

“FEED MY SHEEP.”

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

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“He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.” — John 21:16.

THOSE whom the Lord addressed, and especially Simon, had become fishermen. “Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes.” In the early part of your career most of you were fishermen, or men-catchers, and, truly, to be fishers of men should be your ambition all your lives; but you have now become something more, the fisher has developed into a shepherd. The fisherman represents the evangelist who casts the net into the waters and draws the fish to land, but it is not to him that Christ says, “Feed my sheep;” that is reserved for those of greater maturity and experience. Many of you have now for years been settled in one sphere, and while you will continue to fish, I trust that more and more you will remember that you now have other duties, to perform; you have to feed as well as to fish, to handle the crook as well as the net. We now leave the sea, wherein we were drifted to and fro, and we abide among our own flocks, standing and feeding in the strength of the Lord: we cease not to do the work of an evangelist, but we pay special attention to the duties of the pastor, for he who once said, “Cast the net on the right side of the ship,” now saith to us, “Feed my sheep.” I am addressing disciples to whom the Lord hath shown himself; may he now at this happy season commission us anew, and send us home with the word which he spake to Peter resting in our hearts!

I. This was a sort of ordination of Peter to the pastorate. He needed to be publicly recognized, for he had publicly offended; and his ordination commenced with AN EXAMINATION BEARING ON THE WORK. “Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?” Our Lord does not admit any to the oversight of his flock without first of all questioning them as to their inner condition; neither should any man dare to accept such an office without great self-examination and searching of heart. Many questions, should be put to our hearts, and answered as in the sight of God; for no man rightly taketh this honor upon himself but he that is called thereunto, neither is every man fitted for the work, but he alone who is anointed of the Lord. You will observe that the examination was directed to the state of Peter’s heart, and so *it touched the innermost spring of all his religion*; for if love be absent, all is vain is lacking.

Love is the chief endowment for a pastor; you *must* love Christ if you mean to serve him in the capacity of pastors. Our Lord deals with the most vital point. The question is not “Simon, son of Jonas, knowest thou me?” though that would not have been an unreasonable question, since Peter had said, “I know not the man.” He might have; asked, “Simon, son of Jonas, knowest thou the deep mysteries of God?” He did know them, for his Lord had called him blessed for knowing that which flesh and blood had not revealed to him. Our great Bishop of souls did not examine him with regard to his mental endowments, nor upon his other spiritual qualifications, but only upon this one, “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?” If so, then, “Feed my sheep.” Does not this plainly show us that the chief endowment of the pastor is to love Christ supremely, only such a man as that is fit to love after Christ’s sheep. You will fulfill that office well if you love Jesus: your love will keep you in your Lord’s company, it will hold you under his immediate supervision, and will secure you his help. Love to him will breed a love for all his sheep, and your love for them will give you power over them. Experience testifies that we never gain a particle of power for good over our people by angry words, but we obtain an almost absolute power over them by all-enduring love; indeed, the only power which it is desirable for us it have must come in that way. I have had the high pleasure of loving some of the most objectionable people till they loved me; and some of the most bitter I have altogether won by refusing to be displeased, and by persisting in believing that they could be better. By practical kindnesses I have so won some men that I believe it would take a

martyrdom to make them speak evil of me. This has also been the experience of all who have tried the sacred power of love.

My brethren, learn the art of loving men to Christ. We are drawn towards those who love us; and when the most callous feel “that man loves us,” they are drawn to you at once; and as you are nearer to the Savior than they are, you are drawing them in the right direction. You cannot look after God’s people, and properly care for them in all their sins, temptations, trials, and difficulties, unless you love, them; you will grow sick and weary of pastoral work unless there be a fresh spring of love in your heart welling up towards them. A mother tires not of watching by the bedside of her sick child, because love sustains her; she will outlast the paid nurse by many an hour; love props her drooping eyelids. Even so, “the hireling fleeth because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep,” but “the good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” If you really love the sheep, you will be ready to spend your life for them or even to lay it down for their sakes. Love, then, I take to be the chief endowment of the pastor; although having that, I trust you will not fall short in any other respect but be thoroughly furnished unto every good work. Do not forget what you have been told about study and culture, but remember as the same time that the heart has more power in pastoral work than the head. In this ministry, a humble, godly, ill-educated man with a great, warm, heart will be blessed far more than the large-headed man whose heart is a little diamond of rock-ice which could not be discovered without a microscope, even if he were dissected.

The Lord Jesus Christ connected his examination, upon the matter of love with the commission “Feed my sheep,” because our work in *feeding the flock of God is the proof of love to the Lord*. Do we not tell our people that love must be not in word only but also in deed? We judge whether any man has love to Christ by testing what he will do for Christ. What suffering or reproach will he endure for him? What of his substance will he consecrate to his service? What of himself will he use for the Lord? We can tell which of us, as a minister, is proving his love to Christ by ascertaining who is really shepherding Christ’s flock, and laying out himself for the benefit of the Lord’s redeemed. The man to whom Jesus said, “Lovest thou me?” was the same who before had said “Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.” Some among us would readily venture upon that water-walking, for it would be something extraordinary and brief, and this would suit us, for we are not given to plodding perseverance. Our zeal is

great, and we dash off as Peter did, though soon, like him, we begin to sink. Note well that Christ does not say, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Go and walk the water." The Master seems to say, "You have done enough of that in your young days, now go and quietly feed my sheep. It is hard, tiring, quiet work: and if you have no love to me, you will soon weary of it. 'Feed my sheep,' 'Feed my sheep,' 'Feed my sheep;' three times I bid you do it, that you may continue in the work as long as you live, for thus will you have given proof of the reality of your affection for me." Brethren, go back to your flocks, and feed them well, and so give fresh evidences of your love to your Lord.

This pastoral work for Christ is the craving of love in every heart that is set apart for it of the Lord. Every soul that truly loves him longs to do something for him: it cannot do otherwise, love must serve its beloved, it yearns to go and lay its offering at his feet. No pressure was needed to make the forgiven sinner wash Christ's feet with her tears, and wipe them with the hairs of her head, and anoint them with precious ointment; her heart suggested it, and she hastened to obey; and if you, my brethren, are true pastors, you cannot help looking after the wandering sheep, you naturally care for your people, you have a sacred instinct which compels you to be lovers of men's souls. You see how little girls, as if it were in them naturally to act as nurses, will kiss their dolls, and fondle, caress, dress, and care for them as mothers do for their children; and just so we have seen mere lads converted to Christ, and intended by the Lord to become pastors, who, before they have been out of their teens, have begun to speak of Jesus to their little friends and companions. The Lord has caused them even from their new birth to feel a shepherd's propensities strong within them. It was so with some of us, we could not have helped preaching even if we would, we were born to preach when we were born again; let us then indulge the sacred passion to the full.

Brethren, since we have been at this work, it has been to us *the stimulus of love*. The way to love another more is to do more for him. When a man has done a kindness to you, he will love you; the receiver may be unmindful of the favor, but the giver has a better memory. There is no fear of our Lord's ceasing to love us, since for us he has suffered even unto death; the supreme sacrifice made once for all renders it impossible that he should do otherwise than rest in his love. Even so, if we labor and pray, and practice self-denial for others, we are sure to love them all the more. Then, too, as you go on feeding Christ's sheep, building up his people, and cheering his

discouraged ones, you will love your Master more, and your love for him will act again upon you, and cause increased love to the people, and so on evermore. Those over whom you have most agonized have delighted you most when at last they have been converted; your joy has been increased as you have waited for the realization of your hope.

This feeding of the sheep is to the love which is the matter in question *a sphere of communion*. “Feed my sheep” unites us in service with Jesus. Love longs to be with Jesus, and in fellowship with him. The Lord was about to ascend to heaven when he said to Simon, “Feed my sheep,” and Simon could not as yet go with him; but if he would accompany his Lord while abiding here, he must follow on his Lord’s work, and abide with his Lord’s flocks. If we will undertake labors of love, for those whom he has redeemed, if we will go wherever his sheep are lost, seeking, —

*“With cries, entreaties, tears, to save,
To snatch them from the fiery wave,” —*

we shall soon find ourselves where Jesus is. He is always at that business, he seeketh poor sinners still; and if we are engaged in the same search, we shall be with him, we shall enter into his feelings, we shall share his desires, and feel his sympathies. When thus with him, we shall witness his heart breaking throes, and almost see his bloody sweat streaming down when he was agonizing for souls, for we shall in some feeble measure feel the same. You cannot understand your Lord till you have wept over your congregations; you will understand *him* then, as you see him weeping over Jerusalem. If you feel towards your hearers that you could die to save their souls, you will then have fellowship, with the death of your Lord. In grief over backsliders and joy over penitents you will commune with the Redeemer in the most practical manner. You must feel a shepherd’s feelings, and give, practical proof of it by daily feeding the flock, else will your fellowship with the great Shepherd be mere sentiment, and not a fact.

So much about the previous examination of the candidate for the pastorate. But it is worth noting that the examination is often needed in after life, for we need to be kept right as well as to be made so. Our Lord comes to us this morning with the old question, he pauses at each man, and questions him just as at the first. He seems to say, you have read many men’s books, do you still love *me*? You have heard many conflicting opinions, do you still love *me*? You have been very poor and hardworked, do you still love *me*? Your people have treated some of you very badly, you have had to go

from place to place, you have been slandered, reviled, maligned, do you love me still? You have been sorely put to it to find discourses; I have sometimes left you, as you thought, to make you own your weakness, do you still love *me*?" Imagine that he changes his tone, and says, "Simon, son of Jonas, you have not been all that you promised. You thought you would go to prison and to death with me, and you never dreamed that you could have been so cold-hearted in my service as you have been, and have lived at so great a distance from me as you have done; but do you still love me? If so, remember that in going back to your ministry, you must gather renewed strength from renewed love. Love me more, and then feed my sheep." We rejoice as we listen to his gracious voice, and each one of us answers, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee; and I will feed thy sheep."

II. Secondly, let us LOOK AT THE PERSON EXAMINED IN RELATION TO THE WORK. Perhaps he may bear the same relation to you as he does to me. Painfully do I know myself to be a successor of one of the apostles; — not of Judas, I hope, but certainly of Peter. I could have wished that it had been John whom I had succeeded; but although it is only Peter, it is some consolation to know that he also was "an apostle of Jesus Christ" notwithstanding his terrible fall.

Why did the Savior examine Peter rather than any other? *Because Peter was in peculiar need of a re-ordination.* Had he not received it from his Lord, some would have said in after days, "Was he really an apostle?" and others would have replied, "He thrice denied his Master, surely he is not one of the twelve." We cannot help feeling that blindness has seized the church of Rome when she boasts of the commission to feed Christ's sheep having been given to the apostle Peter, when with half an eye anyone can see that our Lord addressed these words to Peter because at that time he was the least of the twelve. He had denied his Master, the others had not, and, therefore, he was the one concerning whose apostleship distrust was most likely to arise. The sheep would in all probability have refused to recognize him; they might have said, "We cannot receive food at your hands, for we remember how you were frightened by a silly maid, how you denied your Lord, and supported your denial with oaths and curses." Therefore, came the voice to Peter, who needed it. If there is one with us now who feels like conscience-stricken Peter, let him hear the text. Dear friend, if you have any doubt about your call, and even if there should be as

grave cause for that doubt as there was in Peter's case, yet still, if you feel that you love the Lord, hear him again commission you with "Feed my sheep." In your present condition, which is rather that of the weeping penitent than of the assured believer, it will be well to go to your work very steadily, for it will comfort you, deepen your piety, and increase your faith.

Our Lord called Peter to this work because it would be peculiarly beneficial to him. He knew how sincere was his repentance, and how hearty was his grief on account of his great sin; and, therefore, lest he should be overtaken with too much sorrow, he said to him, "Feed my sheep." If nothing had been spoken personally and specially to him, he might have mourned heavily, saying, "Alas, I denied my Master, I swore that I never knew him;" and when the Lord was gone up again into glory, instead of standing up as he did on the day of Pentecost to preach that, ever-memorable sermon, he might have been found at home weeping; instead of going up to the temple with John at the hour of prayer, he might have kept in his chamber, and there mourned all the day. Grief is best expelled by other thoughts; when you have been cast down, it is well when some important engagement has called off your attention from your trouble, and I think the compassionate Master raised Peter out of what might have grown into a morbid condition of continual grief by bidding him feed his sheep. He seemed to say, "Come hither, my dear disciple. I know you are sincerely penitent, and I have fully forgiven you for denying me as you did. Mourn no longer, but go and feed my sheep." Then, as the Lord fed the sheep by him, and blessed him to the conversion of others, he would feel certain that his Lord did not remember his faults, and thus he would learn how perfect was the pardon he had received. I do not know that there is a brother with us this morning who is in the condition of Peter; but if I did know such an one, and could read his heart, I would go out to him, and say, "Come, brother, we are not going to cast you out; we consider ourselves lest we also be tempted. You have been converted once as a sinner, you must now be converted as a minister; and when you are converted, strengthen your brethren. Yes, my brother, go back to your Lord and Master, and then, with all your soul inflamed with love for him, feed his sheep, and the Lord bless you in so doing!"

Dear brethren, in Peter's case we see, a man zealous for his Lord, but of imperfect character, and we see how *his failure had been overruled by God to prepare him for his life-work* of feeding Christ's sheep. John did not

want such preparation, and the other nine did not require it. It was only Peter who needed to be thus rebuked by a display of his own weakness. This man was too great, too self-confident, too much Peter, and too little a disciple; and he must therefore, come down. Probably nothing could have brought him to his true bearings like his being left to see what was in his heart. We speak with bated breath when we say that, to some men, a painful break-down has been the making of them. They became from that, time free from their former self-esteem, all were as cleansed and emptied vessels, fit for the Master's use. A deep sense of our weakness and a humbling consciousness of unworthiness form a considerable part of our qualification for dealing with Christ's sheep. Because you are a sinner, you will deal lovingly with sinners; because you know what backsliding means, you will be very gentle and forbearing with backsliders because you have broken your own bones, you will be very careful how you handle those who have broken theirs.

You see, then, that this feeding of the sheep, as I have already shown you, would benefit Peter in the particular condition in which he then was, and it is not hard to see that *it would benefit him by keeping his rashness in check*. I know some beloved brethren who are impetuous, and, God bless them, I love them none the less for that, especially when they know how to bridle their impetuous spirits, and only allow them to dash out against evil; but some are rashly impetuous and strong-headed, and it will need considerable discipline to make them into useful, workable men; but when the Lord has done this, they will become those determined, independent, resolute men of mark and mind who are so valuable to the Church of God. Such brethren want the education of a pastorate at once to curb and to develop them. You did not know how foolish you were till you had to deal with fools, and found that you could not suffer them gladly. You did not know how passionate you could be till you had to meet with quick tempered people like yourself. You did not know how rash you could be till you fell into the society of a dozen rash men like yourself, who egged you on in your fool-hardiness. You have now discovered that, where you fancied there was a great deal of strength, there was a vast amount of weakness. I believe that the Peter of the Epistles grew out of the Peter of the sea of Tiberias and the Peter of the denial, by means of the grace given, him, while feeding the flock of God. Peter was a bigoted, narrow-minded Jew, and could not readily believe that any others beyond the chosen nation were to be saved; but when he mixed with mankind, and was sent to the

house of Cornelius, his heart grew larger, although it was not as large as it should have been till Paul boldly withstood him to the face because he was to be blamed. "Feed my sheep" is, therefore, beloved, a commission intended for your own good as well as theirs.

It touched me very much to find our Lord addressing Peter by his old name of Simon, son of Jonas. I do not know why he should not have said, "Peter, lovest thou me?" John writes "Jesus saith to Simon Peter." Why did not our Lord call him so? Was it not, in the first place, to remind him of his natural weakness? He is not called Petros, the stone, the rock; but the son of Jonas, the son of a timid dove; and it is under that name that he is commissioned to feed the sheep. Brethren, if this morning you are filled with a consciousness of your own weakness and unworthiness, the Master says to you, "Still go and feed my sheep." If you are not in your own opinion fit for the work, still let the sheep be fed. Do not let them suffer because you are not in a right state of mind and heart. These sheep, what have they done; Why should they starve? It is only too true that you have sinned, but let not that sad fact rob the people of a full display of the gospel next Lord's day. "Feed my sheep." Go as Peter, if you can; but when you cannot do so, go as "Simon, son of Jonas."

But I think there was a deeper reason, and one which touched me more, why our Lord said, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" This was his old name before he was converted, for when Jesus first saw him, he said, 'Thou art Simon, the son of Jonas.' Nothing will help you to feed the flock of God, brethren, like recollecting the time and circumstances when you were first brought to Jesus. If it were possible, which it is not, I should like to be converted every Sunday morning before preaching. At any rate, I should like to feel just that tenderness of heart, that admiration for my Savior, that all-absorbing love, to my Lord, and that wonderment at the grace of God toward me which I felt when I was converted.

There may have been another reason why Jesus said, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Perhaps it was because, when Simon had discovered that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, his Master said to him, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." By repeating that name, our Lord made Peter recollect, in addition to his conversion, the many happy seasons which he had enjoyed, in which the Lord had manifested himself to him as he does not unto the world. We are bound to preach of

the things which we have tasted and handled. If, like John, we have been in Patmos, let us not cease to talk of him that walketh among the golden candlesticks. Come down from the mount to tell of what you have yourself seen there. Be filled with recollections of all the blessed intercourse you have enjoyed with Christ, and then speak about him to others, thus the joy of the Lord shall be your strength. You will have no doubt then of your call to the ministry, but you will say, "that which was from the beginning, which we have seen with our eyes which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life, declare we unto you." "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen."

III. In the third place, I must confine myself to giving you a mere outline of THE WORK ITSELF, as our time is flying so fast. What have we to do, then? "Feed my sheep." In the English, you have the command three times over, "*Feed my sheep.*" What are we to do with the sheep? *Feed! Feed! Feed!* That seems to be the whole of our business, "*Feed my sheep.*" Truth to tell, the middle Greek word properly means shepherdize them, guide them, lead them, go before them as a shepherd does. The first and last words are the same, *feed*. In each of the three sentences there is a minute difference, but twice out of three times in the original the word is *feed*. If I mention nothing else but feeding as the pastor's duty, it will be the very best lesson I could have given you, even if other valuable duties are cast into the shade. Wherever you are weak, be strong in the pulpit. Give the people a good hearty meal whenever you preach. They will put up with a great many defects if you will only feed them. An Englishman is in a good condition if he is fed. Feed him, and he will be all right; but if you dress him, and do not feed him, he will not care for the clothes you put on him however fine they are. You may wash him if you like, but you must feed him. There is an inward, powerful persuader which convinces a man that to be happy and healthy he must be fed. Now, God's people are the hungriest people in the world, they never seem to be satisfied. If you watch a flock of sheep feeding in a clover field, you will be surprised to see how they will eat: they eat, and eat, and eat; and so God's people are a hungering, craving people. It is written, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." They "shall be filled;" it does not say, they shall have a nip and a bite, and then be driven away; and therefore we are to treat them as God would have them treated, — feed them, feed them to the full. Never be afraid of being too free with the food, or of giving them too much sound doctrine and gospel provender.

Some want to drive the flock, but that will never do; we must feed, not drive. We will lead them, say you; that is very good but do not lead lean sheep; feed and fatten them, and then they will follow gladly. Perhaps you wish to govern them, well, the middle word does mean govern after the gospel fashion; but if you somewhat govern, yet give two supplies of feeding for one of ruling. You will be sure to succeed if you keep to the feeding. Blessed be God, you have not to invent a new food for his sheep; it is written, "Feed them," but it is not written, "invent food for them." God has appointed the proper food for his sheep; hand that out to them, and nothing else. The Pope of Rome, who claims to be the lineal successor of the apostle of whom we are speaking, attempts to feed in a strange manner. I wonder how many of the sheep are able to feed on his allocutions, and other specimens of cursing. He seems to be mainly engaged in uttering maledictions upon the wolves; I see no food for the sheep. How is it that he has founded no Bible Societies in Rome for the circulation of the pure Word of God? One of his predecessors has called the Protestant version "poisonous pastures." Very well, then, why not circulate a pure version: Why not spend a part of Peter's pence in distributing the Epistle to the Romans? Why not exhort priests, cardinals, and bishops to be instant in season and out of season, preaching the gospel according to the commission of the Lord? Verily, Peter at this day is crucified head downwards at Rome. The tradition is symbolic of the fact, for the apostle is placed in a wrong position, and exalted to honors which are a crucifixion to him.

Brethren, you have to feed Christ's sheep. Our Lord says, "Feed! Feed! Feed!" He begins with "Feed *my lambs*." My little lambkins, or young believers, — these need plenty of instruction." Feed my sheep" comes next; feed the middle-aged, the strong, the vigorous: these do not require feeding alone, they also need to be directed in their Christian course, and to be guided to some field of earnest service for Christ, — therefore shepherdize them. Then, in the last "Feed *my sheep*" you have the gray-headed believers in Christ. Do not try to govern these, but feed them. They may have far more prudence, and they certainly have more experience than you have, and therefore do not rule them, but remind them of the deep things of God, and deal out to them an abundance of consoling truth. There is that good old man, he is a father in Christ; he knew the Lord fifty years before you were born; he has some peculiarities, and in them you must let him take his own course, but still feed him. His taste will appreciate solid meat,

he knows a field of tender grass when he gets into it; feed him; then, for his infirmities require it. Feed all classes, my brethren, that is your main work; mind that you not only act good food for the sheep, but feed them with it. A farmer one day, after he had listened to a simple sermon, which was the very opposite of what he generally heard, exclaimed, "O Lord, we bless thee that the food was put into a low crib to-day, so that thy sheep could reach it!" Some brethren put the food up so high that the poor sheep cannot possibly feed upon it. I have thought as I have listened to our eloquent friends, that they imagined that our Lord had said, "Feed my camelopards." None but giraffes could reach the food when placed in so lofty a rack. Christ says, "Feed my sheep," place the food among them, put it close to them.

Take care also that you *feed yourselves*. "Who rules o'er freemen should himself be free;" we will alter the line into "Who feeds Christ's sheep should feed on Christ himself." A preacher who is starved in soul will be likely to starve his hearers. Oh, fatten yourselves on Christ, dear brethren! Ask to have the promise fulfilled, "I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the Lord." May the Holy Ghost work this in you!

Having fed them, your work should also comprehend all the rest that a shepherd does for his flock. Neglect none of these things. Go before them, set them an example, encourage them, and direct them in difficulty. Let your voice ever be familiar to them, carry the lamb in your bosom, gently lead those that are in circumstances of pain and peril, care for all the flock, be tender with any that may wander, seek after them, and bring them back.

Now what does all this involve? *Knowledge*. You must "feed them with knowledge and understanding." *Watchfulness*. No shepherd can afford to slumber; and at one part of the year he must be up all night, for the lambs are being born. When you have a lambing time on, or, in other words, a blessed revival, you will need to be especially watchful; and, as the wolf comes not only at lambing time, but as all other seasons, you should be always vigilant against him.

One of the chief qualifications of a true pastor, and one that is not very common, is a great deal of patience. Perhaps you say, "These people are so sinful, and erring, and foolish." Yes, they are like sheep; and if they were not so, they would not need you or any other shepherd. Your calling would

be abolished if all Christ's people were strong, and able to instruct others. Be very patient with them, as a nurse is with the child committed to her to watch, and love, and teach. What an honor this office puts upon you! To belong to the College of Fishermen with Peter, James, and John, is a great honor; but the work of the pastor is nobler still. Well did they speak of old of shepherd-kings, for the shepherd's business is such as is worthy of a king; indeed, amid his flock he is the truest of kings. What a line of shepherds can be bated right through the Word of God! Your business is one which the first martyr followed, for Abel was a keeper of sheep: stand like him in the midst of your flock, ready to sacrifice life itself at Gods altar. You are following the business of Jacob, who said to Laban, "In the day the drought, consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes." Yours is the calling of Joseph, who even when exalted to a throne, was still "the shepherd and stone of Israel." Whatever your position may be, brethren, be shepherds still. You are following the trade of that noblest of woman born, I mean Moses, who kept the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, in the desert, and there beheld the bush on fire, out of which God spoke with him. He who led the people like a flock all through the wilderness was ready like a true shepherd to lay down his life for the flock, even asking to have; his name blotted out of God's book if by that means they might live. You are following the occupation of the men after God's own heart. If a man in these days is after God's heart, let him be a shepherd of the flock. "He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds: from following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance." I hope, my brethren, that like him in your youth you have slain both the lion and the bear, and that if an uncircumcised Philistine comes in your path, you will defy and destroy him in the name of the Lord. You are following the trade of God's only-begotten Son. The Lord had but one Son, and he made a Shepherd of him. Imitate that *good* Shepherd of the sheep, who loved them, and laid down his life for them. Trust that *great* Shepherd of the sheep, whom "the God of peace has brought again from the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant;" and by-and-by you shall see the *chief* Shepherd, and "shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

Never forget that it is *Christ's sheep* that you have to feed. Jesus says, "Feed *my* sheep." Many find fault with the churches of the present day, and the easiest work in the world is to find fault, but, my dear brethren, bad as I know some of the churches to be, I know no better people than God's

people, and with all their faults I love them still. I find my choicest companions and my bosom friends among them. I love the gates of Zion, for, —

*“There my best friends, my kindred dwell,
There God my Savior reigns.”*

I always feel, in reference to my own people, that if they can put up with me, I can very well put up with them. They are Christ’s people; therefore love them, and feel it to be an honor to do anything for those who belong to Jesus.

Much honor lies in the fact that our Lord says to each of us personally, “Feed my sheep.” I think that I see him here among us; he of the pierced hands and the marred countenance, with the thorn crown about his brow, stands in this hall, and speaks to us. Or, if you will, with all his glories on he comes among us, he looks on us all, and even on me also, my dear brethren; and he says to each of us, “Do you see those poor tempted people? They are my sheep. I have loved them from before the foundation of the world; will you feed them for me? I have called them out of the world by victorious grace, will you feed them for me? I have provided abundant pasture for them, will you feed them for me? I have bought them, with my blood, behold the memorials of my purchase in my hands and my feet, my head and my side; will you feed them for me? I have loved you also, and you love me; will you feed my sheep for me? I will feed *you*, will you feed *them*? Your bread shall be given you, and your water shall be sure; will you feed my beloved ones for me? I have gone to prepare a place for them in my own sweeter pasturages on the hill-tops of glory. Will you feed them till I come again? I will feed them through you by the Holy Spirit, will you be my instruments?” Do we not all reply, “Beloved Master, we think it our highest honor to be privileged thus, and cost us what it may, we will spend our lives in feeding thy sheep”? Brethren, say not much by way of vow, but say much by way of prayer. Lord, help us all henceforth to feed thy sheep! Amen.