

# MY SHEEP

Have you ever watched a sheep? They're pretty dumb and really fluffy, and they like to follow the leader, whether it be the shepherd or another sheep. In this newsletter, we are going to explore some characteristics of sheep and how they should apply to us as God's sheep.

## Gone Astray

In my research, I saw a prime example of this verse:

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."—Isaiah 53:6.

A shepherd was walking a rugged path up a mildly steep, rocky hill. Several scraggly, dried out trees dotted its slope. The shepherd was followed by about fifty sheep. As they made their way up this hill, it appeared that they were leaving a far more hospitable plain with patches of green grass.

Suddenly a sheep turned around and ran down the slope. When it reached a nice green patch, it paused and looked back. For a few moments, slow in leaving, the shepherd and the flock slowly progressed up the path. Then the stray sheep turned and continued on its way to an unseen location in the plain. This particular sheep was not recovered, and it was later found in the desert, torn by wild beasts.

Often in our walk with Christ, feel we are missing out on something; the path seems rough, and there are trials and temptations; and, when we look back to the plain, our temptations call us to an easier way. Thus, it was with Lot's wife. We have all gone astray; we have all pursued the quickly passing pleasures of the world, ending up in the desert of sin, where we can find no satisfaction. But the Good Shepherd does not give up on us. As long as we are living, we have a mighty Saviour who is seeking to rescue us from the dry and miserable places we end up in. He is constantly calling:

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken [listen attentively to; give heed] diligently

unto Me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline [pay attention; show willing obedience] your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David."—Isaiah 55:1-3.

We often waste our time and effort on things that cannot satisfy the heart. Lands, pleasure, luxury, food—none of these will ever bring satisfaction. If we diligently hearken to the Word of God, He will supply our lack. If you have wandered from God, He is waiting for you to answer His call. He says:

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."—Revelation 3:20.

There are a few ways to solve the problem of a wandering sheep, but these are not always successful. Ultimately, a sheep cannot be forced to follow the shepherd. One way is for the shepherd to tie the sheep and lead it with a rope. In Jeremiah 31:3, God uses this imagery:

"The Lord hath appeared of old unto Me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."

If the love of Christ cannot draw us after Him what more can God do? He can bind us to Himself with infirmities, with necessities, and with chastisement. Then, when our self-trust has been broken, when we know that without Him we can do nothing, He carries us through. These are ways the Good Shepherd seeks to cure the wandering heart. May we not be rebellious but trust our lives to Him who is able to save to the uttermost.

## Too Much Wool

Have you ever seen a sheep that hasn't had it's wool sheared off? The wool gets so thick that it covers their eyes, keeps them from eating or nursing young, and causes them to overheat; if left without shearing, they will die.

The life of Jesus is a beautiful example of the perfect sheep. He clothes us with His own perfectly white righteousness. His righteousness keeps us warm with love in this cold world. This provides us with an understanding of what the wool sym-

bolizes—righteousness.

2 For us, the wool is also righteousness. When we share the righteousness that grows from Christ in us, seeking to keep others warm with love, we are safe. But if we spend it upon ourselves, loving self, we become puffed up with self-righteousness. This blinds us to our own condition, keeps us from being able to feed on the Word of God or feed others, and causes fiery, proud wrath to fester in our hearts.

God sends humbling experiences to shear us of these bad traits. God sends circumstances to bind our hands and feet, lay us on our back, and shear off all that pride and self-righteousness until, in helplessness, we can see our true condition. Then we recognize that, while blinded by our own self-righteousness and selfishness, we did not know what path our feet were on. If we would be safe, we must constantly be loving others.

“There are many, many, professed Christians who are waiting unconcernedly for the coming of the Lord. They have not on the garment of His righteousness. They may profess to be children of God, but they are not cleansed from sin. They are selfish and self-sufficient. Their experience is Christless. They neither love God supremely nor their neighbor as themselves. They have no true idea of what constitutes holiness. They do not see the defects in themselves. So blinded are they, that they are not able to detect the subtle working of pride and iniquity. They are clad in the rags of self-righteousness and stricken with spiritual blindness. Satan has cast his shadow between them and Christ, and they have no wish to study the pure, holy character of the Saviour.”—*Review and Herald, February 26, 1901, par. 10.*

### **Silence in Affliction**

Sheep are surprisingly silent when bad things happen to them. Whether being attacked by another animal or being sheared, they do not make any noise. The Bible uses this to describe Christ:

“He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth.”—Isaiah 53:7.

This trait is almost too disturbing to witness. It seems unnatural, but it reveals something very powerful. We will take a moment to witness it in the life of Jesus.

The mob had brought Jesus to Pilate in the early hours of the morning. They were shouting insults and accusations against Him. Jesus had only lived His life to bless others, even those who

hated Him and were even now seeking to take His life. As the righteous Son of God, He could have condemned them to eternal death. He could have opened the secret sins of their lives and, in a second, exposed every flaw of His accusers. But what did He do?

“Standing behind Pilate, in view of all in the court, Christ heard the abuse; but to all the false charges against Him He answered not a word. His whole bearing gave evidence of conscious innocence. He stood unmoved by the fury of the waves that beat about Him. It was as if the heavy surges of wrath, rising higher and higher, like the waves of the boisterous ocean, broke about Him, but did not touch Him. He stood silent, but His silence was eloquence. It was as a light shining from the inner to the outer man.”—*Desire of Ages, 726.3.*

Jesus was brought before Herod and replied to His demands in the same way:

“Christ might have spoken words to Herod that would have pierced the ears of the hardened king. He might have stricken him with fear and trembling by laying before him the full iniquity of his life, and the horror of his approaching doom. But Christ’s silence was the severest rebuke that He could have given. Herod had rejected the truth spoken to him by the greatest of the prophets, and no other message was he to receive. Not a word had the Majesty of heaven for him.

“That ear that had ever been open to human woe, had no room for Herod’s commands. Those eyes that had ever rested upon the penitent sinner in pitying, forgiving love had no look to bestow upon Herod. Those lips that had uttered the most impressive truth, that in tones of tenderest entreaty had pleaded with the most sinful and the most degraded, were closed to the haughty king who felt no need of a Saviour.”—*Desire of Ages, 730.4.*

As the spotless Lamb of God, He had no words for self-defense, no words to condemn, and no words to criticize. He lived His life for others and gave His life to save His enemies. He was afflicted and oppressed. Wicked men beat Him for His silence. They mocked Him; pretended to worship Him; and spoke the most cutting words, but not once did Jesus retaliate.

“Far better would it be for us to suffer under false accusation than to inflict upon ourselves the torture of retaliation upon our enemies. The spirit of hatred and revenge originated with Satan, and can bring only evil to him who cherishes it. Lowliness of heart, that meekness which is the fruit of abiding in Christ, is the true

secret of blessing. 'He will beautify the meek with salvation.' Psalm 149:4."—*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, 17.1.*

Do you seek to justify yourself? Do you seek to defend your own righteousness? Do you retaliate when others do things that hurt you? Then you cannot be a sheep. It is Satan's goal to cause division, and he accomplishes his purpose through a retaliatory spirit. Christ declares:

"Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."—Matthew 7:20.

Take careful note of those who are raising a cry for revenge and retaliation. Take note of those who are using their influence to benefit themselves, preying upon other people's anger for their own benefit. Are these followers of the crucified Saviour? Or do they despise walking in His path by suffering in silence? Every good action has its consequences; so consider the cost. We cannot cut off the ear of the high priest's servant and claim to do it in the name of Jesus, He has told us to put away our swords. Do we expect to be treated better than Christ was? Notice the current plans of Satan:

"We must cause distraction and division. We must destroy their anxiety for their own souls, and lead them to criticise [criticize], to judge, and to accuse and condemn one another, and to cherish selfishness and enmity. For these sins, God banished us from His presence; and all who follow our example will meet a similar fate."—*4 Spirit of Prophecy, 340.*

Have you experienced recent trials that have pierced your heart? Have you been unjustly treated? Here are beautiful words of comfort:

"When trials arise that seem unexplainable, we should not allow our peace to be spoiled. However unjustly we may be treated, let not passion arise. By indulging a spirit of retaliation we injure ourselves. We destroy our own confidence in God and grieve the Holy Spirit. There is by our side a witness, a heavenly messenger, who will lift up for us a standard against the enemy. He will shut us in with the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness. Beyond this, Satan cannot penetrate. He cannot pass this shield of holy light."—*Christ's Object Lessons, 171-172.*

"While the world is progressing in wickedness, none of us need flatter ourselves that we shall have no difficulties. But it is these very difficulties that bring us into the audience chamber of the Most High. We may seek counsel of One who is infinite in wisdom."—*Christ's Object Lessons, 172.*

These difficulties draw us closer to God if we

respond in the way Christ has responded. If we accept our trials as blessings intended to shear the self-righteousness that covers our eyes, if we recognize the feelings that arise in our own hearts, we can understand our need and be satisfied with the righteousness of Christ. We find the closest fellowship with Christ in sufferings that cannot be comforted by others, when our motives are twisted, when we unjustly suffer, and when we are left alone. This is the truest mark of a sheep; when we follow the example of the Good Shepherd. Such have fellowship with Christ Himself.

"When it is essential for the purification of the church, trials are permitted. Under these trials some regard themselves as abused; and instead of humbling their hearts, they rise up in indignation. Satan watches his opportunity to present some pleasing sophistry [clever but deceptive, argumentative reasoning] that will captivate the minds of the tempted ones and will lead them to accept his fables. Those who are thus deceived become channels through which other minds are seduced by delusive [misleading, deceptive] sentiments [expressed emotional attitudes and feelings].

"I am instructed to say that we must do all we possibly can for these deceived ones. Their minds must be freed from the delusions of the enemy; and if we fail in our efforts to save these erring ones, we must 'come out from among them' and be separate [2 Corinthians 6:17]."—*20 Letters and Manuscripts, Manuscript 106 (1905), par. 34.*

### Guided by a Familiar Voice

Shepherds lead their sheep by calling them. In the time of Jesus, good shepherds knew each of their sheep by name. Jesus says:

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."—John 10:27.

Are you acquainted with the voice of the Good Shepherd?

"And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left."—Isaiah 30:21.

Jesus is our personal Shepherd. He knows us by name; He knows everything about us, even how many hairs are on our heads. If we are going astray, He will call us back to Himself, but we need to know His voice.

"And when He [Jesus] putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him: for they know His voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers."—John

10:4-5.

4 How does a sheep tell a stranger from a shepherd? The sheep has a relationship with its shepherd. It has spent time with the shepherd, feeding in the pastures; and it has learned to trust the shepherd through difficulties and in dangers. Learning the voice of the Jesus is not accomplished in one day. Time and many trials must pass before we learn to recognize the voice of God, but we are promised:

“If any man will do His [Jesus, the Good Shepherd’s] will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”—John 7:17.

If we have any desire to follow the Good Shepherd, we will hear His voice guiding us. Sometimes, we will need to draw close through prayer and fasting in order to recognize His voice during the fear and the storm. The Good Shepherd is always calling us to something better, leading His precious flock, one step at a time.

### His Precious Sheep

Who are the Shepherd’s sheep? Matthew 18 begins with Jesus calling a little child to Him and warning His disciples that, if such little ones were offended, it would be better if the offender tied a millstone around their neck and cast themselves into the sea. Such a death is actually extremely bad, making you feel shocked or frightened. Many miss just what Christ was saying. He then warns about offenses and recommends cutting off whatever leads one to sin, especially the sin of offending a little one. Then He gives the parable of the lost sheep:

“Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven. For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost. How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.”—Matthew 18:10-14.

The little ones Christ was referring to are not

just children, they are especially the lost sheep. In the day of judgment, there will be a lot of proverbial millstones to be tied around the necks of Seventh-day Adventists.

“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.’ Romans 15:1. No soul who believes in Christ, though his faith may be weak, and his steps wavering as those of a little child, is to be lightly esteemed. By all that has given us advantage over another—be it education and refinement, nobility of character, Christian training, religious experience—we are in debt to those less favored; and, so far as lies in our power, we are to minister unto them. If we are strong, we are to stay up the hands of the weak. [Stay up: to provide physical, emotional, or spiritual support to those who are struggling or lacking in strength, courage, or ability] Angels of glory, that do always behold the face of the Father, in heaven, joy in ministering to His little ones. Trembling souls, who have many objectionable traits of character, are their special charge. Angels are ever present where they are most needed, with those who have the hardest battle with self to fight, and whose surroundings are the most discouraging. And in this ministry Christ’s true followers will co-operate.”—*Desire of Ages*, 440.1.

I encourage you to read all of *Desire of Ages*, chapter 48. It is a very important message for today.

### Conclusion

There are a lot of wolves in sheep’s clothing, complaining of their sufferings, justifying themselves, storing up wrath for the day of wrath, retaliating, puffing themselves up with pride, leading others in the path of destruction, despising the voice of the true Shepherd, and despising His little ones. Be it not so with thee.

*For a finished work,*



**Jonathan Taylor**

*Wisdom is justified of all her children. -Luke 7:35*

*More Food for the Little Flock —*