

LECTURE II.

PSALM xxiii. 1,—6.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

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

He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

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.

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

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.

MY friends, we would be a blessed company, if we could say with David, 'The Lord is my shepherd;' if you could once say this, then you might lay claim to all the rest that is in the psalm. Now the psalmist lays down here many brave conclusions from the Lord's being his shepherd, and by these he comforts himself. And the

1. Conclusion he draws from this, is, that he leads him in green pastures, and by the quiet and still waters; whereby is to be understood abundance of all things needful for him in spirituals and temporals, which he enjoyed with much ease and pleasure, like as a flock of sheep coming to quiet waters, get easy drinking thereof, with all ease and conveniency, without impediment.

2. He concludes, That he shall be well fed and nourished, there was no doubt of plenty, they should (meaning himself and all the truly godly) be fed as with marrow and with fatness in his pastures.

3. He concludes, That he leads them in righteousness, as if he had said, there is no doubt of their straying here, for his way is perfect, and converts the sinner; therein making them perfect in righteousness.

4. His pasture is a sure pasture, for says he, "he will be my guide, his rod and his staff is with me;" and being mentioned here, the rod signifies his correction, and his staff im-
ports

ports his government, or holds out his kingly office and power, that he rules by his sovereign authority.

5. There is this held out in this psalm, that this pasture is a pleasant pasture, and full of spiritual dignities; and holds out his assurance of his fruition and enjoyment thereof all his life.

6. There is this also held out by this psalm, his duration and continuance in that blessed and happy estate.

Now we shall observe some things from these conclusions which the psalmist lays down here; and so from the *first* conclusion that he is a shepherd, we shall observe,

1. That the psalmist in so doing, doth it after the manner of men; and yet God is not angry nor displeased with him for this style: You know that a shepherd is not much in respect with the world; and yet our Lord stoops so low, that he condescends to take on him this style of being a shepherd. And hence we may see, his love to his church and sheep; as also, that he will be careful of them and lead them.

2. That before a person can draw any sure conclusion of their state, they must get him to be theirs, or they must have an interest in him; O then first labour to get him to be your God! O get him to be your king! get him to be the object of your love above all things; and then fear not, you shall not want any thing that he sees good for you. It may be some of you think that you have many straits and wants as to the world, yet look on that as God's good dealing with you, since he sees it better for you to want than to have your desire therein; what is good the Lord will give, and what would you have more? then take all well out of his hand.

3. Observe, That the Lord who is a good shepherd, leads his people in a good pasture, though the world thinks our case very sad; and though enemies cast out the people of God to hunger and die in the fields, yet they shall be fed for all that, and shall grow and flourish; O then first! get Christ to be your shepherd, and you shall get life, you shall get grace and glory, yea, and your wilderness shall become a fruitful field, and you shall not be barren.

Next from the *second* conclusion that he draws, which was, that he should be fed, from that, observe,

1. That though the people of God be overcome sometimes, yet he will come and restore life and health again; or thus, though they be like to be swallowed up, both as to their spirituals and temporals, yet there is a day of restoration coming, in which they will be revived again; but ah! I fear there be many of you so ignorant of God, that you do not discern

cern between his presence and his absence; and you that are such, know not what that restoring or reviving is.

2. Observe, That there is no safety in such a stumbling day, but to seek to be led and guided of God, now when all are out of the way; and for my part, I know of nothing that will bring or set folk right, and keep them right in such a day, but a deep impression of the wrath of God, and of the cause of God upon your spirits, and a deep impression of your duty to God, and to your generation; and never think you will be right while you come to this, and to look only to God for your leading and guiding.

3. Observe, That you must look only for good in and thro' Christ's merits, and noother way, it must come allthro' that channel, and not for any thing in you, or ought that you can do; but look to God, who must come down and condescend to you, for you will never be able to come up to him, he must (to speak so) make the travel, for we cannot do it; O sirs! here is a broad field and large pasture to feed on, therefore, O sirs! come here and be satisfied with this fruitful field of Christ's merits and bounty.

But next from the *third* conclusion, *viz.* That in the Lord's most righteous paths, is the safest pasture. Observe,

1. That the people of God may be in that case, that they cannot tell where they are, they may be in great trouble of spirit, and great darkness, and go through many a sad and dark step, Isa. xliii. 1. Yea, they may go through many a weary step, ere they come to their outgate from under these, yet fear not, it will come in due time; you would aye be at a world of ease without any feck of trouble, you would be at that to have two summers in one year; but you must resolve to have dark steps, to let you see your need of his guiding and leading you.

2. Observe, The people of God will not do any thing right, and they will fear and dread any thing, till once they get a saving sight of Christ, and their interest made sure in him; and then they will be bold; they will not fear, neither the fear of sin, nor the fear of the punishment; O get this! and get faith in exercise; in the assurance of this, you may brag in your strength, for faith is a great bragger; but you may still see this, that it never brags in the creature, but in God, who can deliver you out of all troubles and every difficulty, when he sees his own time; and we may say this, that straits and difficulties should feed and embolden the faith of the people of God; for if you would ask at David, What it was that made him so fearless and confident?

silent? Here is the reason of it, the Lord is with me, or thou art with me. O sirs! seek to get the Lord with you, but seek not the assurance of this perverse generation, seek not the assurance of compliers and their confederates; but seek that the Lord may be with you, and slavish fear shall flee away, and the fear of man shall flee away.

3. Observe, That God hath showed the instruments wherewith he leads and guides his people, viz. "his rod" and his staff," that is, his correction and government, doctrine, and discipline, by which he leads, governs, and feeds his people to their great comfort.

4. Observe, That by sanctified trials, he makes his people a wise people, so that sometimes, and in some respects, they become wiser than their teachers; O sirs! get this pass and absolution, viz. That you are interested in him, and that is wisdom; but, though you should be absolved by all the world, if you want this, you shall be rejected of God: O then! seek your interest in him, and then all other things shall be sure to you.

Next from the *fourth* conclusion, which he lays down in this Psalm, viz. The sureness of the believer's portion, tho' in sight of their enemies.

1. Observe, That believers shall not want any thing that shall be for their good; O believe this! that even when you are meeting with robbing and spoiling, and casting out of your houses, and are cruelly used by enemies, so that you are become a by-word and derision, a proverb and a hissing, yea, a wonder in Israel, yet in all that, you are meeting with nothing but what shall be for your good; O believe this! believe this sirs! and look to Christ who hath a broad back and strong arms to bear you up in all these; O sirs! do not comply with enemies, but betake yourselves to Christ, and plead your necessity from these things, that he may be your guide, and get your interest made sure in him, and you shall not want what is good; and as you will readily profess, that you will trust your spiritual concerns to him, so let your temporal wants be on him also.

2. Observe, That his people shall be fed, were it even in the presence of their enemies; although they seek to starve you, and to make you miserable by their acts and laws, which they put out against you; yet, though they seek to destroy you, fear not, neither for your spiritual nor temporal necessities, for they shall be seen to; dare any of you say, for all that the enemies have done, that ever you had cause to complain? although they have done all that they could

could to cut off the life both of soul and body, yet you are fed in both.

3. Observe, That the people of God are not only fed, but they are fed to the full, so that their cup runs over, and he anoints them with oil; oil is said to make man's face to shine, and it is taken in several places of scripture for the graces of the Spirit, as a parable of the ten virgins, &c. but here it signifies their satisfaction in all their necessities in soul and body.

And from the *fifth* conclusion that he draws from this psalm, viz. His holding out of God's favouring him with his goodness.

Observe, 1. That we are to look to God for the doing of the work himself, for his own name's sake, and for nothing in us moving him to it: He says in another place, it is not for your sake, but for his own name's sake that he doth this.

2. Observe, That the believer's inheritance shall be made sure to him: all things in the world shall vanish away; but the believer's portion shall never fail, nor vanish away.

Sixthly and lastly, From the *sixth* conclusion that he lays down here, viz. That the Lord is his dwelling place, and that he shall have a sure abode in his house. Observe,

1. That believers, and they that are really interested in him, shall dwell with him for ever; he hath a sure abode for that party, *They shall go no more out*, &c. O sirs! here is the believer's happiness, which goes far beyond any temporal happiness in the world. O! who is able to describe this place of happiness? It is a place of continual loving, a place of continual longing, and a place of continual satisfaction to all eternity.

2. Observe, That it is a place of continual continuing and abode; it will never end, it will continue for evermore: All other inheritances, pleasures, and enjoyments will come to an end, and to many they will come to a sorrowful and miserable end, but this is an enduring substance, an inheritance that lasts for evermore.

Now the *Use* we draw from all this, is an *use of instruction*. O sirs! seeing there are so many sweet things to be had with, and in Christ, O then! come and accept of him, and receive him on his own terms. O sirs! get an interest in him; get him to be your shepherd, and you shall be led in his way, and shall get food to your souls. *To him be praise for evermore. Amen.*