

Song of Solomon 1: 8; "Follow in the Footsteps of the Flock", Sermon # 10 in the series - "I am my Beloved's", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall, On July 26th, 2009, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

Last week we spoke of the flock of our Lord Jesus Christ and how He feeds it and makes it to rest at noon. We saw that every true believer in Christ is a sheep in His pasture. We saw that one of the greatest responsibilities that the shepherd has, is to feed the sheep. To feed the sheep of Christ spiritually, is to feed them the word of God. These are also the good pastures that we lie down in; where we find rest for our souls. We saw that Christ our Lord is the Chief Shepherd, and that it is on the basis of His finished work on the cross, and because of the power of His resurrection, which is extended to them by His Spirit's working in their hearts, that all of His sheep are fed. But we also saw that He has entrusted the actual feeding of the sheep, in part, in a delegated sense, to undershepherds whom He has chosen. This began with the Apostles, and I gave you an example of this in the life of Peter in John 21. After Peter had denied our Lord three times as He was going to His trial and afterwards to the cross, Peter felt that anything that he could do for Christ was all over; it was at an end. But the Lord Jesus came to Him later on, after His resurrection, and spoke to him personally about this subject. And He asked Peter three times if he loved Him. After each one of Peter's affirmations of love to Him, Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." This was the work that Christ had called him to do; this work of the sheep being fed by Peter was something that Christ died for; and it was something that the Lord Jesus was going to see effectually accomplished in Peter's life. He was going to follow in the footsteps of the flock. He was going to "feed his little goats beside the shepherd's tents." We want to examine the meaning of this more closely this afternoon. The lesson that our Lord would teach us this afternoon from this text is; that all those Christians who would be faithful to Christ must "follow in the footsteps of the flock." Whether they are least in the kingdom of God or greatest, they must follow Christ on the path of righteousness. They must follow the Chief Shepherd and listen to His voice. If they would be faithful to Him, and if they would be a good example to others; or if they would become teachers of others; one who would feed and lead the sheep; they cannot be as one who is veiled beside the flocks of Christ's companions. They cannot be shepherds or shepherdesses who are strangers to Christ's work or His ways with the sheep. They cannot be ones who wander away from Christ and the work that He calls them to; of following Him and looking out for the needs of others. They cannot be strangers to Christ's work of shepherding them and their hearts. They must be able to say with the Psalmist in Psalm 23, "Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me."

So this afternoon, what I want to do, is to set before you the answer of our Lord to the questions of this Shulamite Bride; the one who would be a faithful shepherdess. I want to show you the 3 encouragements which Christ gives, in His answer to those who are seeking greater faithfulness and usefulness in His service. This message is not only for those who are shepherding others. It is for all those who

would be faithful, in any capacity of Christian service, to the Chief Shepherd. 1st of all - The first encouragement that Christ gives to those who are seeking greater faithfulness and usefulness in His service is to tell them how He sees them. The 2nd encouragement is that He tells them is that there will be good instruction given them if they will follow in the footsteps of the flock. And the 3rd encouragement is to tell them that there are great blessings which come to those who spiritually feed others; those who are children and young in the faith. Let us receive these encouragements from our Savior as a motivation to greater service to Him.

1st of all - the 1st Encouragement which Christ gives to those who are seeking greater faithfulness and usefulness in His service is; He tells His Bride how He sees her.

"If you do not know, O fairest among women...." Now I find it very interesting that this is the way that Christ addresses her when she herself has already said, back in verse 5, that when she looks at herself, she sees herself as dark, or black. But realize, dear believer, that when Christ looks upon His Bride, He sees her as the fairest among women. He sees every true believer in Himself as fair, because of His own righteousness which He imputes to her. It is His own beauty of righteous which He has wrought out for her, and with which He clothes her. She is fair because He beholds the perfect work of His grace at work in her soul. Psalm 45, verse 13, "The King's daughter is all glorious within." Not only within the palace, but out in the field with the flocks. All believers who are maturing, all who are growing more into Christ-likeness; they want to be with His flocks. They want to be with other believers in a church. They want to be with others who are serving Him. They are asking the question which is closest to Christ's heart; where is the group of God's people meeting where I could serve Him best and grow the most? As they join with a local church and become involved in the process of being fed by Christ's undershepherds; they look outside of themselves to see how they might be able to feed others. They want to become more involved in Christ's work. These are fair and most beautiful to Him. They know that they do not have all the answers. But they also know that their Savior, Master, and Friend does have all the answers. That is why they ask Him for wisdom in prayer, and that is why they ask questions of those who are the undershepherds among Christ's flock. Christ does not look down upon their lack of knowledge and give them no answer to their questions. He gives them the answers that are suitable for them, at every stage of their growth in their relationship to Him, so that they will be able to serve Him with knowledge.

I like what Spurgeon says about Christ's thinking of the believer as fair. He says, "I would rather trust Christ eyes than mine." "If my eyes tell me I am black I will weep, but if he assures me I am fair I will believe Him and rejoice." "Some saints are more apt to remember their sinfulness, and grieve over it, than to believe in their righteousness in Christ, and triumph in it." "Remember, beloved, it is quite as true today that you are all fair and without spot as that you are black, because the sun hath looked upon you." "It must be true, because Jesus says so." A little later he says, "How glorious is this." "Jesus does not exaggerate when he thus commends his

church." "He speaks plain, sober, truth." "O thou fairest among women,' saith he. "My soul, dost thou not feel love to Christ when thou rememberest that he thinks thee beautiful?" "I cannot see anything in myself to love, but he does, and calls me "all fair." "I think it must be that he looks into our eyes and sees, himself, or else this, that he knows what we are going to be, and judges us on that scale." "As the artist, looking on the block of marble, sees in the stone the statue which he means to fetch out of it with matchless skill, so the Lord Jesus sees the perfect image of himself in us, from which he means to chip away the imperfections and the sins until it stands out in all its splendor." "But still it is gracious condescension which makes Him to say, "Thous art fairest among women", to one who mourned her own sunburnt countenance." Let us praise God and be encouraged that He has given to us such a husband; such a friend, who when He looks at us, He sees fairness.

The 2nd Encouragement that Christ gives to those who are seeking greater faithfulness and greater usefulness in His service is that He tells them that there will be good instruction given them if they will follow in the footsteps of the flock.

"Follow in the footsteps of the flock". There is a path upon which the sheep are moving. They are walking by faith on the path of righteousness for Christ's name sake. They have inquired about where Christ's flock is, and they have found it. It is the Church of Jesus Christ. It is composed of Jews and Gentiles whose father is Abraham. Romans 4: 11 and 12 say, "Abraham was the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised." Those believers who are wise, whether they are Jew or Gentile, are those who ask for the old paths of living in accordance with the word of God; having His word be their guide in life. They are looking for the good things that Christ alone can bring by His grace as it says in Jeremiah 6: 16 - "Thus says the Lord: Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls." The footsteps of the flock should be upon the good old path that God has laid out for all believers. The people who Jeremiah was preaching to didn't heed his good instruction and as a result God brought calamity upon them. But this Shepherdess Bride did follow in the footsteps of the flock. When she asked where the Chief Shepherd fed His flock and where He made it rest at noon; she was asking for directions to the good old paths of Scriptural obedience and righteousness were; she wanted to find rest for her own soul, and rest for all those who she had an influence upon. She wanted to be involved in the Chief Shepherd's work. You see this same kind of request being made in the form of a prayer by the Psalmist David in Psalm 25: 4 and 5. "Show me your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths." "Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day." And verses 8-10 of that same Psalm. "Good and up-right is the Lord; therefore He teaches sinners in the way." "The humble He

guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way." "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, to such as keep His covenant and His testimonies."

The Shepherdess in this passage represents the growing believer who desires to be engaged in following Christ in every way possible. And she has others around her, brothers and sisters in Christ who have gone before her and who she would follow in their footsteps. New Testament believers would imitate Paul as he imitates Christ. They should remember his words in Philippians 3, verse 17. "Brethren, join in following my example and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern." Some believers are strong enough in their faith, and obedient enough to the Scriptures that they can indeed be a pattern for others. Christ is faithful to work with the heart of every one of His followers. Because the believer has been born again by the Spirit of God, they hear a voice behind them saying, "This is the way; walk in it." Christ's sheep hear His voice and they follow Him and He gives them eternal life. They hear this voice in the Scriptures, as they read them and hear them preached. But they also spiritually hear the voice of the Lord directing them to follow the teaching and example of others who have gone before them, or those who are older than they are in the faith, and farther along the path. It is not an audible voice, but a still small voice speaking in their heart; a voice which directs them to look at the faith and patience of others around them. And so as they walk on these paths of mercy and righteousness and truth, they often are often found, following in the footsteps of other saints who have gone before them. They look to those who are older than they are in the faith. They look to their elders and pastors and experienced Christians in the midst of the assembly that they attend. And they learn from them and they watch the way that they live, and how their life is bringing glory to God and Christ.

Turn to Hebrews chapter 13, verse 7. "Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. This is one of the great reasons that God has appointed undershepherds in the flock of God. Yes, they are there to speak the word of God to you. Yes, they care for the spiritual needs of the sheep, but they are also placed near to you to set forth for you an example of faith in the way that they personally live their lives and in the way that they lead and rule in the church. You are to consider the outcome of their faith. You are to study from it to learn from it, more of the ways of God; how He does things in their life, so that your faith and your Christian life might grow stronger. You will grow stronger when in service to Christ as your faith grows stronger. And faith is often strengthened by good examples of godly people living now in front of us, and also those who have gone before in history. A good example is found in Hebrews Chapter 6, verse 9, if you will turn with me there. Having spoken of how close a person can come to really having salvation and still lose it, in verses 1-6, the writer to the Hebrews says this to those whom He loves in Christ. "But beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner." "For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister." "And we desire that each one of

you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." You see here is the good old path of righteousness which others have trodden on. But the warning is against being sluggish in faith. The way to become diligent in the work of faith and love is to imitate others who were diligent. The believer walks upon this path by faith and with patience, imitating those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. They follow those who have gone before. They are diligent to minister to the saints and they continue to look for every opportunity to do good to others. God does not forget this kind of work. Rather, He encourages it by giving to those who are faithful in little things, a great assurance of hope, that in keeping the commandments of God and loving the brethren that great blessing and reward shall flow in, like a fountain to their lives. Having been faithful in little things, Christ knows that He can entrust them with much more. Oh brethren, can we catch a glimpse of this today? What blessings and rewards await those who have persevered in well-doing by following in the footsteps of the flock!

And then the 3rd encouragement that Christ gives to those who be more faithful and useful to Him is to tell them that there are great blessings which come to those who spiritually feed others; those who are children and young in the faith.

"Follow in the footsteps of the flock, and feed your little goats beside the shepherd's tents." The word "goats" could be a stumbling block here, seeing as goats sometimes in the Scripture being a goat has the definite connotation of sin connected with it. Jesus talks about separating the sheep from the goats when He returns the second time. The word "kids" is used in the American Standard Version and the King James. But this word "goats" is meant to be understood as it is spoken of in Leviticus 1, verse 10. When the children of Israel brought an offering to the Lord, their offering might be a bull, but it could also be as it says in verse 10 - "If his offering is of the flocks--of the sheep or of the goats--as a burnt sacrifice, he shall bring a male without blemish." The type is of Christ Himself as it says in Hebrews 9: 12 -14. "Not with blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption." "For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" There is our connection with service. Our conscience must be cleansed from dead works; all those works that we thought to do to please God before conversion. All those works, also, which we do to serve Him after conversion which really do not have the right motivation; which is the glory of God. Christ died so that all of our works could be established as being wrought in Him. At first sight, It doesn't seem that glorious a thing to try to bring children up in the faith of Christ. But it is what is on the Lord's mind and heart. "Feeding the little goats" is referring to raising up of the young and tender of the Lord's flock to grow up to be mature and strong. It is raising children, physical and spiritual, to the glory of God. The Church

of Jesus Christ is meant to bear children to Him. And it will be said of her, as it says in Psalm 87: 5, "And of Zion it will be said, 'This one and that one were born in her; and the Most High Himself shall establish her.'" "The Lord will record, when He registers the people; this one was born there." "Both the singers and the players on instruments say, 'All my springs are in you.'" Is that how it is with you, dear believer, who would be more faithful and more useful to Christ? Are all your springs in the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church? Then there will be great blessings which will come to you and to others. Are we all walking in the same steps of those who have been faithful and gone before us? "If you do not know, O fairest among women, follow in the footsteps of the flock, and feed your little goats beside the shepherd's tents." Let us walk in step with each other in the fear of the Lord. I like what the Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12: 14 - "Now for the third time I am ready to come to you." "And I will not be burdensome to you; for I do not seek yours; but you." "For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children." "And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved." "But be that as it may, I did not burden you." "Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you by cunning!" "Did I take advantage of you by any of those whom I sent to you?" "I urged Titus, and sent our brother with him." "Did Titus take advantage of you?" "Did we not walk in the same spirit?" "Did we not walk in the same steps?" This is what I pray will be the case with us here in this church. Let us pray to walk in the same steps and pray to minister to those who are young in the faith, and young in body and mind. We will have amply opportunity this next week in the Vacation Bible School.