

THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND THE TRUE SHEEP

A SERMON

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“I fed the flock.” Zechariah 11:7

THIS chapter belongs to the apostolic age in its primary and chief reference, but not to that age only; but it is by reading it in the light of that age that we see more conspicuously its meaning. Hence we have in this chapter a reference to the thirty pieces of silver for which the Savior was sold, and which we may look at in this way, that they looked at him, not as a citizen, but as a servant, or as a slave; and therefore, in paying thirty pieces of silver for him, it was like giving the price of a slave to buy him, as they would buy a slave; only their object was that which they did and yet did not accomplish, namely, his death. They did accomplish it, yet did not; that is, they were suffered to crucify him, and yet, before he died, he finished his work; so that while they were criminals and murderers nevertheless no man took his life from him; he laid it down of himself. I notice *the shepherd here spoken of*, or, rather, *the speaker who is the shepherd*, “I fed the flock;” and then, secondly, *the flock that he feeds*, the flock of slaughter, even the poor of the flock.

First, then, just a word upon the Shepherd. He was, indeed, a servant, and he was poor, and he was friendless. All three of these are worthy of our attention, because all three of these truths do, when rightly appreciated and understood, endear the Savior beyond description. And you cannot be happy with God without endearment; you cannot be happy with Christ without endearment; you cannot be happy in the gospel without the endearment of the gospel; and if we have only a little of that endearment now, if it be of the true kind, if Christ be precious to us now, in ever so small a proportion, if it be of the right kind, the time will come when that preciousness will be realized, and possessed, and enjoyed in perfection. He was under God’s law, and he stood there bound to fulfil that law. Hence the very circumstance of his becoming circumcised was a declaration that he was a debtor to do the whole law. What, my hearer, can be more pleasing to you, when you look at the demands which that law had upon you, than to know that the Lord Jesus Christ came in, while you were yet without strength, while you were yet ungodly, while you were yet an enemy, while you were yet under sin, and under wrath, and afar off, that he came in? He has served God so well, that God asks no other service, not of a legal kind; for it is said that the Lord is well pleased for his righteousness’ sake. “He shall magnify,” just mark this; such a thing is not acknowledged of any man, or any class of men, under heaven, but only of one man, the God-man, Christ Jesus,

“he shall magnify the law, and make it honorable.” And this is a matter of infinite and eternal importance because the Lord has determined that his law should never lose its majesty. He will maintain the majesty and authority of his eternal law; not one jot nor tittle can fail. Now, Jesus Christ, then, became the servant. And how important it is for us to know that God is pleased with that; that God is satisfied with that; that we, by that, are made free! It is important we should know this, because, if we do not know this, then we do not know rightly either the law of God, or the gospel of God. We do not know rightly the wrath of God, or the mercy of God, if we do not know this; and we cannot have peace with God, if we do not clearly understand what Christ has done. How pleasing, then, to hear the Father say, “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; my elect, in whom my soul delights!” Here, then, the Shepherd comes to where the sheep are, and renders that service to God’s law that sets them entirely and eternally free. But let us go on a little further with this service of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was also to endure that which was due to their sins. I could speak for an hour, by tracing word after word, through that beautiful scripture in this same book of Zechariah. I never seem weary of looking at that lovely scripture; I mean that which pertains to the dear Savior coming into the place of poor sinners, interposing his wondrous person, his precious blood, and having love enough to us to endure all that, without a murmur, without a drawback, without a fault, And hence, when the command is given, Christ is there to meet that solemn, and, at the same time, awful command, “Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd!” When did the sword awake against God’s Shepherd? Why, say you, when he died. Ah! before that, before that. You lose a great part of the beauty of that scripture if you look at the sword awaking against him not until he died. The sword awoke against him as soon as he was born. It was the sword of justice; that hung over his sacred head all his days; that watched him, and, as it were, set a print upon every step he took, marked every step he took; as he himself in prophecy says, 50th of Isaiah, “He woke morning by morning: he wakes my ear to hear as the learned. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.” And yet he says, “I know I shall not be ashamed.” This sword of justice followed him all his days; it awoke when he was born; there was the fiery, flaming sword, invisible to man, but not invisible to Christ, and that sword turning every way; that there was but one way of Christ’s escape, and that was to endure that which was to be endured. “Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd!” Mark the way in which it is recorded. We often lose the beauty of Scripture by running through a verse, running through a chapter, as though it was all one, as though its several parts had no particular, distinct meanings, whereas, when you discover their different and distinct meanings, and then view them together in their joint force and harmony, when you view them in this way, you get a representation that charms the soul, endears the blessed God and that is what I want. We can live happy all the time we feel we love God. Hope, unassociated with endearment to him, makes ashamed; but hope in the endearment of him, makes not ashamed. Now, notice that scripture, then, “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd!” There Christ appears the Shepherd; there the sword awoke against him. The Lord did not deal with him as he does with you and me. He looks at us, and he sees what we are. He passes by this fault, passes by that fault, passes by the other, won’t name one of them. He has laid them all upon his dear Son, who has blotted them all out with his blood, cast them into the depths of the sea. And a loving God says to us, “I, even I, am he that blots out your transgressions, and will not remember your sins.” He spares us, remembers that we are dust; but he spared not his own Son, but exacted of him daily obedience, and often nightly obedience too, for he was oft in the fields, or in the mountains, all night, in prayer. Here, then, the sword of justice followed him up. “The man that is my fellow,” that is the next clause. So, then, Christ had to prove that he was

God's equal. The first thing was the sword awoke against him and watched him all his days; and the next is, he is called God's fellow, which there evidently means equal. Christ had to prove himself before the sword smites him; he must prove himself God's fellow, God's equal; and so, bless his dear name! he did, Look at his miracles; see his dominion over all three of the worlds; over hell, by casting out devil; over man, by healing diseases; and over the physical world by silencing, in a moment, the storm; and over heaven by calling immortal souls out of heaven, and re-embodiment in those he raised from the dead.

Here is his dominion over all worlds. He proved himself to be God's fellow. This was revealed, to the delight of Thomas and others, "My Lord and my God." First, here is the sword of justice; secondly, he has to prove himself to be God's equal. And now, after the sword of justice had followed him all his days, and after he had demonstrated by his miracles and his ministry what he was, then came the smiting, after all this; "Smite the shepherd." First, the sword awakes;" secondly, watches him: then he proves himself to be God's equal, and then comes the smiting at last; "Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered." He demonstrated thus that he was able to endure what was to be endured. So far, then, for the services of the Lord Jesus Christ. Would we, then, have the approbation of heaven? It must be by this service of Jesus Christ. Would we have the presence of God? It must be by this service of Jesus Christ. Would we have eternal life? Would we have the victory? Yes, would we have that which all things we may desire cannot for one moment bear comparison with? It must be by this service of the Lord Jesus Christ. Little did Judas know what he was doing when he could part with this Wondrous Person, his life, his death, for a paltry thirty pieces of silver, when he, in his person and work, was worth more than the whole range of material creation altogether.

But then, secondly, he was not only thus a servant to free us, but he was also poor, nowhere to lay his head; "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head." How expressive this is of what we are by sin. The Lord, in his kind providence, supplies us, but then it is by the interposition of this sworn covenant; it is, as I some time ago said from that beautiful scripture, where it is said of the Lord Jesus Christ that "he has in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, by whom he made the worlds," that should be translated, "by whom he made the ages;" the age of providence; there is an age of providence that reaches down to the end of time, seed-time and harvest must continue; and by whom he made the ages of grace; "that he might show forth in eternal ages to come the exceeding riches of his grace." Now, there is a twofold poverty Christ took upon him; first poverty literally, which we ourselves deserved; and secondly, poverty mystically; he took our sins, and underwent, in a way we cannot describe, underwent the privation of God's presence; "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Here, then, he was poor, he had nothing; he had nothing by which he could do the people any good; he had nothing by which he could bring any glory to God; but himself, himself must do it all; it must be his own blood, it must be the suffering of his own person; his own person must do it all. He had neither silver, nor gold, nor kingdoms to offer in room of himself; but it must be himself, his own blood, his own life, his own person; he must give himself, his infinite self, his eternal self; "loved me," said the apostle, "and gave *himself*." Here, then, he had nothing. Why, "all that a man has will he give for his life;" but Christ had nothing to give, he had nothing else to give but his own infinitely precious life, he gave himself. Where is there a Christian that does not from his very soul, in all humility and sincere affection, set his seal to the dear Savior's own testimony upon this matter

when he says, "I am the good shepherd." Ah, Lord, you are indeed! "I lay down my life for the sheep." As Mr. Hart nicely sings:

"What says our shepherd divine,
For his blessed word we should keep?
This flock has my Father made mine,
I lay down my life for the sheep."

So, he has. Here, then, while he was poor, yet he was infinitely rich, because himself was an infinite treasure; he took our poverty, and has put our poverty away, and has now, entitled us to all the blessings of providence that we need, and has entitled us to the glories of eternity, entitled us to all the promises of the gospel, to all the blessings of God's everlasting love; he has a right to all, and his people are joint heirs with him. Thus, then, if we look at the Shepherd in his servitude and his taking our poverty, they are endearing to us.

Then, again, he was friendless. Well, but, say you, his disciples were his friends. But they were useless in a way of help; they were scattered from him; and the one that seemed to cleave the most to him, as you are aware, I mean Peter, denied him; so that the Psalms were fulfilled in the position of the Savior, "Lover and friend have you put far from me, and my acquaintance into darkness. He looked around, east, west, north, and south, but not a friend on earth that was any use to him. All hell in arms against him; all the sins of the church, shall I say, rendered fiery by the law of God against him; all the curses due to the sins of the church, all against him. There stood the Friend of friends, the Friend of sinners, himself friendless; himself an almighty, an eternal, an immutable, an infinite Friend to a number that no man can number, and yet he himself friendless. "This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us," and thus gave his Son to be a servant to take our poverty, that we through his poverty might be made rich; and to become friendless, that he might hereby practically and savingly be our Friend, and that he might thereby reconcile us to himself, turn enemies into friends, and bring us to where Abraham was when he was called the friend of God. Such, then, is the Lord Jesus Christ. That is where I like to live. I am never so happy in my thoughts and feelings, as when I am dwelling with him. And I do like to read that scripture where it is said that "God shall be all in all." There is nothing in the prospect of heaven so attractive to me as that. If there was anything of a mere creature kind to be taken there to help, the time would come when that part would break down. I have never yet seen the creature take any part where it has not broken down, Adam had a part to take in the garden of Eden, and he broke down; angels had a part to take, and they broke down; the Jews had to take a part, and they broke down; and as the Lord lives, I should wish to be annihilated if heaven stood upon such a basis that we were to go there and be there just a few years, as long as a few creature qualities might hold out; for my eye would be always upon that weak part; I should say, Ah, there is a weak part there spoils all the rest, and I am afraid that column will give way, and down will go the whole. What a mercy for us that God is all and in all, by Jesus Christ being all and in all. What a sweet truth, not a word against you in Christ; there you stand, and while the Bible may describe characters that shall not inherit the kingdom of God, you feel in your heart you are in Christ, and you are free from it all. Plead his blood, plead his righteousness, plead his sacrifice, plead his sufferings, plead his name; cleave to him, cling to him. Never think of obeying any precept, only by love to Christ; never think of praying one prayer acceptable, or bringing one particle of praise acceptable, except it be by the

incense, fragrance, and perfection of the blessed Redeemer's name. He is God's delight, and it is the way in which we are to glory in the Lord our God.

But after thus looking at this shepherd, *let us look at the flock that he feeds*. They are called "the flock of slaughter." I think that this means three things. I am aware, of course, the whole human race is a flock of slaughter, as slain in the first Adam; but that is not the idea here intended. There is a threefold sense, and I will bring a scripture for each, in which the Lord's people are called the flock of slaughter; first, vitally; second, literally; and third, relatively. First, vitally. Now I come to a part that you must know something of, or else you are not a sheep. What I have said this morning will be all as nothing to you; what Jesus Christ has done in serving God for you, in taking your poverty, and coming into a friendless state that he might be your friend, and God might be your friend, and you might be saved, will be all nothing to you if you are a stranger to what I am going to say, namely, that they are the flock of slaughter when their false hope is slain. Saul of Tarsus had a false hope, as all of us by nature have. You that are dead in sin, you know that you feel a kind of hope. Well, yes, you say, I have undergone no change, but I have a hope. But you have no reason to have a hope. Well, I do to others as I wish they should do to me. So, you ought; that's no more than you ought to do. And so, I hope. Well, I like to keep the sabbath. So, you ought; I like to go to a place of worship. So, you ought. That is nothing more than the duty you owe as a matter of homage to your Maker and Creator for the providential mercies you enjoy.

But then, you must not on that ground conclude you are a Christian; there must be something more than that. Your hope is false, your religion is after the flesh; your religion is natural; and, as your religion is after the flesh and natural, when you die your religion will die; and what will become of your soul? Damned, if you die in that state, as sure as you are a man, that will be the end of you and a most fearful end it will be. God open your blind eyes and give you a concern, and bring you into that state described by the apostle, and it is this, he says, "The commandment came, and sin revived, and I died." And he says in that same chapter of Romans, in substance, I thought I was on my way to heaven; I thought I was all right and well; but when God's commandment came into my soul, it ploughed up the hidden evils of my heart. Before that, I could boast of myself as being of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, touching the law blameless, a Pharisee of the Pharisees; but now I see myself in possession of nothing but all manner of concupiscence; my heart a cage of unclean birds; my heart the den and dregs of hell; my heart the very place where deceit unfathomable, and wickedness indescribable, has hidden itself. I know now that the law is holy, just, and good; for that is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. I will tell you what your feeling will be; you will feel you have no hope. Here I am without hope; I do not see how I can hope because, you will say; whatever I do will be like myself. If I pray, my prayers will savor of my wicked nature; if I think I love God, it will only be the love of poisoned, corrupted, poor old fallen nature; if I do duties, it will only be the doing of a slave; I would run away from God and the whole of it if I could. That is what you will say. You will see what a poor creature you are. By-and-bye, when the dear Savior becomes manifested, and the testimony comes in, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin," then you will begin to hope in the infinite sufficiency of that atonement; and now, "unto him that works not; but believes in him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." You will gladly receive the testimony, "And him that seeks," that is, if he seeks by faith in Christ, for many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able. Oh, my hearer, I feel more and more the importance of what I am now dwelling upon. We live in a fearful day. Some of you, if you could do such a thing, which you cannot, if you could go among the

churches, especially the duty-faith churches, and hold conversation individually with the hundreds, and, I may say, thousands, scattered over the country, as to their conversion, you would find that their conversion is only a fleshly conversion; that it is only a moral conversion; that it is only a mental conversion; that it is only a natural conversion; that there has been no real ploughing up of the hidden evils of the heart; no being brought into a prison state, into the low dungeon, and remaining there until the Savior appears and opens the prison-house, and brings the soul out. Ah, how few among them know anything of this. And yet, unless we do know something of this; unless the circumcising knife has reached the heart; unless the sword of justice has come in, and cut off all fleshly hopes, fleshly holiness, and fleshly righteousness, laid open the secrets of the heart, pierced to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and laid the whole scene open before a heart-searching God; unless we know something of this change, my hearer, our conversion is only natural, and not supernatural; the change is brought about by the moral influence of God's word, and the workings of conscience, and the oratory of the preacher; but it is not brought about by the quickening power of the eternal Spirit of the living God. The man who is brought into what the apostle there describes, and who does know what it is to say from the deep sighs of his heart, "Oh, wretched man that I am;" who does feel that he is indeed sore broken, as said one of old, "I am like a broken vessel;" and as another says, which I like very much, it is a very humble simile, but a very significant one, "I am like a bottle in the smoke," alluding to the skin bottles of the East, dried up. And so, the poor sinner; Why, he says, my holiness, it is all smoke dried, by the smoke of sin and hell; I am a poor, loathsome, lost, ruined, creature. These are the flock of slaughter; these are the poor of the flock; these are the spiritually poor; these are they that will prize free-grace pastures; these are they that understand what it is to be diseased and sick, and to be heart-broken, and to be driven away, and to be lost. These are the persons that he means; "I will strengthen the diseased; I will heal that which is sick; I will bind up that which is broken; I will bring again that which is driven away; I will save that which was lost." I cannot describe to you with what longing eyes these persons look upon the dear Redeemer. They long to realize in their own experience what is said of him as the Shepherd, that "he gathers the lambs with his arm." There is his omnipotent arm. Satan has got hold of you; sin has got hold of you; it does not matter what has got hold of you; when he reaches out his mediatorial arm everything that has hold of you must let go. When he puts his hand on, all other hands must be taken off, and he draws you into his bosom, into the secrets of his mind; gives you to understand what he is, what he has done; and gives you to understand your safety; and says, with solemn asseverations, that none shall ever be able to pluck you out of his hand. What do you know of this downward work? What do you know as to Jesus Christ meeting the law for you, as to Jesus Christ taking your poverty and wretchedness? You have no poverty and wretchedness for him to take if you know not what this downward work is. What do you know of Jesus Christ being friendless? What do you know of being shut out, and brought to feel that no man on earth can help you, but only God? If you are a stranger to this, you are not a sheep of Christ; you cannot hear his voice, for instance; nor distinguish his voice from the voice of a false gospel, unless you are thus slain. The Lord has done so with all his people without exception. Now, any man knows that if a man is pierced literally in the heart it kills that man. So, on the day of Pentecost, they were pricked in the heart, that mystically killed them; it killed them to all their Jewish religion, prejudice, and enmity, and made them exclaim, in the presence of those very men that they had despised, and mooted, and ridiculed before all, in what a different light these heavenly messengers now appeared, and the people exclaimed, "What shall we do?" What, ask us what you shall do? Why, a little time ago you were ridiculing us, mocking us, and saying we were filled with new wine; and now you are so pricked in the heart, so convinced

of your state, so brought down, your sin in crucifying Christ you, now perceive to be so great, that you appeal to us. *Believe in the Lord, Jesus Christ*. And so they did, and the word went with power, and they were brought into the consolations of the gospel, walking in the fear of God, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, rejoicing in Christ Jesus the Lord. That's the flock of slaughter. And it is no small mercy to escape delusion. There never was a day in which delusion abounded more. Now is the devil's time. It is respectable now to make a profession. Now, says the devil, is my time to sow all the tares I can; now is my time to raise up parsons with free-grace in one hand and free-will in the other; now is my time to sow the mingled seed. I will make the people of God ashamed to be singular if I can; I will moderate them all I can; I will clothe them with all the moderation I possibly can; and, as for here and there a minister that will not cooperate as the phrase is, with the pious, but will stand out, says the devil, I don't care for him. I don't suppose he does; but he shall care for God, though; he shall care for Jesus Christ; for God will have his own, he will feed the flock of slaughter. Thus, then, he is the good shepherd; having rendered that substitutional service, having, taken, our poverty, having become friendless to befriend us, and thus bringing us to know our need by slaying us.

Then there is a second and circumstantial sense in which they are the flock of slaughter, namely, that they should have to undergo the loss of life for the truth's sake. Hence, those people that have been slain in the way I have been describing, and are brought to receive Jesus Christ, what can they not undergo? The apostle, when he, saw the enemy killing one and killing another saw the Jews and Rome at it every day. Well, Paul, what do you say to this? Ah, not surprised at it. "It is written, For your sake we are killed all the day long; we are counted like sheep for the slaughter." Why, are you not beaten, Paul? Oh, no. "In all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us." The words I have just mentioned are a quotation from the 44th Psalm, and I must go to that Psalm again. Recounting the sufferings, they had undergone, and also in a spirit of prophecy as to what they should undergo, see how firm they stood under it all. "All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten you; nor could all that the prophets endured, make them forget their dear covenant God; nor could all that the apostles endured make them forget their dear Lord Jesus Christ. "What, mean you," said one, "to weep and to break my heart? for I am ready, not to go bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." "We have not forgotten you, neither have we dealt falsely in your covenant;" we have abode by the blood of the covenant, by the order of the covenant, by the stability of the covenant, by the Mediator, the Great Shepherd, who was brought again from the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant; we have stood as iron pillars, defended cities, and brazen walls. "We have not dealt falsely in your covenant;" our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from your way for we know that your wisdom is infinite, and that all will end well. These things are rather trying while we pass along; but at the end they will be all right. "Though you have sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death," yet in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us. If you know what this feeling is, and know what this laying hold of Christ is, then you will know something of the blessedness of being a Christian.

One more point, and then I must close, no time to speak of how he feeds them, or of the great account. Now the third sense, then, in which they are the flock of slaughter, is this, that they shall be, to the end of time, the flock of slaughter, as far as the world can slaughter them. Matthew 10th: now just notice those words, "You shall be hated of all men for my name's sake," there it is; and another scripture says, "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you." "You shall be hated of

all men for my name's sake." Why, all over the country, now, men are trying all they possibly can to get God's truth out of the land buying up chapels, slandering ministers. And sometimes the devil will put a straight-haired, long-faced, iron-hearted, covetous man into the office of deacon; and he will watch, and watch, and watch; and perhaps the minister has not gifts and talents enough to keep the place so thronged and filled as to make himself independent of this Mr. Somebody; and he begins to give the minister to understand that he cannot expect to prosper while he is so dreadfully bigoted, so dreadfully narrow-minded, and he begins to think of having Mr. So-and-so, Mr. Shall-and-shan't, Mr. Can-and-can't, Mr. Will-and-won't, these are the gentlemen that he means to have to fill the place; and he has them; and the consequence is that this poor minister presently is obliged to leave, and the few people in that place that know the truth are obliged to meet in a little bit of a room. Such is the way in which devils and deacons go together. But bless the Lord, there are some deacons about the country, as well as in London, that do use the office well, and that do purchase to themselves a great degree of boldness in the faith. Now, I hope you won't think that I have any particular predilection for sweeping the streets, or sweeping a crossing; but I feel, this morning, that I would rather sweep a crossing than I would be associated with deacons that I did not feel satisfied with as men of grace and truth. If I did not feel satisfied with every one of our deacons, I would either leave the place myself, or they should, one or the other. If you get into office with men who are not right in heart, it is very hard work to stand against them; they are always scheming to undermine you. "You shall be hated of all men for my name's sake; but he that shall endure this hatred unto the end," that is the idea; take up that first clause, and carry it with you to the last, "he that shall endure this hatred unto the end shall be saved." Now, I don't like good men to hate me, because I know they do so from misunderstanding, and I don't like to dislike good men; but as for the others, as for a duty-faith man, let him be who he may, I have no unkind feeling, I would do good to any man under heaven within my power, but I dare not enter into private friendship with any party of men that are not as decided, as far as I can judge, for the truth as I am. If I meet with duty-faith, or anything opposed to the truth, I flee from it as I would from the face of a serpent, because, if I got poisoned by that duty-faith, I should be ill and die; I should become dead to the things that have filled me, for more than thirty years, with delight supreme. Oh, to have a conscience clear; to be honest before God, and to the souls of the people, and to insist upon that conversion which is spiritual and personal, and to insist upon that decision for the truth which alone can show a man to be in earnest, is a position, is a crown of rejoicing, that I would not lose for more than this world is worth. Ah, my hearer, never mind then if you are slain; if they slander you, if they call you Antinomian, let them call you what they may; remember, you are called not only to believe, but to suffer for his name's sake. You know it is a truth literally that a living fish always delights in swimming against the stream; a dead fish always goes just the way the stream is going. But you see a living fish throw himself up and go against the stream. That is just like you, you say, not unnecessarily, I have great pleasure in going against the stream of error. I have great pleasure in standing against the whole of it and rejoicing that none shall be able to pluck either me or any of his people out of his baud.