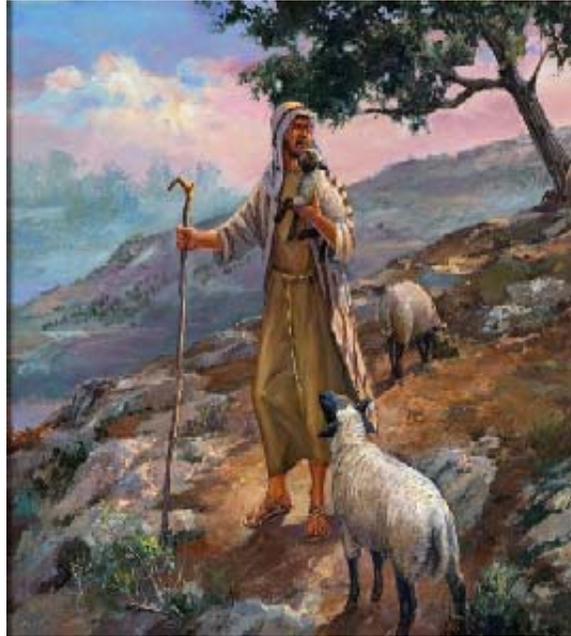


The Shepherds



Much of the Bible is based on the facts of life of the Eastern people; this is why people of other cultures such as ours cannot understand it. I have devoted my life to teaching these Orientalisms in the Bible, so that people can understand and believe that it is a Book based on truth.

In both the East and the West, the figure of Christ as the Great Shepherd of the sheep is the most precious and appreciated way of describing our Saviour. However, I have found in my travels in the western countries that the people do not fully understand the shepherd's way of life, and therefore miss some of the meanings from the Bible verses which tell of shepherd and sheep.

Of course the Easterners have other types of animals which they keep: donkeys, cows, oxen, goats, buffalo, and the like, but none of these animals require the special care that the sheep do. The other animals are very self-sufficient and are taken to pasture by neighborhood boys; when they are brought back at night they are released at the edge of the village and find their way home by themselves. This could never be done with sheep for they are like small children; the shepherd calls each one by name, and talks to him like a child.

We have the comparison of the sheep and the goats which Jesus uses in Matthew 25:32-46 ["...as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left." (verse 32b-33)]; Goats, you see, are not helpless and trusting like the sheep, but are very independent. The goat looks out after the flock of goats. When a goat grazes, he takes a few bites then looks up to check for danger.

Goats are cautious and take care of themselves. The sheep look down when they graze and trust the shepherd to protect them and provide for them in every way.

The sheep are kept divided into three groups: the males of the first year, the females of the first year, and the rest of the flock. The immediate family of the owner shepherds the first two groups of sheep, because they need special care close to home. This special care is required especially in Judean families because a male lamb of the first year was offered at the Passover and must be without spot or blemish. If these lambs were not guarded carefully, they might become bruised and therefore would not be acceptable as an offering.

I believe that these three groups of sheep are the reason for the three questions and answers between Jesus and Peter which we find in John 21:15-17. Jesus says, "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep, feed my sheep." There were three kinds of flocks which Jesus was leaving to the care of Peter. The idea that some commentaries try to put forth, that Jesus asked Peter three times to test whether he would deny him again, is just guess work and imagination.

When the shepherd takes the sheep out to the pasture in the morning, he takes along his food for the day, his staff and crook, and some smooth stones in his belt.

The stones are used in a sling by the shepherd to alert the sheep of impending danger. The sheep does not notice where he is going while grazing except to look a few inches away for better grass. When the shepherd notices that a sheep is wandering away, he calls to him by name. If the sheep does not hear, the shepherd will sling a stone close by the mouth of the sheep without hitting the animal. Safety is with the flock. The sheep will respond to this disturbance and will then hear the shepherd and come back to the flock.

The staff which the shepherd carries is a sort of club about eighteen inches long, which hangs in his belt to be handy in case he must defend the sheep against animals or thieves. Then, the crook is a longer rod with a curve at the end, and with a sharp blade which he can use to reach up and get leaves from certain trees to feed the sheep with, in the case that there is no grass anywhere. All the other grazing animals may be starving, but the shepherd will not let the sheep starve. This crook of the shepherd is also a symbol of authority. You can see bishops of the Eastern and Roman churches carrying this crook and blessing the people with it; I wonder if they understand that this is the symbol of the shepherd. The English word, "pastor" means shepherd.

Sheep will not drink from flowing water; this is why the 23rd Psalm speaks of "still waters." If the shepherd cannot find a place where the waters are still, he must scoop out a pit in the sand for some water to run into, so that the sheep will drink unafraid. Sometimes the shepherd must lead his sheep across a little stream of water which they do not wish to cross, so he must take one and toss him across so that the rest will jump across also. Sheep will follow one another blindly even when it is dangerous, and this is why the Scripture says, "All like sheep have gone astray."

Sometimes, in spite of all the care of the shepherd, a sheep will wander away and fall and get his leg broken. The shepherd always looks until he finds the sheep and carries him on his shoulders back to the sheep fold. He leads all the sheep into the fold through an opening or passage (there is no gate, only this opening) and puts away his rood, staff, and sling: puts down the sheep with the broken leg to take care of him. He pours on oil, and binds up the broken leg.

When the sheep are brought to the fold, they are given water in little buckets, and a good shepherd will give water overflowing to each of his sheep. That is why, in the 23rd Psalm, it says, "My cup runneth over."

After the sheep are cared for, and the shepherd has eaten, then he lies down in the passage way of the sheepfold. He does not trust an ordinary door, so he becomes the door to guard and protect the sheep. He does not trust a hired man to be in the passageway; only himself does he trust to keep his precious sheep safe though the night. That is the meaning of the verse found in John 10:7, when Jesus says "verily, verily I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep". Read the rest of this passage through verse 18, and you will understand better what Jesus means when he speaks of these things pertaining to the shepherd.

A good shepherd gives his life for his sheep, and that is what Christ did for mankind, he is our door, the door to everlasting life.

God bless you!

Bishop K.C. Pillai, D.D.