

THROUGH NIGHT TO MORNING

by

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SERMON FIFTEEN -

A TRIUNE WORLD

"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32)

THREE worlds are packed into these few words, the world of the Shepherd, the world of the Father, and the world of the King. It is a triune world, for the same GOD is Shepherd, Father, and King. Out of these three worlds have come to me four triplets of truth, which I would like to pass on to you.

A TRIPLET OF SPHERES

First of all, a triplet of spheres: The sphere of the sheep, the sphere of the child, and the sphere of the subject. The word which defines the sphere of the sheep is dependence; the word which defines the sphere of the child is love; and the word which defines the sphere of the subject is loyalty.

The sheep is utterly dependent upon the shepherd for supplies, safety, and guidance. The Twenty-third Psalm is the unfolding of this dependence. **"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters."** With such a Shepherd, the sheep has every need supplied. There is need of rest in repose, and GOD gives it by making us lie down. The sheep are rather frisky; they sometimes prefer to gambol over the fields; but the Shepherd, in His loving wisdom, often compels us to lie down and be quiet, and when His hand is upon us for such quiet repose, it is always in green pastures. Then there is need of rest in activity. **"He leadeth me beside the still waters"** - rest in movement, as we follow the Shepherd.

There is, however, a more intimate relation between the child and the father than between the sheep and the shepherd, and that relation is expressed by the word "love." The father loves the children while the children love the father and each other. The ideal home is the haven and Heaven of love.

The subject-citizen is under all circumstances loyal to his king, ready to give up his life, if need be, in his defence.

Scholars tell us that there are three words in the Greek which are translated "**minister**" in the English Bible.

The first word means a *private servant*, who waits upon his master, eager to do his bidding.

The second word means an *official servant*, who represents the Government at the Court of another nation.

The third word, which Paul delighted in using, means an *under-rower*. The figure is taken from the ancient trireme, in which the captain, standing before the oarsmen, gave them the stroke; and as they struck with him, they, of course, struck with each other. Paul's ambition was to be an under-rower to CHRIST, to take the stroke from Him, to find out what He was doing in the world, and then come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty.

So a loyal subject in the Kingdom of CHRIST takes the stroke from his King. He looks to Him for guidance, and is ready to go at His command. If we find that our King is leading a great campaign for the evangelization of the world, we should take the stroke from Him and join in the campaign.

If He is leading for total abstinence and the destruction of the liquor traffic, we gladly take the stroke from Him again, and follow His leadership. "**Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?**" is the attitude of mind in every loyal citizen.

A TRIPLET OF RELATIONS

We have next a triplet of relations. The relation between the sheep and the shepherd is expressed by the word ownership. The sheep belongs to the shepherd; it is his property, and therefore safe. An old Negro man in America was asked whether he felt secure in his hope of Heaven. He replied, "I have my doubts and fears, and many troubles, but when the devil gets after me, I simply go to my Master and say: 'Lord, you had better look after your property,' and He always does it!" Paul rejoiced in the fact that he was a bond-servant of the Lord JESUS CHRIST. He was glad to recognize His ownership, because he had been redeemed, "**not with corruptible things, as silver and gold,**" "**but with the precious Blood of Christ.**"

With this ownership should go possession.

"**What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them.**" He has the sheep, but he has lost it. He owns it, but he does not possess it. It is quite possible to own what you do not possess, and to possess what you do not own. I am quite sure that I own ten or a dozen umbrellas in London, while I possess only one or two. Some time ago I owned a good overcoat, but some one came into my study and took it out. I still own it, but he possesses it. It is possible for GOD to own us, while the devil possesses us. The ideal Christian is the man who recognizes the ownership of CHRIST and realizes His full possession through the HOLY SPIRIT.

The word which expresses the relation between the child and the father is kinship. The sheep is not akin to the shepherd; it has not the shepherd's nature. But the Christian has been born from above; he has become a partaker of the Divine nature. "**As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God.**" "**If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.**"

The word which expresses the relation between the subject and the king is citizenship, a citizenship which extends beyond the bounds of earth. Paul gloried in the fact that he was a citizen of Heaven. But his citizenship in Heaven made him all the more conscientious in using his citizenship on earth. We pity the man who has no better citizenship than England or America can give him, good as that is. He is called in CHRIST not only to a citizenship which is world-wide, but universal, taking in both earth and Heaven.

A TRIPLET OF UNITIES

We come, in the third place, to a triplet of unities. In the flock of sheep there is a unity simply of assembly. They go together as they follow their shepherd. The sheep in his nature is gregarious. I can think of nothing more pathetic than a lone sheep on the mountain side, unless it be a lone Christian, who refuses to join the Church, and seeks to build up a Christian character, and do the work of his Master without association with his brethren.

In the unity of the family there is fellowship and co-operation. Every member of the family works with every other member for the good of all. This co-operation is based upon kinship, a very much deeper thing than simply the gregarious spirit. Sheep herd together, but they do not live together in any co-operative way.

In some great emergency, caused by danger, as in a cyclone, the sheep may herd even with other animals. I remember seeing in my boyhood the picture, in the old Family Bible, of a group of men, women, children, sheep, lions, and tigers herded together on the top of a hill, trying to escape the waters of the Flood. Each one was so intent on self-preservation that it did not regard the presence of the others. Such miscellaneous herding, however, is not the ideal in the Christian Church. There must be a unity of spirit, of nature, of kinship, if there is to be real fellowship and co-operation. In the unity of the kingdom there is organism.

Of course there is organization, but a kingdom is a real organic unity, which expresses itself in various organizations. This organic unity comes from recognizing the king as head, while every citizen is obedient. Our Lord JESUS CHRIST is the Head of the body of which we are members, and every member in healthy condition is obedient to the will of the Head. The spirit of democracy is in the air, which is both the hope and the menace of the age; the hope, if it ripens into a democratic theocracy, in which CHRIST is enthroned; a menace, if it rots into a democratic anarchy, in which liberty is licence.

Let it be remembered that a New Testament Church is not a democracy, but a theocracy, in which JESUS CHRIST is King and every member a loyal subject. Heaven is that; and the nearest Heaven on earth of which I know is a true Church of CHRIST that realizes this ideal.

A TRIPLET OF NEEDS

In the fourth place, we have a triplet of needs. The greatest need of the sheep is courage. "Fear not, little flock."

The sheep is the most cowardly animal alive. When it is badly frightened, it is not even brave

enough to run, but stands and trembles. When it seeks to escape danger it is apt to run into some corner where its foe can easily reach it. It is both cowardly and silly. It is not courage to fight, however, which the sheep needs, for it has no weapons of offence or defence. Its need is courage to depend, to trust, to commit itself unreservedly to the guidance and protection of the shepherd.

Such is the primary need of the Christian. When he realizes that he has no strength in himself, but all his help must come from GOD, and then has the courage to commit himself unreservedly to GOD's grace and power, he becomes invincible.

Weakness always appeals to noble strength. Hence Paul could say, "**When I am weak, then am I strong,**" for his strength was in GOD. He could even rejoice in weakness, that the power of CHRIST might rest upon him.

A friend of mine in America was very fond of the chase, and lived in a country where the woods abounded with wild deer. One morning, as he was walking across his field, he heard the sound of hounds in the distance, and as they approached, looking through the cracks of a high fence, he saw a little fawn, very wearied, its tongue hanging out, and its sides lathered with foam. The little thing had just strength enough to leap over the fence, and stood there for a moment, with its great liquid eyes, gazing about in a frightened manner. When it saw a hound leap over the fence not far away, its first impulse seemed to cause it to run again, but instead of running away, it came and fell down in a heap at the feet of my friend. He said: - "I stood there and fought dogs for nearly half an hour. I just felt that all the dogs in that county could not capture the little fawn after its weakness had appealed to my strength."

So the Christian's weakness appeals to the strength of GOD. Time was when, chased by the hounds of my sins, I was full of fear. I am not ashamed to say now that I was afraid of hell, which my father preached because he believed the Bible to be true and accepted the testimony of His Lord. Bewildered and weary, I stood, not knowing which way to fly, until I caught a vision of JESUS CHRIST on the cross, dying and rising from the dead. With a sense of utter helplessness, I fell at His feet, and His Omnipotence, linked with His love, has protected me ever since.

If you had gone to that southern farm, ten or twelve months afterward, you would have found a beautiful deer playing with the children on the lawn, for my friend, after he had beaten off the hounds, took the fawn on his shoulder and carried it home, to make it a pet in the family. Yes, and our Shepherd taketh the sheep on His shoulders, limp weakness resting, without holding on or even able to hold out, upon the shoulders of Omnipotent love.

GOD's strongest saints realize their weakness, and appeal to Him for strength. As Charles H. Spurgeon passed through the door one Sunday morning back of the pulpit in the Tabernacle, and saw the great crowd of people, he was overheard saying, "O GOD, help!" Strong as he was, he realized that he was insufficient for so great a task as preaching the gospel in power, unless GOD should be his Helper. The appeal of weakness to Omnipotent strength was never unheeded.

What the child in the family needs is the father's approval. "**It is the Father's good pleasure.**" Revel a moment in that phrase, "**good pleasure.**" The motive and mission of the ideal child is to please the Father in all things. By and by we shall hear the Master say: "**Well done!**" Then

Heaven will begin. Why not please Him now, that we may hear His "**Well done!**" here, and have a bit of Heaven enter us before we enter Heaven?

A few weeks ago I was called upon to perform a very sad duty. There came a cablegram from Richmond, Virginia, which read, "Dr. Hatcher dead. Paralysis. Break the news gently to Edith. Get address through Cook's Agency." After some searching I found the young lady, a bright, cheery, musical girl, over here pursuing her studies. When I broke the news to her as gently as I could, it broke her heart, and she said to me through her tears:

"The ambition of all us children has ever been to secure father's smile. We were always happy in having him pleased with what we said or did." Happy father, with such children! And happy children, when they are conscious of pleasing such a father! Happy the Christian who, as he obeys his Father, can hear Him say even now, "This is My beloved child, in whom I am well pleased." He does not need golden streets for his Heaven. He can have Heaven in the murky, foggy streets of London, with the music of the celestial harps in his soul.

The need of the citizen in CHRIST's Kingdom is receptivity. "**It is your Father's good pleasure to give.**" He would, therefore, have us possess capacity to receive. He would give us a Kingdom, even before the King shall appear in His glory to set up His Kingdom on earth. "**Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.**"

They, of course, belong to the Kingdom, but, better than that, the Kingdom belongs to them. Its authority, its prestige, its glory are theirs.

The firstborn in the Jewish family had almost everything in the way of wealth and honour, as is the case to a large extent in Great Britain. But we read in the Letter to the Hebrews: "**Ye are come. . . to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in Heaven.**"

In GOD's family all children are firstborn. Every one can have the best, and GOD wishes us to receive the very best that He can give us. All the prophecies and the promises of the Word are ours. We need to remember that this Kingdom is a constitutional monarchy. The constitution was not wrung from the King by force of arms, as is often the case with the constitutions of earthly governments; but the King has given us, out of His abounding wisdom and love, of His own free will, the Constitution of His Kingdom, which we call the Bible.

The HOLY SPIRIT, Who is, in a sense, the Vicegerent of the King, is the Interpreter of this constitution. We are loyal to the King only in proportion as we are loyal to the constitution which He has given us.

In closing, I bring to you a challenge from our Shepherd, Father, and King. "**Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of Heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.**" The direct reference is to the giving of tithes, setting apart one-tenth of our income to the work of the Lord; and there are accumulations in the hands of Christians that need to be purified by such giving. The principle, however, which underlies this challenge is: "Do what I ask you to do, and then I will do what you ask Me. Hear My prayers, and I will hear yours. Obey Me, and I will obey you. "**Go**

out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that My house may be filled. Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature; and lo, I am with you."

Now, we are not expected to do GOD's part, nor must we expect Him to do ours. I heard once, in Baltimore, in a noon meeting, a very impudent prayer. A good brother prayed thus: "O Lord, go out into the highways and hedges, and constrain the people to come in!" GOD had told him to go, and he impudently turns and tells GOD to go Himself!

Our King expects us to do what He tells us, if we are to have Him do what we ask. "**Take ye away the stone.**" Back of that stone, which ought to be removed, lies the dead Lazarus, waiting to hear the voice of the Son of GOD; but the stone must first be removed before the resurrection will take place. May we have grace to accept this challenge from GOD, bring ourselves and all we have to His altar, and then expect Him to empty Heaven upon earth. It is a loving threat that He will give us another Flood, not to drown, but to lift us above the highest mountains of earth's difficulties. May we do our part, and GOD will do His.

~ end of chapter 15
