

THIS IS HIS COMMANDMENT

Late one night, a year and a half ago, farmer John Wierwille, of Decatur, Georgia, was awakened by the barking of his two dogs, Caspar and Daisy. Wierwille went to investigate, and saw the dogs interposing themselves between his sheep and a pack of coyotes. While Daisy stayed with the sheep, Caspar, a Pyrenean Mountain dog just twenty months old, charged the pack, and there was, for thirty minutes, a terrible battle in which Casper killed some of the coyotes. When the remaining coyotes ran away, Casper pursued. Next day, Wierwille and some friends searched for Casper, but they found only more dead coyotes. Two days later, Wierwille found Casper in the chicken hutch, severely wounded. Wierwille said, "It looked like a coyote grabbed his skin and peeled it right off." Casper was badly wounded, but he had killed eight coyotes. LifeLine Animal Project, an animal welfare organization, helped Casper with the treatment he needed, and the courageous dog lived. Four months ago, the American Farm Bureau Federation named Casper the People's Choice Pup, and donated one-thousand dollars to LifeLine Animal Project. Casper was a good sheepdog, and was prepared to give his life for the sheep. God's people are like sheep, and Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Jesus gave His life for His people, and His people should give their lives to Him, and to each other.

King David was a good man, and a good king. The Scriptures say, "David did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." (1 Kings 15:5) David, before He was king, was a shepherd. When Goliath, the Philistine Giant, challenged the army of Israel, David offered to King Saul to fight the giant. The king did not accept his offer, and told David that he was young and had no experience in warfare. David answered the king:

Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. (1 Samuel 17:34–37)

There was one occasion when a lion, and on another when a bear, took a lamb from David's flock, and he went after the predator, and struck it, and rescued the sheep. When the predators attacked David, he killed them. The Lord gave him victory over the lion, and the bear, and David believed that the Lord would give him victory over the Philistine giant. It was David's duty, as a shepherd, not only to make sheep lie down in green pastures, and to lead them beside still waters, but to guard them as they walked through valleys of death. He not only gave his sheep food and water, but he protected them from predators. He was prepared to put his life at risk for his sheep, and he was prepared to put it at risk for his people.

Jesus dedicated much of His ministry to opposing the false teaching of the religious leaders of Israel, and giving to the people the true Word of God. In the beginning of His ministry, He preached His Sermon on the Mount, in which He contrasted His teaching with the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees. Saint Matthew comments, "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." (Matthew 7:28, 29) Jesus also dedicated much of His ministry to healing people of illness. So, after He preached His Sermon on the Mount,

He healed a leper, a centurion's servant, the mother of Saint Peter's wife, the Gadarene demoniac, a paralytic, two blind men, and a mute man. Saint Matthew wrote, "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." (Matthew 9:36) Everywhere Jesus went he saw that the people had so many needs, both physical and spiritual, and He had compassion on the people. Jesus regarded the people as helpless sheep that needed guidance and protection. He had empathy toward them; He felt their suffering, and He desired to relieve it.

Late in Jesus's earthly ministry, He told His disciples that He is the light of the world, and then He healed a man born blind. Some people who knew the man brought him to the Pharisees for interrogation. Some of the Pharisees regarded Jesus as a great sinner, because He healed the man on the sabbath day. Others said that a sinner could not perform such a miracle. So, some denied that Jesus had healed the man, and they asked his parents how their son, who they said had been born blind, was able to see. The man's parents were afraid to tell the truth, because the Jews had agreed that they would expel from the synagogue anyone who confessed that Jesus is the Christ. The man held his ground, and he mocked the Jews for their ignorance and unbelief. So, the Jews told the man he was sinner, and they expelled him from the synagogue. When Jesus learned that the man had been expelled, He sought him out, and found him, and asked him if he believed in the Son of God. The man asked Jesus to tell him who the Son of God is, so that he might believe in Him. Jesus told the man that He is the Son of God, and the man believed in Him, and worshiped Him. Jesus said, "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind." Jesus told Nicodemus that He came not into the world to condemn the world, but to save it. Nevertheless, judgment is the result of His coming into the world. To those who humbly recognize that, without Christ, they are spiritually blind, Christ gives sight; to those who proudly insist that, without Christ, they have spiritual sight, Christ strikes with spiritual blindness, so that they are more blind than before. The Pharisees heard Jesus say these things, and they knew that He was speaking about them, so they said to Him, "Are we blind also?" Jesus answered them, "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth." (John 9:41) If the Pharisees had recognized their spiritual blindness, then Christ would have enlightened them. As it was, they believed they were already enlightened, and lights to the people, so their sin of pride and rebellion continued. They were guilty of the sin of Eve, who believed that she could be enlightened apart from God. They were, as Jesus on a different occasion called them, "blind leaders of the blind." (Matthew 15:14)

Then Jesus said to them:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. (John 10:1-5)

God has a sheepfold, and there is one door by which to enter, and that is the door made by God. If any man tries to make his own way into the sheepfold, then has ill intent. He would steal the sheep.

As Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount:

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Beware of false prophets, which come

to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. (Matthew 7:1–20)

There are in the world false prophets and false teachers. They do not listen to God. They would make their own way to God, and require others to follow them. They care nothing for the well-being of the people; they care only for their own fame and fortune. They pretend to be sheep of God's fold, but they are wolves who would tear the sheep to pieces and devour them. They would not simply fleece the sheep, they would feed on them. Their way leads, not to life, but to death. As God said through Ezekiel the prophet, "My flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves, and fed not my flock." (Ezekiel 34:8) They disguise themselves, but their true identity can be known by their character, and by their deeds. They are not like God, and they are not like the Son of God. A true shepherd of God's flock enters by the door which God has set. He has in view, not his own interests, but the interests of his flock. He knows what they need, and he leads them to it. He does not follow the sheep, or drive them, but rather leads them, and they follow him, for by his voice they hear the Word of God. The sheep will not follow one who is not their shepherd, but rather flee from him, for they do not recognize the voice of one who is not familiar to them.

The Pharisees did not understand what Jesus was saying to them, and they did not know that He was speaking about them. So He said to them:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (John 10:7–10)

Jesus is the door to God's sheepfold, the way to God. Jesus would later say to Saint Thomas, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6) The scribes and Pharisees claimed the place of the door, way of entry to God. Jesus would later say, "But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in." (Matthew 23:13; compare Luke 11:52) All those who came before Christ, and claimed to be the way to God were frauds; they would make followers, not of God, but of themselves. Later, Jesus, in His woes against the scribes and Pharisees, would say, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves." (Matthew 23:15) Nevertheless, the people that belonged to God did not listen to them. Jesus is the door to God's sheepfold, the door to God's kingdom. If any man enters by way of Christ, and not by some other way, then that man will be saved. He will be blessed in all that he does, and he will have all that he needs. False shepherds seek only to take, to take from others so that by others they might live; Christ came to give, even to give His own life for others so that they might live, and even have eternal life.

Then Jesus said to the Pharisees:

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father. (John 10:11–18)

Jesus is the Good Shepherd, which is to say, He is the only perfectly good shepherd. He is perfectly good because He is perfectly selfless, living, not for Himself, but for God and for man. He is the Good Shepherd because He gives His life for the sheep, for His people. He gives His life for them, not only by serving them in life, but by dying for them. The hireling is not the owner of the sheep, but the owner pays him to look after the sheep. He is a mercenary who looks after the sheep, not for love, but for money. He does not consider the lives of the sheep to be worth his own life. So, if he should see a predator, then he would abandon the sheep, and save his own skin. Jesus is no hireling; He is the Good Shepherd to whom the sheep belong. He knows them, and they know Him. Jesus knows His Father in heaven, and His Father knows Him. They love each other, and are devoted to each other. Similarly, Jesus knows His sheep, and they know Him. He loves them, and is devoted to them, and they love Him, and are devoted to Him. Because He loves them, He gives His life for them. Jesus said this of the Jews, who were, at that time, God's covenant people. Yet, there were other sheep that Jesus would bring into His fold, namely, the Gentiles. They would also hear His voice, and follow Him, and enter the fold, so that Jew and Gentile together would constitute one flock, with one shepherd, even Jesus Christ. God the Father loves His Son, because He is His only begotten Son, and because the Son loves His Father, and does what His Father asks of Him, even giving up His own life. No man could take the life of the Son of God; He had to give up His life. So, when Jesus was on the cross, He died when He gave up His spirit. (John 19:30; compare Matthew 27:50) He would give His life for His people, so that they might live, but He would take up His life again, because God would raise Him from the dead. The Father commanded the Son to die, and to live again, and the Son obeyed His Father's command. He laid down His life for His people, and afterward He rose from the dead.

On one occasion, after Jesus ascended into heaven, Saint Peter and Saint John went to the temple to pray, and there Saint Peter healed a man who was lame from the day he was born. This amazed the people at the temple, and Saint Peter told them that the man had been healed by Jesus, whom they had crucified. The apostle told them that, if they would repent of this great sin, then God would forgive them of it. Five thousand did repent and believe in Jesus. The religious rulers were greatly displeased because the apostles taught the people, and because they preached that because of Jesus the dead would rise. So, they had the two apostles arrested, and next day brought them before the high priests and his family relations. The high priests asked the apostles by what power they had helped the man, and Saint Peter, with the help of the Holy Spirit, answered:

Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; Be it known unto you all, and to all the

people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. Acts 4:8–12)

The apostle first questioned the ground on which he and John were arrested: because they healed a lame man. Yet, if the rulers wished to know how the man was healed, Saint Peter was pleased to tell them: the man was healed by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the same Jesus that the rulers of Israel crucified, but God raised from the dead. What the rulers did was wicked, and yet it was the fulfillment of the psalm which reads, “The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.” (Psalm 118:22) The commonwealth of Israel was like a temple, with the people as the stones of it, and the rulers the builders. God had in mind a design for the temple, and a particular man to be a stone. Yet, the builders would build according to their own design, and not God’s, and so they rejected the man that God had chosen. This stone, which the builders rejected, God made the cornerstone of the building, the stone that orientates and grounds the entire structure. This stone is, of course, Jesus. The name of Jesus, the name by which the lame man was healed, is the name, the only name by which men can be made stones in God’s living temple, and so be saved from their sins. The rulers of Israel did not deny that a miracle had occurred, yet they did not repent and believe in Jesus. They rather gave an order to the apostles no more to speak to the people of Jesus, which order they, of course, refused to obey.

Saint John, in his first epistle, wrote that Christians know the love of God, because Jesus laid down His life for them. So, Christians ought to follow the example of Jesus, and lay down their lives for each other. If anyone sees his Christian brother in need, and he can give to him what he needs, but does not, then that man loves not God, nor does he love his brother. He is like the false shepherds who pretend to care about the flock, but care only for themselves. The Christian ought not merely to say that he loves His Christian brothers and sisters, he ought to love them indeed, by giving them what they need. If a Christian loves the brethren indeed, then he can by this rest assured that he is truly one of God’s people. He may doubt that he belongs to God, but God knows his heart, and sees his good works. If a man from the heart loves the brethren, then his heart does not condemn him, and he may have confidence that he belongs to God. If a man obeys God’s commandment, then God will hear, and answer, his prayers. The commandment of God is just this: to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and to love the brethren as He commanded. If a man keeps Christ’s command to love the brethren, then that man dwells in Christ, and Christ dwells in Him. Yet it is not the Christian by himself that performs works of love. He performs them with the Spirit of God that dwells in him, because God is love.

Let us understand that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep. Let us believe in Jesus Christ, the cornerstone of God’s holy temple, the Church. Let us love one another as Christ has commanded us to do.

Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.