

THE SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP

A SERMON

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“Woe to the idol shepherd that leaves the flock! the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened.” Zechariah 11:17

I WILL take the text in its general application to our necessities, and to our circumstances. And in so doing I will try, in the first place, to point out *the flock of God*; and then, secondly, that *there are four characters upon whom this woe rests*; and then, third, *the woe as described in our text as standing in contrast with the blissful destiny of the real people of God*.

First, then, I will try to point out *the flock of God*, who they are, how they are distinguished, after I have just observed that in their persecutions, they are called the flock of slaughter. I am aware there are spiritual respects in which they may be called the flock of slaughter, but upon those I will not dwell. I will just remind you, then, of the kind of character which the world, and especially the professing world, has in all ages disapproved of. Let us take the first martyr, and he will be a fair representation of the flock of God, and of those that the world disapproves of. Now we all know that Abel was a man that was brought to know his need of sacrificial perfection. He brought the spotless lamb, he knew there was spotlessness or perfection nowhere but in Christ, and this lamb was for sacrifice, substitutional sacrifice. Abel, therefore, was a man that possessed that faith described by the apostle when he says, “It is therefore by faith that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed.” This is that religion that has been hated by the world from the beginning down to the present time; and the dear Savior himself held this religion, he was the very substance of it, and therefore no marvel that the world, under the influence of Satan, should also persecute and crucify Jesus Christ. But I will come, then, to describe the sheep of Christ. They are spoken of in this chapter as poor. “I will feed the flock of slaughter, even you, O poor of the flock.” There is one characteristic; they are poor and needy. Now, whenever you read of poverty, or being poor, as an evidence of being a Christian, you must look at that by which the Lord promises to supply the need of such a poor person, and then the nature of that by which the need is supplied will point out to you very clearly the kind of poverty that is meant. I will give you this one sample: “Blessed are the poor in spirit;” there is the declaration. Now, what is the supply of that poor man? Why, the Savior says, “Theirs is the kingdom of God.” And what are we to understand by the kingdom of God? We are to understand that state of life, that state of peace, that

state of victory, that state of justification, and that state of infallible plenty that is by Christ Jesus the Lord; and that this state of things cannot, says Daniel, be destroyed; his kingdom can never be destroyed. Here, then, is a life that can never die; here is peace, and of course, I include in that, pardon and justification, sanctification, and eternal security; this can never be destroyed, and, as the apostle says, can never be moved. And the apostle gives us distinctly to understand that we can serve God acceptably only by qualities that agree with this kingdom; and as this kingdom rules over all, and can never be moved, the apostle says, "Let us," then, receiving this kingdom that cannot be moved, "Let us have grace." I rather prefer the marginal reading there; instead of "Let us have grace," the words in the margin, "Let us *hold fast* grace," and then the meaning is this, at least, so I understand it: Let us hold fast the gospel of grace; let us hold fast the delightful truth that it is by grace that you are saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. Let us hold this fast, seeing we have a high priest whose blood cleanses from all sin; let us hold fast this provision; let us hold fast this grace, this gospel of grace; and then we shall be sanctified by the truth, we shall then have in us the belief of the truth, we shall then have in us the love of the truth, "that we may serve God acceptably," there it is, "with reverence and with godly fear." So that the kind of supply to the poor there is this kingdom of life, this kingdom of plenty, this kingdom of eternal certainty. So that with all our professing to be poor and needy creatures, if we are not poor enough to receive such a kingdom as that, then our poverty is not of the right kind, because we do not receive that which the Lord has promised; and we shall have something very like that come before us presently in the course of our description of the sheep this morning. Now, then, they are in this chapter said to be poor. "I will feed the flock of slaughter, even you, O poor of the flock." And one consequence is that those who are really poor, they wait upon the Lord; they feel that if they are led into the green pastures, the Lord alone can so lead them; that if they are made to drink of the still waters, the pure springs that rise from God's everlasting love, the Lord alone can lead them so to do. Now, then, these sheep are known, not only by their needing the mercies of the Lord, but they are known also by the relation in which they stand to the Lord. And one relation in which they stand to the Lord is that of covenant relation. We have in this chapter two staves in the hands of the Shepherd; the one he called Beauty, and the other he called Bands; and he broke one of these staves to represent the dissolution of the old covenant, "That I might break my covenant which I had made with all the people." Now the apostle says that this first covenant was taken away to make way for the second. So that the true sheep of Jesus Christ, while one covenant is broken, indicated by the staff being broken, and called the staff of beauty because it was a beautiful covenant, and exalted them to all that beauty of state which they enjoyed in Solomon's day, and sometimes temporarily in after ages as a type of the new covenant. Now, then, the Lord brings his sheep into the bond of the new covenant, and he speaks to them in the language of that covenant; and the language of that covenant, from the first line, I was going to say, of this great roll of God's counsels, that the language of that covenant, from the first line to the last, is "I *will*," and "they *shall*;" that is the language. And they are led to see that, as God could swear by no greater, he has sworn by himself, that "in blessing I will bless you." Now, this is that rod or staff which is never to be broken; this is one of the rods or staves that David looked to as a symbol of a covenant that is never to be broken, when he said, "Your rod and your staff they comfort me." Now let us hear, then, the Savior speak in the language of this covenant, and let us see if you and I believe it, if we understand it, if we love it, if we are brought into harmony with it; for this is another remarkable distinction of the sheep, that they will not hear the voice of strangers, but they will fly from them; but the shepherd's voice they hear, the shepherd's voice they understand, and the shepherd's voice they follow. We have nothing to do but turn to the

pastoral parts of the word of the Lord; and they are so numerous that one hardly knows where, amidst the various excellencies, to go; but I will here, for conciseness' sake, just refer to the 10th chapter of John. You know what the dear Savior's voice there is, that he speaks to them in the language of this everlasting covenant. "I am the door; by me if any man enters in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. I lay down my life for the sheep." You observe here, there is no uncertainty about the Savior's living, and no uncertainty about his dying. It was certain that he would die, and it was certain that he would by that death achieve eternal redemption; it was certain by that death that he would put sin eternally away; it was certain that he would do all by that death which prediction declared that he should. Now then, if we are the sheep of Christ, the voice of Christ by his death is that which we shall hear. We shall recognize what his death has done, we shall see what it has done. We shall love God the Father in sending us such a shepherd; for it was because he loved us that he sent us such a shepherd; we shall love Jesus Christ because of what he has done, and we shall love the Holy Spirit of God in revealing this. And then the Savior traces the matter out further, and he says of his sheep, "I give unto them eternal life;" you see here is no uncertainty, "and they shall never perish." What wonderful scriptures are these! Here is the death, the atoning death, of the Shepherd, that achieves all that we can need; and then here is the declaration, "I give unto them eternal life;" for "you have given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life unto as many as you have given him;" "and they shall never perish." You may lift up your eyes to the heavens, and you may look upon the earth beneath; the heavens may vanish away like smoke, and the earth wax old like a garment; "but my salvation shall be forever, my righteousness shall not be abolished;" "neither shall any man pluck them out of my hands." And some people there are that think we ought not to say too much about this certainty of the Lord's truth; but such persons show that they know but little of the experience of the true sheep. The true sheep of Christ is one who feels himself diseased by sin, sick by sin, and corruption, and wretchedness, mourning that in his flesh dwelleth no good thing; "O wretched man that I am!" The true sheep is one that feels himself a broken-down sinner, broken down from all hope by anything that he can do; he is broken down to self-despair, and that unless the God of mercy become his hope, that sinner feels he has no hope. The experience of the true sheep is the man that feels he is driven away from God by sin, and driven away by the sentence of the law; that there are bounds set by the law between him and God, and that there is no access to God by the law, and that unless some other way he opened for him he never can come near to where holiness, justice, and integrity reign; he must be banished from the presence; such a wretch the poor creature feels himself to be, he sees his only lot must be to be banished from the presence of infinite holiness, and justice, and integrity; feels himself to be a poor, lost creature. Now then, the man who says we must not say too much about the certainty of this covenant, or God's truth, and the man that is a stranger to these experiences, let me then again remind you of the Savior's words: "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." You would have thought that was enough; you would have thought, by such assurances as these, what more can be wanted? Here is his death achieving all that we need; here is the eternal life that follows upon death being swallowed up in victory; we shall never perish; as that life shall never perish, neither shall we; and here is his possession of us; he will never part from us. One would think that would be enough; he would not wish, one would think, to use stronger language than that. But the Savior knew what poor, timid things his sheep would be, and he knew how glad they would be amid the ten thousand evils of which they feel themselves to be the subjects, and the ten thousand uncertainties that attend their path through this wilderness world, having to say, every step they go,

“In life’s uncertain path I stand,
Beset with snares on every hand;”

the Savior, knowing this, knew that they would prize the certainty of his truth; and therefore it did not seem enough in his eyes, and I am sure it is none too much in my eyes what he does say; “I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand;” this did not seem enough, and therefore he says, “My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.” As though he should say, Were the thing possible, which, bless God, it is not possible; but as though he should say, Were the thing possible for any adverse powers to pluck them out of my hands, then they would be as far off as ever, for my Father, which gave them me, is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. Well might the Old Testament saints rejoice, then, that “Your saints are in your hands, they shall sit down at your feet; everyone,” without exception, “shall receive of your words.” Here then is the staff of beauty, never to be broken; here is a covenant never to be broken. And in the language of this covenant the Savior speaks to his people in words that I think are engraved upon my very soul, entwined in my best affections; “They live in me, and I live in them.” They have been made peculiarly dear to me because they represent the very subject we are now upon. When he gave the cup to his disciples, “This is my blood,” not in a broken covenant; “This is my blood,” not in a covenant that waxed old, and that vanishes away; “This is my blood,” not pertaining to those Jewish heavens that are changed, and that I have folded up as a vesture, and they are changed; “This is my blood of the *new* testament,” of the new covenant; the new heavens, the new earth, the new and living way; “behold, I make all things new;” “my blood of the new testament.” Are you poor enough to need such a kingdom? are you poor enough to need such a Shepherd? are you needy enough to need these divine securities? Can you find security anywhere else? Look at poor old nature; look at circumstances; look at the hardness and darkness, rebellions and infidelities of which we are the subjects; quite enough to stop our mouths, make us loathe ourselves in our own sight on the one hand, but, on the other hand, to lead our souls out in intense love to God, in intense adoration of the dear Redeemer, and to cause us to cling with all our hearts and souls unto these living truths, the truth as it is in Jesus. Here then is the flock of God, poor and needy; and they are brought into the bond of the covenant, where Jesus speaks to them in the language of this covenant of his pastoral responsibility. “Ought not Christ to have suffered,” none dare to have said such words as those if the Savior himself had not said them, or the Holy Spirit by an inspired servant to have said so, “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” All the sheep will be demanded of him at the last, and, as we sometimes say, he will not have to come as Jacob did. Jacob did as well as lie could, and we all admire his faithfulness; but Jacob’s account of his pastoral care and his pastoral work was very poor and lame in comparison of that of the dear Savior. Jacob says, “That which was stolen I bore the loss of.” Ah, the dear Savior won’t come before God at the last day, and say, The devil has stolen one, and I will bear the loss of it; no,

“None of the ransomed shall ever be lost;
The righteous shall hold on his way.”

And Jacob says, “That which was torn I brought not unto you.” Ah, the dear Savior finds all his sheep torn to pieces, and heals them, makes them whole, and makes them happy, and will present

them at that tremendous day in all the perfection of his own mediatorial achievement. It is one of the sweetest evidences of belonging to God your being so shaken to pieces, and pulled to pieces, and torn to pieces, and driven out of every vestige of creature holiness, and creature righteousness, and cast your anchor only on the sacrificial ground of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is one of the sweetest evidences of belonging to God that your hope is set as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, entering within the veil. Do not be afraid to hope, entering within the veil: do not be afraid to go into the holy of holies. What shall I find there? "Whither Jesus, our forerunner, is for us entered." In what capacity? "Being made a high priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." What, afraid to go to where the atonement for my sins shines in perfection? What, afraid to go where redemption shows up its brilliancy and perfection? Afraid to go to where my perfection is, where my acceptance is, where God my Father is, where my life is, where my liberty is? for they shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. These are two evidences, then; first, poverty; second, to be brought into the bond of this covenant, where the staff is never to be broken. The staff is the symbol of support; and if we call it a rod, it is a symbol of government; a covenant wherein he will never cease to support us and to govern us.

But, again, there is another staff spoken of in this chapter, called Bands; and the Lord broke that staff, that he might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel. That dissolution of brotherhood means two things: first, Jesus Christ was a Jew, and he was patriotic, too, in perfection; he loved his nation as a man, felt for his country as a man, wept over Jerusalem; and if the people would have listened to him, he would have averted the Roman invasion, he would have reformed the nation, and they might have been a prosperous people to this day. He exhorted them to repent, he exhorted them to believe, on the ground of that personal responsibility under which everyone stands; but of course that repentance and that faith materially and essentially differ from that repentance and that faith which the Lord alone can give, that accompanies eternal salvation. Now, then, he sympathized thus with them; but he had no commission to make them repent, therefore he could not do what he had no commission to do; he had no commission to make them come and listen to him, therefore he could not do it consistently with God's counsels. But presently, when he dies, when the Savior dies, then the second staff is broken; flesh and blood, or natural relationship to the Jews, is dissolved; and after the Savior rose from the dead, he never expressed, in all he said, one word of sympathy with the Jewish nation. He did not pray for them, he did not weep over them, he did not inquire after them, he expressed not the least sympathy whatever with them after he rose from the dead; because the brotherhood was now broken; he ceased to be a Jew, he ceased to belong to one nation; rose from the dead, and became the property of all nations. "Go you and preach the gospel to all the world." I am now the property of all nations. I have been hitherto the property of one nation; I will now be the property of all nations. And so, John sees in vision a people out of all nations, languages, and tongues, standing before the throne, and that by virtue of relationship to Jesus Christ. Thus you find he never expressed any sympathy, after he rose from the dead, with the Jews; so far from that, he would not allow any carnal Jew to see him; no, he would not allow any to be witnesses of his resurrection, that he was alive, but his own disciples. This is a solemn matter; just so it will be with Christians by-and-bye. Your sympathies and mine to everything natural will by-and-bye die, and live no more forever, because they would interrupt us; if we could carry our flesh and blood sympathies to heaven, those flesh and blood sympathies would hinder the joys of heaven, interfere with the glories there. But flesh and blood sympathies cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Those who were dear to us here in the ties of nature will be the same to us there as others, and no more; and those we have never seen

will be the same to us there as those who in the days of our pilgrimage we have seen. "Behold," said the Savior, "I make all things new." But while the brotherhood was broken between Christ and the Jews, and so the brotherhood shall be broken by-and-by between mere professors and real possessors. There is a seeming relation between the foolish and the wise virgins; but the time comes when the brotherhood is broken. There is a seeming relation between those who have a name to live, and are dead; but at the same time the time will come when this relation shall be dissolved; no more false profession; the reality of every man's character must come to light, let it be what it may. If it be bad, his wickedness will be shown before assembled worlds; and if it be good, not one of his sins shall appear in the presence of those assembled worlds, but he himself appear in all the sacrificial triumphs of the blest Redeemer; yes, the top-stone thus shall be brought home with shouting's of grace, and grace unto it; and from the foundation to the top-stone not a flaw, not a fault shall be seen: eternal perfection shall reign in glory there. Now then, while that flesh and blood, or natural relationship of Christ and the Jews was dissolved, the relationship he has to his brethren, a natural relationship; he has a natural relationship to his people; I do not mean an earthly natural, but a spiritually natural; not a first Adam natural relationship, but a last Adam relationship; not a mortal, but an immortal relationship; not a corruptible, but an incorruptible; not that which can perish, but that which is imperishable, as traced out by the apostle; the relationship he has to his brethren shall never be dissolved. When the end shall be, the Savior shall say, "Here am I, and all those whom you have given me." So in taking our nature, he thus took the seed of Abraham; he took these people into indissoluble oneness with himself; and as no separation can take place between the two natures of Christ, so no separation can take place between Christ and the church; as no separation can take place between the Eternal Three, so no separation can take place between the Savior and any one of his people. His sheep are his sheep, and he is the Shepherd still; "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Thus, then, here is the poor and needy; second, brought into covenant relationship; and Christ speaks to them in the language of that relationship; and he also speaks to them in the language of this, I hardly know how to express it; I will call it spiritually natural relationship, "I ascend to my Father and to your Father." "He who sanctifies" that is, Christ, "and they who are sanctified" that is, the people, "are all of one;" the blessed God has constituted them one, and on the ground of that oneness the Savior owns them; "for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren." That is the very ground upon which we are rejected by the world. Says the professor, Of all people, those election people I dislike more than any; of all people, those people that make out that when a man is a Christian once, he is a Christian forever; of all people, those people that talk about an immutable covenant, and the impossibility of being lost, I dislike above all others. Do you? Now just think that over again. Some here, I dare say, this morning, that have said that; perhaps saying it now. Well now, if that be your character, the Lord open your eyes to see that you are doing what perhaps you would not like to do. What is that say you? You would not like to differ from Christ if you knew it, would you? No; I do not like those people, but I should not like to differ from him. But he owns them on the ground of election.

Now hear me again. "He who sanctifies," that is, Christ, sanctifies them by his own blood; "and they who are sanctified," mark that that is, the people, "are all of one." God chose Christ, God chose the people, and God has constituted them one. "For which cause," mark that! God has made them one, Christ is "not ashamed to call them brethren." So, you are ashamed of them, are you, because they are what you call election people? Why, it is the very ground upon which the Savior owns them; therefore, you differ from Jesus Christ. You cannot go to heaven in that state. No. The

Lord open your eyes, and give you to see that your sin is greater than you imagine, and that you are farther from the kingdom of God than you imagine, and that you can enter there only in the Lord's own way; to enter there with a lie in your right hand is utterly impossible; for nothing that defiles, works abomination, or makes a lie, can enter there. May the Lord open your eyes to see and understand what you are doing; because, though you may be a despiser today, it does not follow that you may be tomorrow.

I am not speaking unkindly to you, that would be unbecoming in me; I am speaking kindly, and prayerfully, and earnestly, with a desire that you may see the truth, fall in with the truth, and love the truth, and walk in the truth, and live in the truth, and profit by the truth, and die in the truth, and rise in the truth, and sing forever truth is your shield and buckler.

I must now hasten to point out *four characters upon whom the woe shall rest*. First, the man, let him be what he may, that does not belong to this flock, woe unto that man! For you must be either a sheep or a goat, there is no medium; must be either wheat or tares; must be either saved or lost; must be either cursed or blessed; must be either at the left hand or at the right at the last day; there is no medium. And, therefore, if you are not a poor, broken-down sinner, seeking mercy, then you are under the law, and the law speaks to them that are under it, and it has nothing to say to them but bitter cursing, lamentation, mourning, and woe. We know that whatsoever the law says, it says to them that are under the law. And, my fellow dying mortal, if you do not belong to this flock, if you are not a seeker after God's mercy, and giving some evidence you belong to this flock, then you are one upon whom the woe must rest. May the Lord open the eyes of such, and bring them into that fold where life reigns, and where there is a peaceful Shepherd who says, "Him that comes unto me I will in no way cast out." The second character upon whom this woe rests is the man who has professed to belong to the flock but has left it. "Woe to the idol shepherd!" the man that has got some false doctrine, some idolatry of some kind; the idol shepherd and the idol man, the idol-loving man, the error-loving man, the world-loving man, that leaves the flock, woe unto him! If you are a real child of God, you will not wish to leave the people of God; you will weep with them; or else how can it be said, "I was an hungry, and you gave me meat; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came unto me"? If you are a real child of God, you will therefore sympathize with the sheep, you will not leave them, and go away and despise them in their troubles, but rather your heart will go out to God in prayer for them; or else you are an awful hypocrite to sit in the chapel, and sing that hymn,

"My soul shall pray for Zion still,
While life or breath remains;
There my best friends and kindred dwell,
There God my Savior reigns."

But the professor who has once professed to belong to the flock, and is gone away, the last state of that man is worse than the first; better that he never should have known the way of righteousness, than after he knew it go away; for he will not only be condemned as an Adam-fallen sinner, and as a personal and practical sinner, but also as an apostate, and he shall have his portion among the lowest rank of devils that howl through the regions of the damned. The third character upon whom the woe rests is the careless. Some people go sleeping on, and they are quite content with going

through the form of religion, and as to whether their neighbors, or the people or nation around, are cursed or blessed, saved or lost, damned or not, they do not care, and they do not like to be disturbed. Now then, "Woe unto them that are at ease in Zion!" When I see the carnal feasts of the great have more attraction for professors than the house of God, I think of the words in the 6th of Amos, "They drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments; but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph," no practical sympathy with the church of God, with the gospel of God, or with the progress of that gospel. I make no hesitation in saying to you that we as Christians, we as a church, and we as a congregation, never ought to rest all the time there is one sinner around us under the powers of darkness. We never ought to rest while we can, by any means, by any possibility, be the means of furthering that glorious gospel of the blessed God, by which sinners are saved, and his name is glorified. Do you not find dreadful woes upon them that would take away the key of knowledge, and care nothing for the progress of the gospel? I would that we had a little more of that spirit described by the apostle when he said, "Neither count I my life dear unto me, that I might finish my course with joy:" and again, "I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus;" and again and again we see how he thirsted after, how he sought after, longed after, and labored after the furtherance of the glorious gospel of God. May the Lord increase us in that spirit; and may we, as a church and congregation here, live to see the day when we shall break forth on the right hand and on the left; when we shall be favored with a noble structure; when we shall be favored with one of the best Sunday schools in London, where the children shall hear the truth, and where, in connection with that, we shall have some evening schools as well, to teach the children of needy Christians a little writing and arithmetic, that we may help them on in the world, as well as be the means of helping them on in spiritual things; and that we may be the means of instructing and encouraging young men that we believe to have the grace and gifts for the ministry. There is not a good thing that I know of that I have not my heart more or less set upon. We must first get the building, which we are now aiming at; then the others, I doubt not, will all come in their place. The Lord give us grace and confidence. Never think, while the Lord lives, that he is bound or limited for means; everything belongs to him; and by faith in him we shall stand upon the vantage-ground of complete success, and rejoice that we have not been suffered to leave the flock, nor to leave the ways of the Lord. If God be with us, it matters not a rush what obstacles are in the way. He can divide the sea as easily as he can the Jordan; he can throw down the walls of Jericho as easily as he can blast Jonah's gourd; it matters not to him, to hinder or to help. "The Lord reigns," must be increasingly our song. I trust, therefore, that you and I shall stand free from the woe in our text, "Woe to the idol shepherd that leaves the flock!" God helping us, we wish to cleave to him with all our hearts and souls all our days. Then there is one more character upon whom the woe rests, and that is the opposer. Well, Pharaoh, you mean to say that the Israelites shall not leave the promised land? No, I will oppose them. Then you will go to the bottom of the sea. Well, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, you think Aaron has taken too much upon himself; you think there is too much perfection in Christ? Then the earth must open and swallow you up. Well, Amalekite and Amorite, you do not mean the Israelites to go into the land? Certainly, we do not. Then God will roll them in upon you like a mighty avalanche.