

## **Our Own Dear Shepherd**

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A SERMON INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JANUARY 3, 1886,  
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"I am the good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine. As the Father knows Me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down My life for the sheep." [John 10:14,15](#).

As the passage stands in the Authorized Version, it reads like a number of short sentences with scarcely any apparent connection. Even in that form it is precious, for our Lord's pearls are priceless even when they are not threaded together. But when I tell you that in the Greek the word, "and," is repeated several times and that the translators have had to leave out one of these, "ands," to make sense of the passage on their line of translation, you will judge that they are none too accurate in this case. To use many, "ands," is after the manner of John, but there is usually a true and natural connection between his sentences. The, "and," with him is usually a real golden link and not a mere sound—we need a translation which makes it so. Observe, also, that in our version the word, "sheep," is put in italics, to show that it is not in the original. There is no need for this alteration if the passage is more closely rendered.

Hear, then, the text in its natural form—"I am the good Shepherd and I know My own, and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me, and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep." This reading I have given you is that of the Revised Version. For that Revised Version I have but little care, as a general rule, holding it to be by no means an improvement upon our common Authorized Version. It is a useful thing to have it for private reference, but I trust it will never be regarded as the standard English translation of the New Testament. The Revised Version of the Old Testament is so excellent that I am half afraid it may carry the Revised New Testament upon its shoulders into general use. I sincerely hope that this may not be the case, for the result would be a decided loss. However, that is not my point.

Returning to our subject, I believe that on this occasion, the Revised Version is true to the original. We will, therefore, follow it in this instance and we shall find that it makes most delightful and instructive sense. "I am the good Shepherd and I know My own, and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me, and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep." He who speaks to us in these words is the Lord Jesus Christ! To our mind every word of Holy Scripture is precious. When God speaks to us by priest or Prophet, or in any way, we are glad to hear. Though when, in the Old Testament, we meet with a passage which begins with, "Thus says the Lord," we feel specially charmed to have the message directly

from God's own mouth, yet we make no distinction between this Scripture and that. We accept it all as Inspired and we are not given to dispute about different degrees and varying modes of Inspiration and all that. The matter is plain enough if learned unbelievers did not mystify it—"all Scripture is given by Inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16).

Still, there is to our mind a peculiar sweetness about words which were actually spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself—these are as honey in the comb. You have before you, in this text, not that which comes to you by Prophet, priest, or king, but that which is spoken to you by One who is Prophet, Priest and King all in one, even your Lord Jesus Christ! He opens His mouth and speaks to you. You will open your ears and listen to Him if you are, indeed, His own.

Observe here, also, that we have not only Christ for the Speaker, but we have Christ for the Subject. He speaks and speaks about Himself. It were not seemly for you, or for me, to extol ourselves, but there is nothing more comely in the world than for Christ to commend Himself. He is other than we are, something infinitely above us and is not under rules which apply to us fallible mortals. When He speaks forth His own Glory, we feel that His speech is not vain-glory—no, rather, when He praises Himself, we thank Him for so doing and admire the lowly condescension which permits Him to desire and accept honor from such poor hearts as ours! It were pride for us to seek honor of men—it is humility in Him to do so seeing He is so great an One that the esteem of beings so inferior as we are cannot be desired by Him for His own sake, but for ours! Of all our Lord's words, those are the sweetest in which He speaks about Himself. Even He cannot find another theme which can excel that of Himself.

My Brothers and Sisters, who can speak of Jesus but Himself? He masters all our eloquence. His perfection exceeds our understanding! The light of His excellence is too bright for us, it blinds our eyes! Our Beloved must be His own mirror. None but Jesus can reveal Jesus! Only He can see Himself and know Himself, and understand Himself and, therefore, none but He can reveal Himself! We are most glad that in His tenderness to us He sets Himself forth by many choice metaphors and instructive emblems by which He would make us know some little of that love which passes knowledge. With His own hands, He fills a golden cup out of the river of His own infinity and hands it to us that we may drink and be refreshed. Take, then, these words as being doubly refreshing because they come directly from the Well-Beloved's own mouth and contain rich Revelations of His own all-glorious Self. I feel that I must read them again—"I am the good Shepherd and I know My own, and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me, and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep."

In this text there are three matters about which I shall speak. First, I see, here, complete character. "I am the good Shepherd." He is not a half shepherd, but a shepherd in the fullest

possible sense. Secondly, I see complete knowledge, "and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me, and I know the Father." Thirdly, here is complete sacrifice. How precious that sentence winds up the whole, "and I lay down My life for the sheep!" He goes the full length to which sacrifice can go! He lays down His soul in the place of His sheep so the words might not be incorrectly translated. He goes the full length of self-sacrifice for His own.

I. First, then, here is COMPLETE CHARACTER. Whenever the Savior describes Himself by any emblem, that emblem is exalted and expanded and yet it is not able to bear all His meaning. The Lord Jesus fills out every type, figure, and character—and when the vessel is filled, there is an overflow. There is more in Jesus, the Good Shepherd, than you can pack away in a shepherd. He is the Good, the Great, the Chief Shepherd—but He is much more. Emblems to set Him forth may be multiplied as the drops of the morning, but the whole multitude will fail to reflect all His brightness! Creation is too small a frame in which to hang His likeness. Human thought is too contracted, human speech too feeble to set Him forth to the fullest. When all the emblems in earth and Heaven shall have described Him to their utmost, there will remain something not yet described. You may square the circle before you can set forth Christ in the language of mortal men! He is inconceivably above our conceptions, unutterably above our utterances!

But notice that He here sets Himself forth as a Shepherd. Dwell on this for a moment! A shepherd is such a man as we employ in England to look after sheep for a few months, till they are large enough to be slaughtered. A shepherd after the Oriental sort, such as Abraham, Jacob, or David, is quite another person.

The Eastern shepherd is generally the owner of the flock, or at least the son of their owner, and so their proprietor in prospect. The sheep are his own. English shepherds seldom, or never, own the sheep—they are employed to take care of them—and they have no other interest in them. Our native shepherds are a very excellent set of men as a rule—those I have known have been admirable specimens of intelligent working men—yet they are not at all like the Oriental shepherd, and cannot be, for he is usually the owner of the flock which he tends. He remembers how he came into possession of the flock and when and where each of the present sheep was born. He knows where he has led them and what trials he had in connection with them. And he remembers this with the emphasis that they are his own inheritance.

His wealth consists in them. He very seldom has much of a house and he does not usually own much land. He takes his sheep over a good stretch of country which is open common for all his tribe—but his possessions lie in his flocks. Ask him, "How much are you worth?" He answers, "I own so many sheep." In the Latin tongue the word for money is akin to the word, "sheep," because to many of the first Romans, wool was their wealth and their fortunes lay in their flocks. The Lord Jesus is our Shepherd—we are His wealth! If you ask what is

His heritage, He tells you of "the riches of the Glory of His inheritance in the saints." Ask Him what are His jewels and He replies, "They shall be Mine in that day." If you ask Him where His treasures are, He will tell you, "The Lord's portion is His people. Jacob is the lot of His inheritance." The Lord Jesus Christ has nothing that He values as He does His own people. For their sakes He gave up all that He had

and died naked on the Cross. Not only can He say, "I gave Ethiopia and Seba for you," but He "loved His Church and gave Himself for it." He regards His Church as being His own body, "the fullness of Him that fills all in all."

The shepherd, as he owns the flock, is also the caretaker. He always takes care of them. One of our Brothers now present is a fireman and, as he lives at the fire station, he is always on duty. I asked him whether he was not off duty during certain hours of every day and he said, "No, I am never off duty." He is on duty when he goes to bed, he is on duty while he is eating his breakfast, he is on duty if he walks down the street! And any time the bell may ring the alarm, he must be in his place and hasten to the fire. Our Lord Jesus Christ is never off duty. He has constant care of His people day and night. He has declared it—"For Zion's sake will I not hold My peace and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest." He can truly say what Jacob did, "In the day the drought consumed Me, and the frost by night." He says of His flock what He says of His garden, "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment lest any hurt it. I will keep it night and day."

I cannot tell you all the care a shepherd has over his flock because his anxieties are of such a various kind. Sheep have about as many complaints as men! You do not know much about them and I am not going to enter into details, for the all-sufficient reason that I do not know much about them, myself, but the shepherd knows, and the shepherd will tell you that he leads an anxious life. He seldom has all the flock well at one time. Some one or other is sure to be ailing and he spies it out and has eye and hand and heart ready for its succor and relief. There are many varieties of complaints and needs—and all these are laid upon the shepherd's heart. He is both possessor and caretaker of the flock.

Then he has to be the provider, too, for there is not a woolly head among them that knows anything about the finding and selecting of pasturage. The season may be very dry, and where there once was grass, there may be nothing but a brown powder. It may be that herbage is only to be found by the side of the rippling brooks, here and there, but the sheep do not know anything about that—the shepherd must know everything for them. The shepherd is the sheep's providence. Both for time and for eternity, for body and for soul, our Lord Jesus supplies all our need out of His riches in Glory. He is the great Storehouse from which we derive everything! He has provided, He does provide and He will provide! And each one of us may sing, therefore, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want."

But, dear Friends, we often dream that we are the shepherds, or that we, at any rate, have to find some of the pasture. I could not help saying, just now, to our friends at our little

Prayer Meeting, "There is a passage in the Psalms which makes the Lord do for us what one would have thought we could have done for ourselves—'He makes me to lie down in green pastures.'" Surely, if a sheep can do nothing else, it can lie down! Yet to lie down is the very hardest thing for God's sheep to do! It is here that the full power of the rest-giving Christ has to come in to make our fretful, worrying, doubtful natures lie down and rest. Our Lord is able to give us perfect peace and He will do so if we will simply trust to His abounding care. It is the shepherd's business to be the provider— let us remember this and be very happy.

Moreover, he has to be the leader. He leads the sheep wherever they have to go. I have often been astonished at the shepherds in the South of France, which is so much like Palestine, to see where they will take their sheep. Once every week I saw the shepherd come down to Mentone and conduct all his flock to the beach. I could see nothing for them but big stones. Folk say that perhaps this is what makes the mutton so hard, but I have no doubt the poor creatures get a little taste of salt, or something which does them good. At any rate, they follow the shepherd and away he goes up the steep hillsides, taking long steps, till he reaches points where the grass is growing on the sides of the hills. He knows the way and the sheep have nothing to do but to follow him wherever he goes. Theirs is not to make the way; theirs is not to choose the path, but theirs is to keep close to his heels!

Do you not see our blessed Shepherd leading your own pilgrimage? Cannot you see Him guiding your way? Do you not say, "Yes, He leads me, and it is my joy to follow"? Lead on, O blessed Lord! Lead on and we will follow the prints of Your feet!

The shepherd in the East has also to be the defender of the flock, for wolves yet prowl in those regions. All sorts of wild beasts attack the flock and he must be to the front. Thus is it with our Shepherd. No wolf can attack us without finding our Lord in arms against him. No lion can roar upon the flock without awakening a greater than David. "He that keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." He is a Shepherd, then, and He completely fills the character—much more completely than I can show you just now.

Notice that the text puts an adjective upon the shepherd, decorating him with a chain of gold. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself says, "I am the good Shepherd." "The good Shepherd"—that is, He is not a thief that steals and only deals with

the sheep as He bears them from the fold to the slaughter. He is not a hireling—He does not do merely what He is paid to do, or commanded to do, but He does everything "con amore"—with a willing heart. He throws His soul into it. There is a goodness, a tenderness, a willingness, a powerfulness, a force, an energy in all that Jesus does that makes Him the best possible Shepherd that can be. He is no hireling! Neither is He an idler! Even shepherds who have had their own flocks have neglected them, as there are farmers who do not well cultivate their own farms, but it is never so with Christ. He is the Good Shepherd—good up to the highest point of goodness, good in all that is tender—good in all that is kind, good

in all the directions in which a shepherd can be needed. He is good at fight and good at rule. He is good in watchful oversight and good in prudent leadership. He is most eminently good in every way!

And then notice He puts it, "I am the good Shepherd." That is the point I want to bring out. Of other shepherds we can say, he is a shepherd, but this is the Shepherd. All others in the world are shadows of the true Shepherd and Jesus is the Substance of them all. That which we see in the world with these eyes is, after all, not the substance, but the type, the shadow. That which we do not see with our eyes, that which only our faith perceives, is, after all, the real thing. I have seen shepherds, but they were only pictures to me. The Shepherd, the real, the true, the best, the most sure example of shepherding is the Christ, Himself—and you and I are the sheep. Those sheep we see on yonder mountainside are just types of ourselves—we are the true sheep and Jesus is the true Shepherd. If an angel were to fly over the earth to find out the real sheep and the real Shepherd, he would say, "The sheep of God's pasture are men and Jehovah is their Shepherd. He is the true, the real Shepherd of the true and real sheep." All the possibilities that lie in a shepherd are found in Christ. Every good thing that you can imagine to be, or that should be in a shepherd, you find in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I want you to notice that, according to the text, the Lord Jesus Christ greatly rejoices in this. He says, "I am the good Shepherd." He does not confess that fact as if He were ashamed of it, but He repeats it in this chapter so many times that it almost reads like the refrain of a song. "I am the good Shepherd"—He evidently rejoices in it. He rolls it under His tongue as a sweet morsel. Evidently it is to His heart's content. He does not say, "I am the Son of God, I am the Son of Man, I am the Redeemer"—but this He does say—and He congratulates Himself upon it, "I am the good Shepherd."

This should encourage you and me to get a full hold of the word. If Jesus is so pleased to be my Shepherd, let me be equally pleased to be His sheep and let me avail myself of all the privileges that are wrapped up in His being my Shepherd and in my being His sheep! I see that it will not worry Him for me to be His sheep. I see that my needs will cause Him no perplexity. I see that He will not be going out of His way to attend to my weakness and trouble. He delights to dwell on the fact, "I am the good Shepherd." He invites me, as it were, to come and bring my needs and woes to Him, look up to Him and be fed by Him. Therefore I will do it! Does it not make you feel truly happy to hear your own Lord, Himself, say and say it to you out of this precious Book, "I am the good Shepherd"? Do you not reply, "Indeed You are a good Shepherd. You are a good Shepherd to me. My heart lays emphasis upon the word 'good' and says of You, 'there is none good but One, and You are that good One.' You are the good Shepherd of the sheep"?

So much, then, concerning the complete character.

II. May the Holy Spirit bless the word still more, while I speak in my broken way upon the next point—THE COMPLETE KNOWLEDGE.

The knowledge of Christ towards His sheep and of the sheep towards Him is wonderfully complete. I must read the text again—"I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me, and I know the Father."

First, then, consider Christ's knowledge of His own and the comparison by which He sets it forth—"As the Father knows Me." I cannot conceive a stronger comparison! Do you know how much the Father knows the Son, who is His Glory, His Darling, His alter Ego, His other Self—yes, one God with Him? Do you know how intimate the knowledge of the Father must be of His Son who is His own Wisdom, yes, who is His Himself? The Father and the Son are one Spirit! We cannot imagine how intimate that knowledge is and, yet so intimately, so perfectly, does the great Shepherd know His sheep!

He knows their number. He will never lose one. He will count them all, again, on that day when the sheep shall pass, again, under the hand of Him that knows them, and then He will make full account of them. "Of all that You have given Me," He says, "I have lost none." He knows the number of those for whom He paid the ransom price.

He knows their persons. He knows the age and character of each of His own. He assures us that the very hairs of our head are all numbered! Christ has not an unknown sheep. It is not possible that He should have overlooked or forgotten one of them. He has such an intimate knowledge of all who are redeemed with His most precious blood that He never mistakes one of them for another, nor misjudges one of them. He knows their constitutions—those that are weak and feeble, those that are nervous and frightened, those that are strong, those that have a tendency to presumption, those that are sleepy, those that are brave, those that are sick, sorry, worried, or wounded. He knows those that are hunted by the devil, those that are caught up between the jaws of the lion and shaken till the very life is almost driven out of them. He knows their feelings, fears and frights. He knows the secret ins and outs of each of us better than any one of us knows himself!

He knows our trials—the particular trial under which you are now bowed down, my Sister. Our difficulties—that special difficulty which seems to block up your way, my Brother, at this very time. All the ingredients of our life are known to Him. "I know My own, as the Father knows Me." It is impossible to conceive a more complete knowledge than that which the Father has of His only-begotten Son! And it is equally impossible to conceive a more complete knowledge than that which Jesus Christ has of each of His chosen!

He knows our sins. I often feel glad to think that He always knew our evil natures and what would come of them. When He chose us, He knew what we were and what we would be. He did not buy His sheep in the dark. He did not choose us without knowing all the devious ways of our past and future lives—

"He saw us ruined in the Fall, Yet loved us notwithstanding all." Herein lies the splendor of His Grace. "Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate." His election implies foreknowledge of all our ill manners. They say of human love that it is blind, but Christ's love has many eyes and all its eyes are open—and yet He still loves us!

I need not enlarge upon this. It ought, however, to be very full of comfort to you that you are so known of your Lord, especially as He knows you not merely with the cold, clear knowledge of the intellect, but with the knowledge of love and of affection. He knows you in His heart. You are peculiarly dear to Him. You are approved of Him. You are accepted of Him. He knows you by acquaintance with you, not by hearsay. He knows you by communion with you—He has been with you in sweet fellowship. He has read you as a man reads his book and remembers what he reads. He knows you by sympathy with you. He is a Man like yourself—

"He knows what sore temptations mean, For He has felt the same." He knows your weaknesses. He knows the points wherein you suffer most, for—

"In every pang that rends the heart The Man of Sorrows had a part."

He gained this knowledge in the school of sympathetic suffering. "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered." "He was in all points made like unto His brethren." And by being made like we are, He has come to know us and He knows us in a very practical and tender way. You have a watch and it will not run, or it runs very irregularly and so you give it to one who knows nothing about watches and he says, "I will clean it for you." He will do it more harm than good! But here is the very person who made the watch. He says, "I put every wheel into its place. I made the whole of it, from beginning to end." You think to yourself, "I feel the utmost confidence in trusting that man with my watch. He can surely make it right, for he made it." It often cheers my heart to think that since the Lord made me, He can make me right and keep me so to the end. My Maker is my Redeemer! He that first made me has made me, again, and will make me perfect to His own praise and Glory! That is the first part of this complete knowledge.

The second part of the subject is our knowledge of the Lord and the fact by which it is illustrated. "And My own know Me, even as I know the Father." I think I hear some of you say, "I do not see so much in that. I can see a great deal more in Christ's knowing us." Beloved, I see a great deal in our knowing Christ! That He should know me is great condescension, but it must be easy for Him to know me. Being so Divine, with such piercing eyes as His, it is amazingly condescending, as I say, but it is not difficult for Him to know me. The marvel is that I should ever know Him! That such a stupid, blind, deaf, dead soul as mine should ever know Him and should know Him as He knows the Father, is 10,000 miracles in one! Oh, Sirs, this is a wonder so great that I do not think you and I yet understand it to the fullest, or else we would sit



down in glad surprise and say—"This proves Him to be the Good Shepherd, indeed, not only that He knows His flock, but that He has taught them so well that they know Him!" With such a flock as Christ has, that He should be able to train His sheep so that they should be able to know Him—and to know Him as He knows the Father—is miraculous!

O Beloved, if this is true of us, that we know our Shepherd, we may clap our hands for very joy! And yet I think it is true even now. At any rate, I know so much of my Lord that nothing gives me so much joy as to hear of Him. Brothers and Sisters, there is no boasting in this personal assertion of mine! It is only the minimum truth! You can say the same, can you not? If anybody were to preach to you the finest sermon that was ever delivered, would it charm you if there were no Christ in it? No! But you will come and hear me talk about Jesus Christ in words as simple as I can find—and you cry, one to another, "It was good to be there."—

"You dear Redeemer, dying Lamb, We love to hear of Thee! No music's like Your charming name, Nor half so sweet can be."

Now mark that this is the way in which Jesus knows the Father. Jesus delights in His Father and you delight in Jesus. I know you do, and here the comparison holds good.

Moreover, does not the dear name of Jesus stir your very soul? What is it that makes you feel as if you wish to hasten away, that you might be doing holy service for the Lord? What makes your very heart awake and feel ready to leap out of your body? What but hearing of the glories of Jesus? Play on what string you please and my ear is deaf to it—but when you once begin to tell of Calvary and sing the song of free Grace and dying love, oh, then my soul opens all her ears, drinks in the music and then her blood begins to stir—and she is ready to shout for joy! Do you not even now sing—

"Oh, for this love let rocks and hills Their lasting silence break And all harmonious human tongues The Savior's praises speak. Yes, we will praise You, dearest Lord, Our souls are all on flame, Hosanna round the spacious earth To Your adored name?"

Yes, we know Jesus! We feel the power of our union with Him. We know Him, Brothers and Sisters, so that we are not to be deceived by false shepherds. There is a way, nowadays, of preaching Christ against Christ. It is a new device of the devil to set up Jesus against Jesus—His Kingdom against His Atonement—His precepts against His doctrines. The half Christ, in his example, is put up to frighten souls away from the whole Christ who saves the souls of men from guilt as well as from sin, from Hell as well as from folly. But they cannot deceive us in that way. No, Beloved, we know our Shepherd from all others! We know Him from a statue covered with clothes. We know the living Christ, for we have come into living contact with Him and we cannot be deceived any more than Jesus Christ, Himself, can be deceived about the Father. "My own know Me, even as I know the Father." We know Him by union with Him and by communion with Him. "We have seen the Lord." "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ."

We know Him by love—our soul cleaves to Him even as the heart of Christ cleaves to the Father. We know Him by trusting Him—"He is all my salvation and all my desire." I remember once feeling many questions as to whether I was a child of God or not. I went into a little chapel and I heard a good man preach. He was a simple working man. I heard him preach and I made my handkerchief damp with my tears as I heard him talk about Christ and the precious blood. When I was preaching the same things to others, I was wondering whether this Truth of God was mine, but while I was hearing, for myself, I knew it was mine, for my very soul lived upon it! I went to that good man and thanked him for the sermon. He asked me who I was. When I told him, he turned all manner of colors. "Why," he said, "Sir, that was your own sermon." I said, "Yes, I knew it was and it was good of the Lord to feed me with food that I had prepared for others." I perceived that I had a true taste for what I, myself, knew to be the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Oh, yes, we do love our good Shepherd! We cannot help it!

And we know Him, also, by a deep sympathy with Him, for what Christ desires to do, we also long to do. He loves to save souls and so do we! Would we not save all the people in a whole street if we could? Yes, in a whole city and in the

whole world! Nothing makes us so glad as that Jesus Christ is a Savior. "There is news in the paper," says one. That news is often of small importance to our hearts. I happened to hear that a poor servant girl had heard me preach the Truth of God and found Christ—and I confess I feel more interest in that fact than in all the rise and fall of Whigs or Tories! What does it matter who is in Parliament, so long as souls are saved? That is the main thing. If the Kingdom of Christ grows, all the other kingdoms are of small account. That is the one Kingdom for which we live and for which we would gladly die! As there is a boundless sympathy between the Father and the Son, so is there between Jesus and ourselves.

We know Christ as He knows the Father because we are one with Him. The union between Christ and His people is as real and as mysterious as the union between the Son and the Father.

We have a beautiful picture before us. Can you realize it for a minute? The Lord Jesus here among us—picture Him! He is the Shepherd. Then, around Him are His own people and wherever He goes, they go! He leads them into green pastures and beside still waters. And there is this peculiarity about them—He knows them as He looks upon each of them—and they, each of them, know Him! There is a deeply intimate and mutual knowledge between them. As surely as He knows them, they know Him. The world knows neither the Shepherd nor the sheep, but they know each other. As surely, as truly and, as deeply as God the Father knows the Son, so does this Shepherd know His sheep! And as God the Son knows His Father, so do these sheep know their Shepherd! Thus in one band, united by mutual union, they travel through the world to Heaven. "I know My own and My own know Me,

even as the Father knows Me, and I know the Father." Is not that a blessed picture? God help us to figure in it!

III. The last subject is COMPLETE SACRIFICE. The complete sacrifice is thus described, "I lay down My life for the sheep."

These words are repeated in this chapter in different forms some four times. The Savior keeps on saying, "I lay down My life for the sheep." Read the 11th verse—"The good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep." The 15th verse—"I lay down My life for the sheep." The 17th verse—"I lay down My life that I may take it again." The 18th verse—"I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again." It looks as if this was another refrain of our Lord's personal hymn. I call this passage His Pastoral Song. The good Shepherd, with His pipe, sings to Himself and to His flock, and this comes in at the end of each stanza, "I lay down My life for the sheep."

Did it not mean, first, that He was always doing so? All His life He was, as it were, laying it down for them. He was divesting Himself of the garments of life until He came to be fully disrobed on the Cross. All the life He had; all the power He had, He was always laying it out for His sheep. It means that, to begin with.

And then it means that the Sacrifice was actively performed. It was always in the doing as long as He lived, but He did it actively. He did not merely die for the sheep, but He laid down His life, which is another thing. Many a man has died for Christ—it was all that he could do. But we cannot lay down our lives, because they are due already as a debt of Nature to God and we are not permitted to die at our own wills. That were suicidal and improper. With the Lord Christ it was totally different. He was, as it were, actively passive. "I lay down My life for the sheep. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father."

I like to think of our Good Shepherd not merely as dying for us, but as willingly dying—laying down His life while He had that life—using it for us and, when the time came, putting off that life on our behalf. This has now been actually done. When He spoke these words, it had not been done. At this time it has been done. "I lay down My life for the sheep" may now be read, "I have laid down My life for the sheep." For you, Beloved, He has given His hands to the nails and His feet to the cruel iron! For you He has borne the fever and the bloody sweat! For you He has cried "Eloi, Eloi, lame Sa-bachthani!" For you He has given up the ghost.

And the beauty of it is that He is not ashamed to avow the objective of it. "I lay down My life for the sheep." Whatever Christ did for the world—and I am not one of those who would limit the bearings of the death of Christ upon the world—yet His peculiar Glory is, "I lay down My life for the sheep."

Great Shepherd, do You mean to say that You have died for such as these? What? For these sheep? Died for them? What? Die for sheep, Shepherd? Surely You have other reasons

for which to live beside sheep! Have You not other loves, other joys? We know that it would grieve You to see the sheep killed, torn by the wolf, or scattered. But You really have not gone so far in love for them that for the sake of those poor creatures You would lay down your life? "Ah, yes," He says, "I would, I have!" Carry your wondering thoughts to Christ Jesus. What? What? What? Son of God, infinitely

great and inconceivably glorious Jehovah, would You lay Your life down for men and women? They are no more in comparison with You than so many ants and wasps, pitiful and obnoxious creatures! You could make ten thousand millions of them with a word, or crush them out of existence with one blow of Your hand! They are poor things, make the most you can of them. They have hard hearts and wandering wills—and the best of them are no better than they should be! Savior, did you die for such? He looks around and says, "Yes, I did. I did. I laid down My life for the sheep. I am not ashamed of them and I am not ashamed to say that I died for them."

No, Beloved, He is not ashamed of His dying love! He has told it to His Brethren up yonder and made it known to all the servants in His Father's house—and this has become the song of that house—"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!" Shall not we take it up and say, "For You were slain and have redeemed us to God by Your blood"? Whatever men may say about Particular Redemption, Christ is not ashamed of it! He glories that He laid down His life for the sheep. For the sheep, mark you! He says not for the world. There is a bearing of the death of Christ towards the world, but here He boasts and glories in the specialty of His Sacrifice. "I lay down My life for the sheep"—"instead of the sheep," it might be read.

He glories in substitution for His people! He makes it His boast when He speaks of His chosen, that He suffered in their place—that He bore, that they might never bear the wrath of God on account of sin! What He glories in, we also glory in! "God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world!"

O Beloved, what a blessed Christ we have who loves us so, who knows us so—whom we also know and love! May others be taught to know Him and to love Him! Yes, at this hour may they come and put their trust in Him, as the sheep trust to the shepherd! We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.