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Articles

JESUS, OUR SHEPHERD

By

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*“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without
which no man shall see the Lord” Heb 12:14*

Spreading Scriptural Holiness to the World

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JESUS, OUR SHEPHERD

By Beverly Carradine

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1. JESUS, THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

"The Lord is my Shepherd."--Ps. xxiii, 1.

Christ has likened Himself to many different things in order to illustrate what He is to us in the spiritual life. Hence He calls Himself a door, a vine, bread, water, the morning star, and the sun itself; each figure reveals the Savior in some new light and beautiful relation to the soul.

But among all the terms employed the Lord never used a lovelier and more heart-touching figure than that in which He compares Himself to a shepherd. Blessed and comforting to all, it should appeal especially to those who have any acquaintance with the nature and habits of sheep and the office of a shepherd. Several thoughts at once suggest themselves along the line of comparison. One is the fact of a faithful observation and supervision.

When I was in Palestine a few years ago, I saw many flocks of sheep with their attendant shepherds, and one of the first things which struck me was that the eye of the keeper was continually upon the sheep. Whether standing, leaning on his rod, or sitting on a rock, the eye was always directed toward and upon the flock. This quiet, steadfast gaze greatly affected me. So, the Bible tells us, that the eyes of the Lord are upon His people, as the hymn says:

"Thou art He who, never weary,
watcheth where Thy people be."

Day and night, on land or sea, at home or abroad, at work or on the sick-bed, the faithful eye of Christ is on His followers.

2. NEEDS SUPPLIED.

"I shall not want."--Ps. xxiii, 1.

David says, "The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want," and then, in the next breath, speaks of green pastures.

As grass is the food of sheep, and bread is the provision for the human body, so truth is sustenance for the soul.

The avidity with which men read and listen shows this inner hunger. And as we see men straying over the barren fields of newspaperdom and light magazine literature, which, while posting us on the world's affairs and diverting the mind, yet utterly fail to satisfy the cravings and strengthen the faculties of the spiritual nature, we are made to think of sheep turned out on fields of barren rocks, a desert utterly without vegetation.

The Lord has pastures for us, rich, sweet, juicy, and heart-satisfying. They are green and abundant. We lie down contentedly in their midst, and marvel how we ever managed to live so long without spiritual grace and truth and ignorant of soul communion with God.

The Lord leads His people into the green fields of religious literature, unctuous sermons, the reading of His Word and meditations upon Himself. The difference in spiritual appearance of the man thus Divinely led and fed and the men grazing on what is strictly human will remind one of the contrast between sheep kept in a sun-baked lot and those kept in a meadow covered with richest verdure.

3. HE IS COME.

"The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."--Luke xix, 10.

It is said of a sheep that it has a tendency to wander, and that when it does go astray, will continually wander farther off. It seems to lack the instinct or faculty of self-recovery. This happily, is counterbalanced by the shepherd's practice of going after the wanderer.

It is this fact which Christ has so touchingly applied to Himself when He speaks of His going after the lost sheep in the mountains.

The proneness to wander is in the regenerated man; and in the sinful soul is the tendency to go continually farther and farther from God. If left alone to sin and in sin; if not followed by the Spirit of God and the ministries of the Church, men would be certain to land in hell. Fortunately for us, Christ is the Good Shepherd who comes after the straying ones. It is His voice which calls after us in the quiet hours of the night, on the sick-bed, in the strivings of conscience, and in the pleadings of the pulpit. It is His eyes that discover us in the depths of sin; it is His hand which lifts us up from where we have fallen down moral precipices; it is on His shoulders we are placed, and it is His strength which brings us back to God and heaven.

"But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Nor how dark the night the Lord went through
Ere He found His sheep that was lost."

4. THE LOST FOUND.

"I have found My sheep which was lost."--Luke xv, 6.

If the places and circumstances in which Christ the Good Shepherd found us all could be printed and pictured in a book, it would be a volume of matchless wonder. One was in a gambling den; another in a saloon; a third planning a robbery; a fourth was meditating suicide. Into every conceivable den of iniquity, into surroundings of every kind of moral degradation and horror, comes the steps of Christ, seeking those He would save.

A Mary Magdalene, an Augustine, a John Newton, and countless millions more, will praise Him in heaven for the seeking, finding, and saving.

Read Paul's description, where he speaks of fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners, and says: "Such were some of you; but ye are washed, ye are sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

5. REJOICE.

"Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep."-- Luke xv, 6.

It is wonderful that God should be glad over anything that happens to us; but it is so. There is not only joy in the presence of the angels over the repentance of a sinner, but the Savior, using the figure of a recovered sheep, shows His own gladness when He saves any one of us from sin and Satan.

As He hung on the cross, "He saw the travail of His soul, and was satisfied." He saw that, being lifted up, He would draw all men to Him. He saw them look toward Him, casting down their sins and falling broken-hearted, and won, at His feet. What a joy then, and what a joy now! Every moment, we doubt not, a sweet gladness rushes over the heart of Christ in heaven as He knows some other sinner or backslider has been found and redeemed by His grace.

6. KNOWN.

"I know My sheep."--John x, 14.

In Bible times the shepherd owned his flocks. and being ever with them and looking at them with the eyes of an owner, and not a hireling, the thought of a kind of individual acquaintance with each sheep is not surprising.

In the East the identity of shepherd and owner is still common, quite different from other parts of the world, where the owner of the ranch is one thing and the shepherds that are employed is another. All this is to throw light on Christ's words, "I know My sheep." He is Shepherd and Owner in one.

A few years ago a traveler asked an Eastern shepherd if he knew all the sheep of his flock, and his reply was, "Yes, every one." Being asked how it was possible, as there was such a common likeness his answer was, in substance, this: "To one who is with them day and night, year in and year out, there is usually seen to be innumerable differences. One has a limp from a fall on the rocks, another a scar from the teeth of a wolf, still another a mark received in a thicket of thorns, and so nearly all have what might be called individual brands."

The answer greatly affected the traveler, who was a religious man, and, bowing his head on his hands, he said: "Lord, is it possible that You may know us, your people, by our blemishes and wounds received in the thickets of sin and from the wolves of hell?"

It is a sweet thought that Christ knows us in another and more gratifying way. His omniscience, gazing through eyes of love, recognizes each and every one of His followers, and He says, "I know My sheep."

7. TRY THE SPIRITS.

"My sheep hear My voice."--John x, 27.

Here is a wonderful and blessed truth. God's people recognize the Divine voice. There are many voices and spirits in the world that would, with false promises, lead us astray. There are the cries of the hireling and the words of the deceiver and impostor. Many have gone out claiming to be deliverers, and to be from Christ. Never more so than now. We might well be alarmed; but the Savior declares that we will hear His voice in the midst of all this confusion and babble, and be led by Him.

It is a voice not only in the Word, but incarnated in a human voice, and realized in providential dealings, and felt as a whisper in the very depths of the soul in times of great trial and perplexity. But whether it is from pulpit or on the street, whether in the night or in the day, Christ says, "They shall know My voice."

8. OF THE SAME FAMILY.

"I am known of Mine."--John x, 14.

After saying that He knows His sheep, the Savior declares that His sheep know Him.

Men may speculate as they will over the mystery, but the statement of Christ, and the fact itself that His people know Him, remains like a Gibraltar.

We have never seen Him, nor heard an audible voice, nor touched Him; but we know Him.

As knowledge, it is more real than any other to us. And different from other kinds which seem to depart from us as we grow older, this becomes stronger and more vivid with the years.

Names, faces, dates, and many other things, fade from our minds in spite of all we can do, but the knowledge of Christ grows brighter, clearer, sweeter, and dearer with every passing day.

9. PERFECT REST.

"He maketh me to lie down."--Ps. xxiii, 2.

The whole of the second verse, from which we take a part, contains a very beautiful picture. It is a landscape of still waters on one side, and verdant fields on the other, with recumbent flocks, satisfied and resting in the midst of green pastures, in full view of the protecting shepherd.

In this scene and with this surrounding the sheep are made to lie down.

It is a picture of perfect rest, and it is just what God wants to do for every soul.

It is to the soul, not simply an occasional rest that all can claim, but a fixed condition of spirit, which remains calm when others are troubled, and abides when others are slipping, drifting away, and going to pieces.

This state is spoken of again in Ezekiel, where we read, "I will feed My flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God."

10. DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

"He leadeth me beside the still waters."--Ps. xxii, 2.

Sometimes the Divine Providence directs the child of God to posts of grave responsibility and peril. In the rush of busy hours there is anything but physical rest and mental quiet. But the same Lord, mindful of our needs, both of mind, body, and soul, calls us aside to rest with Him. This can be done by change of locality and, more wonderful still, by conditions of heart that a loving Omnipotence can produce. For days and weeks we have marveled at the soul stillness, the unutterable peace that fairly laved the spirit. We were beside the still waters. God made everything still. Galilee was rebuked. A great, tender peace was in the breast, in the home, in the heavens, and even seemed to be brooding on the earth.

11. FOLLOW.

"He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake."--Ps. xxiii, 3.

It is easy for God to give us raptures. But delightful as they are, they do not suffice to convince a watchful and fault-finding world. Men demand to see holiness of life as proof of an indwelling Christ. So we are led in paths of righteousness. The law is honored in the life as well as kept in the heart. The doctrine of Christ is adorned. Not only the fatherless and afflicted are visited and provided for, but the man keeps himself unspotted from the world.

Such a life honors God. It confirms His Word, and draws attention to the claims and demands of the character-transforming gospel.

As David's sin caused the enemies of God to rejoice and blaspheme, so the righteous, upright life puts them into confusion, and glorifies heaven.

12. SECURE.

"Neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand." --John x, 28.

This does not say that we can not take ourselves out of the hand of the Shepherd. This would be to deny our moral freedom. But, thank God, no outside power can do it. Neither devil nor man can pluck us from the keeping power of the Son of God.

If we fall who sin, that fall does not mean that some Satanic or human influence was greater than the Divine energy, but that we, by our own volition, put ourselves where evil took possession of us.

Let the child of God rejoice that there is no external force able to draw him from Christ through the inferior power of grace in Christ. The Son of God is able to keep us, and will do so if we desire it. If we leave ourselves in His blessed hands, no power in hell or earth can pluck us therefrom.

13. DELIVERANCE.

"They shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods."--Ezek. xxxiv, 25.

This is a picture of such deliverance and safety, that it looks like it belongs to the millennium. In the same verse the prophet says that all beasts shall be killed, and so the sheep are safe in the wilderness.

Even if it does not refer to the devil and his followers being swept off from the earth, yet still it remains as a description of marvelous Divine protection.

Safe anywhere, everywhere, and all the time. We have seen individuals who had reached this point. They had come to such a place of religious attainment, such fixedness of character, and such fellowship with God, that even this side of the gates of pearl they were safe. We could trust them anywhere. They could be in the world, and eat with publicans, yet, like their Master, they would dwell safely. What is true of the individual should be of all. May that time come speedily!

14. REFRESHING.

"He restoreth my soul."--Psalm xxiii, 3.

All Christians remember the sense of spiritual exhaustion attendant upon long and trying religious work; and the feeling of emptiness and loss if too much in human presence.

Just as clear and distinct is the consciousness of spiritual renewal and restoration felt to come directly from Christ. Sometimes it is imparted suddenly, as by the touch of the Divine hand in answer to a heart-cry for help. Sometimes it comes stealing over the soul as gradually, and yet as sweetly and delightfully, as the breath of flowers over a quiet field.

With scarcely a thought of how relief is to be brought, here comes the blessed, healing, refreshing, restful presence of the Savior; the soul is strong again, the spirit laughs, the lips wreath in smiles, the light breaks out of the heart through the shining eyes, and all is well once more.

15. PLEASANT PATHS.

"They follow me."--John x, 27.

Who wonders that they do? His mercy was so profound, His deliverance so great, His love so satisfying, His words so gentle, His care so complete and perfect, they gladly follow Him, as they contrast the present with the past, as they see from what Christ has drawn them, and to what He is leading, they echo the words of Peter, "Lord, to whom shall I go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

Very pleasant is this following. The paths are safe, the pasturage is good, the waters are still, the resting-places abundant, and the care and protection of the Shepherd all that the soul needs and craves.

16. GOD'S WATCHCARE OVER THE LAMBS.

"He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom."--Isaiah xl, 2.

There never has been an age when the children and young people were receiving more attention in regard to their souls from the Church than now. Taught in the Gospel, yet it remained for Robert Raikes to apply the principle in a public sense. Since then the Church, which seemed to have been dreaming before then, began its ever-broadening work, which aims for the salvation of the young before they become seasoned and set in sin.

In some places the Leagues and special meetings for the children seemed loaded down with the entertainment and literary idea; but the Holy Spirit, we trust and believe, will correct this in time, and pure salvation will be presented and received.

The picture of Christ with the children in His arms, the lambs in His bosom, is not to be relegated to a condition of things in heaven alone, but is being seen, and will be seen, even more wonderfully in the Church in the years that lie out before us.

17. SEEKING STRAY SHEEP.

"Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold."-- John x, 16.

Constantly are we rebuked for ecclesiastical and even religious narrowness. An intense denominationalism must be a very amazing and distressing spectacle to heaven. It would be ludicrous if it were not so belittling. The Egyptians would not eat with the Jews, the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans and despised the Gentile world, and the denominations of the Gentiles proceed to rule each other out.

With great characters looming up like Melchisedec, Jethro, and Job; and with historical indications that God has never left the other nations before or since; and with the broad teachings of the gospel of God's love, Christ's death, and the light of the Spirit sent to every man, how can we ever be content to be narrow, selfish, and bigoted again?

Other sheep I have, says Christ, which are not of this fold. And we are finding them every day, in every nation, every Church, and every home.

What a wonderful flock it will be when gathered by the angels from the four quarters of the earth!

18. GOD THE JUDGE.

"I will judge between the fat cattle and between the lean cattle."--Ezekiel xxxiv, 20.

There is no excuse for leanness if we have taken Christ for our Shepherd, and allowing Him to lead us into green pastures.

The Bible says that it comes from having our own selfish requests granted, and is a mark of backsliding.

There is a promise of marrow and fatness in the Bible, and the soul kept like a watered garden. People see the difference. A human judgment has gone out in addition to the Divine judgment. If people can see the difference between lean and fat souls, how much more can God do so!

It is needless for the lean cattle to put up arguments against joyful experiences, overflowing cups, and the hallelujahs of Spirit-filled people. The audience observes the prominent bones of the objector, counts the numerous ribs in his body, and then turns with a smile of pleasure to listen to one whose head is anointed with oil, whose cup runs over, and whose soul delights itself in fatness.

19. CHRIST OUR SUBSTITUTE.

"I lay down My life for the sheep."--John x, 15.

In the Eastern world it is not only robbers, but wild animals, that the shepherd has to meet. So it is said of David that he slew not only a bear, but a lion, in the defense of his flocks.

What a tender, beautiful, and thrilling thought it all is! As we look on a pastoral scene of yore, and see the figure of the shepherd quietly leaning on his staff or crook, and looking on the grazing flocks about him, we say at the first sign of danger that quiet figure would suddenly be instinct with life,

and instantly ready to be struck down, torn, mangled, and slain for the preservation and life of the helpless animals he is guarding.

This is just what Christ has done for us. As He said, "I give My life for the sheep." This is what the cross meant. On Calvary he met the wolves of hell, and poured out His blood to save us.

20. FAITHLESS SHEPHERDS.

"Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them."--Ezekiel xxxiv, 10.

Here is a dreadful warning to ministers of the gospel who are not doing their duty in spiritual lines to their congregations.

In the second sentence the fearful announcement is made, "I am against the shepherds." It would be better for a man to have everybody against him rather than God. May we be saved from such a calamity!

The third sentence declares there shall be a removal of such men from the ministry. Many have gone out already, and more will yet go. It is done in various ways; but it is done.

The fourth sentence declares that the flock itself will be removed from the faithless shepherd's influence. This also, is taking place in many quarters. The hungry sheep are seeking those who will feed, and not abuse them.

21. GOD OUR CAPTAIN.

"I seek out My sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day."--Ezekiel xxxiv, 12.

One of the distressing features of the Church today is its divided and scattered condition. We not only have hundreds of denominations, but cliques, sets, and circles without number. There is not only disagreement about essentials, but endless differences in reference to non-essentials.

There is now in the camp dissensions over interpretation of Bible passages, and separations over the questions as to the true Sabbath-day, Healing, and the Second Coming.

A cloudy and dark day has come. But thank God in the words of the caption, or verse set for the twenty-first day, "I seek out My sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the. cloudy and dark day."

22. SIMILARITY.

"Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he goats."--Ezekiel xxxiv, 17.

There is a similarity and yet dissimilarity between a ram and a he goat. The shepherd knows thoroughly the difference.

So there is a likeness and yet unlikeness between the appetites of the religious and irreligious; between firmness and obstinacy, economy and stinginess, righteous indignation and sinful anger, and liberty and license.

He who knows what is in man, whose Word divides joints and marrow, soul and spirit, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart, knows the exact difference, and judges between the cattle, and rewards or punishes the soul for its life even here, this side of the Great Judgment.

23. BROUGHT BACK.

"I will bring again that which was driven away."-- Ezek. xxxiv, 16.

While many are led off by the enemy from the fold, it is also true that numbers are driven away by hands that never should have done so.

They will cast you out of their synagogues, said Christ, and separate you from their company.

This was never more truly fulfilled in the past than today. The cries of the beaten sheep, driven from their lifetime places of worship, resound through the land.

Again the Lord speaks, and says, "I will bring again that which was driven away."

We may not know all that is in these words, but we see gathering, restoration, comfort, and protection in the future for all who love the Lord and belong to Him. "I will bring again." The Lord will do it. We need not fix our eyes or hopes on a man or set of men. The Lord is to do it.

24. GOD OUR PHYSICIAN.

"I will bind up that which was broken."--Ezek. xxxiv, 16.

It is blessed to know that there is not a spiritual pain or hurt, not a single injury done us by evil men or devils, but the Lord has a remedy and cure for.

As He made the limbs, He certainly can heal a fracture. As He is God, He has all power. As He is greater than Satan, He can destroy and undo the works of the devil.

Let no one hurt by sin, the world, or the adversary think of despairing. Go at once to Jesus. He is the Physician; He has the Balm of Gilead; He knows how to bind up the broken heart. Better still, with a single touch He can make the mourner and sufferer leap to his feet restored and rejoicing.

25. BEULAH HEIGHTS.

"Upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be."--Ezek. xxxiv, 14.

Here is a picture of safety, health, and pleasure. Far above the beasts, far above the malaria of the valley, and with a landscape unrolling before the eye from the rising to the setting of the sun.

There is a religious experience where we are safe, where we feel always well, where we are close to the skies, and have such views far ahead of the coming glory beginning with life's sunset, that pen can not describe, brush portray, nor tongue declare it.

26. TWO GUARDIAN ANGELS.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." Psalm xxiii, 6.

Here the child of God is seen journeying towards the skies attended by two guardian angels, goodness and mercy; the one supplying every want, the other blotting out every sin. Sometimes, in tenderness, you call them Kindness and Pity. Anyhow, never was King more faithfully and royally attended. This escort of Goodness and Mercy cares for both soul and body.

The attendance is not simply for a day or a year, but all the days of the life. Let God's child put the whispers of the devil about starvation and the poor-house beside the faithful promises of God, and be glad and strong again. God's goodness and mercy shall go with you all the days of your life.

27. DEATH HAS NO TERROR TO THE SAINT.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me."-- Ps. xxiii, 4.

Many have a morbid dread of death, and many more an anxiety as to how they shall feel in that last struggle for breath and life.

God, through the lips of His servant David, floods the Dark Valley with light in the words, "I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me."

The Lord will be with us, and that is sufficient. His smile will scatter the gloom, His words will be like a rod and staff to us. His comforting presence will pillow the sinking heart, and His arms will so sustain the soul that sweet, joyous, complete victory will bubble up in the heart, shine in the eyes, and proclaim, with the last breath, "O Death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

We have seen many Christians die. As Wesley said about similar scenes, "They died well." In a true, deep sense they did not feel nor taste death. It was victory throughout by our Lord Jesus Christ.

28. SEPARATION.

"As a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats."-- Matt. xxv, 32.

This division is going on now. The Lord, under the preaching of the Word, by the battle of life, through the force of moral tests, and by the dealings of His providence, is showing who are true and who are false, who are with Him, and who against Him.

The verse above, however, shows the last great separation of the human race into two classes or bodies.

It will be final. In one way it is a thought full of deepest pain as we remember that some whom we knew and loved on earth will be among the lost.

It is also a thought of joy that the day is coming when the tares will be removed from the wheat; the wicked, who would not love and obey God, shall be taken out of the State and Church, and out from the world itself.

This division and eternal separation is certain to come. The mouth of the Lord has spoken it.

29. REWARDED.

"He shall set the sheep on His right hand."--Matt. xxv, 33.

The right hand in court circles means the place of favor and honor. It also stands for security, for the right hand and arm of a man is his strongest. In due time we will be at God's right hand, honored and protected .

We may be mixed up with the multitudes of evil now, and may be overlooked and unknown in the rush of events and shock of daily battles. But we will be seen and recognized in the great crowning day.

Men may fail to honor us for Christian faithfulness and heroism; but God will. The reward may not be a public one on earth; but it will certainly be so at the last day.

Men may have doubted us on earth; but they will not on that day.

Human hands may have been raised to strike us while on earth; but no arm will be lifted at that hour when they see us on the right hand of God, and placed there by Himself.

30. MANSIONS IN THE SKIES.

"I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."-- Ps. xxiii, 6.

We go sometimes into very beautiful homes on this earth, but have not the assurance that we will keep them or remain in them for life. The rule is, that rarely is a mansion occupied for a score of years by the same occupants.

It is one of the saddest experiences in life to leave a beautiful home, made invaluable as well by a thousand precious, sacred memories. We look back from the gate, and from the neighboring hill, and, as the old mansion is hidden from view, partly by the trees and mainly by our blinding tears, we feel that the heart and better part of life have been left behind.

Thank God, this is not so when we enter heaven. We go in with the thrilling thought that we go out no more forever.

We will all have mansions in the skies. Christ has gone to prepare them. He knows our tastes, our temperaments, character, and all. The heavenly home will be just what we want and need.

We will be in the presence of Christ; we will have our loved ones with us; we will be reunited with our friends; we will hunger no more, neither thirst any more; we will never grow old; and there shall be no more pain nor sickness. There shall be no more death, neither sorrow or crying. The word good-bye shall never be heard. God will wipe away the tears from all faces, the Lamb shall lead us to fountains of living waters, and we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.