

## **"TO WHOM SHALL WE GO?"**

**"Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."  
– John 6:68.**

THERE are numerous voices in the world, calling mankind to follow in the pursuit of pleasure, of riches, of wisdom, etc., and various are the inducements presented, and to the young and inexperienced the bewilderment of so many attractions is great. But experience has taught many of us, that these seductive Siren voices would but lead us to shipwreck upon hidden rocks and shoals, and that "all that glitters is not gold." We have learned that the cravings of our own human natures are quite unreliable, that we are fallen beings, that our tastes and appetites are perverse, and so depraved that frequently we crave the things that tend to do us injury, and are inclined to reject the things which are best for us. Our Lord speaks of these various voices calling mankind and leading astray, and contrasts them with his own call of his own "sheep" who hear and obey it, saying, My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me; strangers will they not follow, because they recognize not the voices of strangers. – See John 10:3-5.

Not all are able to hear and recognize the Shepherd's voice in the present time; the majority are deaf on this subject, however acute their hearing may be as respects the inducements held out to them by the world, the flesh and the devil. Consequently the Scriptures say, "He that hath an ear to hear [the gospel] let him hear." But the opening of our ears to hear the good tidings, of which Christ is the center, does not close them to the various voices of selfishness, ambition, pride, avarice, and vain-glory, and the other voices proceeding from the world, the flesh and the devil: it would seem indeed that, after accepting us to be his sheep, and after giving us some opportunity to learn the sound of the Shepherd's voice, the voice of Truth, we are intentionally exposed to the various voices which would call us away from our Shepherd, and from following in his footsteps. And Oh, how

many stray away! "Walking after their own desires." How many thus become side-tracked on the way to the heavenly city! How many are ultimately entirely switched off into another direction! How many have thus gone "back and walked no more with him!" How few, what a "little flock," they are that follow on, day by day, to know the Shepherd more fully, to walk in his paths, and ultimately [R2257 : page 39] with him to reach the heavenly Kingdom!

It will be remembered that the words of our text were called forth by a certain *sifting* of the discipleship. Our Lord's ministry had progressed considerably: at first, the people hung upon his words and said, "Never man spake like this man," and "great multitudes followed him." But towards the close of his ministry, as the jealousy and animosity of the "Doctors of Divinity" and the Pharisees began to manifest itself, he became less popular, and in our context we find that many of his hearers were leaving him, and he said, "Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given him of my Father. From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered and said unto him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." Such siftings and testings of the Lord's disciples have been in progress throughout the Gospel age, and still continue. Many have directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally, repudiated the great Shepherd, his leading and his instruction. Some, because the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees said, "He hath a devil and is mad. Why hear ye him?" Some, because they did not understand his teachings, and they said, "This is a hard saying: who can believe it?" Others, because his teaching drew the line too sharply between righteousness and sin, between God and Mammon; and we may understand as literal our Lord's statement that eventually only a "little flock" will be found worthy of the Kingdom.

It may sound harsh to some, because of their misconception of the subject, when we say that the Lord's message and leading were as

much intended to shake off and repel one class, as to attract and to hold another class. That would be inconceivable, if the ones repelled and shaken off were understood to be shaken into a hell of eternal torment, and such is the general misconception of the subject. On the contrary the attraction and the drawing was to the Kingdom, and the repulsion was from the Kingdom, and the sifting and separating of our Lord's day, and since and at the present time, is to the intent that the Lord may gather out and separate from those who nominally profess to be his followers, and to be seeking heirship with him in his Kingdom, all who are unworthy of those blessings. As it is written, concerning the end of the Gospel age, and the final glorification of the "little flock," "He shall gather out of his Kingdom [class] all things that offend and them that do iniquity....Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father." We may rest assured that none who are fit for the Kingdom will be sifted out. Of such it is written, "No man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand;" and again, "If ye do these things [hearken to the voice of the Lord and cultivate his spirit and walk in his ways], ye shall never fall [for so doing], and an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

How all-important then it is, that we have our minds thoroughly made up respecting the voice that we will obey and the footsteps that we will follow – for "a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." We "cannot serve God and Mammon," however much we try. We cannot hear and obey the voice of Satan and Sin and the World and Self and the Flesh, and at the same time hear and obey the voice of the Good Shepherd, the voice of Truth, the voice of Love. Let this be settled and fixed in our minds, that it may keep us from all wavering after we have once taken our place amongst the Lord's sheep.

In order that the decision may be the proper one, and in order that it may be the final decision, from which we will not think to turn, it is well that we should note the different voices calling us, and to what they lead. We will not notice these voices as they appeal to the world

in general, but merely as they appeal to those who have already heard the voice of the Good Shepherd. They assume that they will not antagonize our faithfulness to the Shepherd, but that they will heartily cooperate. The Shepherd, however, declares that this will not be the case; that the selfish voices of the world are calling, influencing, drawing away from him and the path in which he leads his sheep.

Wealth calls to us, holding out its golden charms, and promising great things; suggesting meanwhile that our religious zeal is right enough, but overwrought, fanatical, and that in this measure only it is in opposition to wealth; and that even if obliged to leave the Lord for the sake of wealth it need only be temporarily, and that soon, having acquired wealth, we could pursue after him with redoubled energy and thus gain the Kingdom. Alas, how delusive! and yet how many are attracted by this call and presentation! Well does the Apostle say that "The love of money is a root of all evil, which some coveting after have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Then, too, how false are these hopes, how few amongst the many who pursue wealth ever attain it! Indeed, it is not the wealth that is the evil, for God is rich above all; it is the love of earthly wealth and the manner in which it absorbs the heart affections, away from the truth and its service and heavenly things, that constitutes the evil and the snare of wealth which remarkably few ever resist, overcome and bring into subjection to the divine will. **[R2257 : page 40]**

Many hear the voice of Fame, and pursue it, if peradventure they will become famous, highly esteemed among men. The impelling motive here is, in part at least, pride and approbateness – ambition for self – not for God, nor for righteousness. And how few who turn aside from the Lord's way, in whole or in part, to gain fame, worldly renown, honor of men, ever attain to fame in any considerable measure! It is a false voice leading on to false hopes, soon shattered in death, if not before: it would induce us to turn aside from the humble path of obedience and self abasement in the divine service whose reward is "Glory, honor and immortality" at God's right hand of favor.

Others hear the voice of worldly pleasure, and see the millions of earth seeking it in the gratification of the flesh: and there is a great drawing to go with the multitude, seeking pleasure through the gratification of our perverted natural tastes. How long it takes us to learn assuredly that worldly pleasures are fleeting, and that they have a bitter which counterbalances every sweet, and that the tendencies of Vanity Fair are quite contrary to the new ambitions, new hopes, new desires of our new natures! How many efforts all of the Lord's people have made, to blend or mix the pleasures of the world with the heavenly joys, only to find that they will not blend, and that true happiness for those who would abide in Christ and follow in his footsteps, means the rejection of all pleasures which have a sinful combination or tendency! How long it takes us to learn that the only pleasures which the new creature can truly enjoy, are those in which our Lord can be our companion, those which we can discuss with him and in which we can enjoy his fellowship!

All of these besetments, be it noticed, have their roots in selfishness – they are all in some form inclinations to self-gratification: on the other hand the voice of the Good Shepherd is calling us away from our debased **[R2258 : page 40]** selfish conditions, moods and desires, to a higher plane of sentiment, a plane of benevolence, love of God and righteousness and fellow men, which seeks to "do good and to communicate." We see, too, that having set before us the new conditions, our Lord, our Teacher, is permitting the selfish tendencies of our natural hearts and of the world in general to call us in other directions; so that by learning to resist these, we may more and more establish for ourselves strong characters, rooted, grounded, fixed, in righteousness and love, strong and able to resist the weaknesses of our own flesh as well as the influence of friends and of the world in general.

Only such as thus develop character can possibly be "overcomers" of the world, and only such will be accepted of the Lord as his joint-heirs in the Kingdom. It will thus be seen that the Lord is

not merely seeking for those who will make a covenant with him, but by lessons of trial and discipline and testings by the way he is seeking to prove his people – to test them, to find and to separate to his own service not those who are strong in self-will, strong according to the flesh, but those who, abandoning the will of the flesh, give themselves so completely to the Lord that they become transformed by the renewing of their minds, – "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might."

In harmony with this thought are the words of the Lord to fleshly Israel, the typical people, – "The Lord your God *proveth you* to know whether ye love the Lord your God with *all* your heart and with *all* your soul." (Deut. 13:3.) This explains the object and intent of the divine course with us, the true Israel, throughout the Gospel age: he has been proving his people, testing them, to ascertain the degree and the strength of their love for him. He tells us that "Not everyone that saith, Lord, Lord, shall enter the Kingdom:" that many who make the covenant of full consecration will fail to keep it, fail to obey its requirements, and that their failure will indicate a deficiency of love for him, and that self-will still reigns in their hearts, giving God only the secondary place. And the Kingdom is only intended for those who by God's grace shall at heart become like to the Lord Jesus, in that they will love the Lord with *all* their hearts, with *all* their souls, and be able to say, "Not my will, but thy will, O Lord, be done." No other condition than this condition of full submission to the Lord can make us acceptable for the Kingdom; for no other condition represents full self-submission and full love to God. And let us not forget that all the heavenly things which "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man," God hath reserved for them that love him supremely.

Hence, however desirable it may be that our friends and neighbors should surrender themselves to the Lord on their death-beds, if they will not sooner surrender, it is nevertheless very evident that those who so repent in their dying hours, are not to be regarded as

in any sense of the word, "heirs of the Kingdom;" for it is not supposable that in the few short hours or days after their repentance they could develop the requisite staunch characters: they have not passed through such testings of faith and love and zeal for the Lord as would develop in them the characteristics of "overcomers" – the Kingdom class. Those who surrender to the Lord on their death-bed may, however, be encouraged to hope for his blessing in the Millennial age, and for an opportunity to come to a fuller knowledge of the Lord and to have an opportunity to cultivate character in that Paradisaic condition – as the Lord promised to the dying thief. [R2258 : page 41]

If we could but keep in memory the fact that every trial, every persecution, every difficulty of life, permitted to come upon those who have made the covenant of sacrifice with the Lord, is intended to *prove them*, to test their love, to see whether or not their characters are fixed, rooted and grounded in righteousness and being built up in love, it would put all these trials, difficulties and temptations in a new light before us, and greatly assist us in fighting a good fight and overcoming. We would say, If by these little trials the Lord is proving my love and devotion to him, then, however trifling they may be or however important, I will diligently use them as favorable opportunities to demonstrate to my Lord the fulness of my love and devotion to him and his cause. Thus viewed and thus met, every trial and every difficulty would prove to be a blessing: as the Apostle puts it, "Beloved, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;" "greatly rejoice, tho now for a season ye are in manifold temptation, that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than that of gold that perisheth, tho it be tried by fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." "Blessed is the man that endureth [faithfully under] temptation; for after his trials he will receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." "These light afflictions, which are but for a moment, *work out* for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" – if rightly utilized. – 1 Pet. 1:7; Jas. 1:2,12.

Thus we are again assured that those who love the Lord, and who in consequence will receive the Kingdom, will be those whose love will have been tested by trials and temptations on the way to it. Those who do not love the Lord with *all* their hearts, in whom self or some other idol has first place, will be seduced by the world, the flesh or the devil into some form of rebellion against the divine Word or divine providence: they will have schemes and theories which they will prefer to the Lord's plan, and their own theories and plans when analyzed will usually be found to be based either upon selfishness or ambition or upon an evil spirit of envy, hatred, jealousy, etc.

The Lord's leading and the Lord's words lose their attraction to such, and they lose their interest correspondingly, and like those who turned away from the Lord at the first advent, saying, "This is a hard saying" – they walk no more with him. But some will continue to walk with the Lord; some will not be driven from him by any of the arts and wiles of the evil one. They are such as are at heart fully the Lord's, not their own; they will follow wherever the Lord may lead, because they have no will except his will. These will follow the Lord in the narrow way of trial, discipline and testings during the present life, and by and by, as he has declared, "They shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy." (Rev. 3:4.) Nor will this company lack in numbers by reason of the falling away of some. No, it will be full, complete, the predestinated number which God foreordained he would select to be joint-heirs with his Son, our Lord Jesus. His foreknowledge permitted him to make full allowance for all who would turn back, as well as to foreknow that the requisite number would go on.

Those who go on will all have the general character of Christ – faithfulness to the Lord and to his word of promise: and when various voices call in various directions, away from the narrow way of consecration and sacrifice, humiliation and self-denial, they, in answer to the Lord's query, "Will ye also go away?" will answer as did the apostles of old, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." They know nowhere else to go; they cannot turn back, for

they can see clearly that to turn back on their part would be as the Scriptures express it, to "turn back unto perdition," to the second death. Having heard the calls of the world, the flesh and the Devil, they have seen also the emptiness of all their false promises, and how none of them can give a satisfying portion. But in our Lord's call they have recognized not only righteousness, justice, but have recognized, also, the promised reward of righteousness through Christ, which he has promised to them that love him – namely, eternal life.

Nowhere else is there such a promise; from no other quarter comes such a hope; in no other service, therefore, could they think of engaging but in this service. With the hope of obtaining this prize of eternal life, they could rejoice even in laying down this present life. Truly, this is that "blessed hope." With such hopes before them, clearly understood, and with the narrow way distinctly marked out, and with an understanding of why it is so narrow and why so few find it (because it leads to the great exaltation of the Kingdom and its joint-heirship with Christ), who could think for a moment of turning aside, or even listening, to the voices calling to wealth, honor, fame, pleasures of this life, etc., seeing that even hearkening to them would interrupt our progress in the way to the Kingdom, and thus frustrate our hopes and make the exceeding great and precious promises of none effect to us. The rather, therefore, will we lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and run with patience the race set before us in the gospel.

As the faithful disciples realized a meaning in the Master's teachings at the first harvest which the majority could not realize, so now at the second advent his words have a preciousness and a meaning and a force to those who are in heart-harmony with him, **[R2258 : page 42]** which they do not have to others; hence now, as at the first advent, some are stumbling and going back, and others are being drawn to the Lord more closely than ever, by the "present truth" which he is supplying as "meat in due season." As we progress in the way, toward the close of this harvest, we shall not be surprised if the way

should grow still narrower, more difficult, and if the tendencies to "stumble" should become more frequent. Let us each, therefore, more and more be on our guard against the wiles of the Adversary; and let the perfect love of God rule in our hearts, driving out self-love and world-love, and their pride and ambition and folly; and let this devotion to God bring into our hearts the promised fulness of joy [R2259 : page 42] and rest and peace; and let us abide in him, the Vine, and be fruitful branches, responding to all the prunings of the great husbandman with more abundant fruitage; and if beguilements come to us, let us view the matter as did the apostles and say, "Lord, to whom should we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."

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