

INTRODUCTION

There are a number of references in the N.T. which refer to the church as a flock and Christ as the shepherd of this flock.

Acts 20:28; "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood"

In 1 Peter 5:1-4 Peter exhorts elders to shepherd the flock of God. If they serve faithfully "When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away."

John 10:3, 4: "And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. And a stranger they will by no means follow, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

Hebrews 13:20: "Now may the God of peace, who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant."

The words "flock" and "shepherd" express the close intimate association Christ has with His church. No other expressions can represent so well the love and concern Christ has for His church.

A knowledge of sheep and the Palestine shepherd will give us a picture of Christ and his relationship to the church. In John 10:1-30 we have the parable of the good shepherd. Many things are revealed in this parable about Christ and His sheep. We will allude to some of these in this lesson.

FIRST, SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF SHEEP.

A Sheep have no sense of direction. They are prone to wander off and become lost. This is why sheep have always needed a shepherd or someone to guide them. In modern times we have fences to keep them from wandering but this was not the case in N.T. times.

We too are very much like sheep. We are not capable of finding our own way. Jeremiah declared a long time ago: "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23).

B Sheep need a shepherd. They need him for their own protection, for direction and for food and water. Our shepherd, Christ is capable to provide all this and even more.

“The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment or the day of judgment.”

John 4:14: “But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

C Sheep know the voice of their shepherd. They will not follow the voice of any other shepherd than their own.

Jesus said, “But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his sown sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. And a stranger they will by no means follow, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”

The Christian follows the Lord. He does not listen to the world, to the temptations of Satan. These voices are not familiar voices in that they do not speak or sound as the oracles of God.

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who gave them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand” (John 10:27-29).

These verses offer to us a sense of great security. The Lord has promised “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” “If God is for us who can be against us.” As the Psalmist said, “I will fear no evil.”

“Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:37-39).

An inseparable relationship with Christ our shepherd gives us peace of mind and a deep sense of security.

D Sheep are perfectly harmless. This is one characteristic that we the church, the sheep of Christ must possess. Jesus warned his disciples, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

SECOND, WE NOTE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

A There were shepherds and there were good shepherds. In John 10 Jesus speaks of thieves and hirelings who were not the owners of the sheep. Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep" (John 10:11)

A hireling seeing a wolf will flee because he does not care about the sheep.

B The good shepherd knows each of his sheep. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own" (vs. 14) in verse 10 he says, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

We are all known personally by the Lord. He knows our every action and stands ready to protect us Paul says, "The Lord knows those who are His" (2 Timothy 2:19).

He knows our needs. The Psalmist said, "I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures, he leads me by still waters."

He knows the value of one sheep. "What do you think?"

"If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying?" (Matthew 18:12.)

C The good shepherd does not ask His sheep to go anywhere he would not go. He is our example. "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow" (1 Peter 2:21). His steps.

THIRD, LET US CONSIDER THE SHEEPFOLD.

A The sheepfold was an uncovered space, open to the air, and usually surrounded by a wall of stone with a strong gate.

It was attended by a gatekeeper who kept it strongly barred at night and who opened it in the morning when the shepherds came to claim their sheep. There might be several flocks in one sheepfold. There was no danger of their getting mixed as they would only follow their shepherd when he came for them. They knew his voice immediately.

B This is true of the Lord's church. There is but one fold, one flock and one shepherd. Speaking of the Gentiles Jesus said, "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16).

C Christ is the door to this fold. He said, "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture" (John 10:9).

D But entering this fold is up to each person. No one is forced to enter. Jesus said, "If anyone enters by me." Thus it is each one's own personal choice. Our Lord calls but there are few who are willing to enter. Many want to enter in their own way. But it cannot be. There is only one door.

CONCLUSION

There are many blessings to be found within. But all these blessings are conditioned upon man entering into the fold of Christ. In Galatians 3:27 "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

Baptism puts one into Christ – into His fold – His church. This must be preceded by faith in the shepherd and his fold and then repentance a willingness to change directions so as to enter by the door into that fold.

Will you hear the voice of Jesus and enter?