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## **THE GREAT SHEPHERD AND HIS SON, THE GOOD SHEPHERD.**

JOHN 10:1-16. – AUGUST 26.

"The Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."

DAVID, THE PSALMIST, wrote prophetically, "Jehovah is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psa. 23); for in David's day the arrangements for the Shepherd and the flock of this lesson had not been completed. True, the heavenly Father had purposed his entire plan as respects humanity's redemption and return to his care as his flock, but he had not yet sent his only begotten Son, the Good Shepherd, to give his life for the sheep, to call the flock, to open the door and to lead them out and into pasturage and to rest. Nevertheless, in the Lord's providence the nation of Israel had already been gathered, as those who would be prepared to be the flock of the Good Shepherd when he should come. These were "shut up under the Law" (Gal. 3:23), waiting for the coming of the Good Shepherd to open the door and to call them by name as his [R2672 : page 230] own sheep. Others, indeed, came before the Messiah, affecting to be the true shepherd, leaders sent of God, but they were mere pretenders, who sought their own good and glory, and not that of the sheep. They were thieves and robbers, who sought to gain possession of the sheep for their own selfish ends.

The "porter" (representing the Law) would not recognize any of these pretenders, nor approve them, nor open to them access to the sheep. But when the true Shepherd came he satisfied the Law (the porter), and bought the sheep from Justice, giving his own life as their redemption price. Thus he gained the full right to open the door, the full sanction of the porter, the full authority to lead forth the sheep to the green pastures and still waters of divine truth which then became due to them.

At the time of the giving of this parable our Lord was laying down his life, and at the same time uttering his voice, that the true sheep might learn to know him. And not only will all the true sheep learn to know the Shepherd, but, precious thought! the Shepherd knoweth his own sheep individually, so that he calleth each by name as he leads them out. This suggests to us the intimacy of the relationship between Christ and each member of his flock.

The treatment of sheep in this part of the world is very different from that described in the parable, which is still maintained in Oriental countries. Here sheep are driven, and have little or no acquaintance with the herdsmen. But in Palestine, for instance, every sheep has a personal acquaintance with its shepherd, and he with it, and it is said that this acquaintance is so particular that the shepherds have a separate name for each sheep, and know each individually by its name, and that the sheep knows its own name and will respond to a call from its own shepherd at any time. How beautifully this illustrates the close relationship between Christ and his flock, the Church! He gives to each one of us a new name, and we are each personally known to him – our peculiarities of character, temperament, etc., our strong points and our weaknesses – he knoweth them all. He loves us, cares for us, helps us over our trials and difficulties, and shields us from the temptations which would be too strong for us. "He will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will with the temptation provide also a way of escape," and causes that "all things work together for good to them that love God, the called ones according to his purpose" – his "little flock" of this Gospel age.

We note also the care of the Shepherd over the sheep, for he says, "He putteth forth his own sheep and goeth before them." The words "putteth forth" have the significance of looking after them, that they all get started in the way to the green pastures and still waters for soul refreshment. He is not heedless, careless, respecting them, whether they go or do not go; nevertheless, having started

them in the way he will not drive them: he goeth before them to lead, that they may follow. Our Good Shepherd has indeed set us a noble example, so that we may walk in his steps; and whoever will, to the extent of his ability, trustfully do this, will find his wants abundantly supplied, for "No good thing will he [the Shepherd] withhold from those who [thus] walk uprightly." "He will guide them with his counsel, and afterward receive them to glory." – Psa. 84:11; 73:24.

Our Lord's parable does not tell us about the disciplines which the sheep are sure to receive, but these are set before us in the prophetic psalm on the subject, in the words, "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." The thought is that the Shepherd, while going before and not driving the sheep, nevertheless has such an interest and care that he will not suffer one of the sheep to wander away without administering certain chastisements designed for its good, and to correct it and to bring it back into fellowship in the flock. This is a comfort, and yet it should certainly be the desire of all true sheep to follow the Shepherd so closely that the rod shall not often be necessary.

The link between the Shepherd and the sheep, as here indicated, is love. The Shepherd loves the sheep, and has demonstrated this in having laid down his life for them; and the sheep speedily learn to love the Shepherd, as their care-taker; they recognize him through his voice – the Word of God. This voice appeals to the hearts of all the true sheep, who quickly respond, "Never man spake as this man."

The voice of the Good Shepherd is a blending of various sounds in a manner in which they are blended by no other voice. His voice sounds forth the chord of justice commingled with the chord of love, and the whole intoned with wisdom and with power. Other theories, plans and schemes of men and of devils, have no such harmony of sound as has the message which the great

Shepherd has sent us through his Son. His voice speaks to us of a just penalty for sins – death; it speaks of love, in our redemption and the forgiveness of our sins, and the opening to us of the way of life, through resurrection. This "word of grace" constrains all the true sheep as no other message or voice could do. Moreover, when the true sheep hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, it satisfies their longings as nothing else could do. They will no longer be in danger of being attracted by other sounds or voices, theories or schemes, but will reply to all,

"Jesus has satisfied; Jesus is mine."

There are many false voices in the world today, seeking to lead the Lord's sheep astray, and these are **[R2672 : page 231]** sometimes sounded in deceptive tones, to imitate the Shepherd's call, to draw away sheep after those who would be shepherds, but whom the great Shepherd has not appointed; shepherds who not only have not purchased the sheep, but who seek to ignore the great sacrifice by which the Good Shepherd did purchase them. We might mention many such false voices, or false would-be shepherds, – Christian Science, Theosophy, Spiritism, Evolution, Higher Criticism, etc., but we have the Good Shepherd's word for it, that his true sheep will not be deceived by any of these. Well do they know his voice, and its combination of justice, love, and mercy cannot be duplicated by others, – its message of redemption by the precious blood, justification by faith, the high calling, the begetting of the holy spirit, the by-and-by deliverance of the sons of God, and eventually of all who will obey him of the entire groaning creation, through restitution.

This voice, once heard, can never be mistaken for another; and those who know this Shepherd and his voice need never be misled by others. The Lord's true sheep, whom he knows by name and who follow him, will not heed the voice of strange shepherds, but will flee from them. They know when they hear a false **[R2673 : page**

**231]** voice, that it means that the Adversary is seeking to ensnare them; and such will flee from the voice of error that they may come the closer to the true Shepherd, who gave his life for the sheep. If, therefore, we see some whom we had supposed were of the Lord's flock heeding another voice and following after strange shepherds, and heedless of the voice that speaketh from heaven, we need not be fearful; for if they are true sheep of the Lord's flock they cannot long be deceived, if at all. We may indeed sound out the voice of the Good Shepherd, calling their attention afresh to the harmonies and beauties of the "voice from heaven," but if still they do not hear and heed, we may know that they do not belong to the flock which our Shepherd is now collecting and shepherding.

Amongst those who heard this parable from our Lord's lips, not many comprehended, not many had the hearing ear for the true Shepherd's voice: only a small proportion of the Jewish people followed him and became his true sheep. Similarly now, many are professing to be the true sheep of the Lord's flock, but in this day of the Shepherd's presence his voice, the truth, becomes the test. All of the true sheep will hear and be attracted by the voice of truth now uttered, and will obey it. Those who are not of the Good Shepherd's flock, and who have not his spirit, he desires shall now be separated; to this end they will hear the voice of other shepherds, and be deceived thereby: because they are not truly of the Lord's flock.

Dr. Porter tells of a scene he witnessed, in which several flocks of sheep were for a time commingled, and how, when the due time was come, the separation took place. He says: –

"As we sat and looked, almost spell-bound, the silent hillsides around were in a moment filled with life and sound. Thousands of sheep and goats were there, grouped in confused masses. The shepherds stood together until all came out, and then they separated, each shepherd taking a different path, and uttering, as he advanced, a shrill, peculiar call. The sheep heard them; at first the mass

swayed and moved as if shaken by some internal convulsion; then points struck out in the directions taken by the shepherds. These became longer and longer, until the confused masses were resolved in long, living streams flowing after their leaders."

So at the present time there are many sheep in the nominal Church, but they are not all the Lord's sheep. Some belong to human leaders of various sects, and some are God's. The harvest, or end of this Gospel age, the time for separating the wheat from the tares, is the time for separating the different flocks of sheep. In harmony with this, we now hear various voices calling the sheep in various directions, as never before. This is, in the Lord's providence, for the purpose of separating all others from his own "little flock." His sheep will hear his voice and follow him – other sheep, consecrated to human leaders, human institutions, human theories, human efforts, will follow their own bents, and thus be separated from the "little flock," and this is now the Lord's good pleasure. Thus he will "gather out of his kingdom all things that offend and them that do iniquity," before the glorifying of his Church and the great time of trouble that will follow.

### **CHRIST THE DOOR OF GOD'S SHEEP-FOLD.**

As a further explanation of the matter, our Lord refers to himself as the Door of the sheep-fold, the lawful, proper entrance-gate, by which God's people might enter into rest. All who had ever come previously, claiming to be messiahs, had attempted to climb up by some other way than that of keeping the divine law and purchasing the sheep. They were thieves and robbers, attempting to take what they had not secured a right to, and that for selfish gain. But none of the true sheep would heed them nor follow them. Now, however, the Good Shepherd had come, and had purchased the sheep, opening a legal door of entrance to them and liberty for them, and it was appropriate that all of the true sheep should know it. Now it had become possible for the sheep to have in Christ the liberty so

long desired, and to be led out and into pasturage and refreshment and to rest and security. Henceforth Jehovah's flock should never lack for pasturage; because, having bought them through his Son, they shall be cared for. They may now say, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." [R2673 : page 232]

Others who had approached the sheep, seeking to be their leaders, had done so selfishly; had been willing to sacrifice the sheep in their own interest; but the Good Shepherd, solicitous for the best interests of the sheep, demonstrated this by the sacrifice of his own life on their behalf, that they might have life more abundant, better than they had ever known hitherto, – eternal life. Hireling shepherds labor for the hire, and not from personal interest in the sheep, and consequently, instead of being ready to lay down their lives for the sheep in times of extremity and persecution for righteousness' sake, they are ready rather to flee the trouble and avoid persecution. They think chiefly of their own ease and comfort, honor and dignity, and of how much of the golden fleece they can get from the sheep. They are not very deeply concerned respecting the spiritual progress of the sheep, their growth in grace, and in all the fatness of love and spiritual welfare; but specially in numbers and collections.

Perhaps never more than at present is this truth clearly illustrated amongst those who are professedly representatives of the Good Shepherd – under-shepherds in his flock. Many of them give evidence of wanting to be on the popular side of every question – of unwillingness to suffer anything for the sake of the truth; of carelessness respecting the real spiritual condition of the flock: of interest rather in the human institutions through which they obtain their support, and with whose welfare their honor, dignity and titles are associated. Of such shepherds Milton, the poet, wrote, styling them –

"...blind mouths.

The hungry sheep look up and are not fed,  
But, swollen with wind and the rank mist they draw,  
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread."

The Christian philosopher, John Ruskin, commenting upon this, says: "These two monosyllables, 'blind mouths,' express the precisely accurate contraries of the right character in the two great offices of the Church, – those of bishop and pastor. A bishop means a person who *sees*; a pastor means one who *feeds*. The most unbishoply character a man can have is, therefore, to be blind. The most unpastoral is, instead of feeding, to want to be fed, – to be a mouth."

Nevertheless, the Good Shepherd will always be represented amongst the sheep by those who have his own characteristics, and who are seeking to walk in his footsteps; and through these he will utter his "voice," and lead his own sheep to pasture and to rest. These will not only have the same voice, the same Word, the same good tidings, but they will have the same devotion to the interests of the sheep – to feed the sheep, to lead them into the green pastures and by the still waters of present truth, and to preserve their liberties in the Lord, and not to pen them up as their own, nor to make merchandise of them.

The Father, the great over-Shepherd, Jehovah, is referred to by the Good Shepherd, Jesus, in verse 16. "The Father knoweth me" [has confidence in me – has entrusted the care of the sheep to me] and even so I know the Father [having full confidence in him, and recognizing him as my Shepherd, director, leader], and [it is in harmony with his arrangement for me and for the sheep that] I lay down my life for the sheep."

The sheep that I am now calling and leading to pasture and caring for and calling by their own names, and who know me, are a very special lot of sheep; in all only a "little flock," for whom

Jehovah, the Great Shepherd, has made special arrangements and provisions in his Kingdom of glory. However, these are not all of his sheep, tho they are all yet called and led forth. "Other sheep I have that are not of this fold." I bought the whole world with the one sacrifice for sins, and all who have the true sheep disposition, all who desire to be in harmony with righteousness, truth, and the author of these, I must recognize as my sheep, and must search them out far and near, until every one of them shall be found. But not yet: this will be by and by, after the present "little flock" shall be glorified with me. Then they, with me, shall be the shepherds who will gather in all of the true sheep, delivering them all from the power of the enemy, and bringing so many as will obey my voice ultimately into that glorious condition of oneness, harmony with the heavenly Father and with myself, in which condition, as my sheep, they will be entitled to everlasting life. "Then there shall be one fold and one shepherd," as it is written, "Of whom the whole family both in heaven and in earth is named." – Eph. 3:15.

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