

## THE GREAT SHEPHERD

### I. The Good Shepherd Who Gives His Life For The Sheep

***“The God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant...”*** (Hebrew 13:20).

***“I am the door; through me if anyone enter in he shall be saved and shall go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal and kill and destroy; I have come in order that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep...”*** (John 10:9-11).

The single most significant aspect of the true shepherd is the caring. With sheep, there is a great deal of personal attention, at least insofar as the small flocks that would have been characteristic of shepherding in Jesus' day. So the thrust of the parable of the lost sheep, where the shepherd must go out into the wilderness for one of his “little ones.” Such close personal ties are not characteristic of herds of cattle and their drovers. The employment of the techniques of the mass media today seem to run counter the concept of sheep and shepherd. The personal identity of the sheep is lost in the maze of technologies required which, unfortunately, produce a minimum of personal interaction. The value of the individual sheep is often lost in the expansion of the herd.

But the Great Shepherd is the ageless example of the Caring Shepherd who cares enough for His sheep to die for them. His own comment was, *The hireling does not care for the sheep. I am the Good Shepherd and I know my own and my own know me.*

So the commission from the Father to the Son, to bring the sheep into the fold was written in blood. This is really “The Great Commission.” So often the strident warnings about judgment are like clanging cymbals drowning out the call of the Shepherd, while the flashing sword of the crusader employs the tactics of terror rather than the power of love to drive the sheep about.

The prophet Isaiah focused on the shepherd aspect of the sacrifice of Christ as the Lamb of God, in his classic prophecy of chapter 53. *“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth”* (Isaiah 53:5-7).

Both Jew and Gentile alike are classed as sheep. In John 10 He is quoted as saying, *“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”* (16). He came not to His sheep with the sword of the conqueror, but with the power of the blood.

The thunderings from the pulpit of judgment and wrath do not serve well the heart of the Shepherd, weeping over His sheep and laying down His life for them. The wrath of Jesus was reserved for the Pharisees—the false and faithless hirelings—and not for the poor souls, Jew or Gentile, who are victims of a world-turned-wilderness by the ravages of the Evil One. Those who would be leaders must bear the responsibility of their leadership. Jesus said again, referring not only to the Pharisees, but all who would assume the role of leadership—“*Whoso shall offend [cause to stumble] one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he would drown in the depth of the sea*” (Matthew 18:6).

**The God of peace...** The message to all is a message of peace—*Peace on earth good will to men*. It was the God of peace who brought to earth the Great Shepherd. It was the God of peace who laid our iniquity upon Him. It was the God of peace who entered into a blood covenant with Him as the “Lamb of God.” It was the God of peace who accepted His sacrifice in exchange for our peace. It was the God of peace who raised Him from the dead and brought healing to His sheep, who were wounded through the ravaging of Eden. The Hebrew expression—“By his stripes, healing came to us—*nir pa’-lanu*. The healing, of course, was of the death-giving effects of sin. The healing came to us—we did nothing to acquire it, except to receive it. Some teachers—always looking for ways to add leverage—make this glorious gift into a reward for human effort. That is to say, that they contend that “healing is in the atonement”—that everyone who is saved should also be healed. And thus, if one is not healed, one must doubt one’s salvation. This kind of “prostitution” of the text is common among the ones who have not bothered to get a thorough enough training in the Scripture.

So the God of peace brought to the world, not a conqueror of the sheep nor a taskmaster nor yet a drover, but a shepherd. The response to God’s gift is “thank you.” The result of God’s gift is rest. The position of the Giver of rest is Shepherd. “*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*” (Matthew 11:28-30).

David Morsey  
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### **INTO THE ABYSS HE CAME**

Into the abyss of human misery He came,  
And, though a babe,  
    yet was His heart aflame with the Glory of God.

Into the abyss—the Glory of God for the world of men;  
Into the abyss, where once He dared to drink the cup of sorrow,  
And then—  
    faced the consequence of that abyss,  
And bore upon His flawless frame  
    the symbols of all human sin expressed;

And in a tragic stroke the grand illusions laid to rest  
Of man's inherent dignity.

Strange it is that all the tragedies of time  
Have not sufficed to prove to man  
the depths of that accursed clime  
to which his soul was born.

Nor has it dawned upon his darkened heart  
That e'en the noble things of man are part of vain facade.  
And all the liberty  
In which he revels to indulge his selfish soul  
Is but a bondage, from the chains of which  
the grace of God alone can set him free

And so, insensitive to all but grosser earthly things,  
And unaware the raft  
To which he blindly clings is rudderless and without sail,  
He drifts through life,  
grasping, striving,  
bearing fortune's perfidies—  
Until that disenchanting moment when the spirit  
flees the mortal cage  
And knows  
that all he lived for was but ashes  
and all the good he shunned—  
the stuff of which eternal bliss is made.

Thus the abyss to which He came—the majesty of God enshrined  
for all the world to see—  
the Blessed Son of Man.  
Into the abyss—  
the Son of God with the power to free  
The souls of all in one great deed  
of holy, and unselfish love.

Now on eagle's wings the souls of those who will, may soar;  
And unencumbered by the chains of demon power,  
Know the thrill of life fulfilled;  
the joy of harmony with Him in whom  
the timeless universe remains secure.

David Morsey  
*From the Eagles Nest*