief Shepherd, returning to earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. This is the Psalm that says: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle . . . The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory."

Between these two portions that deal with the death and the reign of Christ, there is another brief song, often called the Shepherd Psalm.

IN PSALM 23, Christ is the Great Shepherd, caring for His sheep. This is the Psalm that speaks of resting, and leading, and feeding—activities that are common to us all.

In Psalm 22, we see Mount Calvary; in Psalm 24, we look off to Mount Zion; but in between these two mountain heights we have the valley representing this present age in which we live. It is with this valley of our own times and experiences that we are concerned in this meditation.

THE SHEPHERD'S PROTECTION

On the rolling hills of Palestine, the shepherd would take his place above his flock, but never far from them, watching intently against any danger that might overtake the sheep. Likewise, from His position at the right hand of God, our Shepherd can observe the slightest trouble that affects His children. The Eastern shepherd would guard his sheep with his own body, placing himself between them and their enemies. And Christ, the Great Shepherd, stands between us and all that would threaten to harm us. He is between us and danger; between us and trouble; between us and death, and none of these things can touch us without passing first through Him.

“Never a heartache and never a groan,
Never a teardrop and never a moan,
Never a danger, but there on the throne,
Moment by moment He thinks of His own.”

There are two outlines of the Twenty-Third Psalm that may be suggested here. The first one has to do with Christ's protecting care for His own.

With me “the Lord” (v. 1).
Beneath me “green pastures” (v. 2).
Beside me “still waters” (v. 2).
Before me “the table” (v. 5).

After me “goodness and mercy” (v. 6).
Beyond me “the house of the Lord” (v. 6).

In life, in death, and in eternity, the one who trusts in Christ is absolutely safe.

THE SHEPHERD'S PROVISION

There is a second outline of the Twenty-Third Psalm that shows the precious provision that is to be found in Christ. There are six words, each one beginning with the letter “P.”

1. POSSESSION. “*The Lord is my shepherd.*”

You will note that in most Bibles the word “LORD,” in Psalm 23:1, is printed in capital letters. This is to indicate that the word really is Jehovah, “the self-existent One, the eternal I AM.” How wonderful it is that the Lord in His might, the Lord in His majesty, the Lord in His glory, is *my* Shepherd! To say that the Lord is *a* Shepherd is pictorial; to say that He is *the* Shepherd is appreciative; but to say that He is *my* Shepherd is altogether satisfying in its deepest implications.

A colporteur, going through Switzerland, saw a little shepherd boy minding his flock. Taking out his Bible, the man tried to teach the little fellow to read the Twenty-Third Psalm, but he failed. The boy

could learn only the first five words, and he memorized these by saying them on his five fingers, a finger for each word: "The Lord is my shepherd."

The colporteur left him, and it was not until four years later that he was able to return. He was interested to know about the boy, and sought him out in his home. The child's mother received him graciously, and when she found he was the man who had taught her son the Scripture verse, she said with tears: "My boy is dead, but he said that if I ever saw you, I should tell you that he died holding the fourth finger of his hand—"The Lord is *my* shepherd.'"

2. POSITION. "*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.*"

It is said that a hungry sheep never will lie down. The fact that it does so is an indication that it is satisfied. We are told also that sheep will not drink from turbulent waters, but only from a quiet source. It is in the quiet times of the day—especially during the early morning watch—that the Lord speaks to our hearts and makes known to us the deepest lessons.

In Christ there is not only salvation, but also complete satisfaction. He desires that we shall know the secret of the quiet place, suggested by the "still wa-

ters," that we may enter into a deeper, experimental knowledge of Him. We may say triumphantly:

"Jesus, I am resting, resting,
In the joy of what Thou art;
I am finding out the greatness
Of Thy loving heart."

3. PROMISE. "*He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*"

Restoration and salvation should not be confused. The sinner who comes to Christ in faith and accepts His atoning work on his behalf becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17; John 5:24). He is "born again," and does not thereafter lose his salvation, though he may—sadly—lose the *joy* of salvation. In that sense we are:

"Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it;
Prone to leave the God I love."

But—"he restoreth." The manner in which Christ restores us to fellowship is shown in 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." His restoration of us is for a purpose—to lead us in paths of righteousness. One can not be restored, and sit idly with folded arms. The latter condition

would be worse than the first. When the Lord restored Peter, He also commissioned him: "Feed my sheep . . . feed my lambs."

4. PROGRESS. "*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.*"

There are two applications of this verse. The first has to do with the experience of physical death. With that thought in mind, what a sweet message this is! The verse says that "I walk" at that time. I do not run, as though I were afraid, but I walk with all the confidence of a child in company with a strong father. One does not tarry in the valley; he walks *through*. There is no gloom; it is not the dark valley, as it is often called, but "the valley of the shadow"—and shadows presuppose light. When we pass through the shadow, the Light of the world will Himself be at our side!

There is a second meaning in this verse, and it has to do with the life of the Christian here on earth. The Psalm implies that, spiritually, there is a death that is necessary and desirable. Paul said, "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). To experience this kind of death will be painful to

the carnal nature; but in this, too, the believer may say with joy, "Thou art with me." When one reaches the place where he counts himself and all that he possesses as dead, and therefore not worth his notice in comparison with the life that is his in Christ, then he has attained the position in which all the blessings of the remainder of the Psalm become his.

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

Three benefits are named here: the prepared table, the anointed head, and the overflowing cup.

Let us think first of *the prepared table*. The Eastern shepherd, when he was about to lead his flock into a field, often would discover small snake holes in the ground. He knew the snakes would bite the noses of the sheep as they grazed, and that while this action was not seriously harmful, it annoyed the sheep. The shepherd, therefore, would destroy the trouble-makers before he led the sheep into the field. Thus the pasture became a place of peaceful satisfaction—a prepared table. The Lord Jesus Christ desires that, with every fretting care removed, we may feast quietly on the Word.

There is also *the anointed head*. At nightfall, the shepherd would carefully examine each sheep. If any one of them had bruised itself during the day, or if its fleece had been torn, the shepherd would apply the healing oil. Among His children, there is no wound of the flesh or of the spirit that escapes the notice of the Shepherd-Lord. He gives "the oil of gladness for the spirit of heaviness"—and what a healing ointment that is!

Finally, there is *the overflowing cup*. When a shepherd gathered his sheep into the fold, he would stand at the door; in fact, he himself actually was the door. He called each sheep by name. He observed whether it was weary, or sick, or thirsty, and he brought the horn of water for each needy one to have a long, refreshing drink.

Christ Himself is the Door. He thus declared Himself in John 10. There is a little chorus that children sometimes sing:

"One Door and only One, and yet its sides are two;
The inside and the outside: On which side are you?"

Through Jesus Christ we go in for salvation, and out for service. There is no other way.

6. PROSPECT. "*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 faithful shepherd always precedes his sheep, but the shepherd dog walks after them. F. B. Meyer used to explain that "goodness" and "mercy" are like two shepherd dogs: they follow us closely, and we are ever the recipients of the blessings of their presence.

You may feel today that goodness and mercy are not with you, but when you stand in the Glory, and look back over the way God has led, you will find that even during the days of darkness, stress, and seeming tragedy, goodness and mercy have been in your path, and Romans 8:28 has been true in your life.

We shall "dwell in the house of the Lord for ever"—that is, we shall be eternally at home. When we reach the Father's house, we shall be in the land of the living. This world is the abode of the dying, and we are reminded of that fact every day.

When I visited Australia a few years ago, I went into the church that I had attended as a lad. The rector I had known had passed away, but the young

man who had taken his place was very kind about showing me over the building.

I recalled the names of people who had occupied various pews, and I asked, "Are they living?"

The reply was the same for them all. They all were gone, and I was brought face to face with the fact that we live in a land of death.

But before very long, all of us who are born again through faith in Jesus Christ shall "dwell in the house of the Lord"—not for a century, not for a millennium, but forever.

A group of men on one of the battlefronts of the present conflict were asked what they wanted most after the war. A surprising number of them answered something like this: "I want a place to go home to—a friendly place that is safe."

For the establishment on earth of that kind of sanctuary, men are willing to suffer and die. And yet such a dwelling never could be wholly friendly or entirely safe, for it would be located still in a world of sin.

But there *is* "a place to go home to"—a perfect place. The Entrance to it is a Person, the Lord Jesus

Christ, the Shepherd of Bethlehem: "By me if any man enter in, he shall be saved" (John 10:9).

"Are you coming Home, ye lost ones?
Behold, your Lord doth wait;
Come, then, no longer linger,
Come ere it be too late;
Will you come and let Him save you?
O trust His love and might!
Will you come while He is calling,
Are you coming Home tonight?"

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