**VOLUME 4; CHAPTER 12 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**MY LAMBS - MY SHEEP by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Feed My Lambs … Tend My sheep … Feed My sheep..*

*John 21:15,16,17*

THESE WORDS CONSTITUTE OUR LORD'S FINAL COMMISSION TO Peter, and as Peter stands ever before us as the representative man, the words were spoken through him to the Church. We need to rescue these words from an altogether too narrow interpretation. It has been said. that, on the shores of the lake in the flush of the early morning, Jesus handed Peter the crozier, the staff of the pastoral office, and thus entrusted to him the oversight of the saints of God. This is undoubtedly true, but the whole truth is more than this. That narrow view of our Lord's meaning is due largely to the fact that our minds are obsessed almost by one particular utterance of our Lord, in which He drew a clear and sharp distinction between sheep and goats. It is well to remember that Christ only once made such distinction.

If in that great chapter of Matthew, our Lord was referring to a final assize, when individuals will appear before Him for sentence, then we must recognize that He never makes the division until the day of final assize, never suggests that men are goats on the one hand, and sheep on the other, until the day of final destiny. I do not believe that our Lord even then had any such meaning in His speech. The picture of that chapter of Matthew is not that of the assembling before Him of individuals for individual sentence. It is, rather, the picture of the assembling before Him of nations for national sentence. When He makes His division as between sheep and goats, the division is not between individual men, but between nations. The prophecy had special reference to Israel.

The spaciousness of these words spoken to Peter on the shores of the lake can only be discovered as we adopt the usual line of teaching suggested by the figure of the shepherd and the sheep in the Scriptures. The seers and psalmists of the old economy, in moments of highest exaltation and clearest vision, saw that the supreme truth concerning the Kingship of Jehovah is that He is a Shepherd, and that the direst woe fallen upon the sons of men is that they are as sheep without a shepherd.

In that very brief paragraph, which I read from the Gospel of Matthew, we have something we need to attend to very carefully. Matthew tells us that Jesus went through all the cities and villages preaching, teaching and healing, and that when He saw the multitudes He was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd.

In that matchless discourse recorded in the tenth chapter of John, Jesus said, "I am the good Shepherd … other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring."

When Peter, who heard these words on the shore of the lake, came to write his letter afterward to Christian men and women, he said: "Ye were going astray like sheep, but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."

The words spoken to Peter must be interpreted in harmony with these uses of the figure of the sheep. When Jesus, looking into the eyes of Peter as He restored Him by challenge, confession and commission, said, "Feed My lambs … shepherd My sheep … feed My sheep," His holy, lovelit eyes were looking far beyond the first narrow circle of His own disciples, to the vast multitudes of all nations, all peoples and all tongues who were in His heart, because He was the good, the great and the chief Shepherd.

These words are suggestive, as they reveal to us the nature of the work committed to the Church. It is not my intention to deal with them now in that way. I ask only that you ponder, at your leisure, these simple facts. Of the lambs He said, Feed them, and there is profound significance in the fact. He did not suggest that our first work should be that of finding them. He spoke of the children as already His own. When He referred to the sheep, His first word was, shepherd them; that is, find them if they have gone astray, seek them if they are lost, then fold them and guard them. Then, beyond that, "Feed my sheep."

I desire now to direct attention first, to the assumptions of Christ which these words suggest, and, secondly, to what they reveal as to the preparation that is necessary for all such as seek to feed the lambs and shepherd the sheep.

First, let us listen to the words as revealing the assumptions of Jesus: "My lambs … My sheep." The note that first impresses the heart is that of infinite and tender compassion - "My lambs … My sheep."

Let me illuminate this by reference again to the passage in Matthew. When He saw the multitudes, what effect did the vision produce upon Him? As God is my witness, I hardly know how to cite these words to you. I am afraid of harshness of tone. Yet I am also afraid that if I attempt to do other than recite them with the natural harshness of tone, I may but libel the exquisite tenderness that ought to be heard in them. "He was moved with compassion for them."

How familiar we are with the words. Would that in the quiet hush of this moment, they might come to us with all their infinite meaning. "He was moved with compassion." The final outcome of that compassion was the cross.

Why was He moved with compassion? Because He saw them "distressed and scattered." Take the words and let them be pictures, as they really are, and in a moment we discover their true significance. I do no violence to them if I say that our Lord saw the sheep harried by wolves, bruised, wounded, flung to the ground, faint and weary; and it was that vision of humanity in its degradation, spoiled and ruined, that moved His heart with compassion. "My lambs ... My sheep." We cannot hear these words, interpreted by the declaration of the Gospel of Matthew, without discovering in them the note of infinite tenderness and compassion.

Yet, there is infinitely more in them than the note of compassion. There is that of supremacy. It was Homer who once said that kings are the shepherds of the people. Perhaps it would have been more correct to have said kings ought to be the shepherds of the people. It is at least perfectly true that the master figure of kingship in the Old Testament is that of the Shepherd. All God's chosen, ordained kings and leaders were of the shepherd heart. If Moses was to lead the people, he had to learn the art of leading them by being a shepherd for long years. If David was to come to the throne, he had to discover the secrets of victory by slaying the lion and the bear that came against the sheep of his father's flock. The idea of kingship in the economy of God is always that of the shepherd, who feeds rather than is fed, who guards rather than seeks to be guarded. It is the true ideal of kingship.

Ringing through this word of Jesus, coming up out of the old Hebrew economy and ideal, is the note of supremacy, "My lambs … My sheep." Standing in the midst of humanity, speaking to His own disciples, He claimed absolute Lordship over all the race.

We have not yet touched the profoundest note. We go to the tenth chapter of John, and listen: "I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd layeth down His life for the sheep." Then, with a touch of fine scorn: "He that is a hireling and not a shepherd … fleeth because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep." The Good Shepherd enters into conflict with the wolf, and even though He die, He dies to slay the wolf. Jesus saw the sheep distressed and scattered as by wolves, and He was moved with compassion for them; and then, as King, He entered into conflict with the forces that spoil, and, though dying in the conflict, He despoiled and triumphed over the foe in His cross, making a show openly of such as were opposed.

There is yet another note, that of resurrection victory. Once again we go to the same chapter of John for exposition. He not only said, "The Good Shepherd layeth down His life for the sheep." He also said this strange, mysterious, over-whelming thing: "No one taketh it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." That was an empty and a vain boast, unless He rose from among the dead. I need not argue it. He rose. He took again the life laid down, and, standing there on the shores of the lake, He said: "My lambs, My sheep." I am the Good Shepherd. I lay down My life for them. They are Mine by virtue of life laid down. I am the Good Shepherd. I have taken My life again for them. They are Mine by virtue of resurrection.

We think of the Galilean lake, and, in imagination, see all humanity gathered around that central Person; the men of His own age, of every successive age, this congregation, the whole of this city, all the nations of the world, and of them all He said: "My lambs … My sheep." In His voice there is the note of infinite compassion, the ring of absolute authority, the passion of the cross and the triumph of resurrection.

Now, in order that we may understand the commission itself, and our responsibility, let us inquire at what point in the life and history of this man, Peter, our Lord gave him the commission. In order to gain anything like a full and adequate answer to that inquiry we need the whole story of Peter. My comfort is that we know it. We are very familiar with it. I need therefore stay only to refer to the outstanding facts in Christ's method of preparing this man for the hearing of this commission. The work began when Jesus first met him. In that hour, and upon this alone I dwell, the glamour of Christ's personality fell upon Peter. He did not understand Him. He had no theory as to His Person, no doctrine as to His mission, but he felt the irresistible attraction of His personality. He was not yet ready for Christ to commission him to feed the lambs and gather the sheep, but the first stage in his preparation was accomplished.

What next? All the patient training of the weeks, months, years over which we pass, until we come to Caesarea Philippi, and again we have a familiar story. I need but refer to it for illustration. There at Caesarea Philippi this man looked back into the eyes of Christ, and said: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." The Christ, for Whose coming Jeremiah had watched, shedding bitter tears; Whose advent John had announced; for Whose work Elijah had sighed; the One to Whom all the prophets had given witness. Peter had reached the second stage in his preparation for hearing this commission when he uttered that confession. He had come to the hour in which he no longer placed Christ on the level of other teachers, but had discovered His absolute supremacy; knew that all the light that burned in others was derived from this one essential source of light; knew that all the aspirations, and hopes, and longings in the hearts of men were to be fulfilled in Him.

The third stage in preparation followed immediately, as for the first time he beheld the tragedy of the cross. I think sometimes that we are unfair to Peter and the rest of the disciples about that cross. We preach sermons upon their frailty and folly. Had we been among their number we would have shared their disappointment when Jesus spoke of the cross. It was absolutely revolutionary. There was nothing in human philosophy that could understand it. Who ever heard of a man coming to crowning by way of a cross? Who ever heard of a man winning universal victory by the way of disastrous defeat? "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom." These are the things to be desired. And immediately He declared He was going to Jerusalem to die, to be mauled by brutal hands, to suffer and be crucified. Ere we criticize Peter, let us get back into Peter's place. In that moment, he saw the tragedy of the cross, to use Paul's great word, the offence of the cross, the scandal of the cross, scandal in the true sense, the thing in the way that prevents progress. He had to see that, to feel the agony of it, before he was ready to feed the lambs and shepherd the sheep.

One final and revealing matter. When Jesus gave him this commission He was the risen Lord. It is so easy to say this, but can we put ourselves back into his place? What does Peter say about the resurrection? He declares we were begotten again "unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" - a most graphic and wonderful statement - by which he meant this: I saw Him die, and was certain that by that death all my hopes were put out in darkness, all the high and noble things I had hoped for Him and through Him were defeated; but when I saw Him alive beyond death, I was born again, I came to a new vision, a new understanding, and the very cross from which I had shrunk was transfigured with light, and became glorious with a glory that amazed my heart and soul. It was never until Peter had seen his risen Lord that the Lord commissioned him to feed the lambs and shepherd the sheep.

Mark the four stages. First, he felt the glamour of His personality. Second, he came to conviction of His absolute supremacy. Third, he came to the horror and tragedy of the cross. Finally, he came into the light of the resurrection, and saw that selfsame cross transfigured until it shone with a beauty and glory of which he had never dreamed. Never before was Peter ready for the great commission, for the great and sacred work.

These four experiences of Peter coincide exactly with the assumptions of Jesus. The first note is that of His compassion. Peter felt the glamour of His personality. The second note is that of His supremacy. Peter came to the confession of this at Caesarea Philippi. The third note is that of His cross. Peter had felt the offence of the cross. The fourth note is that of resurrection. Peter stood in the light of it.

Does not the meditation carry its own lessons? Christ still stands amid the multitudes of the world, The more I think of my Lord, the more I study His teaching; the more I strive to come into fellowship with Him; the more I recognize that in His presence there are no divisions. He will have none of our adjectives such as home and foreign. He stands in the midst of humanity, universal in His own humanity, whether it be east or west, a Man among men, standing in the midst of the multitudes of our own city, and of the far distant places of the world, moved with compassion for their sorrows and their sins.

If we are to fulfil His commission, we must pass through exactly the same experiences of spiritual life. No man can feed the lambs and shepherd the sheep until he himself has felt the mysterious attraction of the Person of Christ upon his own life. No man can feed the lambs and shepherd the sheep until he has put Christ in the place of final supremacy. If I am a mere discusser of comparative religions, if I put Christ's name by the side of that of Buddha, or Confucius, or any other, I cannot feed His lambs and shepherd His sheep. Until I see that He is above them all, that every gleam of light in their teaching, every touch of truth in the things they said were derived from Him, that He is the supreme, absolute, final Lord, I cannot do His work, neither can the Christian Church. If there be paralysis of missionary endeavour, that is the essential reason of it. We are not sure about His supremacy. We are not absolutely convinced that He is the one lonely Lord and Master of the race. We are trying to put others into comparison with Him, and to admit that perhaps other lords are better for other men than this Lord Christ of ours. All such comparison cuts the nerve of missionary endeavour, and paralyzes the possibility of obedience to this great and gracious commission.

We can never fulfil this commission until we ourselves have come to a sense of the horror of the cross. We must see the offence of it, or we cannot serve, I know that in the light of resurrection we see the glory and beauty of it, but let us be careful lest we miss all that lies behind - the offence, the scandal, the horror of the cross of Christ. That is the danger of the present moment. It is affirmed by some that the doctrine of the cross is vulgar. Hear me now patiently. The cross is vulgar; nothing in human history is so vulgar, nothing so dastardly, nothing so unholy. But what is the vulgarity? Listen to this awful word of Scripture. "He was made sin." There is the vulgarity. It is the vulgarity of the sin that made the cross necessary. Until I have felt it, the horror of it, the scandal of it, and have come to a sense of the shame of the sin that erected it, I cannot shepherd the sheep. We cannot heal humanity's wounds with rosewater. We cannot touch the sheep with their festering sores until we see the horror of the wounding. Who else saw the multitudes as Christ saw them? Not the disciples of those early days. Not the rulers of the people. Not the people themselves. But He knew the poison of sin, the awfulness of sin. That led Him to the cross. We must measure the ruin of humanity by that cross ere we can hope to help it, or serve it, or save it.

That is not the last word. We must know Christ as risen, and so understand the cross as infinitely more than the revelation of sin. It is the revelation of grace - triumphant grace, rich and spacious and overwhelming word of the Christian Church, altogether too lightly and too glibly used in these days. Grace, let the first Pentecostal preacher tell the story of the cross. He fixes your attention upon the Person of the Christ, and says: "Him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay," There is your sin: Lawless men mauled the Christ of God. There is God's grace, "Delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." We never see the cross in that way until we see Christ risen from among the dead. We are not prepared to feed the lambs or shepherd the sheep until we know the risen Lord, and know Him for our very selves.

When He had prepared this man for the work, He brought him face to face with these four matters. Let us state them in sequence. "My sheep." That is the note of compassion. The first thing that Peter ever felt when he came to Jesus was the glamour of His personality. Now Christ begins there "Lovest thou Me?" You know, of course, that the word Christ used for love is not the word that Peter used. The revisers in the margin have drawn attention to the fact these words are not the same, and thus they have only made darkness visible by not distinguishing between them. The word of Jesus suggested love illuminated by intelligence. Peter dared not climb to it, and he said, using a simpler word which seemed a warmer one, "Thou knowest that I love Thee." Christ challenged him again - "Lovest thou Me?" - on this high level, with love governed by judgment and understanding, and Peter kept to his own word. Then Christ came down to Peter's level. That is why Peter was grieved, not because He asked three times, but that the third time He came down to his word. But the essential matter is love. The first condition of service is love. That is the first question, not do you love the heathen, but do you love me? If we go to the heathen because we love Him, we shall come to love the heathen also.

What next? He said to Him, "Feed My lambs … Shepherd My sheep." Mark the grace of this. What did He give them to do? His own shepherd work. We have been saying that the shepherd is king. Kingly work, then, is that of feeding lambs and shepherding sheep. He says to Peter: Prove your loyalty by sharing My royalty. I am King. You have crowned Me King. They are My lambs, My sheep. My work as Shepherd is to feed them and gather them. Share it with me. Do it by My side. Prove your loyalty by fellowship in the exercise of My royalty.

Then the cross. "When thou wast young thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. Now this He spake, signifying by what manner of death he should glorify God." Jesus brought him back to the cross, and said to him: You can only feed My lambs and shepherd My sheep as you have fellowship with My cross. It is a very actual, definite word, believe me. In the case of Peter, it was an actual, positive cross to which he came. We say that has no application to us. No! And yet, think again. I have a newspaper clipping at home. I have had it for more than twenty years. I have read it scores of times for the discipline of my life. It was from the pen of Thomas Champness, and it is headed "Sheer Hard Work." He declared that no minister of Christ has any right to lay his head upon the pillow on any given day of the seven until he is worn out in work. What is true of the minister is true of every man who bears the name of Christ. We have not begun to touch the great business of salvation when we have sung "Rescue the perishing, care for the dying." We have not entered into the business of evangelizing the city or the world until we have put our own lives into the business, our own immediate physical endeavour, inspired by spiritual devotion. We must get to the cross in actual fellowship, in weariness and pain and suffering. When the Church of God gets there, we shall hear no more of decrease and languishing exchequers, the impossibility of raising funds for missionary work, no more of the necessity for calling home missionaries and closing doors. It is to go back to the cross, to individual toil and pain and suffering, that is our supreme need.

But there is one other thing. When Jesus said this final word to Peter about the cross, He did not finish there. He said, "Follow Me." That is to say: When I first named My cross you shunned it; you must come back to it, but "follow Me." You saw Me go to it; you lost hope. You have seen Me Alive again. "Follow Me." The man who comes to the cross with Me comes to resurrection with Me. The man who comes along the pathway of suffering in fellowship for the doing of My work comes to the hour of absolute and assured victory with Me. The Lord challenges us still to follow Him to the cross, but to follow Him to the cross is to follow Him to resurrection and to triumph.

Now we must leave these words of His that are more than all the preacher has tried to say, infinitely more! As we scatter to our homes, those who bear His name and sign, jet us listen to His voice, as He says, "My lambs … My sheep." Yes, those children you saw in the street, "My lambs." Yes, those bruised and broken men and women, those far distant peoples sighing and crying in desolation and darkness, "My sheep."

If we hear His own voice, we shall want to get very near to Him, and to obey Him, when He says: Feed them, shepherd them, feed them!