

'The Shepherd of Israel' ch.10:1-10

by Charles Alexander

In 'The Shepherd of Israel', Charles Alexander explores Christ's role as the Good Shepherd, fulfilling Old Testament prophecies and contrasting Himself with the false shepherds of Israel.

Scripture: Psalm 23:1, Isaiah 40:9, Jeremiah 23:4, Ezekiel 34:23, Matthew 24:1, John 10:11, John 10:27, 1 Corinthians 2:7, Hebrews 8:8, Revelation 3:14

Topics: "Christology", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Charles Alexander delves into the profound prophetic purpose and revelation found in the tenth chapter of John, where Jesus identifies Himself as the Good Shepherd, fulfilling ancient prophecies and declaring His deity. The chapter serves as a divine commentary on the events of the previous chapter, emphasizing Christ's unique position as the One sent by God in accordance with ancient prophecies. Through the parable of the Good Shepherd, Christ reveals Himself as the Shepherd of Israel, fulfilling thousands of years of prophecy and uniting Jew and Gentile in one flock and one kingdom. The chapter highlights the spiritual understanding that comes with growth, emphasizing the importance of recognizing Christ as the exclusive access to heaven and the source of abundant life.

Transcript

In the tenth chapter of John with its incomparable parable of the Good Shepherd, we have much more than an idyllic pastoral interlude such as has supplied religious poetry and preaching, not to speak of artistry, with one of the most pleasing of themes. There is a deep stream of prophetic purpose and revelation in it, throwing open the entire field of Old Testament understanding and interpretation. There are deep undertones of an almighty purpose, the sound of many waters running down to an eternal sea.

For the tenth of John does not stand apart from the context like some attractive portrait in a gallery of individual and unconnected studies. It is the continuation of chapter nine and is intended to be a divine commentary on the events of that chapter. Christ's "Verily, verily" (Amen, amen) with which the chapter opens marks the continuity, for (as others have observed) the Lord never begins a discourse with those powerful words. They always mark a continuation of that which precedes - in this case the healing of the man born blind and the judgment pronounced upon his tormentors.

Throughout this spiritual gospel of John, the Lord proves and demonstrates His own deity, and identifies Himself with the great prophecies which foreshadowed His coming. In the case of the man born blind the Lord concentrates attention on the fact that He was One Sent by God the Father, and this sending was not

to be understood in the inferior sense of a subordinate bearing the commission of a superior, but as an equal. Who else but One who is Himself God could say, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world"? John ch.9:5. Again, at the conclusion of the chapter, He declares of Himself what no man or angel could claim: "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind" (v.39). "I am come into this world" implies a prior existence, while the claim to be the One concerning whom the world will be judged, is conclusive of deity.

The sending of the blind man to the Pool of Siloam was an entirely unnecessary excursion unless it was to draw attention to the judgment of Israel eight centuries before in the days of Isaiah the prophet. "Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah which go softly... now therefore behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria ... and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel" (Isa. ch.8:6-10).

Instead of the soft, gentle flow of Shiloah, the pool of grace and mercy the apostate people would be overwhelmed by the flood from the Euphrates, symbolic of divine judgment. Rev. ch. 9:14. The introduction of the name Immanuel, looking back to Isaiah ch.7:14-16, brings the prophecy up to Christ's day: "A virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel...."

All this is gathered up by the Lord in the case of the healing of the blind man, and the subsequent rejection of Himself by the representatives of the nation. His unique position as the One sent by God in accordance with the ancient prophecies is clearly spelled out, and now He proceeds to a further prophetic field. He declares Himself to be THE SHEPHERD OF ISRAEL, in the terms of a series of prophecies which span the entire range of Old Testament prediction. He walks in the prophecies and fulfils in one grand episode, the writings of thousands of years from the time when Abel, the first prophet and priest of the human race became a keeper of sheep (Gen. Ch. 4:2).

It is thus that the great 10th chapter of John must be approached and understood. It is part of the same action as the healing of the blind man at the Pool of Siloam, who stands for the sheep Christ came to save and to lead, and to deliver from the false shepherds of Israel who reviled this poor sheep and cast him out of their synagogue.

The audience of chapter 10 is the same which witnessed the healing of the blind man (see verses 19-21). By announcing Himself as the GOOD SHEPHERD, Christ used a theological designation the significance of which was well understood. He was claiming to be none other than the Jehovah of Psalm 23, and the mystical King David of Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34. His inference that those who now challenged Him - the scribes and Pharisees and rulers of the synagogue - were the hirelings of Ezekiel 34, was also plain to be understood, and was borne out in their treatment of the man born blind, whom they now thrust from their society instead of caring for him. The good shepherd, on the contrary, according to Ezekiel's prophecy, seeks after all such - the lost, broken, driven away, the sick and the lame (Ezek. Ch. 34:16).

The true Shepherd of Israel is here and shows Himself by one mighty work, beginning in the Temple and culminating in the washing in the Pool of Siloam, to be the One who was "Sent" to gather the true flock of Israel, the evangelical remnant of the ancient people, along with those gentile sheep ("other sheep I have which are not of this fold"), who should constitute one flock and one kingdom. There would be 'one fold and one shepherd' in which the separate identity of Jew and gentile would be for ever extinguished.

In our commentary on the preceding chapter we entered at length into the Lord's usage of the word SENT as it applied to Himself in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. The word is commonly used in relation to the

coming of Christ into the world, both in Old and New Testaments. One of the most important sources is in Isaiah ch. 48:16:

"Come ye near unto me, hear ye this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord God, and his Spirit, HATH SENT ME."

As late as chapter 8 of John, the Lord quoted this text in the temple treasury when the Jews asked "Who art thou?" His answer, "Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning", is a direct quotation from Isa. Ch. 48:16. In our commentary on that passage (Serial Number 017 of our series on the Gospel of John) we showed the remarkable testimony given therein by Christ to His own deity. Now in His further quotation from this great verse in Isaiah, identifying Himself as the second Person of the Holy Trinity ("the Lord God and his Spirit, hath sent me"), He shows Himself to be the true Shiloah, the Sent One, proving His claim by giving sight to one who never had seen the light of day.

Not in the inferior sense of an apostle ('one who is sent') is Christ SENT from the Father, but in the absolute and exclusive term, as the Son of God, the promised Seed of the Woman, the Messiah, upon whose coming into the world depended the entire issue of creation. He who was sent into the world, formed no part of the world into which He was sent, but came from God the Father, was in the beginning with God, and therefore was God.

Thus we understand His own words spoken at the healing of the blind man, "I must work the works of HIM THAT SENT ME, while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work," John ch. 9:4; which we have previously seen is a token of the end of the Jewish day, and the falling of the darkness of spiritual blindness on the rejected nation. "For judgment I am come into the world, that they which see not might see, and they which see might be made blind." (Ch. 9:39).

The parable of the Good Shepherd, extended and developed as it is by the Lord throughout chapter 10, focuses upon Christ the converging light of the whole of the Old Testament. David the Shepherd King of Israel saw in himself the foreshadowing of the One who (of his line and his seed) should reign eternally over the mystic Israel, the Church, as its Shepherd and King. When he wrote the 23rd Psalm, David wrote for all of God's children of whatever age or race, and taught us all to sing, in our varying tongues and measures,

"The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want."

Asaph, taking up the theme from his royal master, wrote Psalm 80 with its address to the Shepherd of Israel who leads Joseph like a flock, and who dwells between the cherubim. In the Book of Revelation Christ is observed at the same great task to which the Godhead is truly dedicated: "The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them unto living fountains of waters." (Rev. Ch. 7:17).

Isaiah catches the same glorious vision of Christ and declares, "Behold your God: Behold the Lord God will come... 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. Ch. 40:9-11) - words which Mr. Handel has set to music which we are tempted to think could be immortal.

He who took little children into His arms and gathered them into His bosom, and said, "Of such is the kingdom of Heaven" was surely indicating by that most affecting action that He was the Lord God of Isaiah 40, declaring the nature of His mission to the world.

The heavenly bride, the daughter of Zion, in the Song of Solomon desires to know where her beloved makes his flock to rest at noon (Song Ch. 1:7). Zechariah sees the Shepherd of Israel smitten by the sword of Jehovah as He lays down His life for the sheep. (Zech. ch.13:7). "Feed my sheep - feed my lambs" was the Lord's last counsel to the remorseful Peter (John ch.21:15-17).

Peter never forgot that commission, and we find him transmitting it to the elders of the church: "Feed the flock of God...be ensamples to the flock...when the Chief Shepherd shall appear ye shall receive a crown of glory which fades not away".

Supreme among the Old Testament prophecies of the coming of the Good Shepherd, are the kindred passages in Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34, upon which the Lord plainly draws for some of the most graphic figures used in the parable. The cruel treatment of the MAN BORN BLIND, by those who should have been his shepherds and protectors, is clearly in view in the Lord's strictures upon the false shepherds of Israel. "Thieves and robbers" He calls them in the opening verse of chapter 10. Jeremiah likewise at the very beginning of his great prophecy in chapter 23 writes,

"Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture, saith the Lord. Therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people: Ye have scattered my flock and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold I will visit upon you the evil of your doings saith the Lord".

As Jeremiah's prophecy hinged upon the impending destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and God's judgment upon the false pastors of Israel, so now Christ warns the spiritual descendants of those false pastors, of the impending Roman destruction of their temple and the end of their special privileges as custodians of the covenant, in those solemn and moving words, "Therefore your sin remaineth".

(John Ch. 9: 41)

Jeremiah concludes this section of his great prophecy with the promise of the new covenant which was to displace the old Jewish covenant. The new covenant endures and cannot be broken, because its terms are graven indelibly on the heart and mind of those who compose the new and spiritual Israel.

(See Jeremiah ch. 31:31-34, and compare Hebrews Ch. 8:8-12; 10:16)

THE NEW ISRAEL

That this new Israel was to be the church of the New Testament, a spiritual Israel embracing Jew and gentile without distinction of race or privilege, is established by Paul in the citations above from the Hebrews epistle. The unworthy attempt in modern times to deprive the church of anything more than a mere reversionary interest in Jeremiah's great prophecy is part of the conspiracy to banish the church from prophecy altogether, in favour of an exclusive Jewish interpretation. Paul in the Hebrews quotations above makes it clear that Jeremiah's fundamental prophecy belongs without discrimination to the believing elements of all nations of mankind, Jew or gentile. To do them justice, even those preachers who still cling fondly to the Jewish interpretation, actually use the context of Hebrews chapters 8-10 with the utmost freedom for Jew and gentile indiscriminately, as for instance the continuing verses of the chapter 10 quotation - "Having therefore brethren boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way...."

So far as we are aware, no-one has yet had the temerity to tell us this access is exclusive to the Jew, all gentiles barred.

JEHOVAH TZIDKENU

Jeremiah's prophecy proceeds to declare how the Lord will gather 'the remnant of his flock' from all countries whither he has driven them and will bring them again to their fold, and set over them faithful shepherds who will feed them. The climax of the prophecy is the raising of a righteous 'Branch' from the house of David, who should reign and prosper and execute judgment and justice in the earth. There is no difficulty of course in recognising who this righteous Branch is. We are given His name by which He should be called - JEHOVAH TZIDKENU, The Lord Our Righteousness. That this prophecy has been fulfilled in Christ is as certain as that Christ is reigning now as the Shepherd of His sheep. The interpreters who settle for a future millennial reign of Christ as the fulfillment of this prophecy can only do so by telling us the Lord has not yet appeared in the character of the Good Shepherd, or that He is not now, or ever will be, to us gentiles, Jehovah Tzidkenu. They take upon themselves a grave responsibility who are prepared to carry the literalistic view of prophecy to these lengths.

ON NEW COVENANT GROUND

The Saviour's words in John 10 however have already established the secret of Old Testament interpretation. By His reference to the great Shepherd prophecy of Jeremiah, He establishes the principle that there shall not be two folds but one only, in which Jew and gentile intermingle with equal right, and so He lifts the whole of Old Testament prophecy onto New Covenant ground where it must rest for ever: "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" (John Ch. 10:16).

Jeremiah proceeds (chap. 23:3-6):

3 And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds: and they shall be fruitful and increase.

4 And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the Lord.

5 Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.

6 In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called,

THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS (Hebrew: JEHOVAH TZIDKENU).

This picture of the Jewish dispersion in Jeremiah's day and the subsequent restoration under Ezra and Nehemiah is an example of THE TELESCOPIC PRINCIPLE IN PROPHECY, namely an ultimate and far more important fulfillment foreshadowed in an anticipatory event.

In this case the anticipatory event was the Babylonish captivity impending at the time of Jeremiah's prophecy. The return from that captivity after 70 years is indicated in the reference to 'the north country' which relates to Babylon. Babylon lies in a higher latitude than Judea, though very far to the east. The

invasion of Palestine by the powers residing in the Euphrates valley always came by way of the north, for an army cannot cross the intervening desert by direct route, but must follow the river valleys curling round the foot of the mountains of Ararat, making their descent from the north, by way of Syria and Lebanon.

But the return of the exiles in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, was in itself a foreshadowing of the great ingathering of the elect of all nations to the mystic Zion, the church, the true kingdom of Christ, beginning at Jerusalem in the days of the apostles, and extending throughout all Judea, and Samaria, to 'the uttermost part of the earth' (Acts Ch 1:8).

This is the true fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy of the gathering of Christ's flock. The divine telescope sweeps the whole of history in one breathtaking view, and sees in that which is near at hand (in this case the return from the Babylonian dispersion) the worldwide range of the gospel from the time of the apostles ("I will set shepherds over them which shall feed them"). Our Lord's Olivet prophecy (Matt. Ch 24) pursues the same prophetic course, envisaging in the destruction of Jerusalem that greater judgment at the end of the world. Only by recognising this principle of prophecy can much of the Old Testament prediction be understood. The neglect of it has given rise to the present confusion of a "parenthetic" church (never the subject of prophecy, declares Dr. Scofield), the absurd compression of practically all the events of the Book of Revelation into the space of seven years at the end of the age, and the fantasy of a Jewish restoration and the revival of the Roman empire.

EZEKIEL IN BABYLON

While Jeremiah was prophesying in Judea on the eve of the Babylonian woe, Ezekiel was already in Babylon, an exile under the first transportation under Nebuchadnezzar 13 years before the final destruction of the city. In common with Jeremiah (though the two prophets spoke independently of each other and without collusion of any kind), Ezekiel received his revelation of the coming of Messiah as the Shepherd of Israel, as recorded in his 34th chapter.

This vision of Ezekiel, which enters so largely into the parable spoken by Christ, was one of a series of revelations which came to the prophet in one night. The next morning there came to Ezekiel in Babylon, a fugitive who had escaped from Jerusalem and who reported to the prophet that the city had been destroyed (See Ezek. Ch 33:21-22). It was in anticipation of this dire event that the night before the fugitive arrived Ezekiel received from the Lord this declaration concerning the wickedness of the 'Shepherds of Israel' whose neglect and exploitation of the flock of God lay at the root of the judgment which had even then already fallen upon the city.

"Woe be to the shepherds which feed themselves: Should not the shepherds feed the flock?" declared the Lord through His prophet. The whole of the 34th chapter of Ezekiel must be read at this point, and its correspondence with Christ's parable in John 10 noted. The Lord was moving through this prophecy in all His acts and words, showing Himself to be the true Shepherd of Israel and the heavenly David of prophecy come to earth to save and defend His flock, and to establish a 'covenant of peace' with them, and make them to dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods (verses 23-25).

The judgment pronounced upon the hireling shepherds is that they will henceforth be deprived of their charge over the flock (Ezek. Ch. 34:10). In their place the Lord God Himself will assume in person the care and leadership of the flock: "For thus saith the Lord God, Behold I, even I, will both search my sheep and seek them out ... and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day"(see Ezek. Ch. 34:11-12).

When the Lord declares therefore in the hearing of the false shepherds of Israel, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (John Ch. 10:11), He is indubitably claiming that He is not only the Messiah, but that He, as Messiah, is none other than the Lord God of Ezekiel's prophecy, and it is in that capacity and title that He lays down His life for the sheep. He has power and authority so to do, and not only to lay down His life, but to 'take it again' by rising from the dead (v.18).

WORLD-WIDE NATURE OF REDEMPTION

Ezekiel's prophecy, like that of Jeremiah, proceeds to describe the world-wide nature of the flock the Lord came to redeem:

13 And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country.

14 I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel.

15 I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God.

16 I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment.

17 And as for you, O my flock, thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and he goats.

The reference to 'the mountains of Israel' must not be taken literally. The divine interpretation of the prophecy is clearly given in John Ch. 10 where the Lord spiritualises all, and applies the prophecy in its entirety to a new situation only realised in the gospel - "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".

THE HEAVENLY DAVID REIGNS

Ezekiel proceeds with the great prediction which is conclusive of that spiritual view of prophecy which we feel it necessary constantly to emphasise:

23 And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.

24 And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it.

In vain does literalism resurrect King David from his grave to sit on a millennial throne. As well might they attempt to put David on Christ's cross. After all he did anticipate the cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" when he composed the 22nd Psalm predicting the death of Christ yet speaking in the first person as though the cry were his own. In like manner we see not David, but David's Lord, in Ezekiel's prophecy of the Shepherd King. Nor do we await a day yet future for the fulfillment of Ezekiel's prediction. In the tenth of John the Lord presents Himself there and then as the Good Shepherd, with Jew and gentile in the same fold, not in a scene of millennial calm and peace, but with thieves and robbers, hirelings and oppressors, wolves abounding, all in the same context. All parties indeed admit that

John Ch. 10 has to do with the gospel age: it will certainly not fit in with any other. But by the same reasoning, Ezekiel's "restoration" prophecy must also belong to the gospel.

The later verses in Ezekiel's chapter describing the peace and security of the flock under the care of the Good Shepherd, must also be understood spiritually, for they describe the working of the covenant of peace established through the blood of Christ. The cessation of the evil beasts, the sheep dwelling safely in wilderness and wood, the showers of blessing, the fertility of the land, the deliverance from servitude to the enemy - these are figures of the spiritual, in keeping with the mystic nature of the whole chapter, thus:

25 And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods.

26 And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing.

27 And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the Lord, when I have broken the bands of their yoke, and delivered

them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them.

28 And they shall no more be a prey to the heathen, neither shall the beast of the land devour them: but they shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid.

29 And I will raise up for them a plant of renown, and they shall be no more consumed with hunger in the land, neither bear the shame of the heathen any more.

30 Thus shall they know that I the Lord their God am with them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the Lord God.

31 And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord God.

THE PLANTATION OF RENOWN

The "plant of renown" of verse 29 may be otherwise translated 'plantation' or "garden" and bears reference to the Garden of Eden; thus, "The Lord planted a garden eastward in Eden" (Gen. Ch. 2:8). Clearly it has to do with the restoration of man from his fallen state, through the atonement of Christ, the triumph of the Seed of the Woman who has bruised Satan's dominion and brought down his kingdom in ruins. The heavenly David now goes forth to rescue His lost sheep and bring them into the secure fold of His kingdom, the plantation of His grace, where they shall be eternally secure.

"ONE SHEPHERD"

Hengstenberg has a valuable comment on the great Shepherd Chapter of Ezekiel with particular reference to the promise of verse 23, "I will set up one shepherd over them." He writes:

"The unity of the shepherd ('one shepherd') in verse 23 can only refer, as the comparison of Ch. 37:24 shows, to the separation of the kingdom caused by the revolt from the Davidic-dynasty (i.e., in the days of Rehoboam and Jeroboam). As one God, so is there now again one king. With the unity is connected the glory of the king and his kingdom, as the decline was connected with the multiplicity of the shepherds. The

words, 'one fold and one shepherd' in John Ch. 10:16 are an extension of this sentence. With the coming of the great Shepherd ceases not only the division of Israel but also the separation between Israel and the heathen. The more explicit announcement in the earlier prophets (as in Isa. Ch. 9 and 11 and other passages of Isaiah), leaves no doubt that by David is here meant the true David, the Messiah, in whom the stem of David is to culminate. No-one who is at home in the language of Scripture can think of a personal reappearance of David, any more than in Malachi Ch. 3:23, of a personal reappearance of Elijah. It is not a resurrection of David that is spoken of, but a sending of a David who has not yet been present."

THE PARABLE NOW PROCEEDS:

"He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber."

To enter by the door is to come by way of the prophecies. He only is the true shepherd who fulfils them. In His explanation of the parable Christ declares (v.7) that He is the door of the sheep. He is then, both door and shepherd - He who enters in, and that by which He enters in. All the prophecies are of Christ, for "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. Ch. 19:10). He is the covenant door to the sheepfold. He is the Messenger of the covenant. He is the One who enters in, and the means by which His poor and persecuted flock gain access.

The false shepherds of Israel priests, Pharisees, scribes, are the thieves and robbers who do not come by way of the prophecies of Christ and His kingdom, but by 'some other way' of their own invention, and lord it over the flock of God. Martin Luther's primary treatise on "The Babylonish Captivity of the Church" shows clearly how false shepherds and domineering lords of the congregation did not expire in flames of Jerusalem in AD 70, but are a continuing feature of the church's history on the grand scale. We could add, that the thieves and robbers are just as much in evidence in local and obscure congregations where the same evil principle is ever at work, always on the same basis as of old, reckoning that the sheep exist for the benefit of the shepherd, and not the shepherd for the sheep. Thieves and robbers they are, because it is thievery and robbery to deprive the sheep of their pasture and to sell and slaughter them that the false shepherds might clothe themselves with the wool and eat the flesh.

V. 2. "He that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep."

The character of the true shepherd is revealed by contrast in these imperishable words, "The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep". He who spake the words came not to enrich Himself at the expense of the flock but to give His great life for theirs. Such is the mark of the true under-shepherd also who has drunk deeply of the Spirit of the Good Shepherd, and many are the under-shepherds from Stephen onward - or for that matter, from John the Baptist backward through history, who have died for the welfare of the sheep and for the glory of Christ, though their sacrifice, unlike His, has of course no atoning efficacy. One only could declare, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." (v.10).

Christ fulfilled the prophecies, especially those already noted above from Ezekiel and Jeremiah, as well as those predictions both personal and verbal, of King David in the psalms and in his personal history. Majestically Christ fulfilled all, type and prophecy, and presented Himself as the only door of entrance into the kingdom of heaven. This is proof of His absolute divinity for such a claim to be the exclusive access to heaven could be made by no-one less.

V. 3. "To him the porter openeth."

This porter has caused much embarrassment to the commentators from earliest times. Some of the best have said that He is the Holy Spirit, others that He is Christ in yet another of His characterisations. The answer may lie in simpler regions. Let us consider the porter as the Word of God which bars the door against all false Christs and all impious intruders, reserving the grand entry to this covenant fold, for Him who came as the prophecies foretold and who fulfilled them in Himself.

"The sheep hear his voice."

This is the effectual call of the gospel, falling not merely upon the outward ear, but sounding in the heart, rousing from death and from sleep, as the Bride declares in the Song of Solomon: "I sleep but my heart waketh. It is the voice of my Beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me my sister, my dove, my undefiled..." (Song of Solomon Ch. 5:2). There is a finality about Christ's word here. The sheep will and must hear His voice. It is a mark of identity which carries over even into the experience of earthly shepherds who not only know their sheep but are known of the sheep. The flock in a special, unique way, 'hear his voice' and know it is He to whom they belong and in whose guidance they trust. So in the spiritual sense, "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" (v.27-28).

"And he calleth his own sheep by name."

To know them by name means that each has a separate identity and possesses characteristics peculiar to the individual. In the natural sphere this is true also. It is remarkable but has often been verified, that however large the flock, the animals are individually known to the shepherd who recognises each one by its face. This almost incredible fact has been proved again and again in courts of law, where the testimony of the shepherd that a stolen animal is his, because recognisable to him by face, has been accepted as proof of ownership. The humble believer must never suppose that he is only one among many. Though untalented and undistinguished he is of equal consequence to Christ as those distinguished for gift and activity. All are equally precious to the shepherd, and His most particular care is reserved for those who need Him the most.

"And leadeth them out."

The fold is only for protection at night when the wild beasts of the forest do move, and night time in prophetic language is always the time of danger, trial and affliction, of delusion and deceit and losing the way. The leading out from the fold to feed in the pastures of the Word, is the holy ordinance of God for the sustaining of the flock. The local church is not only an evangelistic field for bringing in the lost, but is the regular provision by Christ for feeding the flock by the Word publicly preached and taught. Of equal importance with the finding and bringing home, is the feeding, guiding and protecting.

V. 4-5. "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 them; for they know not the voice of strangers."

A true believer, born again of the Spirit, knows his Saviour, and will not be beguiled into wandering into other fields where the voice of Christ is not truly heard. There is a holy instinct born in true Christians to flee from the voice of the stranger. They know the voice of Christ speaking in His Word, for that Word of

grace and peace is already in their hearts. A doubtful, hesitant, confession of Christ from the pulpit is instantly detected by them. They will shun anything which pours doubt on the Word and which speaks only dubiously of Christ's deity and supremacy in heaven and in earth. "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery" says Paul (1 Cor. Ch. 2:7). Mystifying indeed to the children of this world and to the princes of this world, for they cannot understand a religion based on free grace alone, where faith justifies and human merit, works, religious practices and orders, are of no avail. A salvation without merit on the part of the beneficiary is not to the mind of this world. Yet no other brings peace and rest to the conscience, for the Bible correctly diagnoses man's sickness and prescribes the only remedy - free forgiveness and the renewal by the Holy Ghost through the blood of the Redeemer. This is the message - the gospel - which the believer wants to hear and he is quick to detect the falsity which substitutes human works for the grace of God. Merely human religions, however some of them may garnish themselves with the name of God and of Christ, spring from the one corrupt root - the idea that fallen man can deserve, earn, or qualify himself for, the favour of God and acceptance with Him. Christ becomes less and less as the merit of man grows more and more till it is small wonder that His unique deity, His heavenly supremacy before which the cherubim bow and veil their faces, the all-sufficiency of His atoning blood, fade into the background. The nominal orthodoxy of Rome with the service which it pays to the great doctrines of the ancient creeds, is no exception to this rule. Rome reduces Christ to comparative insignificance by its doctrine of the intercession of the Virgin and the saints, the merits of the dead and the departed compounded with the merit of Christ; and formal obedience to ritual observance and the rigours of penance added to, or supplanting the only merit and righteousness of Christ.

PROTESTANT RATIONALISM

Protestant rationalism is equally a delusion, as human pride rises up to substitute the word and the wisdom of man for the mystery of the divine Word, quickly leading to a denying of Christ and His work in whole or in part. Behold the Pharisee and the Sadducee, the ritualist and the rationalist once more defiling the temple of God and making the Father's house a house of merchandise. The sects on the fringe of Christendom are likewise no exception to the rule. They just as surely present their own merits in place of the righteousness of Christ, as those who plough the furrow of a false and only relative orthodoxy. The Mormon boasts of keeping 'the laws and ordinances of the gospel' by which he means the practices and observances taught by Joseph Smith as being necessary to salvation. The followers of Charles Taze Russell, (once known as the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, or 'Millennial Dawn', now by yet another name) must earn their way to, life by obeying the strict regulations of their sect - regulations which are entirely physical and may be performed without any intrinsic merit or spirituality being involved. The Adventist with closer claims to proximity to evangelical religion, likewise places observance of the seventh day sabbath as highest priority in the list for human acceptance with God, on the authority of a supposed vision given to Mrs. Ellen White (the chief feature of which is a gross materialisation of heaven with temple and all complete, with the covenant ark itself in the centre, and a holy radiance surrounding the fourth commandment on the original stone tables of the law given on Sinai).

But the sheep will not hear them, and flee in horror from these self-appointed shepherds and teachers. They will have Christ and Christ alone, Christ's merits alone, Christ's blood alone, and are content to be justified by faith alone, without the deeds of the law.

Fundamental to the nature of Christ's sheep is that they know their own fold and their own pasture. They will feed nowhere else. They know who their shepherd is, and they know His voice. The pasture, like the fold, is hedged about by fundamental doctrines: the doctrine of God, holy, eternal, all-wise, subsisting from

eternity to eternity in the mystery of Three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Ghost; the doctrine of the fall of man, of man's sinful and depraved and ruined nature; of man's need for salvation by grace alone through faith in the all-atoning merits of the blood of Christ; the infallibility and incorruptibility of a miraculously given and preserved Bible. These are basic to our existence as sheep in the fold of Christ. We may have differences of Church Order, but we must beware of the tendency to claim the infallibility and necessity of details which have no relevance to the simplicities of faith, repentance, hope and love. Let differences on other matters be mutually recognised and respected, but let us be intolerant of that which endangers faith or which places anything whatever alongside the merits of Christ as necessary to salvation.

V.6. "This parable spake Jesus unto them, but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them."

This stricture was addressed immediately to the elders of Israel who stood around that day and gnashed upon Him with their teeth (see v.31). The elect remnant in the Old Covenant nation likewise did not understand, nor would they till Pentecost, when a new day of revelation and of grace dawned. They were long in learning even then, as the battle which Paul had to fight against the Judaizing party bears witness (see the epistles of Galatians and Ephesians). The hardest thing for any child of Adam to grasp is that justification is by faith alone through grace. Human merit dies hard, and even when blind eyes are open there are those who only see men as trees walking. Let us learn from these words of the Lord that spiritual understanding is a thing of growth, of-time, of anxious seeking, and humble learning and perseverance. How many to this day interpret this parable of the Good Shepherd carnally and not spiritually? They have not diligently searched the scriptures for the true interpretation of what constitutes the flock of Christ. If they would dwell more upon the words of the Saviour and compare them more diligently with the corresponding prophecies they would discover who the true Israel is; they would perceive that there is only one fold and one Shepherd, and the church is that fold, and there never can be another.

ABUNDANT LIFE

We have anticipated in this exposition the interpretation (vs. 7-9) given by Christ, and so we proceed to verse 10, where the Lord says, "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly." Once more we underline the truth that Christ is speaking here of the exalted and heavenly nature of the life He came to confer upon His sheep. The life Christ gives is life more abundant than the ordinary life of this world. Every Christian has it. It is false to teach that some Christians have only life, and others life more abundant. The distinction Christ is making is between having life at all, and having it not. Life more abundant is that spiritual, eternal life, which is the new life in the Spirit. Much harm has been done by teaching there is a higher spiritual life attainable in this world beyond the life conferred at conversion. This attractive doctrine is not so much in evidence now as in the earlier days of this century. It has been held that until the Christian graduates from the new life received at conversion to some new super-life of 'victory' and holiness, based upon his own consecration he will not experience the promise of Christ that ALL His sheep may have 'life more abundant'.

By necessity this teaching depreciates the normal Christian life and brands the ordinary believer as living 'a carnal life', 'defeated' and 'lacking the fulness of the Spirit'. The doctrine of the 'full surrender' as a specialised experience reserved for the few who graduate from normality to the new level of attainment, of course denies the very nature of repentance, conversion, and regeneration, the heart and soul of which are the dedication of the being to God. Christians should beware of becoming spiritual 'specialists' deceiving themselves that they have that which they have not; being relieved (so they suppose) of warfare

and struggle without and within, entering a sphere of 'calm and untroubled peace' which can resemble more the geographical zone of the Doldrums than the bitter conflict with the 'black north-easter' of sin and temptation. It is a dangerous delusion to suppose that we shall ever in this life be relieved of conflict with sin. It is equally false to teach that when Paul declared "Oh wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" - He wrote as a man who had got his grammatical tenses confused, using present for past, and future for present. [Serial Number 021]

ADDENDUM: THE DOUBLE AMEN

Christ's 'Verily, verily' in verse 1 is 'Amen, amen,' in the original. Though John wrote in Greek, he preserves throughout, the Hebrew word AMEN. Hendriksen's "I most solemnly assure you" is a tasteless representation of a stupendous address. In Christ's "Amen, amen" is a declaration of His own deity and final divine authority. The double Amen occurs for example in Isaiah ch.25:1 where the prophet exalts the name of God whose counsels are faithfulness and truth." Dr. Samuel Lee in his incomparable lexicon uses the definitions: security, integrity, fidelity and truth. Parkhurst observes "It is remarkable that in the New Testament no-one but our blessed Lord Himself uses Amen at the beginning of a sentence as a word of affirmation." Only John records the double Amen's of the Saviour, never the singular. The sayings to which the double Amen is prefixed in John are not recorded by the other Evangelists, and we may conclude that John (who wrote long after the other three) was led by the Spirit of God to choose those declarations which most clearly assert the deity of the Lord. The double Amen has an important place in the Book of Psalms where it is used in the doxologies which conclude the first three of the five sections of the Psalms (41:13; 72:19; 89:52). Each of these three has to do with the messianic nature of the psalm to which the doxology is appended. John never forgets how the Lord in the Book of Revelation declares His deity in the address, "These things saith the Amen...." (Rev. Ch. 3:14). These declarations are deliberately designed by Christ to set forth His divine authority and identify Himself with the prophetic utterances of the O.T. Rev. Ch. 3:14 should put us on our guard against trivial and insipid interpretations.

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