

Characteristics of the Great Shepherd

The Great Shepherd: The Enflaming Shepherd

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Thomas Edison certainly didn't have things easy. He flunked out of school at the age of 12 with the resounding words of his teacher "he is too dumb to learn anything and there is no hope for him" ringing in his ears. He was fired from his first two jobs, once after spilling acid over his boss's desk! Lesser men may have given up amongst the wreckage of shattered dreams, and yet without his persistence I might have ended up giving this broadcast by candlelight. Most of us have dreams of one kind or another and many of us will know the crushing sense of loss as those dreams lie in smoke and ashes around our feet. I guess that must have been how the two people in today's broadcast felt.

As we continue our series on the Great Shepherd, we will consider Jesus as the enflaming Shepherd. Let us begin by reading about Him, and his two broken hearted sheep, in Luke 24: 13 – 35: (NKJV)

Now behold, two of them were travelling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him. And He said to them, What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad? Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days? And He said to them, What things? So they said to Him, The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see. Then He said to them, O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory? And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. But

they constrained Him, saying, Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And He went in to stay with them. Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us? So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon! And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread.

It is not difficult to imagine how these two disciples were feeling as they made their weary journey away from Jerusalem. All their dreams had vanished in the violence and horror of the crucifixion afternoon. They had hoped that Jesus was the Messiah, the One who would redeem Israel. Tied up in their disappointment was a love for their country and a love for their God. Both hopes were dashed, or so they thought. As parents, we might have had dreams for our children's futures. Perhaps their choice of career or location or whatever. But sometimes those hopes are not met. However, the disappointment of these two disciples was of an order of magnitude greater than these kinds of dashed hopes.

The Messiah! Not just anyone, but God's chosen and anointed One. The One who would usher in all the promises of God. What blessing! At last, the world would know true righteousness and peace. Then Israel would be restored to the nation it should have been. Their hopes had started to fly, against the rational, level-headed scepticism of the mind: "we were hoping that it was He." But now! He was dead, they were wrong and there was only the life of shattered dreams and continuing in the desert of routine left for them. So, they made their way along those seven miles to Emmaus.

The thing about sheep is they do tend to wander, and particularly human sheep who have a notion that they know best, certainly better than an invisible God who may seem nothing better than make-believe. They will follow anyone but the Shepherd. As the good Shepherd, Jesus has given His life for the sheep. As the great Shepherd, Jesus is devoted to ensuring that not one of them is lost but that all will reach the safety and security of their heavenly home. So, the great Shepherd sets out on one of the most wonderful journeys in history. This was no crossing of the Alps with elephants like Hannibal or trudging across the Antarctic to reach the South Pole like Captain Scott, spectacular but doomed to failure. No, this was a journey that would lead to success and enflamed hearts, as these two disciples recalled: "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?"

It is worth just noting two lovely characteristics of the great Shepherd, two characteristics that we would do well to emulate as we deal with others. First, in verse 15 we read that Jesus went with them. Walking in the countryside is all very well but I would much rather just pop into a teashop for a nice cuppa and slice of cake. I can't help but think therefore why did Jesus just not stop them in their tracks and miraculously reveal Himself to them? It would have saved a few miles walk. Or why not just appear at the end of their journey and pop in to their house at Emmaus? Jesus chose to deliberately walk that road with them. His feet would have been dusty and tired, just as the disciples' were. Jesus chose to walk with them so that He could fully enter into their situation, their pain.

[I remember watching a rather tongue-in-cheek YouTube video featuring a husband and wife. The wife was complaining about the pain she was suffering, and the difficulties of her situation, only as the camera panned out revealing a nail stuck in her head. The husband wanted to just remove the](#)

nail – problem solved, but was halted by the words “It’s not about the nail!” It made me chuckle with the hidden truths it revealed.

Jesus created time to listen to the disciples’ hurt, to hear their broken dreams before He spectacularly offered them a future brighter than they could ever have dreamt possible. This is exactly the way that He deals with us today. In a world of quick fixes and instant action, Jesus makes time for each of His sheep. We are all blood-bought individuals, and we matter to Him.

The second characteristic is that He does not force Himself upon the disciples. In verse 28, when they arrived at their destination, Jesus indicated that He was going further on. He waited to be asked to stay with them and share a meal. Closeness to Christ is a position that is taken not given. Like John, at the Supper, so here with these two disciples, if they wanted to be close to Christ, then they had only to ask. Do we sometimes feel so far from Christ? Perhaps He is waiting to be asked to draw close! Nor did Jesus force the two disciples to go with Him on His journey. After all, He had been engaging their hearts and minds in the most wonderful study of the Scriptures. Surely, they ought to have been up for a few more hours of that! We might use emotional blackmail to get the results we are looking for. That might benefit us, but rarely does the other person. The great Shepherd always has the best interests of His sheep at heart and deals with them in exactly the right way – those burning hearts were not an accident. They were the result of His work in their hearts.

What was it, then, that led to their heart burning within them? How could hearts and lives that were totally spiritually cold, broken, dejected become so alive, on fire and bursting with life within the space of an hour or so? The diagnosis comes in verses 25 – 26: “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” I am sure that the words themselves were spoken with the utmost tenderness and probably at least a hint of sorrow. If only they had believed. But the words carry a blade of steel, albeit sheathed in velvet. We might like to think that we know it all. Many years as a believer may have led to a state of complacency and thinking there is no more to learn. To such an attitude the great Shepherd would still say “foolish ones.” Our preconceptions as to what we want the Bible to say to fit our plans may well blind us to a greater reality, as it did with these two disciples. Their expectation of the Messiah was not a fantasy, a construction of a fertile imagination. It was based on the Old Testament Scriptures. However, where they had gone wrong was in their selective use of those Scriptures. To such a habit of Bible study, Jesus would still say “foolish ones.”

The use of the word foolish is not without significance. Psalm 14 begins with the words: “The fool has said in his heart “There is no God.”” We might be inclined to point the finger to the atheist and wonder how they can think so. However, perhaps Jesus is gently pointing to me. When I use His word just to find a proof text to win an argument, when I use His word to find an answer to a problem maybe I am stopping God from speaking to me and it has become me telling God what I think He ought to do. No God for me in such circumstances!

In my work for Emmaus Bible School UK, I was really challenged by one of my students. She had recently suffered a double close bereavement in rapid succession, as well as the loss of the family home and the upheaval of relocation. In trying to reassure, I had said that the studies could wait, and she need not feel under any pressure to complete the course for now. Her answer to me was that without the regular routine of starting the day in the Bible, she did not think that she could get up in the morning! Letting God’s word saturate our minds, just because it is His word, is the right way to study His word. I am not saying that there aren’t proof texts that can guide us to rightly understand His word. For sure there are times when I need to study for a reason – to prepare for a public speaking engagement for example. But first and foremost, we must cultivate the habit of just reading His word and letting it speak to us. Perhaps I might read something today that in a year’s

time, the Holy Spirit will echo in my memory and speak to me in a particular situation of which I am blissfully unaware at present.

Having delivered the diagnosis of their condition, Jesus also delivered the remedy: “And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” For the rest of this talk I wish to look at some of the Scriptures the Lord might have used. I do not offer this as anything other than speculation. We simply do not know which Scriptures the Lord used, simply that he started with the books of Moses and then used the Prophets. It really was Christ in all the Scriptures. That lays out a wonderful pattern for us to copy. When we turn to His word it should always be with the desire that we would be drawn to the person of Christ. The Old Testament speaks of Him and is not just a collection of exciting stories, bizarre rituals, or solemn judgements.

I wonder whether the Lord started in Genesis 3 speaking of Himself as the Seed of the woman who would bruise the head of Satan yet be bruised in the process? Surely in the vitality of resurrection life the power of Satan through death had been utterly broken!

Maybe He took them to the life of Joseph, who was despised and rejected by his brothers, as He Himself had been for He “came unto His own, and His own did not receive Him.” However just as Joseph said “God sent me before you to preserve life” (Genesis 45:5) so Jesus had been sent by the Father to be the Saviour of the world (1 John 4:14). From the very lowest place in Pharaoh’s prison, Joseph had risen to rule a kingdom on behalf of the Pharaoh. So too God has appointed the day when Jesus must reign (1 Corinthians 15:25). These things about the Messiah had been there, hiding in plain sight awaiting the Holy Spirit to bring divinely given illumination to the glories of the Son. In similar manner to the instructions Joseph gave to his brothers: “So you shall tell my father of all my glory” we too are to make much of the Lord Jesus before the Father. In Hebrews 13:15 we read:

“Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.”

Surely the Lord spoke about Himself as the true and perfect Passover Lamb. Certainly, Paul recognised the picture of the Lord (1 Corinthians 5:7). Had they really thought that when God had said: “When I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you” (Exodus 12:13). He was meaning nothing more than what had happened in Egypt all those years ago? What glorious certainty and security there is in knowing that we are covered by the blood of Jesus – ‘shed for rebels, shed for sinners, shed for me.’

Jesus might have opened up to them the instructions for the Hebrew servant spoken about in Exodus 21. Who more than He had declared “I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out free”? In John 14:31 we read:

But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, so I do.

Even death on the cross was not too great a demonstration of the love that this perfect Hebrew Servant had for His Master. And how He loved His wife! “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her” (Ephesians 5:25). But it was not only some grand organisation that He loved, and Paul knew this love personally, as He said in Galatians 2:20: “The Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” None has ever loved his children more than Christ. But there was also a cost to such love. In Exodus 21:6, the servant was to be taken to the doorpost and his ear pierced, and he would become a servant forever. We often think of Jesus’ life of humble service whilst on earth. Perhaps we should think more of His service now, though exalted to the heavenly realm, as He continues to serve.

I'm sure that Jesus would have spoken about the bronze serpent, lifted up on a pole, of the offerings and the tabernacle, perhaps of some of the Judges or of David. It would have been incredible to hear Him work His way through the Psalms as a rich seam of truth. Surely, He was the One whom the nations were to "kiss, lest He be angry" (Psalm 2:12), yet He was also the One who was "poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint" (Psalm 22:14). Perhaps He questioned them as to what they thought the Psalmist had meant when in Psalm 16:9 - 10 he had prophetically said, "My flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave [My] soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption." Maybe Jesus had meditated upon these exact words as He hung upon the cross and found immeasurable comfort for His holy soul. The rock-solid foundation of the promises of God are always a sure help for the believer in times of trouble.

The Psalmist had also spoken about the King and His bride:

You are fairer than the sons of men; grace is poured upon Your lips;
therefore God has blessed You forever (Psalm 45:2).

What an uplifting portrait of the Messiah, so in line with what these two had been expecting. But the Psalmist also spoke about His back being "ploughed... they made their furrows long" (Psalm 129:3). The suffering of God's perfect Servant was terrible indeed, and this was so unexpected by the disciples. Surely tears would have flowed as He spoke about reproach breaking His heart (Psalm 69:20) or being so alone and out of place, like a pelican in the wilderness and an owl in the desert (Psalm 102:6).

How privileged these two disciples were as they walked on the road to Emmaus having the living Word explain to them the written word in a way that none of the scribes and Pharisees had been able to do. What authority Jesus must have had as He spoke of those things concerning Himself. Now, having dealt with Moses and the Psalms, Jesus ended His Bible study with these two disciples by looking at the Prophets, for all of Scripture speaks of Him.

Anyone who reads Isaiah chapter 6 must be awestruck at the majesty and wonder of the vision that Isaiah had. As he gazed into the throne room of God, he saw the Lord "high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple." What a scene of marvellous glory! In splendid holiness, surrounded by the mightiest of angels sat the Lord. Isaiah rightly felt his own unworthiness to be in such hallowed circumstances.

Later in his prophecy, he again sees the High and Lofty One, dwelling in the high and holy place. However, this time it is with those who have a contrite and humble spirit. How could such individuals ever be at home in such splendid holiness? Well, I am sure that the Lord would have spoken about Himself in Isaiah 53. The only way that mortal human beings could find themselves in the presence of a thrice holy God and not be consumed was because between these two hallowed events of chapters 6 and 57 we read of the high and lofty One taking the lowest place – being despised, smitten by God and the subject of judgement.

Perhaps at last it was beginning to dawn upon them that their perception of the coming Messiah had been awry. Yes, the Scriptures spoke about the Messiah as God's anointed One, full of glory and majesty. But in equal measure they spoke of Him as the subject of suffering and rejection. As these two disciples neared the end of their journey did they find themselves considering the picture of Jonah – three days and nights in the belly of the great fish? Had not Jesus been three days and nights in the rock cold tomb? Maybe they ended in the book of Zechariah considering the Messiah riding into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey (Zechariah 9:9), or as Ruler over all the earth (Zechariah 14:9). Surely, they noticed the nail prints of the One who had been pierced for them (Zechariah 12:10). How could they miss those marks that spoke of His great love for them and for us?

As we draw to a close, I wonder if our hearts are warmed just a little by these considerations of Him. It was as the Lord spoke to them on the road that their heart burned within them. How much we need to immerse ourselves in the Scriptures so that our hearts will also be on fire for Him. I can only look within my own heart and feel so often the stone-cold deadness towards spiritual things. As I become aware of this, I need to make time to read His word and let His Spirit do His work.

However, I find there is one more point of interest in this episode at least. It is not without importance that it was not until the Lord broke bread with them that their eyes were opened. You might have thought that all the Bible teaching would have done that. Instead, it was seeing those hands taking that bread and breaking it, as they had done on that Passover night as Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. I would just close with a plea in defence of the centrality of the Breaking of Bread (Lord's Supper, communion, or whatever other name it is given). Too many churches today have relegated this to an add-on after the main event on the fifth Sunday of the third quarter or some other such time! They view evangelism and entertainment as more important. We very much need to get back to a situation where we remember Him in His death, illustrated by those two simple elements of bread and wine, on a weekly basis, as they did in Acts 20:7.

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk entitled "The enflaming Shepherd" in the series on "The Great Shepherd", talk number T1447.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1.