

## The Quiet Hour

### Christ the Good Shepherd.\*

Written for Dominion Presbyterian

This section must be read in close connection with the last lesson, having the same time and place. Jesus had cured the blind man, but there is more than one kind of blindness, and even Our Lord found the spiritual blindness more difficult to cure. But He could not allow it to go unnoticed and unrebuked. When those who claimed to be men of light and leading were blind, He who was the true Light must point out to them that evil passion and bigotry was darkening their minds. Such faithful words must produce great effect; but the effect was often in the wrong direction; men of high official position regarded the new Teacher as a presumptuous imposter and turned scornfully away from His noblest teaching. Thus we find in this lesson the sternest rebuke linked with the most beautiful parable. The figure of the Shepherd, representing divine care and control was familiar to readers of the Old Testament. "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock." "He shall feed His flock like a Shepherd." Our Lord's use of this figure is then another form of the same claim to be the God-sent Christ the Saviour of men. It is possible for men now to sit down and discuss this claim calmly; but, in the days when this beautiful parable was spoken, it roused the very fiercest excitement, political as well as personal. In verses 1-5 we have a parable, "An earthly story with a heavenly meaning." The twice repeated verily marks its solemn import. The picture is that of an eastern sheepfold, where a number of flocks of sheep have been enclosed for the night, and the porter set to guard, while the shepherds take their rest. Robbers coming to this sheepfold would seek to climb over the wall, and catch the porter unawares, but a shepherd will come to the door, saluting the porter and calling his sheep. In eastern lands the shepherd does not drive but leads the sheep; and when, having called them, he steps outside the fold, they know that they can safely follow him, for he will lead them into pleasant places where they will find food and rest. The sheep are wise in their own way, they know the shepherd's voice, and run willingly at his beck and call, but they will not run after every strange

new voice. In this we may well learn a lesson from the sheep; when we have found a good shepherd, why should we run after empty novelties? In verse 6 we are told that this parable was not understood; the words were easy and the figures familiar, but the meaning was not plain, "They understood not what things they were which He spoke unto them." The men to whom these words were spoken claimed to be pastors, shepherds of faithful souls, and they did not at first discern in the parable an indictment of their conduct. But we might ask how had they treated the blind man in his perplexity? How did they regard the ignorant and poor? Had they given the new Teacher a fair hearing? On the dark background of their faithlessness He places the picture of His own devotion and self-sacrifice. He would teach them that elders, ministers, synagogues and churches are for the helping of men. The Church was made for man, not man for the Church. There are times in the life of the Christian Church when we need to have this fundamental principle re-asserted.

Verses 7-10 explains the parable and prepares the way for a still fuller revelation. He is the door, through Him men enter into a secure sheepfold, and into rich spiritual pastures. He is the way to life and to God. Deliverance, free activity and abiding satisfaction come through Him. How many had used their position simply for their own advantage. Men regarded place and power in church and stall as prizes to be fought for and enjoyed, rather than as a stewardship to be unselfishly administered. The sheep, that is the people, were taxed and worried, no one gave them comfort and help. Jesus had compassion on them because they were as sheep having no shepherd. He came not to get but to give, not to impoverish but to enrich; not to kill but to make alive. "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." The very purpose of His coming was to meet the desire of the penitent soul which cries for more life and fuller. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

No single figure can completely express what the Christ is to those who trust Him. He is the "Shepherd" as well as the "Door," as He is also the "Vine," "the Living Water," "the Life-giving Light," "the Bread from Heaven." He is not only the entrance to life, He is the giver of life, and the life He gives is His

own. The hireling stands by the sheep only so long as he can make profit out of them; in the hour of danger he quickly flees to save his own skin. Every man who puts into his work no higher motive than the love of money is a hireling, no matter what his calling may be. But he who pursues a sacred calling from such base motives and in such a mean spirit is a contemptible creature. The Jewish Church could not have been built up without good shepherds, but we know how often the true prophets were opposed and persecuted by those who sought only popularity and pay. Each man, however, is true to his own character; the hireling fleeth because he is what he is; because he does not understand love and self-sacrifice; he has never entered into that realm.

Jesus dwells in a different world. It is His very nature to be the ideal Shepherd, to live and die for His sheep. He knows them and they know Him, in this knowledge there is mutual satisfaction and strength. They who know Him have eternal life, and though many reject Him, He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. His knowledge links Him on the one side to the Father and on the other side to faithful men. He knows the needs of men and He knows the infinite resources of the Divine Love. The Cross is not an accident, it is not an ignorant venture, a leap in the dark; it is based upon this sure knowledge of the human and the divine. It is after entering deeply into both sides of the case that He lays down His life to make God and man at one. This is a voluntary act; the life is not lost or snatched from Him against His will; it is the highest sacrifice, the most complete self-surrender that the world has ever seen. This is the meaning of the Cross, "I lay down my life for the sheep," and this is not to be construed in any small sectarian sense. He has other sheep, who though they may be in different folds belong to the same flock. For convenience it seems to be necessary to have different folds, perhaps men have made too many folds, but the central fact is that there is one flock, one shepherd. That fact, which even now underlies all superficial differences shall one day receive a clearer manifestation; the Christ shall unite those who in separate places have had the same spirit, and these shall become one flock and one shepherd. The way in which we may help forward that time is by now acknowledging the one true Shepherd and following in the spirit of love the path He has marked out. He who has given His life for us has the strongest claim upon our love and service.

### Giving.

Unto the erring, charity,  
Unto the suffering, swift relief,  
Unto the sad our gift may be  
A tender sympathy with grief—  
Our time for giving is so brief.

—Mrs. McVean-Adams.

\*International S. S. Lesson for March 19, 1899. John x. 1-16. Golden Text, verse 11. "I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep."