

THE CHRISTIAN RACE

AND OTHER SERMONS

BY THE RIGHT REVEREND

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MCM

PREFATORY NOTE

ALTHOUGH the Bishop of Liverpool has published many books—Commentaries, Biographies, and Theological Dissertations—he has never published a volume of sermons.

When his many friends heard that he was about to resign the See of Liverpool, they urged him to publish a volume of his sermons as a “memorial” of his *sixty years’* ministry. The Bishop kindly consented to do so, and invited me to make a selection from his MSS. and to prepare the sermons for the press. I need hardly say that I willingly undertook the task as a “labour of love” for my aged Bishop. The selection I have made for publication sets forth the great doctrines of our Faith—Sin, Redemption, Regeneration, and Sanctification. I have also added sermons which call attention to the *Practical* side of Christianity, and which especially emphasise the “DUTIES” of the Christian life. The closing sermons proclaim the coming of our Lord; the Reward of His Saints; and the Rest of Heaven.

Friends, who knew of the preparation of these sermons for the press, have been praying that the “message of God” which they contain may bring blessing to many thousands. In the sure and certain hope that His Word will not return unto Him void I have prepared this volume of sermons by the first Bishop of Liverpool—and in this hope it is sent forth.

T. J. MADDEN,
Archdeacon of Warrington.

LIVERPOOL, *March 1st*, 1900.

The Bishopric of Liverpool was declared vacant on March 3rd, 1900.
[Bishop Ryle died a few months later.]

IX

THE CHARACTER OF THE TRUE CHRISTIAN

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me! and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.”—JOHN X. 27, 28.

THAT is a glorious saying, a perfect and complete text; containing all I need to know for my soul’s comfort, full of privileges and mercies for true believers and penitent sinners, and at the same time shutting the door effectually against self-righteous Pharisees and whitened sepulchres and painted hypocrites. It shows us two things: the character of real Christians, and the spiritual treasures they possess; or, in other words, what they are to their Saviour, and what their Saviour is to them. I propose this morning to consider these two things in order, and I pray God you may all be led to examine yourselves by the light which the text affords.

I. First, then, with respect to true Christians—their names, their marks, their character: what does the text say about them? “My sheep,” we read, “hear my voice and follow me.” The Lord Jesus Christ likens them to sheep; and He declares “they are mine, and they hear me and follow me.” There is matter we shall do well to consider in each of these expressions.

True Christians, then, are compared to sheep, and we shall find a great depth of meaning in the comparison if we look into it. Sheep are the most harmless, quiet, inoffensive creatures that God has made. So should it be with Christians: they should be very humble and lowly-minded, as disciples of Him who said, “Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.” They should be known as persons of a very gentle and loving spirit, who desire to do good to all around them, who would not injure anyone by word or deed; who do not seek the great things of this world, but are content to go straightforward on the path of duty and take whatever it shall please God to send them. They ought to show forth in their lives and outward conversation that the Holy Ghost has given them a new nature, has taken away their old corrupt disposition and planted in them godly thoughts and purposes and desires. When, therefore, we see people biting and devouring one another, saying and doing uncharitable things to their neighbours, fierce, and passionate and evil-tempered and angry on the slightest occasion; full of envy and strife and bitter speaking,—surely we are justified in saying, “Ye do not belong to Christ’s flock; ye have yet to be born again and made new creatures; there must be a mighty change. Profess what you please, at present we can only see in you the mind of the old man, even Adam the first, but nothing of the Second Adam, even Christ Jesus the Lord; we can discern the spirit of the wolf, however fair your clothing, and we want instead to discover in you

the spirit of the lamb.”

But again, sheep are of all animals the most useful; none are so serviceable to man, none so necessary in every way for his comforts and conveniences; and such should be the character of a true Christian. We must study to do good in our day and generation, and lay ourselves out for the spiritual and temporal advantage of our brethren. All can do much: it is not the rich alone, and the great, who are able to be useful; there are a hundred ways of conferring benefits beside the form of giving gold and silver; and each in his respective station can do good if he will. Has not a poor man a tongue? Then surely, if he is a sheep of Christ’s flock, he will use it for his neighbours’ profit, when occasion is afforded; he will warn and entreat and counsel and persuade; he will reason and argue, as a witness and servant of God, against sin and carelessness in every shape; he will show himself an affectionate lover of men’s souls, who would fain impart to others the knowledge he has found valuable to himself. He will never suffer wickedness to pass unnoticed if, by saying a quiet word on the Lord’s side, he may perchance restrain it. He will never allow anger and strife to continue, if he can be the means of making peace. And then has not a poor man a feeling heart? Then surely, if he is a true sheep of Christ’s flock, he will remember them that are in adversity, as being himself in the body; he will not shun the house of mourning, but strive to be a comforter, bearing in mind the proverb “A word spoken in season, how good is it”; he will weep with them that weep, as well as rejoice with them that rejoice; he will let men see that he is a real child of his Father in heaven, who doeth good to the just and the unjust too, and is kind even to the unthankful and the evil. And cannot a poor man pray? Yes! and effectual fervent prayer availeth much, and if he prays for the souls of others, who knows but he may draw down benefits on all around him? Oh! but a real praying Christian, a man who is constantly asking for the Spirit to come down on the place in which he dwells and convert the sleepers, that man is a mighty benefactor; he is working a powerful engine, and if he is the cause of one single person being converted, he has done something that makes all heaven rejoice. Brethren, let it be written on our minds that all *can* do much, and they that belong to Christ’s flock *will* strive to do much. No man is so really useful in a parish as a true Christian, and no one can have much real Christianity about him who does not endeavour to do good either by his advice or by his example or by his prayers. Are we indeed the sheep of Christ? Let us never forget this point of our character.

A genuine Gospel-faith has nothing selfish about it—it never makes a man think only of his own salvation; it stirs him up, on the contrary, to anxiety about the souls of others. I always suspect that those who care nothing whether their brethren are saved or not, must in reality be ignorant or

thoughtless about their own state.

Again. Sheep love to be together; they do not like being alone; there are no animals which seem to take such pleasure in being in a flock, and cling to each other's company so faithfully. And so is it with true Christians: it is their delight to meet each other and be together, if possible. It is their continual sorrow and complaint that far too often they have to journey on alone, without any that are like-minded to commune with about the things which their souls love most; and this is a very sore trial. Friends and relations may be kind and affectionate, they may have everything to make this world enjoyable, but what they sigh and crave after is to have with them persons who can enter into their secret feelings, who understand the unseen workings of their inward man, who can comprehend the hidden warfare which goes on in their hearts,—persons with whom they can take sweet counsel about their souls' health and souls' trials, with whom they can converse freely and unreservedly about their Lord and Master and their hopes of forgiveness through His name. Who, indeed, can describe the pleasure with which the members of Christ's flock do meet each other face to face? They may have been strangers before; they may have lived apart, and never been in company; but it is wonderful to observe how soon they seem to understand each other, there seems a thorough oneness of opinion, and taste and judgment, so that a man would think they had known each other for years; they seem, indeed, to feel they are servants of one and the same Master, members of the same family, and have been converted by one and the same Spirit; they have one Lord, one faith, one baptism; they have the same trials, the same fears, the same doubts, the same temptations, the same faintings of heart, the same dread of sin, the same sense of unworthiness, the same love of their Saviour. Oh, but there is a mystical union between true believers, which they only know who have experienced it; the world cannot understand it—it is all foolishness to them. "Whatever can you find," they say, "to make you take such interest in each other's society?" But that union does really exist, and a most blessed thing it is; for it is like a little foretaste of heaven.

Beloved, this loving to be together is a special mark of Christ's flock,—nor is it strange if we consider they are walking in the same narrow way, and fighting against the same deadly enemies,—and never are they so happy as when they are in company. The unconverted know nothing of such happiness; they meet each other, and are civil and polite, and even kind in their way; but how seldom do they open their whole hearts, how much of jealousy and cold suspicion there is about their very friendships, how much they conceal from their nearest acquaintances! The sheep of Christ know nothing of all this; it is their hearts' desire to be together, and when together they have all their thoughts in common, there is no reserve, no keeping

back. No doubt there are false professors in the world, who have a form of godliness without the power—tinkling cymbals whose religion consists only in talk, all sound and no substance; but notwithstanding the number of these hypocrites, I still say that true believers are remarkable for their love of communion and intercourse with each other; they are ready to pine away with heaviness when separate; it is the very life-breath of their nostrils to be together.

The last thing I would remark about sheep is this: they are of all animals most helpless, most ready to stray, most likely to lose themselves and wander out of their pasture; and so it is with Christ's people. They are far too ready to turn aside and go in ways that are not good; in vain they are warned and advised to be watchful and take heed to their path; they often get into a drowsy, sleepy frame, and fancy there is no danger, and so they wander down some bypath, and are only wakened by some merciful chastisement or heavy fall. They will have it they are strong enough to get on without this constant vigilance, and so they take their eye off the Chief Shepherd, and wander on from this field to that, after their own desires, until they find themselves at last in darkness and doubt. And Christ's sheep, too, like other sheep, do seldom return to the fold without some damage and loss, for it is far more easy to get out of the right way when you are in, than to get into it when you are out.

There are some people who fancy Christians are perfect and faultless creatures, but this is indeed an opinion far wide of the truth. No doubt they aim at perfection, but the very best come far short of it; they would tell you that in many things they offend daily, that they are continually erring and straying and backsliding, that the most fitting prayer they could offer up would be this: "Lord, we are no better than wandering sheep. God be merciful to us unworthy sinners!"

And then, too, like sheep, true Christians are easily frightened. It takes very little to alarm them and make them fearful about their own condition; they are jealous and suspicious of danger from every quarter, and, like creatures who know their own weakness and the number of their enemies, they will often imagine there is something to be feared where no fear really is. But still this godly fear is an eminent sign of Christ's flock—it proves that they feel their own helplessness; and when a man knows nothing of it, and is full of presumptuous confidence, there is but too much reason to suspect he knows little of Christianity as he ought to know it.

Such appear to be the reasons why true believers are compared to sheep. They may not always be discerned in this corrupt and naughty world; you may often see no great difference between them and the unbelievers, but still they have a nature of their own, and sooner or later if you observe you will see it. You may put a flock of sheep and a flock of swine together in a

broad green meadow, and an ignorant man might say at first their natures were the same; but drive them together in a narrow road, with a puddle at one side, and the mind of the animal will soon come out. The swine may have looked clean in the meadow, but as soon as they have the opportunity they will wallow in the mud. The sheep were clean in the meadow, and when they come to the dirt they will keep clean there too if they possibly can. Just so is the case of the Christian and the world: when things run smoothly, and there is no particular inducement to sin, there seems no mighty difference between them; but when there comes a temptation, and self-denial is required, immediately the disposition of the heart comes uppermost—the Christian holds on his way, however narrow it may be, the worldly-minded turns down that broad lane which leads to destruction, and the real character of each is revealed.

II. The second thing to be considered in our text is that word “My.” Our Lord does not simply call His people sheep, but He says also “My sheep.” It is as though He would have us understand He looks upon them as His property; they are, as it were, stamped and sealed and marked as the possession of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and it is a blessed, comfortable thought that even as men are careful and tender about their earthly belongings, and will not willingly allow them to be lost and damaged, so is our Lord and Saviour careful of the souls that belong to Him.

But why are Christ’s people called Mine, in this particular manner? There are many sufficient reasons. We are “His” by *election*. We were chosen and given to Him by the Father before the foundations of the world were laid; our names were written in the covenant of salvation before we were born, we were predestined or fore-ordained to be His people from all eternity. That is a glorious, a soul-comforting doctrine, however some abuse it: a man may doubtless get to heaven and never feel sure that he was a true sheep of Christ’s flock until he gets there; he may walk in much darkness and uncertainty all his days; but to all who really feel in themselves the working of Christ’s Spirit, the doctrine that we are *His* by everlasting election, is full of sweet, pleasant and unspeakable consolation.

But again: Christ’s people are “His” by *purchase*. Death and hell had claims upon every one of them, they had all broken the law and forfeited eternal life, but Christ has redeemed them. Christ paid the heavy price of their salvation, even His own most precious blood, and well may He call them “Mine,” for He has bought them off from captivity and Satan at the cost of His own life. He can say “They are Mine by fair purchase in time as well as Mine by free election in eternity.”

And lastly, Christ’s people are “His” by *adoption*. He has put His Spirit in them, and overturned the power of sin in their hearts; He has given them a child-like frame of mind, so that they cry Abba Father; they are become

part of His family, the very sons and daughters of the Almighty; He looks upon them as a portion of Himself, as members of His body and flesh and bones, and loves them and cherishes them accordingly. See then, beloved, what great things that little word “My” contains: “My sheep” is the name that Jesus gives to Christians—“Mine” by election, by purchase, by adoption. Oh, believe: you may sometimes be cast down and faint-hearted, but if you have any real interest in that blessed title, if you are really in the number of Christ’s sheep, you have indeed good reason to rejoice.

III. But I must hasten on to the third point which our text lays down in the character of true believers: “My sheep,” says Jesus, “hear My voice.” This hearing of Christ’s voice, what is it? It cannot be the mere hearing of the ears, for many do that who die in their sins; it must be the hearing with the heart, the listening with attention; the believing what is heard,—the acting manfully on what is believed. And where may Christ’s voice be heard? It sometimes whispers in a sinner’s *conscience*, saying, Oh, do not these abominable things: turn, turn, why will you die? it sometimes speaks solemnly, in a visitation of *providence*, as a sickness or an accident or an affliction or a death, saying slowly but clearly, “Stop and think; consider your ways: are you ready to die and be judged?” But it generally is to be heard in the reading of *Scripture* or the preaching of the Gospel; then the voice of the Lord Jesus may be heard plain and distinct. One day it is sharp and piercing: “Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish”; “Ye must be born again”; “Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead.” Another day it is gentle, winning, entreating: “Come unto me, O weary and heavy-laden one, and I will give thee rest”; “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink;” “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” In all these ways and manners the voice of Jesus may be heard. And here comes in the distinction between the converted and the unconverted: they that are converted hear Christ’s voice, but they that are unconverted hear it not. The true sheep of Christ were once foolish and disobedient, serving divers lusts and pleasures, dead in trespasses and sins; but they heard their Redeemer’s voice at last, and when they heard they lived; they knew not at first who called them, but they heard a voice they could not disobey, and now they can tell you they are sure it was the Lord’s. They heard His voice, they listened to His invitation, they believed His promises, they confessed themselves sinners, and in Him they found peace. And now without His voice they will do nothing; His word, His saying, His command, His will is their rule of life,—to be taught of Him by His Spirit and His Bible is their hearts’ desire and prayer, to hear about Him from His ministers is the meat and drink of their souls. Their ears are like a dry soil, ever thirsting to drink in the water of life. Sometimes they may be tempted to turn aside to hear what the world can offer, but they soon go back again to sit at Jesus’ feet and

hear His voice, with sorrow and shame and wonder for their own backslidings. The world cannot see that Christ's voice is such a joyful sound; they dislike it—it offends them; to be told they are sinners, and must repent and believe or perish, is a stumbling-block. But Christ's sheep are never offended; day after day they listen diligently to their Shepherd's teaching; no music is so sweet to their ears as Jesus' voice, and whether preached or written there is nothing they love so much. It seems as if it were spoken for their own particular case, and they cannot, they dare not, they would not for all the world disregard it.

IV. I must go on to the fourth and last mark of a true believer. "My sheep," says the text in St. John, "hear my voice and follow me." To *follow* Christ, that is the grand mark of Christians. No man shall ever say of them, they profess and do not practise, they say and do nothing for their Master's sake; they must not only hear their Master's voice, but follow Him. To follow Christ is to place implicit trust in Him as our Redeemer, Saviour, Prophet, Priest, King, Leader, Commander and Shepherd, and to walk in His ways, straightforwards. It is to take up our cross and subscribe our name among His people, to look to the Lamb as our Guide and follow Him wheresoever He goes. We are not to follow our own devices and trust in ourselves for salvation; we are not to follow that vain shadow of a hope, our own doings and performances, but we are to fix our eyes and hearts on Christ; on Him we are to rest our faith for free and full forgiveness, to Him we are to pray for grace to help in time of need, after Him we are to walk, as the best, the brightest, the purest example. The way may be narrow and steep, we must press forward, not turning to the right hand or the left; the way may be dark, we must keep on,—there will be light enough in heaven. O that Christians, the very best of them, were not so slack in following! Some stop to trifle with the perishable things of earth; some stop to pick up the gaudy, scentless flowers by the wayside; some stop to sleep, forgetting this is not our rest, it is enchanted ground; some stop to pick holes and find fault with their fellow-travellers; few even of Christ's sheep do hold on their way as steadily as they might. But still, compared with the world, they are following Christ Jesus (Oh that they would only remember, those who follow Him most fully shall follow Him most comfortably!); they are following Christ Jesus, and they know where they are going; and even in the dark river, in the valley of the shadow of death, they feel a confidence that their Shepherd will be with them, and His rod and His staff will comfort them. They would all tell you they are poor wandering sheep, less than the least of all God's mercies, ashamed of the little fruit they bear; but still, weak as they are, they are determined to follow on to the end, and to say, "None but Christ, in life and in death, in time and in eternity."

Such is the character which the text gives of true Christians. They are

compared to sheep; they are called Christ's property; they hear His voice, and they follow Him. To go further at this time would be plainly impossible, and I therefore purpose, if the Lord will, to speak to you about the other branch of the text—the privileges of Christians—this evening. By God's blessing you shall then hear what their Saviour is to His people. It only remains to wind up what has been already said by personal application.

I told you this was a text for *self-inquiry*; and in that light I press upon each of you now. I call upon thee, O man or O woman, to put thy hand upon thy heart and ask that little question, "Am I a sheep of Christ's flock, or am I not? Do I hear His voice or do I not? Do I follow Him or do I not?" Does not thy Redeemer and thy Judge say plainly, "This is the character of my people?" Does He not give thee the most certain marks by which to try thy state? and if thou canst not see in thyself these marks, where and what are thy claims to eternal life? without them thou art, for the present, no better than a lost soul. Dost thou not know there are only to be two sorts of characters before the judgment-seat—sheep on the right hand in honour, and goats on the left hand in disgrace? And dost thou not know it is just the same even now? There are only two classes of characters upon earth—men who hear Christ and follow Christ and are in a way to be saved, and men who neither hear nor follow Him and are in a way to be lost? And which flock dost thou belong to? There is no middle state. Examine thyself and be wise in time.

Think not to put off this question by saying, "I shall do as well as the rest of the world,"—that well may be doing very badly. The way of the world, indeed! Bring the world to the bar, and try it by the text, "Does the world hear Christ?" Who will stand forth and say it does? Christ's promises and invitations and warnings and threatenings and instructions and exhortations are all alike disregarded and despised; the world is deaf to them; they might never have been spoken. "Oh," says the world, "we shall do very well without minding all that; it was not meant for us." And who was it meant for, then?

But again, does the world follow Christ? Who will stand up and say Yes to that? No, indeed! Christ's ways and Christ's example, holiness and love and meekness and temperance and self-denial, are the exceptions—the rare, scarce things in the world; and the things most frequent are anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, drunkenness, revellings, wantonness, pride, vanity, idleness, spiritual sloth, Bible-despising, prayer-neglecting, church-forgetting, worldliness, and the like. "Oh, never mind," says the world; "we shall do very well without being so strict." Very well in the devil's opinion, who would love to ruin every living soul, but not very well in God's. No; indeed the world will neither

follow Christ nor hear Christ, anything else sooner—and yet remember it is the character of those who are to have eternal life that they hear Christ’s voice and follow Him. Sinner, remember, today I have told you.

And think not, O man, to put me off by saying, “At this rate very few will be saved.” Thou sayest very truly, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself foretold it; but let me tell thee a secret: Why is it so few are likely to be saved? God would have all men brought unto the knowledge of the truth: why do so many, so very many, come short and take the broad way? Simply because they will not believe what God has told them in His word; simply because they will have it God will not stand to what He has written in His Bible; they will fancy heaven is to be entered without being Christ’s sheep—will have their own way and not God’s.

Remember, then, this day, I tell thee, that God is willing to receive thee *if thou wilt only turn to Him*: if thou wilt only resolve to think for thyself and never mind the world, if thou wilt only hear the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ and follow Him, if thou wilt only be in earnest and come unto Him for forgiveness and His Holy Spirit, He shall grant thee thy heart’s desire, and thou shalt never perish but have eternal life. But whether thou wilt hear or whether thou wilt forbear, Christ and Christ only is the way, the truth, and the life, and whatever the world may tell thee, no man shall ever come unto the Father but by Him.