

IN WHOSE PASTURE ARE YOU FEEDING?

"O come let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker ! For He is our God and we are the people of ***His pasture.*** (Ps. 95 vs.6-7)

"The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want. ***He*** makes me lie down in ***green pastures.***" (Ps. 23 v.1)

"I am the door; if anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and go in and out and find ***pasture.***" (John ch. 10 v.9)

"You are My sheep, the sheep of ***My pasture,*** and I am your God. (Ezekiel ch. 34 v.31)

The above scriptures will suffice (many more could be quoted) to establish without any shadow of doubt that the Lord is our all-sufficient Shepherd, and that there is a wholly adequate and satisfying source of food for us in the pasture into which He leads us, which He designates as His pasture.

With this in mind, look at the early verses of Jeremiah ch. 23, where the Lord has a controversy with the shepherds of His people. This is what the Lord says: "Woe to the shepherds, who destroy and scatter the sheep of ***My pasture!***" How had these shepherds failed? What had they done that grieved the Lord? As I asked these questions and continued to read on in Jeremiah's prophecy, I came to another passage, this time in chapter 25, where God once more enters into judgment with the shepherds in these terms: "Wail, you shepherds, and cry, and roll in ashes you lords of the flock, for the days of your slaughter and dispersion have come, and you shall fall like choice rams. Hark, the cry of the shepherds, and the wail of the lords of the flock ! For the Lord is despoiling ***their pasture*** and the peaceful folds are devastated, because of the fierce anger of the Lord." (vs. 34-37)

The change of personal pronoun from "***My pasture***" in chapter 23 to "***Their pasture***" in chapter 25 held the key. God, the true Shepherd, wanted the people in ***His pasture,*** but the shepherds had scattered them and had usurped the prerogative of the Lord and had brought the people into ***their own pastures,*** there to become what the scripture calls "Lords of the flock." Now isn't that exactly what has happened with the Church? The Father has appointed for us, as our Shepherd, Jesus the Good Shepherd, and Great Shepherd of the sheep, and He had planned that we should live and feed in ***His pasture*** in one united flock. But now, what we have instead of that, is a multitude of shepherds, "lords of flocks", Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic, etc., each feeding in ***their pasture.***

In another prophetic word, Jeremiah, in chapter 12 vs.10-11 says, "Many shepherds have destroyed ***My vineyard,*** they have trampled down ***My portion,*** they have made My pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. They have made it a desolation; desolate it mourns to me. The whole land is made desolate, but no man lays it to heart."

It would seem, however, that today God has been stirring up some of His people by His Holy Spirit to "lay it to heart" concerning the state of the church so sadly divided

up amongst the pastures of the "lords of the flocks", and He has put in them a strong desire and longing to return to the pasture of the Lord Himself. He is calling them to come out from the control of human shepherds and to follow the one true and good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus, who has promised, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand." Such believers have chosen, rather than the security of the enclosed pastures of the human shepherds, the wide and abundant pastures of the Lord. Their security is in the Shepherd Himself. They have also laid to heart that other sure promise of the great Shepherd, recorded in John ch.10 v 16b, "There shall be one flock, one Shepherd." So they have left the fenced enclosures, and separated folds to be in the "one flock", and they are finding that His pasture is indeed sufficient, and that His care surpasses all human care.

A Lesson from the Farm

I well remember going with a sheep farmer to shift a mob of lambs from a paddock in which they had thoroughly eaten down the grass, into a much larger paddock full of lush feed. First my farmer friend opened the gate, and then he sent his three dogs round the mob to gather them together and bring them up to the gate. With much barking and running to and fro by the dogs, they finally achieved their purpose, and there were all these lambs face to face with the gate. Easy! But no! The animals had other ideas, and off the whole mob went again, swirling round the eaten-out paddock. More whistling and shouting from the farmer, and frantic running and barking from the dogs, and once again the gate confronted the mob. This time some fifteen of the lambs got the message and plunged through the gate and out into the rich pasture, while the rest once more headed for the further reaches of their current paddock. By this time the farmer was not a little frustrated and his dogs were panting heavily with tongues hanging out, but the job had to be completed. The third time in front of the gate, and seeing the pioneers eating happily in hock-deep grass, the great bulk of the flock poured through, but there were still a few who refused. Then my friend shut the gate and said, "Well they'll just have to stay where they are." The dogs were exhausted and he was hoarse!

Later, as I was thinking about it, I saw the whole thing as an acted parable. Here are God's sheep shut up in eaten-out denominational church paddocks belonging to the "lords of the flocks". God opens the gate, and by various means brings His people in front of it, showing them the richness of His abundant pasture, but we are so resistant to change that we refuse to go through. But the Lord is patient and brings us again to the place of choice. This time a few are bold enough to move out beyond the familiar confines, and find stretching before them a wide place with limitless feed. The third time the majority of those who remain see their former companions with heads down eating eagerly, and they decide to abandon the enclosure too. Sadly, however there are those who will not move. It is as if they are saying, "This is our paddock. It is good enough for us. We don't know what might happen to us if we move out. We're staying put."

I believe we are at stage two of the parable. Some pioneers among God's sheep have gone through the open gate, and are finding that the Shepherd has led them into a promised land, not fenced in with rules and regulations, and with abundance of food, "His pasture." Now they can say of a truth, "The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall lack

nothing." But these pioneers are the forerunners of a greater exodus from the church systems, when people will see the open gate and the verdant pasture of the Lord and will come out to join their fellows in that place of overflowing provision. Some, alas, will cleave to the way it has always been done in "our church", and will stick with tradition and be content with their particular enclosures.

And so I return to the question with which I headed this short article; "On whose pasture are you feeding?" Are you fenced in, in a denominational paddock, under a lord of the flock, or are you out in the wide expanses following the Good Shepherd and enjoying "His pasture." In the light of Jeremiah's prophecies where do you think it would be best to be found?

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