

THE GREAT SHEPHERD AND HIS FLOCK

(From St. Paul Enterprise, Oct. 22, 1915, Detroit, Mich., Oct. 17, 1915, by Pastor Russell)

Jehovah the Chief Shepherd of the Sheep

God's Ideals Widely Different From Those of the World—His Infinite Greatness and Our Littleness—His Marvelous Condescension—His Wonderful Plan—Far Beyond Human Conception—How God Tested His Only Begotten Son—Christ's Supreme Exaltation Later—The Church Called to Follow His Steps—Our Testing and Exaltation Similar—Jehovah's Plan For the World of Mankind.

Detroit, Mich., Oct. 17—Pastor Russell preached here today. He took for his text Psalm 23:1—"The Lord is My Shepherd; I shall not want." He said in part:

All the great families of the world have their coats-of-arms, that differentiate them one from another and that represent their own ideas. Some have figures of rapacious birds; others have various kinds of wild beasts, real or imaginary, so that whoever looks upon them would wish that he might never fall into their clutches. But no family has ever yet adopted the symbol that God has adopted for His family; namely, the lamb, the sheep. There is nothing ferocious about these animals. They are meek and inoffensive.

The Lord tells us that He is the Shepherd of His saints. This means that we are His sheep. It is a wonderful suggestion that the Father of Mercies, the Almighty One who is so high, and in comparison with whom we are so small should be willing to take charge of us and care for us. And we are very desirous of abiding in His care, of abiding so fully that ultimately, by His grace, we may attain unto all the blessings which He has in reservation for His faithful people. We appreciate this great favor; and the more we consider it, the more we appreciate it.

As we have before our minds so great a God, man in comparison seems something like an ant. We pay little attention to the tiny ant; it is of no account to us. When we compare mankind with God, there is a still greater contrast. We are like the small dust of the balance, not worthy to be accounted of. (Isa. 40:15) Nevertheless God has favored us, and has made a great Plan for the redemption of every member of our race. Especially do we who are now God's children appreciate His particular love and care manifested toward us, in that He has invited us to become partakers of the Divine nature, to be associated forever with our Lord Jesus Christ, to share His glory and honor, to be granted the same immortality. This seems more wonderful every time we think of it. The matter grows upon us continually—enlarging our hearts.

God's Plan Beyond Human Conception

It seems strange indeed that the Heavenly Father should have adopted so marvelous a Plan. To His Only Begotten Son, who had always been faithful to Him, He desired to give still greater blessings, in connection with the blessing of others. God said, "I will test Him fully; and if He still proves faithful, He shall have the best I can give." And so the first offer to carry out the Divine Plan and to obtain the Divine nature through humiliation and suffering was made to this Son, God's only direct creation. (Rev. 3:14; Col. 1:15) The Logos gladly responded. By a transfer of nature He was made man; and by faithfulness and obedience even unto death He became the Head of this company that God purposed to bring from the lowest plane of His intelligent creatures to the very highest.

Now observe the conditions upon which this offer was made, Jehovah would grant the Son this great exaltation only after thoroughly proving Him. His trial would take place in the midst of the adverse conditions prevailing in the lost world that He would come to redeem by the sacrifice of Himself, and from which fallen race His footstep followers would be selected. To these the Father in His great Plan would say, "I will give to you the opportunity to become associated with Jesus in this great work."

This part of God's wonderful Plan would never have occurred to our minds. We would never have thought of taking any of humanity into the Plan in such a way—of stooping down to fallen creatures who had been under the curse of death and in a depraved condition for over 4,000 years, and of making an offer to these sinners, not only of having their sins forgiven and of being reconciled to God through the death of His Son, but also of becoming followers of that Son and by passing through similar trials and experiences, of becoming joint-heirs with Him in His glorious inheritance. Therefore "We stand all astonished with wonder, And gaze on this ocean of Love!"

Our Lord Jesus Most Highly Honored

It is well that we notice particularly that the Father has planned that the Lord Jesus shall be first. (Col. 1:18) Jehovah, the Chief Shepherd, has provided that His Son shall be His Representative and our Shepherd, and that we may come in as the first flock of His sheep. There will be others, later on, who are not of this particular fold. (John 10:16) But the sheep of His present fold are the ones in whom we are especially interested now. The sheep of the next fold will be those of the world who shall receive Restitution blessings in the Age about to dawn. The sheep of this Gospel fold are the ones particularly referred to in our text; for the Psalmist David spoke prophetically for Christ and His Church, His Body. The Church, with our Lord Jesus as Head, can truly say, "Jehovah is My Shepherd; I shall not want."

Until the Lord Jesus was highly exalted at His resurrection, there was none of this Divine nature except Jehovah Himself. All others were of a lower nature. The Logos, although above cherubim and seraphim, and next to the Father, was upon a very different plane of being from God. But it was to this Divine plane that God purposed to exalt some. He designed to have a certain company on that highest plane of existence. God had first created Jesus, the Logos, and through Him all the worlds and all the ranks and orders of angels, and finally man. His next creation, instead of going further downward, was to go upward, to a still higher plane than any other—the Divine. In harmony with this purpose, the Body members of Christ are to be God's New Creation, as the Apostle Paul explains. (2 Cor. 5:7; Eph. 2:10) And God gave His Son the One through whom all other beings were created, the first opportunity to demonstrate His love, His devotion, His loyalty.

“But,” you say, “had the Son not always demonstrated this?” “Yes; He had always demonstrated His loyalty under favorable conditions amongst the holy ones in harmony with Jehovah, where there were no requirements of sacrifice.” But now God would put Him to a special test, making Him a special offer as a reward; and the two propositions must go together. If he would accept Jehovah's proposition, and be loyal even unto death amongst the unholy ones out of harmony with Jehovah and under conditions of suffering and humiliation, then He should have an exaltation far above angels, principalities, powers, dominions, and every name that is named.

The Apostle sums it all up. After telling how our Lord accepted these terms, how He left the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, how He was made flesh and dwelt amongst us, and being found in fashion as a man, humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. St. Paul declares that Jesus was found worthy in that He, for the joy set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the Divine Majesty on High. That is, our Lord was given a position of the very highest honor:—Phil. 2:8-11; Heb. 12:2; 1:3.

Price of Our Lord's Great Exaltation

We see the earthly experiences of Jesus and their significance shown in the types of the Jewish Law. For instance, every high priest, before he could enter the Most Holy of the Tabernacle on the Day of Atonement, must first offer a sacrifice of a bullock, must take its blood into the Holy and offer incense at the Golden Altar in the Holy—representing in type the perfection of Jesus' human nature being consumed as a sacrifice. Then, after he had offered the incense, after its perfume had preceded him into the Most Holy and had rested as a cloud above the Mercy-Seat, the high priest would pass under the second veil into the Most Holy—the veil representing death itself.

If the high priest did not fulfill to the letter every requirement of the Divine Law, he would die as he passed under the veil. That priest was a type of the Lord Jesus Christ; and the figure showed that Jesus would have perished if He had not fulfilled to the letter every requirement which the Father made. This being the case, it is no wonder that our Lord felt great anxiety as the time of His death drew near. The Apostle has written of the Master's distress of mind at this time: "Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong cryings and tears, unto Him that was able to save Him out of death, was heard in that He feared."—Heb. 5:6-10.

What did Jesus fear? He feared that in passing under the veil of death He might never rise again. He knew that as the antitypical High Priest He was on trial, and that His trial would eventuate in life or death everlasting. Knowing this, He appreciated life with its blessings, and to a marked degree appreciated the life on the higher plane which He had enjoyed with the Father, and which He hoped again to enjoy. Why did He pray with strong cryings? Because He desired to know whether He had been wholly faithful, and whether He might expect the resurrection change. And he was heard. God sent an angel to minister to Him and to assure Him that He had proved faithful in every respect. From that moment Jesus was calm and self-possessed. None of the disciples had such courage. To the weeping ones following Him to the cross He said, "Weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children."—Luke 23:28.

A Feature of the Revelation

A picture dating back to the time before our Lord Jesus entered the world, and showing God's Plan recorded in figurative language, was given to St. John on the Isle of Patmos. (Rev. 5:1-14) In this picture He beheld Jehovah sitting upon a Throne and holding in His right hand a Scroll written within and without and sealed with seven seals. Then he heard a proclamation made, "Who is worthy to open the Book, and to loose the seals thereof?" But no one was found worthy to open the Scroll—no one in Heaven or earth. No one of mankind was worthy because all were sinners. No one on the spirit plane had ever yet proven himself worthy of the great honor of carrying out God's marvelous Plan of the Ages.

In symbolic language the Scroll represents all that God had in mind before the foundation of the world respecting the Church, respecting His great work for the world during the, Millennial Age and respecting Messiah's great future. All these things were represented by the Scroll in God's right hand—the hand being symbolic of power. At this time the Son had not yet been tested and proved.

On one occasion Jesus had said to His disciples, "But of that day and hour [of Messiah's Second Coming and the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth] knoweth no man, no, not the angels in Heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only." (Matt. 24:36) The Father

had not yet permitted the Scroll to go out of His hands. St. John wept when he realized that God had some great purpose to execute but had found none worthy to carry it out.

Then one of the elders said unto St. John, “Weep not; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the Book, and to loose the seals thereof.” The Lion of the tribe of Judah had proven Himself worthy. When had He done so? Not before He came into the world; for then He was not the Lion of Judah. He was born of the tribe of Judah when He was made flesh; but He had not yet become the Lion, the Strong One. Our Lord was the Lion of the tribe of Judah from the time when He made a Covenant with the Father at the River Jordan, although He did not finish His sacrifice until at Calvary He cried, “It is finished.”

It required, in one sense, the entire three and a half years of Christ’s ministry to demonstrate Himself to be this Strong One. In the picture in Revelation St. John looked, and behold, “A lamb stood, as it had been slain” (a lamb newly slain, says the Greek)—the lamb representing the Lord Jesus sacrificed. By that sacrifice of Himself He had prevailed. As St. John looked, he heard myriads of angels saying, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory and blessing!” There Jesus became worthy—not without blood, not without sacrifice, not without being tested by the Father, not without coming off Conqueror. Thus He proved Himself worthy to be the Father’s Representative in opening the Scroll and carrying out its provisions.

Our Glorious High Calling

How glad we are that God has provided for the ultimate recovery of all mankind from the death-curse, to bring whosoever will back into harmony with Himself by restitution processes during the Millennial Reign of Christ! But we who are of the Bride class, how we rejoice when we think of our invitation to join in with our Savior and be partakers with Him, both in the sufferings of this present life and in the glory to follow! This is our privilege and portion. We may have a share in carrying out the Father’s great Plan.

We might well rejoice that, in God’s mercy, we have heard the glad Message; that through the merit of Jesus’ sacrifice we have been invited to become His footstep followers and to prove ourselves worthy, even as He proved Himself worthy, by laying down our lives in the service of God and His Truth. But we are not worthy without our Redeemer. We are made worthy in Him. This High Calling to be joint-heirs with Jesus comes in as a special privilege, over and above justification. And we must demonstrate our worthiness or we shall never get it.

Our test is the same as in our Lord’s case; namely, faithfulness to God, loyalty to the Truth, the putting away of all selfishness, seeking to do only the will of our Heavenly

Father. We cannot do God's will perfectly, as Jesus could. But we must do what is possible to us; and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all unintentional blemishes, making up for our deficiencies. But we are required to have the same spirit, the same mind, as the Apostle admonishes us—the mind which is willing to humble self in order to do the will of God.—Phil. 2:5; Rom. 8:9.

It is important that we realize our need of justification, and that we note the difference between justification and the High Calling. I am sure that not many Christians see the distinction clearly. The Bible teaches everywhere that through Christ we are to be “justified freely from all things.” It is God that justifies, and not we that justify ourselves. We are justified by faith in Jesus' blood. “It is not of works, lest any man should boast.” Justification merely brings us to the place where we can offer an acceptable sacrifice to God. Then we must present our bodies. (Rom. 12:1) We are to follow in Jesus' footsteps.

None have yet been justified except a special class—the Church. God has willed that the whole fallen human race shall go down to the tomb unjustified in sin, and shall wait until the Millennial Age; and in that Millennial Day Jesus, who died for them, will be their Justifier. During those thousand years He will bring them up from the tomb, and will help them up the Highway of Holiness. (Isa. 35) At the close of that time He will present them to the Father blameless. He will not present anybody to the Father in any other way. So the whole world, at the end of the Millennium, will be presented to God; for Christ will have justified them, made them right. But all who will not meet the conditions will die the Second Death.