

The Intimate And Sublime Relationship Between Christ And The Believer.

Text: John 10:11-16

Suggested Hymns:
387, 161, 151, 146, 148

- 1) Is Set Forth In The Parable Of The Good Shepherd
- 2) Is Set Forth By A Still Sublimier
And More Striking Comparison

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 10:11-16, ¹¹ ***“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. ¹² But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. ¹³ The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.***

¹⁴ ***I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. ¹⁵ As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

A common opinion is *“Christianity may be a good thing for the dying, but it offers little or nothing for the living.”* Since Christianity deals in *“things not seen,”*¹ and continually admonishes us to fix our eyes on the *“inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,”*² many people leap to the conclusion that all real compensations of discipleship lie on the far side of the grave.

This is one of the reasons why so many people who are not openly hostile to Christianity continue to postpone their repentance — and as a rule, until it is too late.

But the experienced believer knows better. He knows that the choicest blessings and the purest pleasures of life are conferred upon him through his Christian faith.

When he considers what his life would be without these blessings and pleasures, he is constrained to say with the psalmist in Psalm 27:13, ¹³ ***I would have lost heart, unless I had believed That I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living.***

Yes, Christianity makes life worth living. It supplies the one thing needful in all conditions and in every respect. In this dry and thirsty land it is ***“a well of living waters and streams from Lebanon.”***³ Luther wrote, ***“The temporal life is a life only if it is lived in Christ and in the spirit of faith.”***⁴

Among all the fruits of faith which the believer enjoys in this world, none is more precious, or the source of greater joy and satisfaction, than his fellowship with Jesus, that intimate and sublime relationship existing between Christ and the believer.

We read in Galatians 2:20, ²⁰ ***I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.***⁵

And in John 15:4, ⁴ ***Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.***⁶

In our text this beautiful and inspiring relationship is portrayed with perfect skill by the great Master Artist Himself.

Let us now study the picture which Jesus has painted for us in order that we may be led to a deeper appreciation of our relationship with our beloved Saviour and that this blessed relationship may henceforth be cultivated more diligently among us.

The theme for today is, *The Intimate and Sublime Relationship between Christ and the Believer.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Intimate And Sublime Relationship Between Christ And The Believer Is Set Forth In The Parable Of The Good Shepherd.

Jesus says, ***I am the good shepherd.*** “The Son of Man claims for Himself the name of Shepherd. Now we will not learn any thing from that, unless we enter humbly and affectionately into the spirit of Christ’s teaching. It is the heart alone which can give us a key to His words.

Recollect how Jesus taught. By metaphors, by images, by illustrations, boldly figurative, in rich variety - and yes, in daring abundance. He calls Himself a gate,⁷ a king,⁸ a vine,⁹ a shepherd, and Jesus will return unexpectedly as a thief in the night.¹⁰ In every one of these He appeals to certain feelings and associations. What He says can only be interpreted by such associations. They must be understood by a living heart: a cold, clear intellect will make nothing of them.”¹¹

Yes, here the Saviour speaks to our hearts. It is with open, believing, and loving hearts that we must receive His message if it is not to be wasted upon us.

The title “*the Good Shepherd*” contains a wealth of comforting truth for the believer. “*Good*,” not in the sense of benevolent and kind, but in the sense of genuine, of the real kind, true-born. St. Paul uses this word, *Kalos*,¹² where he speaks of “*a good soldier of Christ*.”

Moreover, Christ does not say that He is merely a good shepherd, one among many, but the Good Shepherd. Jesus claims this as a title belonging to Himself alone.

On the word “*Shepherd*” Luther says: “It is exceedingly comforting that He is here called a Shepherd; for in this one little word all the beautiful and comforting things that may be said about God have been concentrated. ... This word has a cordial sound and immediately communicates to the godly, when they hear or read it, confidence, consolation, and security. ... Therefore this image is one of the loveliest and most solacing in the Scriptures.”¹³

The early Christians dwelt with special fondness on the image of the *Good Shepherd*. They used it on cups, ornaments, coffins, and in the catacombs.

Now let us turn to the parable. We read,¹¹ “*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.*”¹² *But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them.*”¹³ *The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.*

Even a casual reader will recognise in these words a wonderful description of the ideal relationship existing between Christ and the believer. But upon closer

examination we find that this relationship is viewed here from three different angles and that three of its most important characteristics are plainly exhibited.

Firstly, we have a relationship grounded in love, the everlasting love of Jesus, manifested, tested, tempered, and deepened by His supreme sacrifice.

Jesus says, *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.* And He kept His word. We read in Romans 5:8, ⁸ *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* Jesus sacrificed Himself for us, just as a faithful shepherd at times sacrifices his life in an effort to rescue a wayward sheep; but with this difference: the shepherd loses his life by accident, but Jesus laid it down of Himself,¹⁴ for no other reason than that He loved the sinner.

Thus the death of Jesus was the manifestation of God's everlasting love to man.¹⁵ — But more: When a shepherd is called upon to make a great sacrifice to save his sheep, his love for the sheep is put to the test.

In a similar way, Christ's love for us was tested on the cross.¹⁶ And it stood the test, for He remained faithful to us even unto death. We read in John 13:1, *having loved His own ... He loved them to the end.*"

Now we know that His love is genuine and true and not the superficial love of the self-centred hireling; for it did what no other power in heaven or earth could do. It nailed the Son of God to the cross and laid Him in the grave.

The hymnist wrote,¹⁷

O the height of Jesus' love!
Higher than the heavens above,
Deeper than the depths of sea,
Lasting as eternity;
Love that found me—wondrous thought!
Found me when I sought Him not.

But His love was also tempered and deepened in the ordeal of the *Great Passion*. True, the shepherd makes sacrifices for his sheep because he loves them. But, having made the sacrifices for them, he loves them all the more; for in his eyes they are not merely sheep, but represent all the toils, hardships, and sacrifices to which he subjected himself for their sake.

Likewise with Jesus. He died for us, because He loved us even in our sins, but having brought this great sacrifice for us, He loves us all the more. We are the fruits of His suffering and death.¹⁸ — This everlasting love of Jesus, revealed in all its fullness on the cross and tested, tempered, and deepened in the ordeal of the *Great Passion*, is the sole cause and the firm foundation of the relation existing between Christ and the believer.

Under normal conditions a genuine sacrifice deepens not only the love of the one who brings it, but also the love of the person for whose benefit it is brought. Yes, at times a sacrifice will even succeed in kindling love in a heart that previously has been altogether devoid of love.

For example: A mother whose sacrifices win back a wayward son. This the death of Jesus did for us. By demonstrating His infinite love for us, it finally melted our icy hearts and kindled in them a sincere love for Him who died that we might live.¹⁹ And thus we, too, entered into that sublime and intimate relationship with Jesus that was created through His sacrificial death.

Secondly, we have a relationship of mutual ownership, the ideal ownership of love.

The attitude of the shepherd toward the sheep differs from that of the hireling, because the shepherd owns the sheep. Our text says ¹¹ ***“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. ¹² But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.***

This is true also of the Good Shepherd. He owns us, not simply because we are His creatures,²⁰ but, above all, because He has redeemed us with His blood and still embraces us with His holy love.²¹ This is a comforting truth. We are not our own, for we were bought with a price.²² Surely our Good Shepherd will guard and defend those whom He has purchased with His own blood.²³

But the reverse is true also: the sheep can claim the shepherd as its own. Since the sheep belongs to the shepherd, the shepherd belongs to the sheep. This is true especially in the fold of our Good Shepherd. We read in Psalm 23:1, ¹ ***The LORD is my shepherd.*** Not, indeed, because we, the sheep of His pasture,

did anything to bring Him into our possession, but because He gave Himself to us through the Gospel.

Henceforth Jesus belongs to us, and nothing in heaven or on earth or in hell can take Him away from us.²⁴ Luther wrote *“True faith embraces the Son of God joyfully and with outstretched arms and says: This is my Beloved, and I am His.”*²⁵ Thus the good Shepherd and His sheep live in an ideal and blissful relationship — by virtue of their mutual love they have full possession of one another.²⁶

Thirdly, we have a relation characterised by careful solicitude (concern and watchfulness) on the part of the Shepherd, and care-free confidence on the part of the sheep.

The shepherd differs from the hireling also in this, that he *“cares”* for the sheep. Our text says, ¹³ ***The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.***

This does not mean merely that he takes care of the sheep, for the Greek word for “care” is to be translated with ‘to care about’ or ‘to have regard for.’ The true oriental shepherd’s consideration is not his own person, but his sheep. He knows their value, and has a high regard for them.²⁷

Even so *“our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,”*²⁸ cares about us. Others may despise and ignore us; but Jesus has placed a high worth upon us, for He knows the value of an immortal soul purchased with His own blood. Hence He watches over us with careful solicitude. He guides us with His eye. We read in Psalm 32:8, ⁸ ***I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye.***

The attitude of the sheep over against the shepherd, on the other hand, is one of care-free confidence. The sheep instinctively relies upon the shepherd. We believers in Christ should do the same. Since we belong to the flock of the Good Shepherd, we know that we will be well provided for, temporally as well as spiritually.

Having the Good Shepherd, *“I shall not want,” “I will fear no evil,” “Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me.”* Hence, our hearts should be free from anxiety, worry, and fear. We learn from Psalm 40:17, ¹⁷ ***But I am***

poor and needy; Yet the LORD thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer.

And Psalm 55:22, ²² *Cast your burden on the LORD, And He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.*²⁹

Matthew 6:25-34 tells us not to worry. We are told 1 Peter 5:7 to ⁷ *cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.*

Thus Jesus in the parable of the Good Shepherd describes the intimate and sublime relationship existing between Him and the believer.

But verses 14 and 15 of our text reveal that Jesus had not exhausted this subject. Beautiful and appropriate though it is, the image of the Good Shepherd is not altogether adequate. In fact, the relationship between Christ and the believer is so unique, so mysterious and supernatural, so heavenly and divine, that it is impossible to find a satisfactory illustration on earth. Therefore Jesus ascends, as it were, into heaven and returns with a comparison that is sufficient in every respect.

2. The Intimate And Sublime Relationship Between Christ And The Believer Is Set Forth By A Still Sublimier And More Striking Comparison.

Jesus says in 14 and 15 of our text, ¹⁴ *I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.* ¹⁵ *As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.*

Here we are face to face with an amazing comparison. The believer is highly exalted, and his relationship to Christ likened to that mysterious and ineffable communion between the Father and the Son.

“The affection between the divine Shepherd and His flock can be compared, for the closeness of its intimacy, with nothing but the affection between the eternal Father and the Son of His love. As the Father knows the Son, so does the Shepherd know the sheep; as the Son knows the Father, so do the sheep know their heavenly Shepherd.”³⁰

“This communion of love between Christ and the believing Christians is as intimate, strong, and firmly established as the eternal communion between the eternal Son and the eternal Father.”³¹

It is impossible for us to fathom the mysteries of the unique relationship between the eternal Father and the Son. But we may get at least a glimpse of its solemn grandeur and sublime and holy intimacy by viewing it in the light of Christ's own words. For example Matthew 11:27, ***27 All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.***

And John 5:23, ***23 all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.***³²

What, then, shall we learn from this astounding comparison if we cannot comprehend and explain it? Chiefly this, that our relationship with Jesus is a thing so wonderful that the world with all its wisdom and glory pales into insignificance aside of it.

This is expressed in Philippians 3:8, ***8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.***

It is a heavenly relationship, patterned after the relationship which exists from everlasting to everlasting between the Father and the Son. Thus the believer is, as it were, lifted out of the world and placed side by side with the most high God; and this is while we are still living in this vale of tears. We are in the world, but not of the world.³³

What we have learned today clearly shows everyone that our Christian life is a blessing, not only in the future, but also very much in the present with Jesus as our Good Shepherd.

Let us conclude with the words of the hymnist,³⁴

Thee, O Jesus, I'll not leave,
Who for me Thyself hast given;
Firmly unto Thee I cleave,
Nor from Thee will I be driven.
Thou the light of life dost give:
Thee, O Jesus, I'll not leave. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Hebrews 11:1

² 1 Peter 1:4

³ Song of Solomon 4:14

⁴ VIII, 1456

⁵ See also

⁶ See also John 17:23, 1 Corinthians 1:9, 1 John 1:3, 2 John 9

⁷ Matt 7:13

⁸ John 18:27

⁹ John 15:5

¹⁰ 2 Pet 3:10

¹¹ F. W. Robertson: The Good Shepherd

¹² 2 Tim. 2:3

¹³ V, 261 f.

¹⁴ John 10:18

¹⁵ Rom. 5:8; John 3:16; John 15:13

¹⁶ John 15:13

¹⁷ Hymn 170 v 2

¹⁸ Isaiah 53:11

¹⁹ 1 John 4:19; Rom. 5:5; 2 Cor. 5:14a; 1 Pet. 1:8

²⁰ Psa 100:3b

²¹ Gal. 4:5; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:14; Rev. 5:9

²² 2 Cor. 7:19-20

²³ John 10:29; Mal. 3:17; Psa. 17:7-8; 91:10-11; 121:7-8; Isa. 42:6, Hymn 200 v 1

²⁴ Rom. 8:32, 38-39. Hymn 211 ALHB "*Jesus, Thou art mine forever*"

²⁵ XIX, 1439

²⁶ Hymn 413 v 5 & 6

²⁷ Psa. 23; Ezek. 34:11-13; Luke 15:3-5

²⁸ Heb. 13:20

²⁹ See also Psalm 127:2

³⁰ F. W. Robertson: The Good Shepherd

³¹ Stoekhardt

³² See also John 1:18; John 5:19-21; John 8:28-29; John 8:42; John 14:7-9; John 15:9; John 17; 1 John 5:20.

³³ John 17:16

³⁴ Hymn 146 v 1