

The Sabbath School.

INTERNATIONAL L.E.SON.

Third Quarter Lesson 9, Aug. 26, 1900

JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD—John 10: 1-21.

Read Psa. 23; John 10: 1-21.

Commit Verses 9-11.

GOLDEN TEXT.—The good Shepherd giveth his life for his sheep—John 10: 11.

HISTORICAL SETTING

Time.—Probably October, A. D. 29, in close connection with the last lesson.

Place.—In or near Jerusalem.

Connection.—A new and beautiful light is thrown over this lesson by keeping in mind the close connection between this lesson and the last. The Pharisees, who held the place of shepherds of God's flock, were not true shepherds. Like hirelings, they neglected the sheep and sought their own advantage and not the good of the sheep. Like robbers, they spoiled and destroyed the sheep. They had driven out of the fold one of the sheep, the blind man. Jesus showed himself the good shepherd. He was the door for that poor blind man into green pastures. Thus Jesus set before leaders and people a picture of the bad shepherd and the good shepherd, that they might be convicted of their sin, and might find the good shepherd and the true fold.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND HIS FLOCK.—Vs. 1-6. (1) THE SHEEPFOLD.—Verily, verily. Emphasizing what he was about to say. Into the sheepfold. The sheepfolds of the East, while there are sometimes within them low, flat buildings for shelter in severe weather, are mere enclosures surrounded by a wall of loose stones with thorn bushes upon the top, or a palisade, and effectual barrier against the wolves. One such fold serves for a large district. To this the shepherds lead their flocks at night. When the flocks have been carefully counted, sheep by sheep, as they enter, the door of the fold is fastened, and the fold is guarded by the porter. There prowl Bedouins, whose trade is sheep stealing, but the porter will not let them in. In the morning each shepherd calls his own sheep forth. They recognize his voice, and follow him as he goes before them. The doorkeeper, or porter, sleeps just outside the door; the watch dogs also remain outside. The sheepfold symbolizes the kingdom of heaven.

(2) THIEVES AND ROBBERS.—Climbeth up some other way, instead of the regular path by which the shepherd comes. A pilferer, sneak thief, one who gains his booty by craft. A robber suggests the idea of violence, and of an organized band. These were those who claimed to be the Messiah, but without the works and character of the true Messiah. They robbed instead of feeding. The people could easily see the application.

(3) THE GOOD SHEPHERD.—He that entered in by the door. The door represents the right way of entering upon the duties of a shepherd. Jesus, as the good shepherd, was divinely appointed; his purposes, his teachings, his works, his miracles, etc., were those which must belong to a good shepherd of God's people. To him the porter openeth.—The way is opened for the prophets who prepared the way, by the divine power working in him, and all through his ministry. And he calleth his own sheep by name.—It is a remarkable fact in Oriental husbandry, that in a flock of hundreds each individual sheep has its name, knows it, and is known by it. As we sat and looked, almost spellbound, the silent hillside around us were in a moment filled with life and sound. Thousands of sheep and goats were there, grouped in dense, confused masses. The shepherds stood together until all came out, then they separated, each shepherd taking a different path and uttering, as he advanced, a shrill, peculiar call. The sheep heard them. At first the masses swayed and moved, as if shaken by some internal convulsion, then points struck out in the direction taken by the shepherds; these became longer and longer, until the confused masses were resolved into long, living streams, flowing after their leaders.—J. L. Porter, D. D.

TO CALL BY NAME implies: (1) That the shepherd takes a personal interest in each individual's peculiar circumstances, so that he ministers what he specially needs. (2) That he assigns to each one the work for which he is best fitted. (3) That he can accept the love and loyalty of each individual. Jesus, the good shepherd, does all this and more for his flock. And leadeth them out. To pasture, showing them where are the best feeding places, and the waters. Jesus thus leads his disciples. His Holy Spirit will guide into all truth.

No one is wise enough to choose his own life for himself. He goeth before them. The Oriental shepherd never drives his flock as we do, but goes before them. Jesus never asks us to go where he does not go, or to do or suffer anything he has not done or suffered. He is the perfect example.

(4) THE FLOCK.—Their ears are open to listen to his call, and to learn his will. This is one test of a good sheep. And the sheep follow him. They so trust their shepherd that they follow wherever he leads. But there are some sheep that are a ways stragglers and so always getting into trouble. Sometimes they are torn by dogs and sometimes they lose their way. Those who keep near to the shepherd are most contented and happy.

They know his voice. There are characteristics to each one's voice by which he can be recognized. The disciple recognizes his Master's voice. There are peculiarities of character, of spirituality, of unselfishness, of reverence, of love, which show who it is that speaks. And a stranger will they not follow. If a stranger call they stop short, lift up their heads in alarm, and if it is repeated they turn and flee, because they know not the voice of a stranger. This is simple fact. For they know not the voice. The true disciples recognize a different spirit and tone and purpose and so will not follow. This parable they understood not. They did not see the point. They did not realize how it applied to them. They imagined that they were good shepherds.

THE DOOR OF THE SHEEP.—Vs. 7-10. (1) Jesus is the door. Then said Jesus. Since they did not understand his illustration, Jesus proceeds to interpret and apply it. I am the door of the sheep. Through him the sheep enter the fold and the flock, to receive the shelter, care, food, and the holy character which fits them for heaven.

The door is an emblem (1) of admitting the right persons; (2) of shutting out enemies and dangers; (3) of protection; (4) of hospitality. By me if any man enter in. To the fold, to the kingdom of God. He shall be saved. Safe from the sin that would ruin; and shall go in and out. We must go in to learn to trust, to rest, to think, before we can go out to do good to others. And find pasture. Compare the green fields and still waters of the 23rd Psalm, and the bread of life in Lesson II of this quarter. There is something to satisfy every want and longing of the soul. I am come that they might have life... abundantly. Jesus gives his disciples eternal life. He feeds and inspires this life more and more.

(2) THIEVES AND ROBBERS.—All that ever came before me. Not all teachers or prophets, but all who came professing to be the Messiah. Are thieves and robbers. The teachers opposed to Christ were robbing the people of salvation. But the sheep did not hear them. The true people of God did not go after these false Messiahs. The true people still hoped and looked for spiritual redemption. They saw in Jesus the marks of the true Messiah. The thief cometh not, but for to steal and to kill, and to destroy. Such were the Pharisees, who were robbing and destroying both body and soul.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD GIVES HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP.—Vs. 11-16. Jesus is the good shepherd. I am the good shepherd. Jesus fails to men the ideal shepherd. The good shepherd giveth (layeth down freely) his life for the sheep. This is the test of any good shepherd, that he is faithful even unto death. Even to this day the shepherd must risk his life in defending his flock. So it was in David's time, when he slew the lion and the bear in defending his flock. Jesus died to save his sheep from their great enemy, sin.

And know my sheep. Connect this verse with v. 15, putting between them a comma only, as in the R. V. As the Father knoweth me, i. e., completely, through and through. He knows our thoughts and hopes, our plans and needs, our temptations and dangers, what is good for us, the effect of each influence upon our lives, what discipline is good for us. Thus he can take perfect care of us. And am known of mine. They are his friends and are acquainted with him. Working with Christ, studying his character, striving to be like him, loving him, all help us to know him. And to know him better is to love him more.

(2) THE HIRELING. But he that is an hireling. Not every one that receives pay is a hireling, but one who serves only for pay, without love for the work or care for the employer. He is a hireling who is seeking his own interests, his reputation, his gains, more than the good of the flock. The true pastor never works for his pay, but the people support him so that he may give all his time to the care of the sheep.

(3) THE WOLF.—The wolf is the enemy of souls in any of his manifold disguises, as not only persecutor, but heresy, worldly living, or a low standard of faith and morals.

(4) ONE FLOCK, MANY FOLDS.—And other sheep I have which are not of this fold. The Gentiles, who were not in the kingdom of God, but would be brought in. He does not say "of another fold," as if there were then another true church, but "not of this fold," scattered abroad, without fold as yet. They shall hear my voice. They will listen to the gospel, and to the voice of God, and accept his invitations, and become the sheep of his flock. And there shall be one fold. Better, one flock; no one exclusive enclosure of an outward church, but one flock, all knowing the one shepherd, and known of him. And one flock because one shepherd; one not in creed, or organization, or method of worship, but one in Christ Jesus. One in heart, one in purpose, one in the service of God and man.

Keep the Record.

A young girl, called by her friend a great reader, kept account for a year of the books she read, putting them down in a small blank book, numbering each and marking with a star anything read for the second time. At the end of the year she read over her list, and found in it several things to surprise her. First of all, she found that she had not read nearly as much as she supposed, having exceeded the hundred by a few volumes only, although when this number was regarded as an average of two books a week it did not seem so small.

Next, she was not prepared to discover that the proportion of her reading given to fiction was considerably more than three quarters.

Lastly, knowing herself not to be a reader of actual trash, she was amazed to find how many books she had read which were merely agreeable at the moment and of no permanent value. Standard books as compared with ephemeral literature held a place in her list of which she could not feel that she had reason to be proud.

She was startled by these observations, but was interested enough to continue her record another year, and indeed she has kept it ever since.

"It is so little trouble," she says, "and so full of interest to oneself as time passes! In my little Book of Books, as I call it, I can look back and follow my gulf track through the Scott fever, the Dickens mania, the Thackeray period, my poetic time, my relapse into romantic novels, my digression among detective stories and remorseful returns to particularly dry and solid philosophy, my happy acquaintance with George Eliot, my discovery—such it seemed to me—of Emerson; and note along the way the increasing stars which indicate the gradual formation of my taste, and my recurrence to the authors I love best."

"And I know that my record has helped me to read well. I did not like to read books which I should not wish to put down in it, and many a time the conspicuous absence of some author with whose work it seemed time for me to become acquainted has sent me to the library shelf to seek him out. "To keep the journal of an uneventful life in a manner at once truthful, unexaggerated and interesting is no easy task, and tends to make many who try it egotistic; but to keep, by a simple list of titles, half the journal of one's mind, is as easy as it is desirable. I should feel sorry indeed to lose the little blank book that can reveal no secrets, wreak no spite, do harm to no one, and yet means so much to me."

The books we read must be either foes or friends—they help or harm us. It is well to understand thoroughly—as many careless readers never do—what literary company we keep; what possible friends we put from us, what intimates we choose, what unwise associates we tolerate. Set down in black and white, there can be no mistake. A good record is a solid satisfaction, and a poor one often leads to a better sequel.

Questionable Reading.

Next to the people with whom we mingle, the books which we read shape our sentiments and make us what we really are. A recent writer gives in the following incident a suggestion which cannot fail to prove helpful in these days of wide and careless reading:

Coming down to the office on a train, a few mornings since, we noticed a girl of our acquaintance eagerly reading a book. Our seat was just behind the one occupied by her, and it was impossible not to see the title of the volume she was devouring. It was a well known book of questionable moral teaching. That evening, we chanced to meet this young friend just as we reached the station, and, upon entering a coach, we sat down together. Presently we said: "I was sorry to see you in questionable company on the train this morning."

The young woman looked startled, and said: "Why, you are certainly mistaken. I was alone."

"Not alone," we said; "and you seemed to be much delighted with your company."

"What do you mean?" our young friend demanded, her eyes flashing with indignation.

"Simply this," was replied. "You were reading a silly book. You were reading it with evident relish. You were so held by its fascination that you noticed nothing that was transpiring about you and looked up in real surprise when you found yourself at your journey's end. A book is a companion. A silly book is a silly companion. A silly companion is a questionable one. A questionable one is a dangerous one. You judge people by the society they seem to enjoy. Is it not fair to judge them, also, by the books they choose?"—Monthly Greetings.

Work of Sunday-School Teacher.

The other day several school children visited the residence of ex-President Harrison, and he made them a little address. He said: "I am fond of children. I like and try to help all those agencies that are devised to take care of them intellectually and morally, and help those who are poor and outcast. I have a notion that they are about the only people we can do much of anything for. When we get to be men and women we are spoiled or improved. The work is then done. But while young, a great deal can be done for us."

How admirably this shows the work of the Sunday-school teacher and the responsible position he occupies. If he fails to do his duty, how sad the results! He further said:

"Young people are always interested in looking to the future. I want to remind you that some time or other you will take a backward glance. You will look over your shoulder at the road by which you have come. A great deal of the comfort of life will depend upon that backward look. If as you look backward you see there is a road that goes up, it will indicate to you that you have been going down. If as you look backward you see that the road goes down, that you stand in a higher place, that will mean that you have been going up, and that is the comfort." And that kind of a road each one of us may travel.—Our Bible Teacher.

A Woman's Predicament.

The Chicago Post describes the sad case of a woman who was waiting at the "limits car barn" for an Evanston Avenue car.

There were plenty of Evanston cars, but her transfer check was good only on the avenue line, and she was determined not to pay another fare.

At last, as night approached, she went to a telephone and called up her husband. She told him the situation—that no Evanston Avenue cars seemed to be running, that it was getting dark, and she was afraid. "Why, take an Evanston car," he replied.

"But I have to pay another fare," she objected. "Well, what of it? You don't want to stay there, do you?"

"But I can't," she said, and hesitated.

"Why not?" he asked. "Because—because, I haven't any money. I just used my last dime in the telephone to call you up."

And then she wondered at the laugh which reached her ears over the wire.

He who has learned to see what is lovely in field and forest and landscape has found an exhaustless resource of gladness.—Rev. J. Miller.

The less we parade our misfortunes the more sympathy we command.—O. D. wey.

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