

THE LAMB

MY SHEPHERD



By Stanley Kimber
Retired sheep farmer

The Lamb - My Shepherd

During our Lords earthly ministry He spoke often about sheep and the shepherd. Why was this? After all He must have spent much of His early life in Joseph the carpenter's workshop. From the early pages of scripture we learn that we cannot work our way into God's kingdom. In Genesis 4 Cain was sincere in using his hands to present to God an offering from the soil but Abel brought a slain lamb, his offering was accepted rather than Cain's. John the Baptist introduced the Lord Jesus as "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," and our Lord refers to Himself as "The Good Shepherd" (John 10:11). We now consider in a very simple way this important teaching as we look at our Lord as the Lamb and secondly the Shepherd.

THE LAMB OF GOD

John the Baptist prepared the way for the Lord Jesus and he realised that the one who was to follow him was the only one who would “take away sins.” Throughout the Old Testament animals were slain for the sins of people. The outstanding example of this is found in Exodus 12 when the Israelites were to be set free from bondage in Egypt. Each household was instructed to take and slay a lamb and the blood was to be put on the door posts and lintel. When God saw that this was done that home was safe, whereas death struck at the houses of all Egyptians. This was of course the Lord’s Passover.

As the Israelites were held captive by the Egyptians, so the human race was held captive by Satan and could only be set free by a sacrifice. “Without the shedding of blood is no remission.” (Hebrews 9:22) We may ask why liken our Lord to a lamb?

As we look back to creation we read in Genesis 1:25 God created all livestock according to their kind, but in Genesis 2:7 man was created in God’s image and became a living soul, but man sinned.

A sheep does not sin: it cannot because of its nature. The Lord Jesus “was tempted in all points as we are and yet He was without sin.” “He knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Just as the acceptable sacrifice in the Old Testament had to be without blemish, so our Lord was sinless, born of a virgin with no earthly father, was conceived by the Holy Spirit, God’s only begotten Son, who was led as a lamb to the slaughter.

Have you watched a sheep being sheared? As the shearer holds the sheep in one hand he takes the fleece off with the other. The wool is then used as clothes for you to wear. “As a sheep before her shearers is dumb so He opened not His mouth (Isaiah 53:7). We read in Matthew 27:28 that prior to the crucifixion the soldiers took our Lord’s coat from him and put on Him a scarlet robe. Our Lord then was submissive to wicked men, that we may be clothed with His righteousness for we have none of our own. Please read Romans 3: 21-26, and notice verse 25, “God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement.” (N.I.V)

We see then the Lord Jesus Christ dying on the cross for us. All sacrifices in the Old Testament are pictures of our Lord's death. He died for us. We read in John 3:16 it was because of God's love for "the world" that He gave His only begotten Son. However this verse also makes it clear there must be a personal faith in His sacrifice, "whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting (Eternal) life."

"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." John 1:29.

MY SHEEP

What a privilege to be called the Lord's sheep. How do we become part of His flock? Sheep farmers maintain the size of their flocks in two ways. Sometimes they need to buy new stock for breeding, how careful they have to be in their choice in order to purchase only healthy ewes. Buying the best usually proves to be expensive. We have already noticed the price our Lord paid to purchase us, He made the supreme sacrifice in dying upon the cross, offering all mankind the opportunity of accepting His forgiveness and salvation.

However not all sheep farmers buy their replacements they are all born into the flock. Lambs, like other animals, up to the time of birth are encased in a water bladder. Sometimes when the lamb is born it remains in the bladder and needs immediate assistance in order to breathe. This I believe is the important lesson our Lord was teaching Nicodemus in John 3. We too must be born again. As the Lord explains in John 3:5-8, we are born of water or of the flesh. "Flesh gives birth to flesh," this is our natural birth, but we need also to be born of the Spirit. "The Spirit gives birth to the Spirit." The Lord has died for the world but only those who have a personal faith with a repentant heart can be part of Christ's flock.

St. Paul spoke of this experience as "receiving the Spirit of adoption." At lambing time deaths sometimes occur and lambs are left with no mother. They cannot care for themselves and if left would die. They need to be adopted. At the same time a ewe might lose its lamb. The shepherd sometimes skins the dead lamb and covers the lamb which needs adopting with the skin of the dead lamb so that the ewe accepts the scent of her own lamb. In more recent years we have used a specially produced adoption spray. By spraying the adopted lamb and the ewes' nose she accepts the new lamb as her own. St. Paul reminds us that we need someone to care for us spiritually; we need to be adopted into God's flock by faith in the death of Jesus Christ.

Have you wondered why it is, that in the spring when young lambs are put into the field with their mothers, that both ewes and lambs have numbers in various colours painted on their sides. I remember jokingly telling a group of school children it was in case the ewe lost its lamb it

could read its own number and then find her own lamb with the corresponding number. It took a while for some of the children to realise sheep could not read. The reason of course the sheep are numbered is to assist the shepherd to match ewe and lamb if they get separated. What a comfort and consolation it is to read John 10:14 "I know my sheep and my sheep know me." Everyone in His flock is known by our Lord personally.

Why do farmers keep sheep? Of course it is nice for the general public to see them in the field and especially the new born lambs, but a flock of sheep must be profitable. Each year the ewes are expected to produce lambs: Christians too have a responsibility. We must bring forth fruit to the glory of God. In order for a sheep to be profitable it must have the food, if a sheep does not want to eat there is something wrong. Just prior to lambing ewes are always fed at the trough and the best ewes are always first to arrive but the weak sheep come behind. What sort of appetite have you got for the scripture or for that time set apart in the quiet place for prayer and communion, and do you value fellowship with the Lord's people? I believe this is necessary to be profitable for God.

Sheep are susceptible to many diseases, which if not treated can result in death. One injection annually can control eight problems. Sin shows itself in many ways in our lives, see Galatians 5:19-21, and just as the disease in a sheep can end in death if not treated, so we spiritually face death with sin not dealt with. We who are in God's flock have been spiritually healed eternally. We do not need to come annually as the Israelites on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16) but our Lord has died that we may have faith in Him and live. Please read Hebrews 10:1-18.

Often sheep go lame and need treatment from the shepherd. What about our daily Christian walk? A limping Christian will be left behind as the rest of the flock move forward. If a sheep is lame on its front feet it often kneels down, this of course does not cure its lameness, but it is a good remedy for the limping Christian when we kneel in prayer.

Another problem is caused by a fly laying its eggs in the wool of a sheep which then hatches out into maggots. Prevention is better than cure and this can be avoided by dipping the flock, each sheep is totally immersed in a special chemical. This will also kill any maggots which may already

be present. Here is another great truth. I have already sought to make it clear that when we turn to the Lord in faith we are saved for time and eternity, but as a Christian I feel the need to come daily to the Lord to seek His cleansing and forgiveness. The true Christian is not of the world, but we are in the world and can become contaminated by it. We must not sin intentionally but when we fall and “confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9. As the sheep is dipped regularly to be kept clean, so the believer needs to come for cleansing daily.

It is often said “The grass is greener on the other side.” Some sheep never seem satisfied with the grass allotted to them and finding a hole in the hedge stray into the next field. When the shepherd appears, or the dog is sent round the sheep, they know where they got out and go back through that same hole in the hedge. St. Paul tells us in Philippians 4:10-13 that he learned the secret of being content. Surely E.H. Swinstead knew something of this when he wrote this chorus. “There’s a way back to God from the dark paths of sin, there’s a door that is open and you may go in, at Calvary’s cross is where you begin, when you come as a sinner to Jesus.” Perhaps as a Christian you have gone out of God’s will, commit the situation to the Lord, be prepared to go back, allow your shepherd to lead you into blessing.

THE SHEPHERD (please read Psalms 23)

David the shepherd boy, psalmist and king was able to say “The Lord is my shepherd.” He speaks of the tremendous care of the shepherd; because of this the Christian can be spiritually satisfied. “I shall not want.” Our shepherd provides “green pastures.”

A sheep farmer must be thinking and providing for his flock weeks and months ahead. What a lovely sight to see the flock “lying down in green pastures.” It is possible to throw a sheep over on its side or push it to the ground but immediately it will stand up again. The only way to make a sheep lie down on its own is to fill it up with food. Why is there so much discontent among professing Christians today? Why seek satisfaction in worldly pursuits where is the satisfied Christian “Lying down” in “quietness and confidence”. This is where our strength will be. (Please read Isaiah 30:15)

The scriptures speak of the sheep following the shepherd as opposed to being driven; the sheep follow the shepherd, whom they trust. What peace there is to be enjoyed as the Lord leads us “beside the still waters”, or the “waters of rest”, knowing that He cares for us. Only when our Lord is leading can we know this.

Have you ever walked in the valley of the shadow of death? Many of us have as we have had a loved one taken from us. David was speaking as a sheep in the Lord’s flock and the life of a sheep can be taken at anytime at the discretion of the shepherd. In this sense we are all “in the shadow of death”. However the Christian does not fear, the Lord is “with me”, what comfort this is. As in Psalms 23:2, the green pastures are prepared, so in Psalms 23:5-6 the Lord is always making provision for us for time and eternity.

It is an interesting fact that sheep always go to the high ground at night to sleep. We have thought of the valley, but what a consolation to know that as we sleep at night, ours can be a mountain top experience in the care of our Lord.

Is your “cup running over”? This speaks of a life filled and overflowing with the love of the Lord, but a cup can only run over once unless it is

continually being filled. The work of the Holy Spirit is a continuous work and not just one subsequent experience to salvation, the shepherd longs to do this for us as we allow Him.

Shepherds choose single syllable names for their dogs, so that the commands to the dogs are clear. Had this not been the case I would have named my dogs “Goodness” and “Mercy”. Sheepdogs prevent the sheep from straying and encourage the flock to follow the shepherd who walks in front. How encouraging to know the Lord’s “Goodness” does follow us all the days of our life and that we can experience His “Mercy” when we have wandered and are brought back into the flock. As we seek to follow our Lord there will be times of chastening and correcting on earth, but what a future what an eternity, dwelling with the Lord in the place He has “prepared” for us.

In John 10:9 we read that God’s sheep, or the Christian “will come in and go out and find pasture.” This of course does not mean we are in God’s flock one minute and out the next, remember we have eternal security. No, this is a picture of the sheep being in a fold at night, reminding us of our security, but this verse says we “go out to find pasture,” led by the shepherd: a picture of salvation, security and satisfaction.

In the gospel according to St John Chapter 10 we read of the relationship we as sheep have with our shepherd. Verse 27: We hear His voice, and follow Him, and he knows us. A good shepherd knows everyone of his sheep, he knows when one is sick. This is exactly what this scripture is saying, our Lord knows us and cares for us as individuals. Verse 28 says: “My father who has given them to me is greater than all, no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand, I and the Father are one”. What an assurance. Each true believer is not only secure in the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ, but in the hand of God the Father as well. This is the promise of eternal security, “The Lord is my shepherd”.

The shepherd knows the difficulties his sheep can experience. A small bramble or thorn can hold a sheep for hours and the sheep can only be set free by the shepherd. The small things of life hold so many people prisoners, as the sheep is denied the satisfaction of the pasture around it when held by the thorns, so perhaps you are held by sinful habits, worldly

pursuits or bad companions, and are kept from the spiritual blessings the Lord has provided for you.

In the same way a sheep when it rolls on its back can seldom get up again. This happens often just prior to shearing when the wool is thick and makes the back flat, or just before lambing when the ewe is heavy with young. If left on its back the sheep will soon die. What a waste! This is not only the death of the ewe, but of the lambs she is carrying. A shepherd when he sees the four legs of the sheep in the air runs and pushes her over on to her feet, and steadies her until she fully recovers. Christian friend, be up and doing for the Lord, He is near at hand to assist you to be profitable again for Him.

UNDER SHEPHERDS

Jeremiah Ch. 23, dated approximately 600 BC, is a chapter which speaks of our Lord's birth and of the return of the Jews to their own land, which we are seeing today. It is not my intention to deal with this important teaching now, but to notice the warning these verses bring today to God's under shepherds. Look at verse 1 of the chapter "Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture" saith the Lord. What a privilege to be a pastor, one who has the care of a flock, but how important it is for him to realise this responsibility. We must care for those already in the flock and pray for discernment as others join us that we may recognise any who may be "wolves in sheep's clothing." Sadly so many churches have been divided in the way the sheep have been scattered. The true sheep however will stand together. We sometimes sing "Souls of men! Why will you scatter like a crowd of frightened sheep?" - Frederick William Faber 1814-63. It is true that initially sheep will scatter when they are frightened but not for long they always bunch together when danger is near. Here is a great lesson for the Lord's people: true fellowship is invaluable. All under shepherds, and that includes all who have responsibility of leadership in the Lord's name, preaching the word of God, listening to the needs of others, helping the sheep which is on its back on to its feet, taking the food to those who are too weak to come to get it with the rest of the flock, and always on duty for the Great Shepherd. A shepherd is concerned about every sheep in his flock, but especially about one which is away from the rest of the sheep, standing on its own, under the hedge, its head hanging down, ears drooped, not chewing its cud; if left it will soon be lying down, unable to stand. Pastor, have you got someone in your church like this? Yes, perhaps they do have a chip on the shoulder, but they need the Lord's servant to minister to them. The isolated sheep needs extra care. It has been my joy to see many four legged sheep that I have treated eventually begin to eat again and chew their cud and stand up and stretch. A shepherd expects to see a healthy sheep stretch when it stands up; it is putting rest and sleep, and sometimes weakness behind it: it is ready to walk and feed.

It has also been my joy to minister to those I lovingly refer to as "two legged sheep"; those in the Lord's flock who have been very low

spiritually. How good to see the Lord raise them up, to see them “stretch” and move forward with their Lord.

Some readers may not appreciate my next illustration but I believe it is important. As the sheep cannot chew its cud until it has eaten, how good it is to be able to reflect on and spiritually digest those blessings the Lord has given us. Please read 1 Kings 19:1-8. We too can go in the strength the Lord gives us.

There is always great interest at lambing time; town and city dwellers drive into the country, stop their cars and look over the hedge to see the lambs with their mothers. This is necessary for the welfare of the lambs they need the care of the ewes. Why then do we so often keep the children separate in our churches? Of course the Sunday school and bible class are important, but see to it that the sheep and lambs are together as much as possible. The lambs have a vital part to play in the church.

It is very rewarding to be able to assist the ewes at lambing time. Quite often the help of the shepherd is needed and it does not matter how many years of experience the shepherd has, the wonder of a new life is still the same. However every sheep farmer knows the importance of watching both ewe and lamb for the next few hours. The ewe and her lambs are put in a pen so that bonding might take place and to ascertain the lambs are being fed. What a time of rejoicing it is when someone becomes a Christian, not only for that person, we are told there is rejoicing in heaven when a soul is saved but as the new born lamb needs care, so too does the new Christian. Outreach and follow up is the responsibility of the local pastor and church fellowship. There is a limit to what the shepherd can do for the sheep and the pastor for his people. Every shepherd has spent time and effort in holding a weak newborn lamb to its mother to encourage that first feed, but sometimes it just refuses to take the milk. Then after all the shepherds effort, when left alone it will feed on its own. It is so important for the new convert to be fed the “milk of the word”, 1 Peter 2:2, but it is also so necessary for all of us to read for ourselves the scripture so that we may grow and be strengthened spiritually.

MOVING TO NEW PASTURES

During spring and summer a flock sometimes has to be transported long distances to new pastures. The whole flock, ewes and lambs are collected into a pen and taken load by load through the day. Each time ewes are taken without their lambs, and lambs are taken without their mothers. As each load is taken there is a separation and distress on the part of ewes and lambs, but as each load arrives at the new pastures there is rejoicing and, by the end of the day, each ewe is reunited with its lambs, but still under the care of its own shepherd. There are sorrowful experiences in life for all of us, every day through death someone is separated from a loved one but there will be another meeting where we “shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever,” provided we are part of the flock.

Please allow me to ask you some important questions:

Have you personally thanked the Lord Jesus Christ for paying the supreme sacrifice, as the lamb on the cross? Have you personally acknowledged your sin and asked for His forgiveness? Do this now and be in His flock.

Perhaps you are a believer but you know you have wandered from the shepherd and the rest of the flock. The shepherd longs for your return. Are you an under shepherd? Look around you; many are hungry for the word: there is no substitute; others are weak, lead them to our Great Shepherd.

Copies available from:

Mr. S.J. Kimber, Beaconsfield Cottage, Lippen Lane, Warnford,
Southampton, SO32 3LE

Copyright © S.J. Kimber 2000, 2009. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without prior permission.