

Jesus the Good Shepherd

“I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.”
—John 10:14,15

IN THIS SCRIPTURE, THE Apostle John has recorded the comforting and tender words of Jesus when he spoke of himself as ‘the good shepherd.’ By assuming this meaningful title, he also made clear his willingness to lay down his life for the sheep—his true and faithful followers. He said, “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”—John 10:17,18

NO OTHER NAME

John began this tenth chapter of his gospel with our Lord’s warning to those who would seek another way than the door which had been provided for them, and would, therefore, not receive the

Heavenly Father's approval and blessing. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber."—John 10:1

When Peter rose to speak to the rulers, elders, scribes, and the High Priest of Israel, along with the others, he addressed them directly, "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."—Acts 4:10-12

The Apostle Paul also reminded the Hebrew brethren that Jesus not only gave his life for the sin-sick world, but that he also opened a new and spiritual way for his very special followers. In his letter to them, he said, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh."—Heb. 10:19,20

THE DOOR

In John's gospel, from which our featured scripture is taken, we learn that Jesus spoke of a special door that would be opened to his faithful followers who had responded to the new and living way. He taught them, "He that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter

openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.”—John 10:2-6

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

There are many illustrations and lessons in the Scriptures in which our Lord Jesus is shown as leading his people, and his loving care over them. However, in none of these is shown the profound and tender relationship more impressively than in the illustration of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, and his faithful followers as sheep. Because of the special nature of this symbol, it has been readily accepted as one of the most beautiful images in the Bible that relates to this special characteristic of our dear Lord and Savior.

Thus we see Jesus immediately exercising his shepherding care over his disciples after his resurrection from the dead. It is further evident that he intended that this title and office as the Good Shepherd should be a continuing one throughout the call to the Christ during this present gospel Age. The Apostle Peter brings this thought to our attention in his letter to the brethren after Christ's resurrection. He speaks of it as the present commission of our Lord, and in reference to Jesus as a shepherd to his people, he wrote, “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that

we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”—I Pet. 2:24,25

The Apostle Paul, when speaking of Christ, also said, “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”—Heb. 13:20,21

ASPECTS OF THE RELATIONSHIP

There are important aspects concerning the relationship that exists between Christ Jesus and his people, and this is shown by his having a living fellowship with his little flock of followers. This intimacy is more clearly appreciated when we become familiar with the pastoral life and duty during the time of our Lord’s First Advent.

In our Lord’s time, a shepherd would never leave his flock. He lived with his sheep during the daytime and slept near them during the night. His eye was ever on them, and he became very familiar with their every need. He incurred personal risks and inconveniences for their safety and welfare continually. This included a sense that his interests and that of his sheep were one and the same. The hazards and the hardships of the flock were shared by him. When they suffered, or were in want, he took it upon himself to see to their every need, and he was never happier than when he saw

them satisfied and at peace. So close and sympathetic was the union between the shepherd and his sheep that their feelings were what he felt, and his will was their will. Together they became one body, he the head and they the members, and the interest of the one was the interest of the other.

A LIVING FELLOWSHIP

This living fellowship is the same relationship that our Lord has with all of his people during this present Gospel Age. Jesus, as our good shepherd, has experienced his people's burdens, and is aware of their varying degrees of exposure to the sentence of sin and the dying process. He gives himself continually to their everlasting spiritual welfare and peace.

As the greater and more glorious David who watched over his sheep, Jesus stands to defend his flock against the lion and the bear, and anything that may seek to injure his flock. The Good Shepherd cares for his sheep and his heart is drawn towards them. All of his dealings with regard to them are conditioned by an undying affection for them. If any are fearful, or weak, or in need, his eye is ever watchful to notice it, and he is always ready to provide the necessary help for those who need him most.

DEFENDER OF THE SHEEP

We have Jesus' own beautiful promise in the context of our featured scripture. It is recorded, "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. I and my Father are one."—John 10:27-30

The landscape was intensely rugged, and there were many dangers from the weather, robbers, and wild beasts. A good shepherd is also the faithful defender of his flock. He stands by them in every peril and defends them on every occasion. Christ has loved his people even to the point of dying for them, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."—John 15:13

THE SHEEP

From the other point of view, we note that if Christ is recognized as the Good Shepherd, then also are his people illustrated as the sheep. Sheep are very defenseless creatures by nature, and could very well perish if someone was not looking after them. Sheep have many enemies that are much more powerful than they are, and they must have a keeper.

This puts in perspective the true nature of our weaknesses, and foresees the condition of our lost and exposed estate if we did not have this relationship with Christ.

It was in this helpless and lost condition that Christ found his people during the time of his First Advent. "When he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." (Matt. 9:36) Jesus explained the very nature of God's wonderful providence as it was made known to him. At the proper time, the Good Shepherd was sent from on high, and began the assembling of his flock—the elect of God who were called to be fellow heirs of his own glory.

SELECTED FROM THE WORLD

The children of God have been selected out of every sorrowful state known in this sin-sick world, and have become a people gathered unto him. He bought them with his own blood and graciously offered himself to them as their true Shepherd. He has drawn them by his loving spirit, and they have learned to know him and to confide in his marvelous wisdom and goodness. They have separated themselves from the rest of the world to be one with him as their ever-blessed Lord and Master. They have learned to appreciate his great sacrifice on their behalf, and have been blessed with a personal acquaintance with him. They are his and they are safe in him.

Jesus said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me."—John 6:44-46

This has been true of all who have received the message of the heavenly calling in Christ Jesus during this present Gospel Age. They are the true sheep that have recognized the shepherd's voice and have been led by him who gave his life for them. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."—Luke 12:32 ■

*"Thou, O LORD, art a shield for me; my glory,
and the lifter up of mine head."
—Psalm 3:3*