



LESSON,—SUNDAY, APRIL 5, 1908.

Jesus the Good Shepherd.

John x., 1-11. Memory verse, 9. Read John x., 1-18.

Golden Text.

The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.—John x., 11.

Home Readings.

- Monday, March 30.—John x., 1-18.
- Tuesday, March 31.—John x., 19-42
- Wednesday, April 1.—Ps. 23.
- Thursday, April 2.—Isa. xl., 1-11.
- Friday, April 3.—II. Pet. v., 1-11.
- Saturday, April 4.—John xxi., 15-25.
- Saturday, April 5.—Jer. xxiii., 1-8.

FOR THE JUNIOR CLASSES.

Start the children talking about some such little hymn as that beginning 'Jesus, tender shepherd, hear me,' or 'I am Jesus' little lamb,' with which they are all familiar and find out what they think this figure of speech means, why Jesus is called a 'shepherd' and children his 'lambs.'

We do not have so very many sheep in our country, but in the land where Jesus lived they were seen all over the hills, for a great many of the men of Palestine were shepherds. Do you remember how on the night when Christ was born the shepherds who lived around Bethlehem were the first people to be told about it? You know the angels told them when they were busy looking after their sheep. Jesus must have often watched the shepherds and seen how careful they were to keep their sheep from danger, taking them where they would find the nicest grass to eat and the easiest way to go, and sometimes when they would have to go over hard rocky ground to get to good pastures beyond, the shepherd would stop and pick up one of the little tired lambs who found the way so hard, and carry it until it was rested and strong again. And Jesus thought 'That is just the way I would like to care for my people and the dear little children.' So he says that if any one will come to him he will care for them and keep them from the dangers that are about us, give us the things we really need and when we grow tired, he will comfort and help us. Has Jesus proved that he really does love us like this? (Talk for a while on the golden text and Christ's death to free us from the power of sin.) Has Jesus really the power to save and help us that he claims to have? Yes, for he is God's own son and God himself works through Christ our Saviour.

FOR THE SENIORS.

This lesson follows immediately on last Sunday's subject of the blind man healed and the comparison between the true shepherd and the thief or the hireling follows naturally the contrast between the treatment of the one-time blind man by the Pharisees, who claimed to be the true leaders of the people and by Christ who received him and whose voice the poor man heard and answered. The difference in motive is expressed in that the Pharisees and such leaders are compared to the thief who comes to steal or the hireling whose object is what he 'can make out of the job,' and Christ whose motive is always to give,—to give life (verse 10), to give present care (verse 9), to give himself (verse 15). Christ elsewhere has called himself 'the way, the truth, and the life,' that is, the road, the guide along this road, and the ultimate end in view. Here he describes himself as both the door and the shepherd in much the same way. The Christian who lives 'in Christ' will

not find this difficult to understand, for Christ means so much to him. He is the door into a life of which we have but a glimpse as yet, he is that life itself, for 'to be with Christ' is the longing desire of his heart, yet more wonderfully even is it true that Christ is the ever present friend and guide along the way for 'So, I am with you always.' The representation of the coming Messiah as a shepherd was familiar from earliest prophecy (Gen. xlix., 24) and reached a higher expression in some of the beautiful passages of the later prophets. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel frequently spoke of the religious leaders of Israel as false shepherds who exploited the people for their own profit, so that the figure and comparison here used by Christ would not be unfamiliar. The fact of the atonement being based on the desires of both Father and Son is emphatically given in verse 18.

(SELECTIONS FROM TARBELL'S 'GUIDE'.)

1-18. The beautiful pastoral symbolism of our Lord's discourse runs through the first eighteen verses of this 10th chapter of John. It has been pointed out, however, that in these words we have not one parable but three, all of them drawn from Eastern pastoral life, each related to the others as part of a composite whole, yet each presenting a distinct contribution of thought.

These three parables are drawn from the circumstances attending three different hours of the pastoral day. The first parable is that of the Shepherd, and comprises the first six verses. The scene is laid in the early morning. During the night the sheep have been sheltered in a large open enclosure, in which, under the care of a single porter, numbers of flocks belonging to different owners have shared a common protection.

The second parable, which is that of the Door, runs from the seventh to the tenth verse, and carries forward our thought from daybreak to midday, and from the large night-fold to a structure set in the middle of the pasture. This fold meant to afford shade and security amid the day's heat and danger. The sheep may go in and out at will, according as they want food or rest. It was of this structure, with its wide swinging door, that Christ was thinking when He called Himself the Door. That door was at once a protection and a means of freedom.

The third parable shifts the scene still further forward and brings us to the close of the day. The shadows are creeping up the mountain slopes. The chills of sundown are in the air. The flocks must be led back to the night-fold. But on the way a sudden danger emerges. Wolves spring out of ambush and attack the sheep. It is a critical moment, and tests the quality of the shepherd. The hireling runs away. The good shepherd casts himself between the sheep and the wolves, and sacrifices himself to save the flock.—Charles A. Berry.

5. A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him. The shepherd depends upon the sheep to follow, and they in turn expect him never to leave them. They run after him if he appears to be escaping from them, and are terrified when he is out of sight, or when any stranger appears in his stead. He calls them from time to time to let them know that he is at hand. The sheep listen and continue grazing, but if any one else tries to produce the same peculiar cries and guttural sounds, they look around with a startled air, and begin to scatter.—Mackie's Bible. Manners and Customs.

I am the door, says Christ. It means that He is the great Opportunity of the human race. Now in what sense is He an opportunity to men? What do they gain by accepting the offer of Himself? What do they lose by rejecting or neglecting it? The question might be answered in many ways, but here we cannot do better than follow His own words. 'By Me if any man enter in he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.'—J. M. E. Ross.

Verse 10, God's will to us as revealed in and through Christ is not a series of negative commands forbidding many things and emptying life of any positive content. Instead, God's will is a call to the fullest per-

sonal achievement. He bids men to realize the possibilities that He has implanted within them; they are to be the best and to do the most that lies within their power. The ideal life is one of high character, noble service, and great achievement.—'Biblical World.'

(FROM PELOUBET'S 'NOTES'.)

The Eastern shepherd knows his sheep as perfectly as they know him. 'One day a missionary asked a Lebanon shepherd if he counted his sheep every night. On answering that he did not, he was asked how he knew if they were all there or not. His reply was, "Master, if you were to put a cloth over my eyes, and bring me any sheep and only let me put my hands on its face, I could tell in a moment if it was mine or not."—Mackie. 'Often Christ's sheep do not know themselves but the shepherd knows them.'—St. Augustine.

'Here is the beauty and glory of Christ, that he goes before, and never behind his flock. He goes before us in the bearing of temptations. He taught us forgiveness, by forgiving himself his enemies. He went before us in the loss of all things. He bore the cross himself that he commanded us to bear after him. Requiring us to hate even life for the Gospel's sake, he went before us in dying for the Gospel. And then he went before us in the bursting of the grave, becoming the first fruits of them that slept.'—Horace Bushnell.

'A poor, faithful fellow last spring, between Tiberias and Tabor, instead of fleeing, actually fought three Bedouin robbers until he was hacked to pieces with their khanjars, and died among the sheep he was defending.'—Thomson.

'The planets are not all alike. They have different habits, different lengths of year, different lengths of day and kinds of day, and varieties of atmosphere and of season and of life. But they form together a harmonious unit because they are held to a common sun. So the way in which we are to have one flock, is in the possession of one Shepherd.'—W. E. Barton, D.D.

BIBLE REFERENCES.

- I. Sam. xvii., 34-37; Psalm xxiii.; Isa. xl., 11; John xxi., 15-17; Matt. xxiii., 13; Jer. xxiii., 1; Eph. ii., 18; I. Cor. viii., 3.

Junior C. E. Topic.

Sunday, April 5.—Topic—Songs of the Heart. IV. The men whom God accepts. Ps. xxiv. (Consecration meeting.)

C. E. Topic.

Monday March 30.—The Bible our lamp. Ps. cxix., 105.

Tuesday, March 31.—The Bible will endure. Isa. xl., 8.

Wednesday, April 1.—Why the Bible was written. II. Tim. iii., 16, 17.

Thursday, April 2.—Loving the Bible. Ps. cxix., 97-103.

Friday, April 3.—Delighting in the Bible. Ps. i., 2.

Saturday, April 4.—The Bible hid in the heart. Ps. cxix., 11.

Sunday, April 5.—Topic—Christ's talk about the Bible. John v., 39-47. (Consecration meeting.)

Knowing the Author.

'I do not agree with you about the meaning of that poem,' said one friend to another, with her finger upon a page of Browning.

'But you must agree with me,' said he, 'because I knew Browning personally, and therefore am able to interpret him to you.'

Only a little later this boastful friend of the poet began to chaff the lady upon what he called her superstitious belief in the Bible, calling it a pack of fables.

'Ah! now,' said she gently, 'you must give way to me about this book. Remember, I know the Author!'

And herein lies a startling truth: only those who know the voice of God in their souls can recognize it in his word.—'C. E. World.'