**WESTMINSTER BIBLE SCHOOL; THE PARABLES AND METAPHORS OF OUR LORD - THE TEACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**57. THE GOOD SHEPHERD**

*"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who doesn't own the sheep, sees the wolf coming, leaves the sheep, and flees. The wolf snatches the sheep, and scatters them. The hired hand flees because he is a hired hand, and doesn't care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and I'm known by my own; even as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will hear my voice. They will become one flock with one shepherd. Therefore the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it away from me, but I lay it down by myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. I received this commandment from my Father."*

*John 10:11-18*

THIS the fourth of the parabolic illustrations used by our Lord in connection with His great claim, "I am," " I am the good Shepherd." We have already considered three: "I am the bread Of life," "I am the light of the world," "I am the door." Now that of the good Shepherd is closely linked with that of the door, and by way of introduction we must tarry with that fact. Our Lord had made use of that illustration in that claim, "I am the door of the sheep "; in connection with the same teaching, "I am the good Shepherd."

We ask, then, What was He illustrating? Then we will consider the figure itself, in order that from it we may deduce the teaching intended by our Lord, when He used this figure of the good Shepherd.

When the Lord had opened the eyes of the blind man the people brought him to the Pharisees, the religious authorities. The man grew in understanding himself as he talked to them, until they were angry with him; and as John tells us, they cast him out, which meant that they put him out, not of the temple precincts, but they excommunicated him. They put him outside the covenant, and outside the established order over which for the time being they were in authority. Whether their exercise of authority was good or not we are not discussing. We know it was not. When the Lord knew they had cast him out, He found him and there passed between this man and Jesus that little conversation, and He asked, in effect, Do you believe in Me? In that moment Jesus received him to Himself. It was then He said, "I am the door," and by that figure of speech He claimed that He was the way of entry into a new order entirely. That may be put in another way. They had excommunicated the man, and Jesus excommunicated them. He did so on subsequent occasions more definitely and specifically, when He said the Kingdom of God should be taken away from them. By that action He was putting Himself in the place of authority, and He was receiving this man into the entirely new order that He was in the world to set up. Then He said, "I am the door." By that He claimed that He was the way of entry to that new order, that men should enter into it through Him, as this man had done, when he had submitted to Him in belief, and worshipped Him in person.

We now come to the second thing. Under that claim, "I am the good Shepherd," He revealed the nature of the new order. This man had been received into a new order, in which He is the way of entry, and then still in that same realm of ideas, He said, "I am the good Shepherd." Those were the circumstances, and the evident intention of our Lord in the use of these two figures of speech at this point.

We now confine ourselves to the wonderful figure, and ask again What was the figure which He employed? It was a figure of a shepherd with folds and a flock. The fold is an enclosure. The flock is those who are enclosed. It is important to make that distinction. He did not say there should be one fold and one shepherd, but one flock. There may be many folds, just as in that Eastern country. The shepherd in that land may own two or three dozen sheep, and they can be folded in many folds, but it is one flock. The unity was not created by the fold, but by the nature of the sheep, and their relationship to the shepherd.

The shepherd was the one not only able to take charge of the flock. This is an Eastern picture, different from anything we know in this country. The sheep know his voice. That is literally true of Eastern shepherds. If a stranger came along, the sheep would shrink back; they know their shepherd's voice, and follow when he calls. He was in charge of them, and it was his work to lead them out of the fold to pasturage, in order to the sustenance of their life. Of course it was also his work to defend them against wolves, or any enemies. That was the Eastern shepherd.

But when our Lord used this figure, I think there can be no doubt that He was employing the figure in one way. The shepherd was always the symbol of the king. It was Homer who once said, "All kings are shepherds of their people." It was a great idealistic word. As we look down human history we may be inclined to say, amending that statement, All kings should be shepherds. God's kings were always shepherds, and the shepherd was the king. I quote a verse oft quoted, Our Lord was talking to His disciples one day, and said to them, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." I can imagine a purely literary critic coming to that sentence in some booklet published to-morrow, who might indulge in pleasantries. He might say, The writer now broke down in his employment of his figures. He first suggests the flock of sheep, "Fear not, little flock." Then forgetting that, he went off to the idea of the family, "It is your Father's good pleasure"; and before he finished, he had forgotten that figure also, and used the figure of a nation, "to give you the Kingdom." We know perfectly well, however, that though the figures merge they do not mix. Those are the three elements that constitute Kingship ideally in all that Eastern country, and ought to everywhere. The king should be the shepherd of his flock, the father of his family, the one in authority over his nation. When our Lord said quietly, but with august majesty and dignity, "I am the good Shepherd," all those figures, all those implications of the figure of the shepherd and the flock, unquestionably merge in His claim, "I am the good Shepherd."

We come now to the supreme matter. What was the teaching, the thing revealed? What did Jesus claim when He said that? Two things, absolute authority and constant care in and over the new order that He was in the world to establish. God had established the order of the Hebrew people but they had broken down. Need that be argued or even illustrated? Is there anything more ghastly than the failure of the Hebrew people from the beginning to the end? They were always failing, and they never failed more disastrously than when they wanted a king "like the nations." In that act, as God said to Samuel, they had rejected Him from being King. It had gone on through the ages, and the last thing the Hebrew people did to prove their ultimate and appalling catastrophic folly and sin was to crucify the Son of God. So God was superseding the order definitely established; as the writer of the letter to the Hebrews said, the law "made nothing perfect." It broke down and failed, and its failure was manifested in that one incident. When those men in authority put this man out, they revealed their failure. Then Jesus took him in, and admitted him to the new order to which He was the door.

Now He is in authority. I am the King. I am the Father of the family. I am the Shepherd, the good Shepherd of all the flock. We see then a new order emerging in human history, by the act of God. The same Kingdom, the same eternal Throne, but, in its administration in earthly affairs, a new dispensation, a new economy. When Jesus said, "I am the good Shepherd," so simple, so beautiful, that all our hymns express it in the terms of tenderness and love; there is more in it than that. If there is in the claim the evidences of infinite tenderness, there is the evidence of supreme authority. "I am the good Shepherd." It marks not only authority, but it does mark care in every way.

As our Lord went on speaking He revealed the method of His authority as the good Shepherd, that great title in which there merge the ideas of Kingship, of Fatherhood, and Shepherdhood. He shows how He exercises that authority and that care. In verse eleven He says, "The good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep." In verse fifteen He says, "I lay down My life for the sheep," and again, in verse seventeen, "Therefore doth the Father love Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again." There is a growth of teaching here. How will He lay down His life? In conflict with the wolf, who comes to destroy and to harm, to harass, and to kill. In order to overcome that wolf, I will lay down My life; I lay down My life on their behalf. That is the idea of the first verse. Then presently there is something else. "I lay down My life, that I may take it again." That is more than dying; that is rising. That is more than going down to death in the grapple with the wolf, and the wolf kills. But He is coming through and out and beyond the grapple with the wolf into the place of victory over him. "I lay down My life, that I may take it again."

Then follows that august claim, "No one taketh it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have authority to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." Here is the second idea; laying down His life for the sheep, first, in conflict with the wolf; laying down, secondly, His life that the sheep may share His life. He takes it again to bring His sheep into union with Himself; victory over the wolf, and conflict that issues in victory; and then fellowship with the King Himself in consequent life. "I lay down My life, that I may take it again."

Thus the two statements are interpreted by what He says in verse seventeen, "Therefore doth the Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I may take it again." "I am the good Shepherd," in complete authority, having the care of the sheep; and My method of Kingship is first dying to kill the wolf; rising to share My life with the sheep who have been delivered from the wolf.

Then it was that He glanced on, and took a larger outlook upon this new order. He said, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice, and they shall become one flock, one Shepherd." Not one fold necessarily, but one flock. It is interesting to remember how in the next chapter (chapter 11)), we have the striking story of Caiaphas, the clever and astute politician. When these enemies of Christ, these men exercising authority in a wrong way, were plotting as to what they should do with Him, Caiaphas rose after their discussion, and introduced his subject by that excellent formula, if one wants to be heard, "Ye know nothing at all." He said this, "It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." Then follows this remarkable little passage of interpretation. "Now this he said not of himself; but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation; and not for the nation only, but that He might gather together into one the children of God that are scattered abroad." "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock, one Shepherd."

Again, what was the deep secret of His authority, the secret of His care, the secret of His laying down of His life for the sheep? "Therefore doth the Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I may take it again." The deep secret was the Father's love, and the love of the Son in co-operation with the purposes of the Father. So we have the claims of the new order. Jesus the good Shepherd, in authority, caring, acting by laying down His life in conflict with the wolf, acting by laying down His life, by taking it again, that it might be shared by His own; so creating and constituting the new order of the Kingdom of God under His authority.

Go back over the Old Testament, Psalm 23., Isaiah 40., Jeremiah 23., Ezekiel 34., 37., Zechariah 11., all these are about shepherds, all looking on to the same great Shepherd. Here we stand and hear Him say, I am He, I am the Shepherd fulfilling the idealism of the psalms, realizing the ideal of the prophets, all of them; "I am the good Shepherd," I am the Shepherd, the good. That is the form of the statement literally in the Greek. Something may be missed by having changed it. "I am the Shepherd, the good." Presently we come to His statement, "I am the true vine," literally again, "I am the vine, the true." The very form of the sentence suggests comparison with all others, He said "All that came before Me are thieves and robbers," that is, all who claimed absolute authority, as those rulers did when they put the man out. They were thieves and robbers. He said, I am the Shepherd, the good; and the word good there is beautiful. It is the Greek word *kalos*, which is rendered beautiful, noble, true, as well as good. It was a word that marked the attributes to all perfection; and they all emerge from and merge in Him for evermore. He is the Shepherd true, noble, beautiful, infinite in wonder. This all ends with the first words, "I am," God manifestly seen and heard, heaven's beloved One. "I am," King, Father, Shepherd true.