

Sabbath School Lesson #11 – Jesus Bade Them, “Follow Me” – 3-9 Sep 2016

Christ bade them to follow Him, for He was and is the Good Shepherd. And today, as it was then, His sheep hear His voice and follow Him. “And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers” (John 10:5). We here focus on the Sunday section of the Lesson – They Know His Voice – John 10:1-16.

In disffellowshipping the healed blind man for confessing Christ is the Son of God (John 9), the church leaders showed that the motive which ruled their actions was a jealous regard for their own dignity and honour, rather than a tender concern for the true welfare of God’s people who looked for spiritual guidance. Mankind are often referred to in the Scriptures as sheep, and in habits and disposition they show the fitness of the comparison. The Lord recognises it Himself, and He desires to be to us what a faithful shepherd is to his flock. The Scriptures say: “He is our God; and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand” (Psalms 95:7). “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters” (Psalms 23:1-2). “And ye My flock, the flock of My pasture are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord God” (Ezekiel 34:31).

The Shepherd Himself was now come to seek and to save that which was lost. Those to whom the care of the flock had been committed, the leaders of the Church, had too often proved themselves thieves and robbers, and the sheep had been scattered. “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” (Ezekiel 34:6). “Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? 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 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” (Ezekiel 34:1-5). Because of this the Lord says, “Behold I, even I, will both search My sheep, and seek them out” (Ezekiel 34:11).

In the performance of this work the Good Shepherd was brought into conflict with the false shepherds. Those who retained their control of the flock, they were not concerned with the desire that they might do them good, but they sought and retained control of the flock for the sake of the influence which their position procured for them. They were hirelings, only caring for the emoluments of their office, and ignoring its duties and responsibilities. Christ came to reveal to all the character of the true shepherd. Although every one, like sheep, had turned each to his own way, still all were sheep, and the Shepherd came not to condemn but save. Yet none could be saved unless they should turn from the evil of their way and live.

Jesus proclaims Himself to be the one door by which the sheep may find entrance to the fold. He is the way, the truth and the life. So He is the living way, and He is the living door. No one can enter into the fold who does not live the life of Christ. Whoever can say, like Paul, “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in Me” (Galatians 2:20), is in the way, and can go through the door. “He shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture” (John 10:9).

But this is not the end. While we are always the flock of Christ, when we have His life in us, we are also to be shepherds to others, that they too may be led to enter through the door. “He that entereth by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.” This responsibility rests upon every soul. We cannot say like Cain, unless we share his spirit and his destiny, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9) and Christ has answered for every one the question those that are willing to justify themselves, “Who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:29) We must either gather with Christ or scatter abroad. We are either true shepherds, or false ones.

There is only one way of becoming a true shepherd, and that is by receiving the life of Christ. This does not merely consist in agreeing verbally to what the Lord says. The life of Christ is as real as our physical life, for it is only by His life that we live at all. Our lives are just what we are in word, deed and thought. The life of Christ is just what He is, in every detail of His life. Whoever receives Christ’s life will live as He does, in thought, word and

deed. Whoever comes short of that life commits sin, which is coming short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Whoever comes short of the glory of God, no matter how high his profession may be, is living a sinful life. But Jesus came to save His people from their sins therefore, He came that we, might, in our lives, be filled with all the fulness of God, and not come short of His glory. Our own thoughts and words and deeds are not to appear. "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection." "Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." "If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness" (Romans 6:5, 13; 8:10).

Jesus makes the issue a very plain one. The shepherd who lives to himself, or by himself at all, is not one who may develop into a true shepherd. He never will. The command to men is not to train and discipline their thoughts, but to forsake them (Isaiah 55:7). Let the wicked forsake his way. Christ is the living way, and no man comes into the fold except by that way. Christ did not come to combine Himself with men, but to save them from themselves. Light has no fellowship with darkness. Everywhere shepherds are feeding the flock with their own words. They themselves are not properly identified with Christ, but self is allowed to appear. Christ says of all such that they are thieves and robbers. Only the one who is emptied of self and lets the mind of Christ guide him fully can feed the flock with unselfish, Christ-like care.

The characteristics of the true Shepherd, and every other feature of Christ's life, must be reproduced in the undershepherds, because the only way for them is the way of Christ's life.

The sheep hear His voice. The true shepherd will not speak of himself, but as the oracles of God. Jesus' life was just the Word made flesh, and His followers are to live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. In this way, the word will be the spring of all their actions, not of a few, but of all. The words of God are not merely articulate sounds, but being alive, they are things. Our food, which grows by the creative power of the word, is the word made food, and in our lives, the word is to appear as a living thing, taking its shape from us, but having all the life and power in itself. We are to be the word made flesh, and through us the word will speak to the scattered and wandering sheep in words and deeds of tender love and helpfulness. The sheep will recognise the voice of the Shepherd, and will follow the loving call. Let the word of God dwell in us richly in all wisdom so that there is nothing in our lives which is not the working of the word, and Christ, being lifted up, will draw all unto Him.

"He calleth His own sheep by name." Successful work does not consist in dealing with the multitudes, but with individuals. The work is not given to a favoured few. It is "to every man his work" (Mark 13:34). Self-love and self-seeking prompt a desire for the most public place where all may see and admire. The true shepherd leaves the ninety and nine and goes after that which is lost until he finds it. So will it be with all who have the true shepherd heart that all receive who enter the sheep-fold by the way of Christ's life. He "leadeth them out and when He putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him." The true shepherd does not delegate to others the difficult and unpleasant parts of the work. He goes before them. Christ is to them not merely a set of regulations, but a life. So far as men may be to others what Christ is to them, His followers are to be to those to whom they minister, not merely words of instruction but a living example. The true shepherd lives before his flock the truths which he proclaims. He is foremost in every good word and work. He does not preach and expect others to practice, but he preaches mainly by his practice.

The likeness between the Chief Shepherd and the under-shepherds is not to stop at any point. The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep, and those who share His life will also give theirs. The Lord promises all who thus partake of His sufferings that they shall share His joy. Through them He will perfectly manifest Himself to the flock. "I am the good Shepherd, and I know Mine own, and Mine own know Me, even as the Father knoweth Me, and I know the Father." The closeness of the relation between Christ and the Father sets forth the intimate relation which Christ will establish between Himself and His flock. As they two are one, so all His people are to be one with Himself and each other. When this is true they will be successful as soul-winners. The Lord will be able to reveal Himself through them as the true Shepherd, and by their means to bid the sheep to follow Him and bring in the sheep which are outside the fold, so that there shall be one fold and one shepherd.