

“FEED MY LAMBS:” A SABBATH SCHOOL SERMON
NO. 1684

A SERMON
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“So when they had dined, Jesus says to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, love you me more than these?
 He said unto him, Yea, Lord; you know that I love you. He said unto him, Feed my lambs.”
 John 21:15.*

READ the whole chapter, and observe the change of scene. First, they are on the lake fishing, casting their nets at Christ’s command, and dragging to land a multitude of great fishes. They have all come on shore, and when they have breakfasted, their faces are not turned to the sea, but to the pastures on the hillside. These are clothed with flocks, and the Master says no more about fishermen and fish, but speaks of shepherds and sheep.

Herein lies a parable, the servants of the Lord Jesus are first fishermen, and then shepherds. The first work of Christ’s servants is comprised in that commission, “Go you into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,” or, parabolically, “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught.” They begin their heavenly vocation as fishers, even as Jesus said to them at the first, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

Their earliest work is to preach the Gospel, which is like the letting down of a great seine net, enclosing life of all kinds. They are not to make a selection of characters so as to preach only to likely persons, that would be comparable to angling, a figure which is used in the Old Testament in connection with destruction, and not in reference to salvation, even as Amos says, “The Lord GOD has sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks.” In Gospel fishing we let down the big net and thus encompass many of all sorts. In the act of preaching the Gospel, all is fish that come to the net, the sorting of the good from the bad is to be done another day.

Our urgent work—I mean yours and mine, my brethren—is to go out into the world and proclaim the blessed Gospel of salvation to all who care to hear us. We are to go into every place to which we can gain access, “into all the world,” “into the streets and lanes of the city, into the highways and hedges,” anywhere and everywhere the world over. Our one instrument as fishers for Christ is the Gospel of the grace of God. God forbid that we should use any other. May the Lord help us to keep to our fishing, and may we come and instantly receive divine direction as to how and where to cast the net, so that we may have a full net, and yet a net unbroken, wherewith we may fish again.

After this is done, and while it is being done, another art is to be practiced. Fishing is not all, as many seem to think. It is a great part of our service, and would God it were more attended to, but after it has been attended to shepherding comes in, and is a work of equal weight. Our Lord Jesus Christ would have His servants attend to this second task with all their hearts. If souls are converted they have been brought up from the depths of sin, and the scene changes, we see a flock, “the church of God which he has purchased with His own blood.” This flock needs as much care as any other, yea, it needs to be tended with the utmost labor and watchfulness.

The Lord Jesus Himself is the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep, the Great Shepherd who is brought again from the dead, and the Chief Shepherd under whom He has appointed shepherds to watch for the souls of men. He will have those of us whom He calls to His service to shepherdize those who are converted, leading, protecting, feeding, comforting, and succoring them. He

will call us to account if we neglect this charge, for He will require His flock at our hands, saying, “Where is the flock that was given you, your beautiful flock?”

This shepherd work is so important that three times the Savior bids us attend to it, saying first, “Feed my lambs,” then, “Feed my sheep,” or as some old manuscripts have it, “my little sheep,” and then again, “Feed my sheep.” We are to feed the babes in grace, to shepherdize the young men in Christ Jesus, and to feed the older ones who feel many growing infirmities, and need again the comforts of their earliest days. Three times over we are thus bidden, are we, then, so apt to fail in this?

Jesus spoke but once to death, and Lazarus came forth, are we more deaf than the grave, and must we be thrice commanded? Let us no longer be disobedient to the heavenly mandate. We must never so evangelize the outside mass as to forget to fold and feed those within. We are to disciple all nations, and then to teach them all things whatsoever Christ has commanded us.

Not every man that can haul in a net is ready at once to tend a flock, we need much grace, for the Lord Jesus Christ spent years in most industriously educating the twelve, training the seventy, and getting ready a band of followers who were not only saved, but educated, so as to teach others also. We must not be indifferent to this matter. The quiet work of building up believers must be steadily pursued, even though those who sound a trumpet before them may despise such ministries.

I shall speak this morning upon work within the fold, the feeding of the sheep and lambs, and this I shall do in order that I may help our beloved Sabbath school teachers. This is their day, and if I do not seem to speak directly or exclusively to them, I hope I shall nevertheless say much to stimulate and direct them in their invaluable labors. I bespeak for them your most earnest prayers and loving sympathies, and of many I would beg a more practical cooperation with them.

Concerning this shepherdizing for Christ let us first note *the sphere*—“My lambs,” secondly, *the man* for it—one like Simon son of Jonas, thirdly, *his preparation* for it, fourthly, *the work itself*, and fifthly, *the motive* under which the feeding is to be carried out. Briefly on each point, Oh for help from the Spirit of God!

I. First, think of THE SPHERE.

Although in the other instances Jesus says, “Feed my sheep,” yet in this first instance He says, “Feed my lambs.” To whom does He refer? I think, first, to *such as are little in grace*. They have but a grain of mustard seed of faith as yet, their love is not a flame, but a spark, the leaven of grace within them has begun to work, but all the measures of meal are not yet leavened. The spiritual life in these is like a candle newly lit, apparently in danger of being suddenly blown out, and therefore needing great care.

Weakness is an idea in the word “lambs,” and so in the church of God all such as are weak—and alas, how many there are—all such as are doubting, all such as are slenderly instructed, all such as are easily bewildered in doctrine, cast down in spirit, and apt to be staggered—all such, I say, are to be watched over with special care, and therefore Jesus mentions them particularly and separately and in the first place. If our kindness should neglect the strong, it would be a sad pity, but it might not entail so much damage as if we neglect the weak. What says the apostle? “Comfort the feeble-minded; support the weak; be patient towards all men.”

In our numbers we always have a few who wear the weeds of spiritual widowhood, these are very sincere, but sadly anxious, scarcely knowing what full assurance means, but yet true and resolute. Their faith is a trembling one, crying, “Lord, I believe; help you my unbelief.” Such are not to be blamed, nor avoided, nor despised, nor in the least degree discouraged, but inasmuch as we ourselves may also be tempted with like fears, we are to console them.

We ought to know that if we are strong, our strength lies not in ourselves, for our own strength is perfect weakness, and therefore we should deal graciously and tenderly with the weak of the flock. I think this is the reason why the weak were committed to Simon Peter in this particular case, because he had been very weak himself, he had denied his Master through his fears, and thus he was taught to have compassion on other trembling ones. He who is himself compassed with infirmities knows the heart of the weaklings, he can enter with sympathy into their doubts and their distresses, for he has felt the same.

I say therefore, this morning, in the name of the Lord Jesus, to all of you who love Him, “Look well to the weak ones of the church.”

But I cannot think, as some expositors do, that weakness is the main idea in the word “lambs,” for the notion of a lamb is not confined to the thought of weakness, since full-grown sheep may be weak and lambs may be vigorous, but the most prominent thought is that of youth. The lambs are the young of the flock. So, then, we ought to look specially and carefully after those who are *young in grace*. They may be old in years, and yet they may be mere babes in grace as to the length of their spiritual life, and therefore they need to be under a good shepherd.

As soon as a person is converted and added to the church he should become the object of the care and kindness of his fellow members. He has but newly come among us, and has no familiar friends among the saints, therefore let us all be friendly to him. Even should we leave our older comrades we must be doubly kind towards those who are newly escaped from the world and have come to find a refuge with the Almighty and His people. Watch with ceaseless care over those newborn babes who are strong in desires, but strong in nothing else. They have but just crept out of darkness, and their eyes can scarcely bear the light, let us be a shade to them until they grow accustomed to the blaze of Gospel day. Addict yourselves to the holy work of caring for the feeble and despondent.

Peter himself that morning must have felt like a newly enlisted soldier, for he had in a sense ended his public Christian life by denying his Lord, and he had begun it again when he “went out and wept bitterly.” He was now making a new confession of his faith before his Lord and his brethren, and therefore, because he was thus made to sympathize with recruits he is commissioned to act as a guardian to them. Young converts are too timid to ask for our help, and so our Lord introduces them to us, and with an emphatic word of command He says, “Feed My lambs.” This shall be our reward, “Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these you have done it unto me.”

But surely we must include in this those who have been converted while *young in years*. We thank God exceedingly that we have among us and round about us many dear children that already know Christ. We have never as a church thought that a certain number of years must have passed over a child before it can confess its faith in Christ and be received into the church. It is sometimes said that we teach *adult* baptism. We do nothing of the sort. We practice *believer's* baptism, and baptize all who confess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, whether they are children or adults.

Our inquiry as to fitness does not refer to age, but to faith. The number or the fewness of days or years is no consideration whatever with us. Our question is, “Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?” If that be fairly answered we say at once, “What does hinder you to be baptized?” However young a believer may be he should make an open confession of his faith, and be folded with the rest of the flock of Christ.

We are not among those who are suspicious of youthful piety, we could never see more reason for such suspicions in the case of the young than in the cases of those who repent late in life. Of the two we think the latter are more to be questioned than the former, for a selfish fear of punishment and dread of death are more likely to produce a counterfeit faith than mere childishness would be. How much has the child missed which might have spoiled it! How much it does not know which, please God, we hope it never may know! Oh, how much there is of brightness and trustfulness about children when converted to God which is not seen in elder converts!

Our Lord Jesus evidently felt deep sympathy with children, and he is but little like Christ who looks upon them as a trouble in the world, and treats them as if they must needs be either little deceivers or foolish simpletons. To you who teach in our schools are given this joyous privilege of finding out where these young disciples are who are truly the lambs of Christ's flock, and to you He says, “Feed my lambs,” that is, instruct such as are truly gracious but young in years.

It is very remarkable that the word used here for “feed my lambs” is very different from the word employed in the precept, “feed my sheep.” I will not trouble you with Greek words, but the second “feed” means exercise the office of a shepherd, rule, regulate, lead, manage them, do all that a shepherd

has to do towards a flock, but this first “feed” does not include all that, it means distinctly *feed*, and it directs teachers to a duty which they may, perhaps, neglect, namely, that of instructing children in the faith. The lambs do not so much need keeping in order as we do who know so much, and yet know so little, who think we are so far advanced that we judge one another and contend and emulate.

Christian children mainly need to be taught the doctrine, precept, and life of the Gospel, they require having divine truth put before them clearly and forcibly. Why should the higher doctrines, the doctrines of grace, be kept back from them? They are not, as some say, bones, or if they be bones, they are full of marrow, and covered with fatness. If there be any doctrine too difficult for a child, it is rather the fault of the teacher’s conception of it than of the child’s power to receive it, provided that child be really converted to God.

It is ours to make doctrine simple, this is to be a main part of our work. Teach the little ones the whole truth and nothing but the truth, for instruction is the great want of the child’s nature. A child has not only to live as you and I have, but also to grow, hence he has double need of food. When fathers say of their boys, “What appetites they have!” they should remember that we also should have great appetites if we had not only to keep the machinery going, but to enlarge it at the same time. Children in grace have to grow, rising to greater capacity in knowing, being, doing, and feeling, and to greater power from God, therefore above all things they must be fed. They must be well fed or instructed, because they are in danger of having their cravings perversely satisfied with error.

Youth is susceptible to evil doctrine. Whether *we* teach young Christians truth or not, the devil will be sure to teach them error. They will hear of it somehow, even if they are watched by the most careful guardians. The only way to keep chaff out of the child’s little measure is to fill it brimful with good wheat. Oh that the Spirit of God may help us to do this! The more the young are taught the better, it will keep them from being misled.

We are specially exhorted to feed them because they are so likely to be overlooked. I am afraid our sermons often go over the heads of the younger folk, who, nevertheless, may be as true Christians as the older ones. Blessed is he that can so speak as to be understood of a child! Blessed is that godly woman who in her class so adapts herself to girlish modes of thought that the truth from her heart streams into the children’s hearts without let or hindrance.

We ought especially to feed the young because this work is so profitable. Do what we may with persons converted late in life, we can never make much of them. We are very glad of them for their own sakes, but at seventy what remains even if they live another ten years? Train up a child, and he may have fifty years of holy service before him. We are glad to welcome those who come into the vineyard at the eleventh hour, but they have hardly taken their pruning-hook and their spade before the sun goes down, and their short day’s work is ended.

The time spent in training the late convert is greater than the space reserved for his actual service, but you take a child-convert and teach him well, and as early piety often becomes eminent piety, and that eminent piety may have a stretch of years before it in which God may be glorified and others may be blessed, such work is profitable in a high degree. It is also most beneficial work to ourselves. It exercises our humility and helps to keep us lowly and meek. It also trains our patience, let those who doubt this try it, for even young Christians exercise the patience of those who believe in them and are therefore anxious that they should justify their confidence. If you want big-souled, large-hearted men or women, look for them among those who are much engaged among the young, bearing with their follies, and sympathizing with their weaknesses for Jesus’ sake.

You see the sphere which is presented to your zealous activity. Will you not occupy it? Many of you are already engaged in it, see to it that you fulfill your high calling, and to the utmost feed the lambs.

II. Secondly, let us speak of THE MAN who is to do this.

I look upon my text as addressed, not to Peter only, but to those who are like Peter. What if I say it is addressed to us all? As servants and lovers of Jesus, He says to us, “Feed my lambs.” Who should do it? Christ selected Simon Peter as *a leading man*. He was one of the chief of the apostles, if we may use

such a word. He was one of the triumvirate that led the van—Peter, and James, and John. But though a leading man, he was to feed the lambs, for no man may think himself too great to care for the young. The best of the church are none too good for this work. And dear friends, do not think because you have other service to do that therefore you should take no interest in this form of holy work, but kindly, according to your opportunities, stand ready to help the little ones, and to cheer those whose chief calling it is to attend to them. To us all this message comes, “Feed my lambs.” To the minister, and to all who have any knowledge of the things of God, the commission is given. See to it that you look after the children that are in Christ Jesus. Peter was a leader among believers, yet he must feed the lambs.

But he was especially *a warm-hearted man*. Simon Peter was not a Welshman, but he had a great deal of what we know as Welsh fire in him. He was just the sort of man to interest the young. Children delight to gather round a fire, whether it is on the hearth or in the heart. Certain persons appear to be made of ice, and from these children speedily shrink away, congregations or classes grow smaller every Sunday when cold-blooded creatures preside over them. But when a man or a woman has a kindly heart, the children seem to gather readily, just as flies in these autumn days swarm on a warm sunny wall. Therefore Jesus says to warm-hearted Simon, “Feed my lambs.” He is the man for the office.

Simon Peter was, moreover, *an experienced man*. He had known his own weaknesses, he had felt the pangs of conscience, he had sinned much and had been much forgiven, and now he was brought in tender humility to confess the love and loveliness of Jesus. We want experienced men and women to talk to converted children, and to tell them what the Lord has done for them, and what have been their dangers, their sins, their sorrows, and their comforts. The young are glad to hear the story of those who have been further on the road than they have. I may say of experienced saints—their lips keep knowledge. Experience lovingly narrated is suitable food for young believers, instruction such as the Lord is likely to bless to their nourishing in grace.

Simon Peter was now *a greatly indebted man*. He owed much to Jesus Christ, according to that rule of the kingdom—he loves much to whom much has been forgiven. Oh, you that have never entered upon this service for Christ, and yet might do it well, I beseech you consider your obligation to Jesus. The state of our schools at the present moment is a strong argument for your aid. We have plenty of children and few teachers, around this place of worship many schools are doing their work in a lame and halting manner for want of teachers.

O you who owe so much to Christ, will you not feed His lambs? Ought you not to be forward to offer yourselves? Will you refuse Him? Come forward at once and say, “I have left this work to younger hands, but I will do so no longer. I have experience, and I trust I yet retain a warm heart within my bosom, I will go and join these workers, who are steadily feeding the lambs in the name of the Lord.” So far as to the man who is called to feed the lambs.

III. Thirdly, when the Lord calls a man to a work, He gives him THE PREPARATION necessary for it.

How was Peter prepared for feeding Christ’s lambs? First, *by being fed himself*. The Lord gave him a breakfast before giving him a commission. You cannot feed lambs or sheep either unless you are fed yourself. It is quite right for you to be teaching a great part of the Lord’s-day, but I think a teacher is very unwise who does not come to hear the Gospel preached and get a meal for his own soul. First be fed, and then feed.

But especially Peter was prepared for feeding the lambs by *being with his Master*. He would never forget that morning, and all the incidents of it. It was Christ’s voice that he heard, it was Christ’s look that pierced him to the heart, he breathed the air which surrounded the risen Lord, and this fellowship with Jesus perfumed Peter’s heart and tuned Peter’s speech that he might afterwards go forth and feed the lambs. I commend to you the study of instructive books, but above all I commend the study of Christ. Let Him be your library. Get near to Jesus. An hour’s communion with Jesus is the best preparation for teaching either the young or the old.

Peter was also prepared in a more painful way than that, namely, *by self-examination*. The question came to him thrice over, “Simon, son of Jonas, love you me? Love you me? Love you me?” Often the vessel wants scouring with self-examination before the Lord can fitly use it to convey the living water to thirsting ones. It never hurts a true-hearted man to search his own spirit and to be searched and tried by his Lord. It is the hypocrite who is afraid of the truth which tests his profession, he dreads trying discourses, and trying meditations he dreads, but the genuine man wants to know for certain that he really does love Christ, and therefore he looks within him and questions and cross-questions himself.

Mainly, dear friends, that examination should be exercised *concerning our love*, for the best preparation for teaching Christ’s lambs is love—love to Jesus and to them. We cannot be priests on their behalf unless like Aaron we wear their names upon our breasts. We must love or we cannot bless. Teaching is poor work when love is gone, it is like a blacksmith working without fire, or a builder without mortar. A shepherd that does not love his sheep is a hireling and not a shepherd, he will flee in the time of danger, and leave his flock to the wolf. Where there is no love there will be no life, living lambs are not to be fed by dead men.

See, brothers and sisters, we preach and teach love, our subject is the love of God in Christ Jesus. How can we teach this if we have no love ourselves? Our objective is to create love in the hearts of those we teach, and to foster it where it already exists, but how can we convey the fire if it is not kindled in our own hearts? How can he promote the flame whose hands are damp, and dripping with worldliness and indifference, so that he acts on the child’s heart rather as a bucket of water than as a flame of fire? These lambs of the flock live in the love of Christ, shall they not live in ours? He calls them His lambs and so they are, shall we not love them for His sake?

They were chosen in love, they were redeemed in love, they have been called in love, they have been washed in love, they have been fed by love, and they will be kept by love till they come to the green pastures on the hilltops of heaven. You and I will be out of gear with the vast machinery of divine love unless our souls are full of affectionate zeal for the good of the beloved ones. Love is the grandest preparation for the ministry, whether exercised in the congregation or in the class. Love, and then feed. If you love, feed. If you do not love, then wait till the Lord has quickened you, and lay not your unhallowed hand to this sacred service.

Thus I have described the sphere, the man, and his preparation.

IV. Let us now consider THE WORK, “Feed my lambs.”

I have given you the gist of this subject already. With the weak of the flock, with the new converts in the flock, with the young children in the flock, our principal business is to feed. Every sermon, every lesson, should be a feeding sermon and a feeding lesson. It is of little use to stand and thump the Bible and call out, “Believe, believe, believe!” when nobody knows what is to be believed. I see no use in fiddles and tambourines, neither lambs nor sheep can be fed upon brass bands.

There must be doctrine, solid, sound, Gospel doctrine to constitute real feeding. When you have a joint on the table, then ring the dinner bell, but the bell feeds nobody if no food is served up. Getting children to meet in the morning and the afternoon is a waste of their steps and yours if you do not set before them soul-saving, soul-sustaining truth. Feed the lambs, you need not pipe to them, nor put garlands round their necks, but do feed them.

This feeding is *humble, lowly, unostentatious work*. Do you know the name of a shepherd? I have known the names of one or two who follow that calling, but I never heard anybody speak of them as great men, their names are not in the papers, nor do we hear of them as a trade with a grievance, claiming to be noticed by the legislature. Shepherds are generally quiet, unobtrusive people. When you look at the shepherd, you would not see any difference between him and the plowman, or the carter.

He plods on uncomplainingly through the winter, and in the early spring he has no rest night or day because the lambs need him, this he does year after year, and yet he will never be made a Knight of the Garter, nor even be exalted to the peerage, albeit he may have done far more useful work than those who are floated into rank upon their own beer barrels. So it is in the case of many a faithful teacher of young

children, you hear but little about him, yet he is doing grand work for which future ages will call him blessed. His Master knows all about him, and we shall hear of him in that day, perhaps not till then.

Feeding the lambs is *careful work* too, for lambs cannot be fed on anything you please, especially Christ’s lambs. You can soon half poison young believers with bad teaching. Christ’s lambs are all too apt to eat herbs which are deleterious, it is needs that we be cautious where we lead them. If men are to take heed what they hear, how much more should we take heed what we teach? It is careful work, the feeding of each lamb separately, and the teaching of each child by itself the truth which it is best able to receive.

Moreover, this is *continuous work*. “Feed my lambs,” is not for a season, but for all time. Lambs could not live if the shepherd only fed them once a week. I reckon they would die between Sunday and Sunday, therefore good teachers of the young look after them all the days of the week as they have opportunity, and they are careful about their souls with prayer and holy example when they are not teaching them by word of mouth. The shepherdry of lambs is daily, hourly work. When is a shepherd’s work over? How many hours a day does he labor? He will tell you that in lambing-time he is never done. He sleeps between whiles just when he can, taking much less than forty winks, and then rousing himself for action. It is so with those who feed Christ’s lambs, they rest not till God saves and sanctifies their dear ones.

It is *laborious work* too, at least he who does not labor at it will have a terrible account to render. Do you think a minister’s life is an easy one? I tell you that he who makes it so will find it hard enough when he comes to die. Nothing so exhausts a man who is called to it as the care of souls, and so it is in measure with all who teach—they cannot do good without spending themselves. You must study the lesson, you must bring forth something fresh to your class, you must instruct and impress. I have no doubt you are often driven very hard for matter, and wonder how you will get through the next Lord’s-day. I know you are sore pressed at times if you are worth your salt. You dare not rush to your class unprepared, to offer to the Lord that which costs you nothing. There must be labor if the food is to be wisely placed before the lambs, so that they can receive it.

And all this has to be *done in a singularly choice spirit*, the true shepherd spirit is an amalgam of many precious graces. He is hot with zeal, but he is not fiery with passion; he is gentle, and yet he rules his class; he is loving, but he does not wink at sin; he has power over the lambs, but he is not domineering or sharp; he has cheerfulness, but not levity; freedom, but not license; solemnity, but not gloom. He who cares for lambs should be a lamb himself, and blessed be God, there is a Lamb before the throne who cares for all of us, and does so the more effectually because He is in all things made like unto us.

The Shepherd spirit is a rare and priceless gift. A successful pastor or a successful teacher in a school will be found to have special characteristics, which distinguish him from his fellows. A bird when it is sitting on its eggs, or when the little ones are newly-hatched, has about it a mother-spirit, so that it devotes all its life to the feeding of its little ones, other birds may be taking their pleasure on the wing, but this bird sits still the life-long day and night, or else its only flights are to provide for gaping mouths which seem to be never filled.

A passion has taken possession of the bird, and something like it comes over the true soul-winner, he would gladly die to win souls, he pines, he pleads, and he plods to bless those on whom his heart is set. If these could but be saved he would pawn half his heaven for it, ay, and sometimes in moments of enthusiasm he is ready to barter heaven altogether to win souls, and like Paul, he could wish himself accursed, so that they were but saved. This blessed extravagance many cannot understand, because they never felt it. May the Holy Ghost work it in us, so we shall act as true shepherds towards the lambs. This, then, is the work, “Feed my lambs.”

V. Lastly, let us consider THE MOTIVE.

Our Lord Jesus heard Peter’s assurance of love, and then He said, “Feed my lambs.” The motive for feeding the lambs was to be *his Master’s self*, and not his own self. Had Peter been the first Pope of

Rome, and had he been like his successors, which indeed he never was, surely it would have been fitting for the Lord to have said to Him, “Feed *your* sheep. I commit them to you, O Peter, Vicar of Christ on earth.” No, no, no. Peter is to feed them, but they are not his, they are still Christ’s.

The work that you have to do for Jesus, brethren and sisters, is in no sense for yourselves. Your classes are not your children, but Christ’s. This is not my church, but Christ’s. The exhortation which Paul gave was, “Feed the church of God,” and Peter himself wrote in his epistle, “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.” Let these lambs turn out what they may, the glory is to be to the Master and not to the servant, and the whole time spent, and labor given, and energy put forth, is every particle of it to redound to His praise whose these lambs are.

Yet while this is a self-denying occupation, it is sweetly honorable, too, and we may attend to it feeling that it is one of the noblest forms of service. Jesus says, “*My lambs: my sheep.*” Think of them, and wonder that Jesus should commit them to us. Poor Peter! Surely when that breakfast began he felt awkward. I put myself into his place, and I know I should hardly have liked to look across the table at Jesus, as I remembered that I denied Him with oaths and curses.

Our Lord desired to set Peter quite at his ease by leading him to speak upon his love which had been so seriously placed in question. Like a good doctor He puts in the lancet where the anxiety was festering, he inquires, “Love you me?” It was not because Jesus did not know Peter’s love, but in order that Peter might know of a surety, and make a new confession, saying, “Yea, Lord; you know that I love you.” The Lord is about to hold a tender controversy with the erring one for a few minutes, that there might never be a controversy between Him and Peter any more.

When Peter said, “Yea, Lord; you know that I love you,” you half thought that the Lord would answer, “Ah, Peter, and I love you,” but He did not say so, and yet He did say so. Perhaps Peter did not see His meaning, but we can see it, for our minds are not confused as Peter’s was on that memorable morning. Jesus did in effect say, “I love you so that I trust you with that which I purchased with My heart’s blood. The dearest thing I have in all the world is My flock, see, Simon, I have such confidence in you, I so wholly rely on your integrity as being a sincere lover of Me, that I make you a shepherd to My sheep. These are all I have on earth, I gave everything for them, even My life, and now, Simon, son of Jonas, take care of them for Me.” Oh, it was “kindly spoken.”

It was the great heart of Christ saying, “Poor Peter, come right in and share My dearest cares.” Jesus so believed Peter’s declaration that He did not tell him so in words, but in deeds. Three times He said it, “Feed my lambs: feed my sheep: feed my sheep,” to show how much He loved him. When the Lord Jesus loves a man very much, He gives him much to do or much to suffer. Many of us have been plucked like brands from the burning, for we were “enemies to God by wicked works,” and now we are in the church among His friends, and our Savior trusts us with His dearest ones.

I wonder when the prodigal son came back and the father received him, whether when market-day came he sent his younger son to market to sell the wheat and bring home the money. Most of you would have said, “I am glad the boy is back, at the same time I shall send his elder brother to do the business, for he has always stuck by me.” As for myself, the Lord Jesus took me in as a poor prodigal son, and it was not many weeks before He put me in trust with the Gospel, that greatest of all treasures, this was a grand token of love. I know of none to excel it.

The commission given to Peter proved how thoroughly the breach was healed, how fully the sin was forgiven, for Jesus took the man who had cursed and sworn in denial of Him and bade him feed His lambs and sheep. Oh, blessed work, not for yourselves, and yet for yourselves! He that serves himself shall lose himself, but he that loses himself does really serve himself after the best possible fashion.

The master motive of a good shepherd is love. We are to feed Christ’s lambs *out of love*.

First, as a proof of love, “If you love me, keep my commandments.” If you love me, feed my lambs. If you love Christ, show it, and show it by doing good to others, by laying yourself out to help others that Jesus may have joy of them.

Next, as an inflowing of love, “Feed my lambs,” for if you love Christ a little when you begin to do good, you will soon love Him more. Love grows by active exercise. It is like the blacksmith’s arm, which increases in strength by wielding the hammer. Love loves till it loves more, and it loves more till it loves more, and it still loves more till it loves most of all, and then it is not satisfied, but aspires after enlargement of heart that it may copy yet more fully the perfect model of love in Christ Jesus, the Savior.

Besides being an inflowing of love, the feeding of lambs is an outflow of love. How often we have told our Lord that we loved Him when we were preaching, and I do not doubt you teachers feel more of the pleasure of love to Jesus when you are busy with your classes than when you are by yourselves at home. A person may go home and sit down and groan out—

*“Tis a point I long to know
Of it causes anxious thought,”*

and wipe his forehead and rub his eyes, and get into the dumps without end, but if he will rise up and work for Jesus, the point he longs to know will soon be settled, for love will come pouring out of his heart till he can no longer question whether it is there.

So let us abide in this blessed service for Christ that it may be the delight of love, the very ocean in which love shall swim, the sunlight in which it shall bask. The recreation of a loving soul is work for Jesus Christ, and among the highest and most delicious forms of this heavenly recreation is the feeding of young Christians, endeavoring to build them up in knowledge and understanding, that they may become strong in the Lord. The Lord bless you, dear fellow-laborers in the Sabbath school, from this time forth and for evermore.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOHN 21

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—104, 735

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.