

The Voice of the Shepherd

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”
—John 10:27

THE APOSTLE JOHN WAS

one of our Lord’s closest companions, and in his Gospel account he has recorded many of the important events and

marvelous words which were spoken by the great Master Teacher during his earthly ministry. John has devoted the entire tenth chapter to the subject of the shepherd and his sheep, from which our featured scripture is taken. These verses reveal the closeness that marked Jesus and his people who have faithfully followed him throughout this present Gospel Age.

A TRUE BONDING

There is a particular intimacy that exists between a shepherd and his sheep, basically because they live together. Shepherds know the lay of the land, where the best grazing is, where the fewest predators are, and where they can best guard and care for their flock. At the time our Lord spoke these words, the average shepherd was responsible for taking care of about one hundred sheep. Often, however, several

shepherds would combine their flocks with those of other shepherds who may have been grazing their animals nearby. Despite the seeming confusion that might result from this practice, all of the shepherds knew their own sheep and all of the sheep knew their own shepherd.

The psalmist wrote, “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.” (Ps. 95:6,7) In another of the psalms, we read, “Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.”—Ps. 100:1-5

The Prophet Isaiah also draws our attention to the shepherd and his care over the sheep. “Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.”—Isa. 40:10,11

THE SHEEPFOLD

Jesus was preaching to the people who had come to hear his teachings when certain Jews encircled him with demands to reveal to them his identity and purpose. (John 10:22-24) The words of our

featured scripture were directed to those Jews whose hearts had not been open to accept his wonderful message, nor to appreciate the miraculous works which he accomplished during his earthly ministry.

Earlier, the Master had explained to them, “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. But 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 10:1-6

PLACE OF REST

The sheepfold represents the place of rest and protection which our loving Heavenly Father has prepared for his consecrated people during the long centuries since Pentecost. “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”—Acts 4:12

Sheep are known for their gentleness, meekness, and obedience to the shepherd in whom they have put their trust. “Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved,

and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”—John 10:7-10

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Jesus spoke of himself as being both the “door” and the “good shepherd.” (vss. 9,11) There was only one door, which no one else could open. He opened that door of redemption by giving his life for the sheep. This wonderful feature of the Heavenly Father’s plan and purpose will be made known to all people under the administration of Christ’s future kingdom, and for the blessing of all the families of the earth. (Gen. 22:18; Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:8) As the true sheep know their shepherd, so also does the shepherd know his sheep.

Thus the Master made clear, “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. 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 10:11-15) The Heavenly Father knew Jesus intimately, had full confidence in him, and entrusted the care of the sheep to him.

OTHER SHEEP

Jesus also taught that there would be other sheep for him to look after. When the Christ class will be

set up in power and authority during his coming kingdom, the whole human family will be given the opportunity to learn the ways of truth and righteousness. The obedient will receive the right to life here on a glorious and perfected earth. (Matt. 6:10) This will include the countless numbers of mankind who will be resurrected from the grave and given an opportunity to walk up the highway of holiness. (Hos. 13:14) The Prophet Isaiah wrote concerning this future blessing, saying, "An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."—Isa. 35:8-10

Our Lord was speaking of that blessed future time, and also explained, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. 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 10:16-18

From the Gospel of John, we again read, "There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said,

These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind? And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch. Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly."—vss. 19-24

In response to the Jews' angry inquiry, John recorded, "Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. 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. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him."—vss. 25-31

FALSE SHEPHERDS

The Israelites were the covenant people of God, and he dealt exclusively with them through their mediator Moses. However, through pride, ambition, and arrogance the religious leaders of the Jewish people were not good shepherds to those who looked to them for guidance and instruction. The Prophet Ezekiel addressed this fact. "The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?"

(Ezek. 34:1,2) They were not willing to lead their people to the green pastures of God's wonderful word of Truth, nor to the still waters of spiritual refreshment.

The prophet further wrote, "Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered."—vss. 3-5

The false shepherds of Israel permitted God's character and his ultimate plan and purpose to be misrepresented. "My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them. Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves, and fed not my flock; Therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from

their mouth, that they may not be meat for them.” (vss. 6-10) In an even greater fulfillment, many of the Lord’s people have been led astray by the false shepherds of Christendom throughout the long centuries since the days of the Early Church.

JESUS CONFRONTS THE JEWS

The Master attempted to reason with the religious leaders of the Jews who were questioning him, but was unable to persuade them that he had ministered in his Heavenly Father’s name and had done many wonderful things. “Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him.”—John 10:32-38

It was apparent that the hearts of the Jewish leaders were hardened against him. Therefore, he travelled elsewhere to deliver the wonderful message of Truth to those who had ears to hear and accept his words. John records, “They sought again to take him: but he escaped out of their hand, And went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there he abode. And many

resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true. And many believed on him there.”—John 10:39-42

THE SHEPHERD’S PSALM

The psalmist wrote concerning the special relationship that exists between the shepherd and his sheep and declared, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.” (Ps. 23:1) The word “LORD” which David used in this scripture is in reference to Almighty God—the Great Shepherd of all things. The Apostle Paul said, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Rom. 8:28) In turn, our Heavenly Father has appointed his only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus, to oversee the little flock of Jesus’ faithful followers. “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”—Luke 12:32

David speaks of his realization of the shepherd’s personal and loving care over him. “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”—Ps. 23:2-4

To “lie down in green pastures” illustrates the rest of faith that the Lord’s people are promised, and the spiritual refreshment that they are provided. We are being led to streams of Truth and blessing, while being shielded from all foes and dangers which might harm us as New Creatures. (II Cor. 5:17) We can put our trust in the Lord even as the

sheep trust in the wonderful care of the shepherd. To walk in the “valley of the shadow of death” suggests that the Lord’s people have been called from the sin-sick and dying human family, yet with the realization that our Lord is with us to the end of our walk in faith.—Heb. 13:5,6

The psalmist was truly thankful for the shepherd’s care and said, “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.” (Ps. 23:5,6) The truly consecrated child of God is feasting at the wonderful table of Truth that has been provided, especially during the harvest years of this present Gospel Age. His “goodness and mercy” will follow us until the end of our consecrated walk, and then, if faithful unto death, we will share in the blessings of the heavenly state in the Heavenly Father’s house.—Rev. 2:10; John 14:1-3

THE SHEPHERD’S PRAYER

Jesus, the “good shepherd,” was constantly in an attitude of prayer, and he often turned aside from the pressing issues that were before him to seek his Heavenly Father’s special counsel and guidance. His earthly ministry was rapidly drawing to a close, and John recorded the wonderful words which he spoke. “These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee. As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might

know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”—John 17:1-3

Our Lord had left his heavenly home to provide a ransom for the entire human family. He would soon die to fulfill that most important work. During his earthly ministry, the invitation was given to certain individuals that would become his apostles, and others who were to be of the Early Church. In his prayer, he said, “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”—vss. 4,5

The Master then turned his attention to his beloved disciples. They were truly consecrated and had come to Jesus as their shepherd. “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” (Rom. 8:14) “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”—Phil. 2:13

In his prayer Jesus said, “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.”—John 17:6-8

John recorded further Jesus’ wonderful words on behalf of his disciples. “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. And

now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”—vss. 9-14

BRINGING MANY SONS TO GLORY

The words of this prayer were spoken by our Lord on the night of his betrayal. He was on his way from the upper room, where he instituted the memorial of his death with his disciples, to the Garden of Gethsemane. It was given on behalf of his disciples and those who would be his special followers since Pentecost. Afterward, during the administration of his future kingdom of righteousness, the whole world would have the opportunity to believe on him. (John 3:16,17) The very next day after offering this prayer, he died as the ransom price for the sin-sick human creation. “We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”—Heb. 2:9,10

THE FLOCK OF GOD

The Apostle Peter spoke of the “chief Shepherd” and the “flock of God,” and put the wonderful relationship in perspective when he composed his first epistle. He wrote, “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”—I Pet. 5:1-4

The Apostle Paul, likewise, wrote concerning the “great shepherd of the sheep,” who makes us lie down in green pastures and leads and guides us in the way of quiet waters. Our shepherd is always ready to care and assist us in the ways of righteousness and Truth. If found faithful, we will share in the marriage ceremony as his faithful bride. “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 wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”—Heb. 13:20,21 ■