

THE SHEPHERD, THE DOOR, THE FLOCKS

- JOHN 10:1-18. - APRIL 5 -

Golden Text: – "The Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." – V. 11.

THE Scriptures assign many very beautiful and expressive titles to our Lord as descriptive of his relationship to his faithful. Amongst the most beautiful and impressive of these is the Good Shepherd, or, more literally, the grand Shepherd, the ideal Shepherd. Likewise amongst the various names applied to our Lord's followers, the term "sheep" is the one most familiar as well as one of the most fitting. Surely it would never occur to the natural man to use such an illustration. In illustration of what we mean note the fact that the barons and lords of England have adopted various signets, coats of arms, etc., on many of which animals or animals' heads appear. Did any one ever see a sheep's head on any of these? We think not. If we could imagine any earthly lord as adopting a symbol of a sheep, it would surely represent a surly-horned ram. Lions' heads, tigers' heads, eagles' heads, and nondescript heads of ferocious aspect, dragons, etc., are what are usually chosen. This represents the natural mind and the desire that the natural man has to appear strong and ferocious and to intimidate others. He who represented himself as the Good Shepherd and his followers as sheep had a very different idea of the whole matter from that of the natural man, and we who have become his followers should take note of this, and, appreciating it, should cultivate more and more of the sheep-like nature in our relationship to him as the Shepherd.

THE DOOR INTO THE SHEEPFOLD

The parable of our lesson divides itself into two parts, representing Jesus first of all as the door into the sheepfold and

secondly as the Shepherd. The fold described in the parable is well represented in the accompanying illustration. It was a place of safety, of rest, of protection from prowling wild beasts and from robbers. There was but one doorway into these folds and it was supposed to be guarded by a porter who would know the true shepherd and admit him and no other. Our Lord declared himself to be the true Shepherd of Jehovah's flock, the only one to whom the porter would grant admission and the only one, therefore, who had the right to control the sheep and who alone could provide for their safety. The porter who could thus discriminate between the true and the false was the Law Covenant. **[R4157 : page 93]** Those who could not answer the Law, who could not fulfil its demands, could not substantiate their claims to being the Shepherd, the Messiah. But our Lord did meet the demands of the Law fully, completely – "in him was no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." He was already holy, harmless, separate from sinners. He is thus identified to us as the rightful Shepherd. Others had come in his name, professing to be the Messiah – false Messiahs – and had endeavored to attract the sheep; but our Lord declares of them that they were fraudulent, "thieves and robbers," who were merely assisting to steal the sheep, and who were actuated not with a desire to profit the sheep but by personal, selfish ambitions.

There was but one way to become the true Shepherd of the Lord's flock and to have a right to lead his flock – out to the green pastures and still waters of truth and grace and into the rest and security of the fold. That way was the way of the cross – to give himself a ransom for all. This our Lord did and thus he became the door to the sheepfold, opening up a new and living way, or, more correctly, a new way of life. Nevertheless, this is not the making of a new door into the fold, but the opening of the door which had previously been closed. The door was the Law, which could not open except by obedience to the Law; and now our Lord Jesus, having kept the Law, has made it possible for all of his true

sheep to enter in by the same door, by the keeping of the Law – not, however, the letter of the Law, which would be impossible to us, but its spirit. Thus the Apostle says of the true sheep and their entering into the fold, "The righteousness of the Law is fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit," (Rom. 8:4); because our Shepherd has made an appropriation of his grace on our behalf which makes up for us all that we lack. So long as we are his and are striving to walk in his ways every deficiency is compensated out of his abundance. To him the porter openeth, to him the Law and the prophets bear witness.

"BUT THEY UNDERSTOOD NOT"

It is supposed that this parable was uttered in the hearing of the man born blind, who had been expelled from the synagogue, and in the hearing also of the Pharisees, who had so much to do with his expulsion. No doubt the man was feeling discouraged, downcast, because of his excommunication from the supposed fold of the Lord's people. The presumption, then, is that the Lord gave this parable to illustrate the fact that he had not really been cast out of the Lord's fold, but merely out of a human organization by those who had no power in respect to the matter. Our Lord would have him and the Pharisees and his disciples and us see that there is no flock of the Lord except that of which he is the Leader and Shepherd; that there is no way into that flock except through him, through the work which he would accomplish by his sacrifice and through our acceptance of the same by faith. But verse 6 says the hearers understood not the meaning of the parable, therefore the Lord repeated it in slightly different terms, proclaiming himself as the doorway by which any could enter into divine favor as members of the Lord's flock. Thus the man who had been cast out of the synagogue might perceive that he really had lost nothing, but that on the contrary he had been assisted toward the right door of the true fold, in which rest indeed could be obtained. Now he was invited to see that the Lord

alone was the avenue to rest and salvation and to the spiritual refreshment of divine instruction. Others had selfishly sought to steal or to destroy the sheep, if thereby they could advance their own personal interests; but he, as the true Shepherd, instead of seeking his own welfare, was seeking the welfare and advantage of the sheep that they might have life and have it more abundantly.

What a lesson for us! The Master did not say that he came to deliver the sheep from eternal torment, but that he came to deliver them from death. He does not say that they already have a life which they must spend somewhere either in joy or anguish, and that he had come to assist them, so that it should not be spent in anguish; his language, on the contrary, teaches that the sheep could have no life except through him, the Life-Giver; that he had come to give back in due time by restitution processes, to as many as would receive it, the life which was lost by father Adam's disobedience – human life. Yea, he declares that he intended to give life more abundant than that which was lost! How could this be, if father Adam was perfect and as such had everlasting life according to divine arrangement? We answer that the life which the Lord proposes to give to those who are his sheep of this Gospel Age, this Little Flock, is a still higher form and degree of life, namely, immortality, inherent life. These he proposes to make partakers of the divine nature by giving them a share with himself "in his resurrection," the "First Resurrection." – Phil. 3:10.

HE GAVE HIS LIFE FOR US

This is the central point of our lesson. The Good Shepherd, so far from self-seeking, gladly laid down his life for the sheep, and it was by virtue of thus purchasing the sheep by his own precious blood that their eternal life is possible; without his purchase there would be no flock, and it is by this that he becomes

the Shepherd of the flock. How clear, how beautiful the thought, "Ye were bought with a price"! (1 Cor. 6:20.) No one else could give this ransom for us, no one else could purchase us or grant us life everlasting, no one else, therefore, could legally become our Shepherd or be able to lead us into the rest and peace of God, into the knowledge of the truth and ultimately into the heavenly fold, the rest that remaineth for the people of **[R4157 : page 94]** God. Worthy the Lamb that was slain to receive glory, honor, dominion and power!

"THE SHEEP HEAR HIS VOICE"

The tales told respecting the shepherds of eastern countries and their flocks are remarkable and illustrate well our Lord's declarations of this parable. Let us examine a few of these that we may sympathetically enter into the spirit of the Lord's words. Those who heard him were familiar with these facts. One writer says: —

"It is one of the most interesting spectacles to see the number of flocks of thirsty sheep water at a fountain. Each flock in obedience to the call of its own shepherd, lies down awaiting its turn. The shepherd of one flock calls his sheep in squads, and when the squad has done drinking, orders it away by sounds which the sheep perfectly understand, and calls up another squad. The sheep never make any mistake as to who whistles to them or calls them. In a flock of hundreds or thousands each individual sheep has a name, knows it and is known by it. The Greeks had a similar custom. The names frequently corresponded to certain defects, as for instance, 'Torn' or 'Broken-Legged,' 'One Eye,' 'Curly Horn,' 'Bald Head.' As lambs they are taught to answer to their names by patient drill, being led back and forth from the rest of the flock and not allowed to go to their mothers for food until they respond properly to the calls. The shepherd never drives his sheep in the East, but goes before them, they follow him, they run

after him if he appears to be escaping from them and are terrified if he is out of their sight or any stranger appears instead of him. He calls for them from time to time to let them know that he is at hand, they listen and continue grazing, but if anyone else attempts to produce the same peculiar sounds they look around, startled, and begin to scatter. A Scotch traveler [R4158 : page 94] changed clothes with a shepherd, and thus disguised began to call the sheep; they remained motionless; then the true shepherd raised his voice and they all hastened to him in spite of his strange garments."

"HE CALLS HIS OWN SHEEP BY NAME"

The foregoing illustrations help us to appreciate this statement and assist us in applying it to the true sheep of the Lord's Little Flock. "The Lord knoweth them that are his," and it is also true that those who are his know him. "He goeth before them and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice and a stranger they will not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers." The voice of the Lord is the voice of justice, of truth and of love, and all who are his sheep are expected to be able to discriminate between his message and the various false messages which more or less particularly represent the Adversary, who seeks to mislead the flock, using human instrumentality to accomplish the purpose. We have the Lord's assurance that none of the true sheep will be satisfied with the false Gospel; it will not appeal to their hearts, and equally we have the assurance that the true sheep will be satisfied with the true Gospel, because it will satisfy their longings as nothing else will do. This is an important point to keep before our minds. It indicates to us the importance of becoming fully, truly, emphatically the Lord's sheep, of entering into covenant relationship with him and thus making sure his protecting care and instruction.

"I KNOW MY SHEEP"

It becomes an important question then as to how and when we become the Lord's sheep. Are all the wise and the learned, the rich and the great, the Lord's sheep? The Apostle answers, No, and says further that not many of those will be found amongst the sheep – not many wise, not many great, not many learned, not many noble, not many rich, but chiefly the poor of this world, rich in faith. (1 Cor. 1:26-28; Jas. 2:5.) Are all of the poor, then, the Lord's sheep? We answer, No! These different flocks do in a general way indeed hold the name of Christ. But surely not many of them give evidence of being his disciples, his followers. Many of them know little about his Word, his voice; many of them know nothing about his leading into green pastures and by still waters of divine truth and grace, many of them know nothing about the real fold with its rest and peace and protecting care. Their lack in these respects shows that they are not of the true flock whom the Lord is leading, though true sheep of the Lord may be found in each denomination. But wherever they may be, if they are his, they are being led and being fed and know him and know his voice, his Word, and are dissatisfied with the husks of human tradition.

"THE HIRELING FLEETH"

Many, indeed, might have been glad of the honor of being the Shepherd, the caretaker of the Lord's flock, but the test, the cost, was too great for them. We may well suppose that many of the angels would have been glad to occupy such a position – but would they have been willing to undertake it at the cost involved? Many amongst men have coveted the office of a shepherd both before our Lord's day and since; but while none of them could have bought the sheep, since all were under condemnation, we have no reason to suppose that any of them would have been willing to purchase them at the cost of his all. The Lord's words

seem to imply this. Only the true Shepherd was willing to make the sacrifice and to lay down his life for the sheep. We may remark here that while there is but one Shepherd of the Lord's flock, he, in his absence, has made provision for his flock, that he would give them pastors and teachers who were to feed the flock of God and to watch for their souls, for their lives, to protect their interests.

It is in line with the Master's teaching that we find that he expects all who would be worthy of this position of feeding this flock, shepherding them, must have his spirit, his willingness to lay down their lives for the sheep, and in their defense, as his representatives, to protect them from the Adversary and his various snares and machinations and from the wolves in sheep's clothing who would make merchandise of them that they might bring them into bondage, into human pens separate and apart from the true fold opened by the true Shepherd and who would feed them upon the husks of human tradition, instead of leading them to the green pastures of "Present Truth." As the true sheep know the true Shepherd and are known by him, so the true Shepherd should know the true under-shepherds and they should know the sheep intimately. Those who utter a voice or call of their own cannot be recognized by the true Shepherd or by the true sheep; the faithful under-shepherd will [R4158 : page 95] speak not only the words but also in the tones, in the manner of the true Shepherd.

How comforting the assurance of verse 14, "I know mine own and mine own know me, even as the Father knoweth me and I know the Father"! (R.V.) What a beautiful description we here have of the precious relationship between the Lord and his own! The comparison between his knowledge and that of the Father is forceful, and, as our Lord elsewhere pointed out, they that know not him know not the Father. How important from the divine standpoint is knowledge, not merely head knowledge, but heart

knowledge, intimate acquaintance with the Lord and his glorious plan!

ONE FLOCK AND ONE SHEPHERD

An important truth is set forth in v. 17: There is only the one fold now provided for the Lord's sheep, and in it all of his true ones of this Gospel Age find rest and peace through faith and obedience. This is the Little Flock, to whom it is the Father's good pleasure to give the Kingdom. Many have supposed in the past that this Elect Little Flock which will receive the Kingdom glory, honor and immortality will be the only ones ever recognized of the Lord as his sheep, that all others will be consigned to purgatory or to eternal torment. But the erroneousness of this view is abundantly shown in this verse where our Lord distinctly declares that he has other sheep not of this fold, others who have not yet entered into its rest of faith which we have entered, hoping for the glories of the Kingdom beyond. Let us have a good view of the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of divine love and provision in Christ: that the whole world was lost in sin and death through father Adam's disobedience, and that the whole world was redeemed by the precious blood of Christ! Let us see that as yet only a special class has been called out of darkness into the Lord's marvelous light and into the privileges of the present sheep-fold conditions! Let us note that the great mass of mankind are without God and have no hope in the world, because their eyes are blinded and their ears are stopped and they know not of the grace of God and have not yet received of the blessings!

But let us hearken also to the declaration of the Lord that in due time all the blind eyes shall be opened and all the deaf ears shall be unstopped! Let us hearken to his declaration that the Little Flock now being selected are to constitute his Bride and joint-heirs in the Kingdom and that then, through him and his glorified Bride, the blessing of the Lord shall be extended to

every member of the race. The Sun of Righteousness shall shine forth with healing in his beams, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess. Then the gathering of the sheep of the other flock will begin, as recorded in John 10:16. At that time the present flock will have passed beyond the veil into the Kingdom and its glories. Then the present fold will be at an end and there will be no use for such a fold in the future, for thieves and robbers will not be permitted then – "nothing shall hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain [Kingdom]." (Isa. 11:9.) Then the great Adversary shall be bound for a thousand years that he may deceive the sheep no longer until the thousand years are finished. Meantime the whole world of mankind will be under the instruction of the Lord and his Bride class, and the knowledge of the glory of God shall fill the whole earth. (Hab. 2:14.) The effect will be a test of humanity, and some will come gladly, voluntarily, into accord with the Lord as his sheep and be accepted to his right hand, to his favor, as the kind upon whom he is pleased to bestow everlasting life. Others under the same favorable conditions will manifest the goat-like, the wayward disposition and be gathered gradually to the left hand of disfavor as of those who have the spirit of the Adversary, which cannot be favored of the Lord. These ultimately with Satan, at the close of the Millennial Age, will be utterly destroyed in the Second Death. Their punishment will be everlasting, because their death will be everlasting; they will never be resurrected, theirs will be the Second Death – symbolically Gehenna, destruction.

None will deny that throughout the Gospel Age there is a large class who have never heard of the only name given under heaven and amongst men whereby they must be saved and who, therefore, have never had an opportunity of becoming members of the Lord's flock. That they have gone to heaven without a knowledge of the "only name" is unscriptural as well as unreasonable, and that they have gone to eternal torment without an opportunity for salvation is equally unscriptural and

unreasonable. That the Lord intends to use the Very Elect Little Flock of this Gospel Age as his kings and priests during the Millennium, to carry his mercy and favor to all of these and to give them an opportunity of becoming members of the human flock to whom he will be pleased to give eternal life, is both reasonable and Scriptural.

ONE FLOCK, BUT NOT ONE FOLD

Our common version declares, "There shall be one fold and one Shepherd," but this is not borne out by the Greek [R4159 : page 95] text, which is more properly rendered in the Revised Version and in the Diaglott – "There shall be one flock and one Shepherd." This is in full agreement with the Apostle's statement (Eph. 1:10) that in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one [literally, under one head] all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in him. Ultimately all of God's creation will be under the headship of this great Shepherd, who is now the Head of the Church, the Little Flock, and who in future will be Head over angels also and over restored humanity. The flock will be one, but the sheep will be of various natures on various planes of being; as it is written, "In my Father's house are many mansions," many apartments, many planes, but all harmonious, grand. But the highest of all these planes, the plane of glory, is that to which the Lord has invited the Little Flock, the Bride class of this Gospel Age. Let us hear his voice, let us follow in his footsteps, let us make our calling and election sure!

