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TRUE SHEPHERD, TRUE SHEEP, TRUE FOLD.

– JOHN 10:7-18. – APRIL 2. –

Golden Text: – "The Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."

THE PARABLE of the Good Shepherd opens with the first verse of John 10, and really concludes with the incidents of our last lesson, which showed the Scribes and Pharisees angry with the blind man who had been healed at the Pool of Siloam, who had confessed Jesus, and as a result had been cast out of the Synagogue. This parable seems to be a continuation of our Lord's remarks anent that incident. From this standpoint it seems to have had special force as teaching that whatever the Scribes and Pharisees had previously done or attempted to do in the way of shepherding the sheep they were merely hirelings, seeking their own advantage, honor of men, influence, wealth, etc., and willing to sacrifice the sheep to serve these ends. This was illustrated in the treatment of the man whose eyes had been opened: his interests as a sheep were entirely sacrificed to their personal ambitions and fear of the loss of influence through the growing popularity of Jesus.

The lesson declares that the Lord is the "door" of the sheep – the door by which the true sheep entered the true fold. All who ever preceded Jesus, claiming to be the shepherds of the sheep, were deceivers, (thieves and robbers). The word here rendered thieves contains the thought of craftiness, embezzlement, while the word robbers contains the thought of open violence, free-booting. In combining these two words our Lord represents the foes of the flock, some of them being crafty, "wolves in sheep's clothing," and some of them open, bold, aggressive. The Adversary's attacks have always [R3527 : page 89] been along both lines, and the sheep still need to be on guard against both classes of deceivers, but chiefly against the deceitful foes who cloak their ambitious designs under the

ministerial garb, affecting to be caretakers of the flock, while in reality their conduct shows that self interest controls them.

The late Mr. Ruskin in his book, "*Sesame and Lilies*," quotes from Milton's writings a characterization of these false spiritual shepherds, as follows:

"Blind mouths: that scarce themselves know how to hold
A sheep hook, or have learned aught else, the least
That to the faithful herdsman's art belongs!

* * *

"The hungry sheep look up and are not fed,
But, swollen with the wind and the rank mist they draw,
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread;
Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw
Daily devours apace and nothing said."

Ruskin's comment is, "These two mono-syllables ['blind mouths'] express the precisely accurate contraries of 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 unpastorly is, instead of feeding, to want to be fed – to be a mouth."

"I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD."

The pretended Shepherd, self-seeking, is called a thief because he not only steals or misappropriates the title of Shepherd or Pastor, but in his self-seeking greed is willing to risk the destruction of the spiritual life of the sheep that the sectarian lines may be kept up, that his own personal interests may be served. We see this illustrated today. How many of the Protestant Shepherds of the Lord's flock in all denominations seem willing to misrepresent the harvest message, and

everybody and everything connected therewith, that thereby they may preserve their hold upon the sheep, maintain their standing and influence in the denomination, and withal get goodly clippings of the golden fleece of the flock.

The Good Shepherd is the reverse of all this – his entire thought is for the sheep, their welfare. Our Lord himself was the true Shepherd, and he demonstrated his devotion to his office by the sacrifice of everything, even life itself, on behalf of the sheep. The Lord would have his true sheep to recognize the distinction between the true and the false shepherds, and he would have his sheep of to-day similarly recognize his appointees, representatives, in the flock by the same signs. Those elders in the Church to-day who manifest the blind-mouth disposition should be avoided, should not be encouraged, should be reprov'd; while those whose loyalty to the Lord and the flock is continually manifested should be recognized, and, because of their likeness to the true Shepherd, they should be loved "for their works' sake" as well as for their intellectual worth. The self-sacrificing spirit, blended with humility, should be recognized by all of the sheep as the spirit of the true Shepherd, and from such alone should be expected the leading which the Good Shepherd promised to the flock throughout this Gospel age.

Our Lord defended the interests of the sheep against the false spirits and the wolves of his day, and it cost him his life. And so the faithful followers of the Lord throughout this Gospel age have been obliged either to fight with the wolves in the sheep's clothing, and thus incur their hatred, malice and opposition, in synods, presbyteries, counsels, etc., or else ignominiously flee before them by silence and allowing the sheep to be starved and misled. Our Lord could have taken this course: he could have refrained from antagonizing the Scribes and Pharisees and chief priests: he could have said, "Why should I expose myself to opprobrium and persecution and all manner of reproach and death by opposing these blind leaders of the blind?" For him to have done so would have been for him to have fled

responsibility and duty. His love for the sheep would not permit this, and his faithfulness demonstrated him the true Shepherd of the flock. In this he made it plain that he was not a "hireling," not merely serving for the sake of the golden fleece, but out of a true heart with true love for the sheep.

The true Shepherd thus commends himself to all who are truly sheep, and such admire this spirit of their Master wherever they find it. That is to say, whoever are the true sheep will love and appreciate such a spirit and none other, and will thus differentiate themselves from those who are merely the followers of men, partisans, sectarians. The Lord knoweth them that are his, and they know him. The Lord appreciates those who thus recognize principle, and that class recognize, know, the Lord more and more intimately day by day, and find their love and devotion to him continually increasing. Our Lord's words on this matter are more clearly presented in the revised version, namely, "I know mine own and mine own know me, even as the Father knoweth me and I know the Father." This intimacy of acquaintance, this fellowship divine, is something which cannot be explained to others, but which is certainly appreciated by all the true sheep who know the true Shepherd, and who have been, under his guiding care, led to the green pastures and still waters and also into the fold for safety.

OTHER SHEEP OF ANOTHER FLOCK.

When the Lord said, "Other sheep I have which [R3527 : page 90] are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and they shall become one flock and one Shepherd," he was voicing the same truth which was afterward, under the guidance of the holy Spirit, elaborated by the Apostle Paul, saying that the heavenly Father hath purposed himself that in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ – the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth. – Eph. 1:10.

The flock which the Lord was gathering to himself at the time of this parable was not natural Israel, but spiritual Israel. Natural Israel had existed under Moses and the Law for centuries, but the Law made nothing perfect and could not give them the liberty and blessing requisite to their attaining everlasting life. They were "shut up" under the Law Covenant, as the Apostle Paul expressed it. Various pretenders came claiming that they were proper shepherds of the sheep and able to lead them to the necessary nutriment, the green pastures and the still waters of truth, but they were all [R3528 : page 90] unfaithful, thieves and robbers, who sought their personal honor and social advantage at the expense of the sheep. Our Lord became the "door" (vs. 7,9) of the sheepfold; those who accepted him were the true flock, he knew them and they knew him, and heard his voice and followed him. They were a small flock indeed compared with the large nominal Jewish system, the majority of whom followed the false teachers because they did not have the true spirit of the sheep.

All "Israelites indeed" heard and recognized the voice of the true Shepherd and became his followers. Our Lord as the "Door" gave these true sheep that access to the blessings and mercies of this Gospel age in the fullest sense which began at Pentecost and will not be finished until all the true sheep shall have heard the Shepherd's voice and shall have entered into his rest and have been fed and refreshed by following him. Jesus as the "Door" represents all the privileges and blessings of the true sheep. By him we enter into rest in the fold or resting place provided for the true sheep – the rest of faith. By him also we may go out to enjoy the liberties and refreshment to which as our Shepherd he leads his flock. We go in and out continually, enjoying the liberties and privileges secured to us by our Shepherd. We thus enjoy "the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free." – Gal. 5:1.

This rest and liberty we obtain, first, through our justification by our Lord's sacrifice of himself; and, secondly, through our

consecration as his sheep and our adoption through the holy Spirit, which brings us under his care and feeding.

"FELLOW-HEIRS OF THE SAME PROMISE."

We who are not Jews by nature, but Gentiles, when we come into Christ are members of this same flock. This the Apostle distinctly states, declaring that God hath broken down the middle wall of partition to make of the twain one; wherefore we are no longer aliens, strangers, foreigners, but are brought nigh, and are permitted to enjoy all the privileges and blessings accorded to any by the great Shepherd. We were not the Lord's sheep in any sense of the word before, but foreigners, strangers, aliens. Hence the view that some have taken that we who are of the Gentiles or "other sheep" mentioned are now being brought into the one fold is not correct. We were not the Lord's sheep at all at the time of this parable.

The Apostle in Romans 11 pictures our relationship to natural Israel. He represents the Jewish people as the olive tree, the outgrowth of the fat root of the Abrahamic promise, the Oath-Bound Covenant, and shows that the branches or people of that nation were broken off from the relationship of the root of promise except the few who properly received the Lord Jesus. He then points out that the Gentiles are being engrafted instead of these broken off branches. Thus the Jewish flock as it previously existed was not accepted of the Lord but merely those who heard the good Shepherd's voice, and with these we, who are Gentiles, are made fellow-heirs, members of the one body, the one flock. This same thought is held before us in Revelation 7 where our Lord pictures the entire elect Church as 144,000, 12,000 from each tribe. God's election was made in respect to the twelve tribes of Israel; and, when many of all these tribes were found unworthy of the highest honor and rejected, the elect number in each tribe was filled up from believing Gentiles. We may not know to which of these tribes we have been accredited, even as we do not know which crown has been apportioned to us; but we do know that

all of the elect of God, the overcomers, are thus reckoned of him as Israelites indeed in whom is no guile, and these shall be heirs with the Lord in the Kingdom.

Evidently these "other sheep" mentioned in this parable are those who will become the Lord's sheep after the present "little flock" shall have been completed. The entire Millennial age will be required for the finding of the Lord's true sheep amongst the world of mankind, including those Israelites who, because blinded by sin and error, were unworthy to be sheep of the present flock and were turned aside and blinded, but whose blindness shall be put away in the Lord's due time.

The Lord refers to this other flock of sheep, and explicitly tells us about the gathering of those sheep to his favor under him as the great Shepherd. He definitely fixes the time, and shows that the parable of the sheep and goats belongs not to the present age but to the Millennial age by the declaration with which it opens, namely, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them from one another, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats." – Matt. 25:31,32.

It will require all of that Millennial day, that thousand years, to demonstrate who amongst the world of mankind desire to be the Lord's sheep, to hear the voice of the good Shepherd and follow him in the paths of **[R3528 : page 91]** righteousness and truth and to the attainment ultimately of life everlasting. Others who will not hear him shall be cut off from amongst the people – destroyed in the Second Death. (Acts 3:23.) These are the goat class of the parable, whose destruction is pictured elsewhere in the lake of fire and brimstone, which is explained to mean, the "Second Death." – Rev. 20:14.

At the close of the Millennial age all of the sheep of that age will be received into full favor with the Lord, and will be brethren to all who are the Lord's on any plane of existence. They will be brethren

to the Church which is now being selected, the "elect," who will sit with the Lord in his throne during the Millennial age and be associated in the work of judging both the sheep and the goats (1 Cor. 6:2), and they will be brethren also of all the angelic hosts. When all things in heaven and in earth are brought fully into subjection to our great Shepherd, in that sense of the word all will be his sheep on whatever plane of existence they may be – the "Church" partakers of the divine nature, the angelic hosts, restored and perfected men.

"THEREFORE DOTH MY FATHER LOVE ME, BECAUSE I LAY DOWN MY LIFE THAT I MAY RECEIVE IT AGAIN."

The special love of the Father for the Son above all others is here referred to. The basis of that special love was the Son's complete trust in the Father and thorough harmony with and obedience to the divine will. We can see at a glance how such a noble, faithful character would be appreciated by the Father. Our Lord had always been obedient to the Father, but he learned the meaning of obedience, he learned to appreciate how much obedience might cost by the things which he suffered – his self-denial, humiliation, death. No wonder all noble hearts love this noble Shepherd, and what wonder that we who are his sheep, and who realize so great a blessing and advantage through his sacrifice for us, should love him in return.

No wonder, as the Apostle says, that we find such a love constraining our hearts to a responsive love. The Apostle exhorts us that we should have this same mind that was in Christ Jesus – not only the elders of the Church, who as under-shepherds, pastors, seek to safeguard the interests of the flock in every way, but all of the Church, seeking and attaining more and more of a likeness to the great Shepherd – have more and more of his spirit. The Apostle urges such, saying, "We ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren." This spirit should be manifested in all of the Lord's sheep, and should be considered as a prerequisite to recognition as one of the under shepherds.

Our Lord's commission was not merely to lay down his life, but also to receive it again. Evidently he had the promise of the Father of a resurrection from the dead. He intimates this in his prayer, "Father glorify thou me with the glory I had with thee before the world was." Doubtless the Master had been promised some still higher glory and honor, but he waived all reward and was content that he should please the Father and accomplish his purposes for mankind. The Father was not content to merely restore him to his previous high position of the past, but made him a partaker of the divine nature in the fullest and most absolute sense. The same promise, through our Lord, is open to us if we are faithful – "if we suffer with him we shall also reign with him," sharing his "glory, honor and immortality" – the divine nature. – 2 Pet. 1:4.

Our Lord wished it to be understood that his life, which would shortly be given was voluntarily submitted on his part. It was necessary that his disciples should know this, not merely that they might esteem their Lord more highly, but especially that they might realize him as the Redeemer whose voluntary sacrifice for our sins redeemed Father Adam and his entire race. To have confidence in the result they must have confidence in his resurrection – that the Father had so pleased and had given his sanction or authority or power to this end. Our Lord acknowledged that all the authority, all the power in connection with his resuscitation was of the Father. He was trusting implicitly to the Father, and so doing was able to lay down even life itself on behalf of the flock. The same will be true of all who would walk in his steps. In order to be faithful in the laying down of our lives, we must have faith in the Father and in the great plan of salvation which hinges upon the sacrifice of our Lord. With this matter clearly before our minds we may have grace and strength for every time of need.

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