

The Shepherd of the Everlasting Covenant

By John Thiel, [mp3](#)

Scripture reading: Hebrews 13:20 Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom [be] glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Wandering Sheep

God has likened His people to sheep. Do you like the idea that you and I are sheep? What do we know of sheep? They need to be fenced in, or they need a shepherd, someone that they can follow. The quality of a sheep is that it will follow the shepherd. We are living today in a time when sheep are fenced and sheep are driven by dogs and motorbikes and such like, and the sheep are jostled and pushed about. Or you see them in the big trucks with the legs sticking out, all uncomfortable. The lesson to be learned from sheep is very difficult to pick up today, because we don't see them with shepherds. But Jesus was giving a story of a shepherd with his sheep as an object lesson for us.

And one of the characteristics of sheep is found in the words of the hymn:

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it.

A sheep that has no fence around it will wander; and it's very likely it will lose its direction and won't be able to find its way back. So it is with God's people – prone to wander, absorbed with their feeding, absorbed with their little life, unconsciously walking away.

The infinite value of the sacrifice required for our redemption reveals the fact that sin is a tremendous evil. Through sin the whole human organism is deranged, the mind is perverted, the imagination corrupted. {8T 312.2}

This is the condition of the sheep.

Sin has degraded the faculties of the soul. Temptations from without find an answering chord within the heart, and the feet turn imperceptibly toward evil. {Ibid.}

This is what sheep do. Unless they are hedged in by a fence, unless they are called by a shepherd, they will *imperceptibly* wander. This is written as plainly as can be in Isaiah. Not one of us is exempt here.

Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way;

God knows this condition of ours, what sin has done to make us like dumb sheep to go astray, and He treats us like a shepherd to save His sheep. It is from this condition that it is God's preoccupation to reclaim us. The Scripture describes this sheep-like behaviour in detail in many different places. God's people have wandered in all directions. Can't we see this today? God's people have wandered and are scattered in all directions. There is no one fold that they are part of; there are many different folds. Jesus Himself expresses this. I have other sheep in other folds, He says, and them I will bring (cf. Jn 10:16). *All we like sheep have gone astray*; we have wandered in all directions.

Ezekiel 34:11 For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, [even] I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. 12 As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep [that are] scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.

Can we identify with that in these times in which we live? These are cloudy and dark days indeed, perilous times for God's children.

The Shepherd

It was so in the days of Christ when He came to this earth, and a similar situation exists today. It is important that we acknowledge that what God is saying is our experience, and that He wants us to be sheep that will follow the true Shepherd.

Matthew 9:36 But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

Jesus came to His own, and they were scattered. He came to His own, and they knew Him not. He had compassion on them because they were not under the Shepherd in all reality. Besides the sheep losing their shepherd and being scattered, there is yet another description:

Hosea 6:4 O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness [is] as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.

Is this not the experience of so many? They have heard the voice of God, like the people did in the time of Christ. These knew that He was someone special, but then they started drifting again. How much I have seen this happening in today's spiritual circles. The testimony heard was, We have never heard anything like this before; we love it; we appreciate it. They really enjoyed it; but then, like sheep, they have wandered away from that. But our human reaction would be, "Dumb people, dumb sheep. Aren't they crazy? Aren't they silly?" But does Jesus look at them that way? We observe that He had *compassion* upon the scattered sheep. He looks upon us human beings with compassion.

Psalm 103:13 Like as a father pitieth [his] children, [so] the LORD pitieth them that fear him. 14 For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we [are] dust.

He remembers that we are sheep. *He remembers that we are dust*; He knows that we will wander.

Psalm 103:15 [As for] man, his days [are] as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. 16 For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.

There is the parable of the grain falling. There is a plant growing in stony ground: everything is nice for a little while, but then the wind passes over it, and the sun burns on it, and it's gone. O Ephraim, O Judah, what can I do for you? Your goodness is like the passing cloud and like dew.

Psalm 103:17 But the mercy of the LORD [is] from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; 18 To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.

Although they wander, He calls them, He has mercy upon them; He does not cast them off, because they have the covenant at heart. This is the focus of this meditation – the great Shepherd and the everlasting covenant. We want to see the covenant that is connected with the Shepherd.

When the Sheep Is Lost

There is another characteristic of the sheep that has a shepherd. When it wanders and inadvertently gets lost, what is its characteristic? It bleats for help; it calls for its shepherd. The sheep is a creature that will bleat and cry out.

The sheep that has strayed from the fold is the most helpless of all creatures. It must be sought for by the shepherd, for it cannot find its way back. So with the soul that has wandered away from God; he is as helpless as the lost sheep, and unless divine love had come to his rescue he could never find his way to God. {COL 187.3}

This is a humbling experience for people who have intelligence. As Christians we think we can find our way back if we lose ourselves somewhere. But the fact is we can't. And this is a reality that each one of us needs to own. When I have once had a clear indication of the Shepherd's voice and then I lose Him, the reality is I might be looking around, but I can't find my way back. This is a reality. This is the way it is written, whether we like it or not. We are sheep.

The lost sheep knows that it is lost. It has left the shepherd and the flock, and it cannot recover itself. It represents those who realize that they are separated from God and who are in a cloud of perplexity, in humiliation, and sorely tempted. {COL 193.3}

There are situations in our life when we are out of touch with the true Jesus, and we are like sheep, running here and there, wondering where is the Shepherd's voice, crying, bleating. The sheep knows that there is something uncertain in his life, and he has a cry, Lord, help me here.

Will God ignore the cry of one calling for help?

Psalm 18:6 In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God:

The psalmist knows the experience.

Psalm 18:6 ...he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, [even] into his ears.

What an example King David gave us. He went astray badly, and he cried to God for mercy; and he knew by experience that the Lord heard him. And as we cry to God because of the uncertainties and perplexities that affect us, have we not experienced in those uncertainties that the Lord gives us love-tokens, telling us, "I am here, I am listening, I am hearing you; follow Me"? Here is Jesus listening to the cry, and hearing the cry:

With what relief he hears in the distance its first faint cry. Following the sound, he climbs the steepest heights, he goes to the very edge of the precipice, at the risk of his own life. {COL 188.1}

All heaven was at risk when Jesus came.

Thus he searches, while the cry, growing fainter, tells him that his sheep is ready to die. {Ibid.}

Have you ever been in an experience where you cried and cried, and after a while you think you're not being heard, and you begin to just trail off? He hastens; it tells Him that His sheep is ready to die.

At last his effort is rewarded; the lost is found. Then he does not scold it because it has caused him so much trouble. {Ibid.}

How different Jesus is to many of today's undershepherds. He does not scold the sheep; He does not censure it.

He does not drive it with a whip. He does not even try to lead it home. In his joy he takes the trembling creature upon his shoulders; if it is bruised and wounded, he gathers it in his arms, pressing it close to his bosom, that the warmth of his own heart may give it life. With gratitude that his search has not been in vain, he bears it back to the fold. {Ibid.}

What a story, what a meditation for our imagination to occupy itself as we are filled with perplexity and we are wondering where the fold is, where Jesus is in all the different voices that we hear around us today, all the voices claiming to be the voice of Jesus.

Thank God, He has presented to our imagination no picture of a sorrowful shepherd returning without the sheep. The parable does not speak of failure but of success and joy in the recovery. Here is the divine guarantee that not even one of the straying sheep of God's fold is overlooked, not one is left unsuccored. Every one that will submit to be ransomed, Christ will rescue from the pit of corruption and from the briars of sin. {COL 188.2}

Desponding soul, take courage, even though you have done wickedly. Do not think that perhaps God will pardon your transgressions and permit you to come into His presence. {COL 188.3}

Don't say that. Do not think that.

God has made the first advance. While you were in rebellion against Him, He went forth to seek you. With the tender heart of the shepherd He left the

ninety and nine and went out into the wilderness to find that which was lost. The soul, bruised and wounded and ready to perish, He encircles in His arms of love and joyfully bears it to the fold of safety. {Ibid.}

A wonderful story, isn't it? But so many people stay with the story and don't apply the story in their living experience to stay with Jesus or to cry to Him and let Him bring them to His fold amongst the many folds of today.

The Story in Reality

We observe that the story of the shepherd has to do with turning from the ways of sin. It is not to do solely with leaving a church; it has to do with going away from the voice of obedience and from the ways of God's perfect truth. It is from this that we cannot turn ourselves. Here we see the connection. Sheep that cannot find their way back need the Shepherd, *the great Shepherd of the sheep*, through the covenant of the cross. This reminds us that God has established a covenant exercise for the sheep that cannot find their way back. Originally the human being has in him a certain amount of pride, which makes him think, *I can find my way back*. So the human being comes to God, like the Hebrews after God had brought them out of Egypt, and says, Everything that the Lord has said, I will do and be obedient. This is the pride of a people who have lost their way. So God gave them a covenant for them to promise. There we have the two covenants in the Bible that deal with human beings to lead them to understand that they cannot find their way back. God has established two covenants to teach the lesson.

God Makes Two Covenants

The first covenant was the one He made with the Hebrews at Mount Sinai. It is called the old covenant; He solemnly brings them to a relationship with Him for them to promise Him that they will keep His commandments. But as they solemnly promise this, man promises and God says, You've made your promise, I make Mine. And now man tries to keep his promise, and he fails bitterly. This is the old covenant, and it does not merely apply to the Hebrews. It applies to every person whom God calls to Himself and to whom He says, You promise to keep My law. This is an important study in the word of God – to the proud person who thinks he can keep God's law, who thinks he is part of God's church (just like the Hebrews thought they were), and to us today God says, You promise, and I will promise you.

And then, when we discover that we fail miserably, and we try again and we fail miserably, and we try again and we fail miserably, God says, Now I give

you another covenant. This is now a covenant in which God does all the promising. Because these people have wanted to do what the Ten Commandments say but have failed miserably, so He makes what is called the everlasting covenant.

Genesis 17:7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

In Abraham all the nations of the world were to be blessed. And God says to us, You will become a child of Abraham and I make an everlasting covenant with you. Significantly, in the words of Ezekiel the Shepherd and the covenant are tied together. Why? Because the sheep needs to discover that it can't find its way back.

Ezekiel 34:22 Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. 23 And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, [even] my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. 24 And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken [it]. 25 And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods.

The Shepherd and the covenant are inseparably presented to our mind here. Jesus is the Shepherd. Here David is regarded as the servant, but as we will see, God is here talking about Jesus, because Jesus was the Son of David, and He is the King.

Ezekiel 34:12 As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep [that are] scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. 13 And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. 14 I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and [in] a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel.

The scattered sheep, the people who have been scattered among the different folds, he will bring together into one fold. Notice now how the everlasting covenant comes into focus in connection with this work.

Ezekiel 36:24 For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. 25 Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. 26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do [them]. 28 And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.

To get the message clear in our mind is one thing, and the other thing is to actually meditate upon it, to really appreciate this compassion that God has. Let us not lose sight of this. To us who are so full of our own way of working through our problems He is saying, “You can’t do it; let Me show you. Let Me show you. You promise to follow Me.” And then we fail and fail again, until we come all broken before Him and we submit to the Shepherd who will sprinkle clean water upon us. Do you know what the sprinkling of the pure water is? To have your conscience sprinkled by the water of the word. And as we submit ourselves to the water of the word, He is sprinkling that upon our conscience and cleansing us from all our filthiness, and He gives us a new heart by this process. And by this process He will put His Spirit within us and cause us to walk in His statutes, by this covenant. This is the exact language found in the words of Jeremiah about

The Everlasting Covenant

The children of Israel are here referred to as the ones who had been making the promise to keep God’s law in the old covenant, as we have been brought to make the promise even at our baptism:

Jeremiah 31:31 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: 32 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day [that] I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: 33 But this [shall be] the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Here is the covenant that follows the old covenant. It is the covenant that we read in Ezekiel 36:2, where it says that He will gather them out of all the nations where they were scattered. They were His sheep. And He now works with

His sheep through the water of His word to sprinkle this word upon their hearts to show them His wonderful grace, the Shepherd Jesus Christ.

Let us explore this now. We now pass the Old Testament representation of Israel as scattered sheep and see whether this refers to the Israel of all nations in the last days, which includes us. Many people see the Old Testament as being only for the Jews, but it is actually a story that belongs to all of us, Abraham's seed. Remember the words of Hosea. God asks, What will I do to you, Ephraim and Judah? The Jews were Judah and Benjamin, and the other ten tribes were scattered everywhere. Let us compare this with Ezekiel that we may see that this is indeed referring to us as His sheep.

Ezekiel 37:19 Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which [is] in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, [even] with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand.

He said He would put the two together, Ephraim and Judah.

Ezekiel 37:20 And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes. 21 And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: 22 And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all: 23 Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God. 24 And David my servant [shall be] king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them.

Here is the covenant.

Ezekiel 37:25 And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, [even] they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David [shall be] their prince for ever. 26 Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. 27 My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 28 And the heathen shall

know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore.

My sanctuary shall be among them, He says, and they will be gathered into that place where there will be David the Prince, the one Shepherd; the tabernacle of God will be there. The tabernacle of God will be with them and they will dwell forever under the Shepherd.

Revelation 21:1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. 2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God [is] with men, and he will dwell with them,

Isn't this what is written in Ezekiel? This is the tabernacle of God that will dwell with them, *and He will dwell with them,*

Revelation 21:3 ...and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, [and be] their God. 4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

What we have seen here is the Old Testament account that leads us to the correct understanding in the New Testament, the Shepherd of Ezekiel, David, the King, the covenant made with them by the Mediator.

The Shepherd's Work and Our Duty as Sheep

This is all summarised in the following words, where we see what the Shepherd is doing:

Hebrews 13:20 Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom [be] glory for ever and ever. Amen.

He is working in you the new covenant, working in us, putting His law into our hearts. As we realise that we have promised to keep His law and we have failed miserably, and as the great Shepherd brings the wandering sheep to His bosom through the word of the beautiful gospel, here we have this amazing Shepherd of the everlasting covenant. The sheep and the blood of the everlasting cove-

nant. Through this wonderful work He will make the covenant of writing His law in our hearts.

If you and I will call upon the Shepherd in our distress, if we will call as sheep bleating, Lord, I am in trouble, I can't help myself here; I've tried, I've miserably failed; I do not know Your love perfectly; I need to see it more fully;" and as He shows us through the old covenant our hopeless condition, and through the new covenant His wonderful mercy, we will know that He is listening to our cry. He will find us; He will make an everlasting covenant with us for us to do the law because it is in our hearts.

If any are finally lost, finally destroyed, why are they, when He has tried to save every one of us? Why are they finally destroyed? Because that everlasting covenant that was made through the blood of Jesus was broken.

Isaiah 24:4 The earth mourneth [and] fadeth away, the world languisheth [and] fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish. 5 The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant.

Is it possible that the covenant that Jesus made, of writing His law in their hearts, is rejected to such a point that they are finally lost? They have *broken* the everlasting covenant.

Hebrews 10:26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, 27 But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. 28 He that despised Moses' law [under the old covenant] died without mercy under two or three witnesses: 29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know him that hath said, Vengeance [belongeth] unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. 31 [It is] a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

It is a sad story that we are watching in this planet, and we will continue to see it if we go on living until the visible coming of Jesus. We have been seeing it ever since 1844. By having the mind enlightened by God's word we can see that the everlasting covenant that God so mercifully provided for us through Jesus Christ the Shepherd, can actually be broken. And if it is broken, then the earth will languish, and the people in it will languish also. This is what we have seen in the First and in the Second World War, and it is becoming worse.

Let us be the sheep that call for help in such a dark hour as now, that the covenant-making Shepherd may recover us and we may dwell forever in the precincts of His sanctuary. My hearts goes out in gratitude and praise to God that, as we respond to the call of the Shepherd and we cry to Him, we have the assurance of coming through and entering the reality of the description of Revelation 21. May God bless us to this end.

Amen.