

"THE GOOD SHEPHERD"

"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." John 10:11.

"I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine." John 10:14.

The oldest picture of Christ known to exist today is on the rock wall of one of the catacombs at Rome, one of those vast underground places where the early Christians buried their dead. This picture, which probably dates back to the second century, represents our Lord as a shepherd. It would seem that in those dark days when Christians were suffering cruel persecution from the imperial government that they delighted to think of themselves as sheep under the care of the Good Shepherd.

Of the numerous figures by which our Lord Jesus Christ is presented in the Word of God that of the Good Shepherd is one of exceptional appeal and blessing to the human heart. It is doubtful if any more beautiful figure could be employed to portray the relationship of Christ and His people than that of the oriental shepherd and his sheep.

In the land where our Lord lived there were many shepherds and thousands of sheep. At each village or town in the pastoral sections of Palestine there was a large sheepfold, or walled-in enclosure with a shelter and a single gate. As night approached the different shepherds would lead their flocks to the door of the fold. After the sheep had passed through the door, the shepherds left them in the care of the porter while they went to their abode for the night. The porter securely fastened the door of the fold and it remained that way until the next morning when the shepherds returned to get their sheep.

Upon their return in the early morning, the porter recognized the true shepherds and opened the door for each of them to enter. After the entrance of each shepherd into the fold, he called his sheep. They heard and recognized his voice and approached him. When he had brought them out, he went before them and they followed him. He led them out into the pasture for their morning meal. Before the sun had become too hot the sheep had enjoyed a bountiful repast. The shepherd then led them to the water in order that their thirst might be quenched. After that, he sought a good place for them to rest until the fierce noon-tide heat had passed. Following an extended period of rest, the sheep arose and enjoyed another good feeding before the shepherd led them back to the fold again, just prior to the sinking of the sun.

Accustomed to using familiar objects and situations in teaching great spiritual truths, Christ took some commonplace things, such as the shepherd, the sheep and the sheepfold, and made them the vehicle of certain gracious and glorious truths. One of those grand and wide-sweeping statements which our Lord frequently made of Himself is, "I am the door." Thus He taught how essential He is to life, whether it be an entrance or an exit.

Christ is the door to salvation. He is the means of entrance into the family of God. He said, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me." One must enter this door or he never will be saved.

Christ is the door to security. Our Lord said, "By Me if any man enter in he shall be saved." One who enters this door will find protection from the pangs of the past, the perils of the present and the fears of the future. Christ is the only door to real security. Those who are His are safe forever. "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, neither shall any man pluck

them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." John 10:27-29.

Christ is the door to satisfaction. "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10:9). Christ is the door to everything that is rich and good in life --- forgiveness, peace, joy, victory, contentment, hope, etc. He came in order that we might have and enjoy the abundant life, the life which lifts us above the changes and circumstances of this world. What He possessed He came to give to those who would believe on Him. In Him there is an all-sufficiency to satisfy our daily needs, and to sustain us amid all the temptations, toils, trials and tribulations of this life. There is an overflow in the life that Christ gives. It is life with a surplus. It has peace and joy and power. He wants every Christian to enjoy this abundant life daily.

Those of us who are God's children have a Shepherd Who watches over us even as an earthly shepherd watches over his sheep. In this we should rejoice greatly. Because Christ is our Saviour we are never left alone.

I. A Shepherd's Relationship To The Sheep.

1. He owns them.
2. He recognizes them.
3. He calls them by name.
4. He guides them.
5. He provides for them.
6. He guards them.
7. He protects them.
8. He chastens them.
9. He goes after them.
10. He sacrifices for them.

II. Christ's Relationship To Christians.

1. He gave His life for us.
"The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."
This sacrifice was:
 - (1) Deliberate.
"For this cause came I into the world."
 - (2) Voluntary.
"No man taketh my life."
 - (3) Vicarious.
"Bearing their own sins in His own body on the tree."
2. He owns us.
 - (1) By right of creation.
 - (2) By right of preservation.
 - (3) By right of providential care.
 - (4) By right of redemption.
 - (5) By right of final consummation.
3. He knows us.
"I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep." He knows all of our weaknesses, dangers, anxieties, cares, temptations, trials, struggles and needs.

4. He provides for us.
"He shall feed his flock like a shepherd" (Isaiah 40:11). The Shepherd provides for our needs. There is not a physical need that He will not supply. With confidence Paul said, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). He also provides for every spiritual need of our lives. If we sin, there is the promise of forgiveness. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). If trials press in upon us, He gives us grace. To Paul He said, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (II Corinthians 12:9).
5. He chastens us.
The Lord said, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" (Revelation 3:19).
6. He protects us.
We are saved by what Christ has done for us. We are made sure of our salvation by the Word of God. We enjoy the Christian life in proportion to our obedience to Christ. Through faith in Christ we have become the children of God and members of His family. Our wonderful security in Christ is pictured fully in Romans 8:38-39: "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Christ will never permit one of His sheep to perish. "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:28).
7. He comforts us.
The Good Shepherd gives comfort when sorrow comes. Here is something I have noticed, namely, those who are near the Good Shepherd stand sorrow better than those who are away from Him. The distance of worldly, back-slidden Christians from the Saviour often throws them into a panic when sorrow comes. Because He died and went into the grave, and knows all about death, He is able to cover those who draw near to the river of death.

III. Characteristics Of A Sheep.

1. A sheep is helpless.
Nature does not endow a sheep with weapons of defense.
2. A sheep is gentle.
No other animal is more tame or gentle than a sheep. Even a child can approach a sheep without fear of injury.
3. A sheep is dependent.
In the East the sheep look to the shepherd for protection and for guidance to and from the pasture.
4. A sheep is wayward.
A sheep is prone to wander. How sadly true this is of Christ's sheep!

"O to grace how great a debtor,
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness like a fetter
Bind my wandering heart to Thee!
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it;
Seal it for Thy courts above."

5. A sheep does not like filth.
A sheep may accidentally fall into a mudhole, but it will get out at once, and look as if it were ashamed of itself, instead of wallowing in it like a hog. Our Lord's sheep do not enjoy sin.
6. A sheep is useful.
Its wool is made into useful garments and its flesh provides meat for food. The Lord's sheep are useful in His kingdom.

IV. Characteristics Of Christ's Sheep.

1. They have an ear mark.
"My sheep hear My voice."
 - (1) In conversion.
 - (2) In Christian service.
 - (3) In afflictions.
 - (4) In the hour of death.They hear His voice obediently.
2. They have a foot mark.
"And they follow Me."
They have hearing ears and following feet.
They follow the Good Shepherd as their:
 - (1) Saviour.
 - (2) Teacher.
 - (3) Example.
 - (4) Master.

Are you one of Christ's sheep? Are you sure of it? If not, but you want to be, listen to His words, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved."

"There is one door and only one
And yet its sides are two
The inside and outside;
On which side are you?"

At the entrance of this door are two steps, namely, repentance and faith. Won't you repent of your sins and trust Christ as your Saviour now? If so, then come and unite with the church as now we sing.