

Shepherds of the Flock

By Rev. Eric Alexander

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: John 10:1-15
Preached on: Friday, December 5, 2003

Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary
200 E. Main St
Taylors, SC 29687

Website: www.gpts.edu
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/gpts

There might be some profit in our having this opportunity at the end of this evening, not so much a time of questions or at least questions that I would answer, but a period when we might be able to share that together perhaps on the lines of some of the things we have been thinking of in these evenings, problems that we may have, questions that may arise, and I would hope that at the end of the time when I speak this evening, which I hope will be briefer, although I make no promises, but I hope that we might be able to have some of our more mature and senior brethren able to be free to help us, those of us who may have some things that are on our heart and that we have brought to this conference from our own pastoral situation.

Now may we turn to the word of God, the tenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. John's Gospel, chapter 10, reading from the beginning.

1 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. 2 But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. 4 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. 5 And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. 6 This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. 7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. 10 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. 11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. 12 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. 13 The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. 15 As

the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.

May the Lord bless this word to us this evening.

I hope there has been some measure of progress according to the pattern that we have been following in these evenings. So on the first evening on Monday, we spoke of our thinking upon the calling of the minister, to be primarily a man of God; and last evening we were looking at that second element in our calling to be ministers or servants of the word of God, and I suggested to you that this evening we might look together at the calling we share to be shepherds of the flock to which God has sent us, and our theme therefore this evening will concern that area of our work which is commonly understood by the term pastoral ministry.

May I repeat now what I said on a previous occasion that it does seem to me that there is a false conception of the pastoral ministry to which we are all of us called that has created a hiatus between what a man does in the pulpit and what he does in the home and in the vestry. There was someone who said to me the other day, "The work that I do between one Sunday and the next, hawking around people's houses, is the price that I am reluctantly willing to pay to get into the pulpit on Sunday." And I think that that is an awful distortion of a truly pastoral ministry. May I remind you again of the words of John Owen that the true worker or pastor is to feed the flock of God, and it does seem to me that the truest understanding of the ministry is that the whole of our ministry is a ministry of the word, whether it is exercised in public or in private. Its unifying purpose is that wherever we are, we labor in the word and doctrine, and our purpose in private dealing with people ought to be in the same sense to be drawing under the gracious influence of the word of God. The fact is, you see, that some of the most profitable pastoral work that you will do will be thrown up in the context of the exposition of the word. Isn't that what you've experienced, those of you who have an expository ministry, that out of this very ministry itself some of the most vital pastoral work develops, and I do believe that there is a sense in which some pastoral work, so-called, can be purely a social concern and I think we need to be careful here what we understand by a pastoral ministry.

Yet even within this context, there are many things that we need to learn, I believe, brethren, about the shepherdly work of pastoring a flock and the shepherd language of the Scripture is in a very peculiar sense fitted to this tribe, this area of our ministry because the one word which expresses the relationship between the true shepherd and his flock is the word "care." In John 10, our Lord describes the pastoral ministry and makes it clear that there is a true and a false pastor, you will notice, and he distinguishes his own ministry from that of the thief and the robber and the hireling in this specific context, that the precise point where the distinction occurs is in this question of caring for people. "The hireling fleeth," John 10:13, "because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep." And the essence of the true shepherd is to be found in this whole matter of caring for men.

Now while it is obviously true that our Lord's shepherdly work is unique, it is unnecessary to remind this company this evening of that, there is a sense in which there is a pattern here in terms of the fact as I was reminding you the other evening, that there is one sense in which all our ministry derives from our Lord's ministry, and you can find many of the terms that are used to describe human ministry in the words that are used to speak of our Lord's ministry. He is the chief Shepherd, the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. He is described also, his ministry is a diaconia, and you find the words that are used for our Lord's ministry can be applied to our ministry. Of course our Lord's ministry differs from ours so fundamentally in that it is a redemptive ministry. He is the Good Shepherd who giveth his life for the sheep, but even here as I hope to show towards the end, there is a pattern which is to be seen in our ministry too.

Now I want to suggest to you, brethren, this evening, that in a time of drawing aside like this from our own ministry to seek God's face and to examine our own hearts, it's not unnecessary for us to remind ourselves that this calling that we have of God to care for men. I have missed the discussion on evangelism but this I would want to say, that the thing that marks out some of the most gracious evangelists of a generation in the church in Scotland which produced men like Andrew Bonar and Robert Murray M'Cheyne and William Chalmers Burns, the thing that marked out these men who had such a zeal for the souls of men and were so wonderfully blessed of God and seen multitudes brought to Christ, the thing that marked their lives, I would suggest to you, is a deep and gracious and loving care for the flock to which God sent them, and an indescribable longing that these people to whom God has committed and bound them might be drawn into the fullness of the blessings of the Gospel of Christ, and this is the kind of pastoral heart that I pray God may give to us.

You know, there is a story told of Andrew Bonar that when someone went to his door one Saturday, a thing that congregations ought to avoid doing, but they went to the door of Andrew Bonar's house on a Saturday and someone was telling me that when the servant opened the door, that shows you how long ago it was, there was a servant, the man's servant opened the door and the person waited in the hall and above they heard the squeaking voice of Andrew Bonar, he appears to have had rather a high-pitched voice, and the person asked the servant, "What's that?" And the answer was, "That's the Mister crying to the Lord for sinners."

Now you know, brethren, you can't read the pages of Bonar's diary, which I commend to you, you can't read the life of William Chalmers Burns without catching something of this tremendous sense of care for their people, a care which was proved in its reality in the case of a man like M'Cheyne when he was really honestly to be glad before God if he left his people that another man had been used to bless them. Now there's a real test in the ministry, is it not, that a man is ready to rejoice with all of his heart before God that God has taken him away out of the road for a time, in order that another man might come in and his people be blessed and visited. And the M'Cheyne letters to Burns are a real study in themselves in this kind of pastoral heart for his people as he writes back from the Holy Land to him. This is the kind of thing that I'm speaking about this evening and I suggest to you that this is the shepherd's heart that we need to grasp. May I just in these moments

this evening pick out some mark of it and suggest to you that we need to seek that God would lead us into this. I would suggest to you the professed mark of it is this very genuineness of which I've been speaking in the case of a man like M'Cheyne, that genuineness which stands the test of being truly and really freed from personal concern that who it is that God uses to bless this people; a genuineness which is ready himself to be put out of the way if only God will come and bless this people.

Now it is, you see, a mark of the false shepherd and the false hireling that he pretends a care for the sheep which he doesn't really possess. This is the mark of the false shepherd, you see. He comes in amongst the flock but whenever the wild beast appears, the falsehood of the man is immediately exposed and the fact that he doesn't have true care for the sheep is seen because immediately he himself is in danger, he leaveth the sheep and fleeth and the wolf catcheth them and scattereth the sheep because they are not really his own. His care is not genuine. He is proved to be a false shepherd.

I wonder if you know of the store which sent out a duplicated letter to all its customers in an attempt to increase sales around the Christmas period, and the idea was that they might get the sense of a warm family care, you know, on behalf of the management and the Board of Directors for all the customers who came into this huge department store. And when they got the letter, the customers didn't know, unfortunately, that it had come to grief in the typewriter and what in fact happened was that they read, "We would like you to know that we try to fake an interest in all our customers." You know, brethren, I get the impression that there are many of the people in the congregations in our land who are getting the impression that the ministers who are sent to be the shepherds over them are faking an interest in them, and the one thing that everybody was absolutely persuaded about in Jesus' ministry was that his care for them was utterly genuine, and in this sense, one of the prime necessities and one of the fundamental qualities in a true shepherd and in the ministry generally, is integrity. Integrity of life, integrity of character, integrity of speech so that people know that you mean what you say and that you're not just indulging in professional chitchat.

I met two people who came to my manse some time ago and both of them were talking about places they had moved around, traveled quite a bit, and they had gone to two different ministers and one of them said to me once which I later wrote down because I think they were so important, when he had been a distinguished graduate going through certain deep difficulties both intellectually, morally and spiritually, but in a clear and real sense seeking God, and he had gone to this particular minister and here is what he said to me, "I got the impression that I was only of significance to him as a potential fish he might catch and add to his spiritual aquarium where everybody could see." And someone else came to see me not long afterwards to speak about a minister we both knew in Glasgow and she said this to me, and I know that he was a man who at that particular period when she was with him was overwhelmed with work, "He made me feel that he had all the time in the world and I was the only person in the world at that time."

Now it seems to me, brethren, that this is a very important thing that we need to come before God about, the genuineness of our care for people as people. You know how often

people can get the impression that we're only interested in them as souls, caring for people as souls. I don't know how you can detach a man's soul from the rest of him and be interested in him as a soul, and I think it's terribly important thing that we should learn what it is to care for people in the whole realm of their life. The genuineness of that care, you know, will be severely tested when we are dealing with unlovely and unlovable people in unlovely situations; difficult people; odd people; people who can sometimes be objectionable and, therefore, the genuineness of the shepherd's heart is really put to the test.

You know, I wonder sometimes if this whole question of the reality of our lives as ministers is not part of a deeper problem, the problem that many of us find in just being ourselves in the ministry, just being natural. I've never been able to discover who said it but somebody evidently once did say that the most heavenly music is played in the key of B natural. And it's very true, you know, because it's a strange thing how there is a certain strain about so many of our lives when we are talking with people so that we find it very difficult to be real and to be in a very real sense, human, you know? And yet you know, brethren, I believe that one of the great works of the grace of God in a man's life is to restore in him a true humanity so that he is not only more Christ-like, he is more gloriously human when God has been at work in his soul. Yet some of us do give the impression, don't we, to people of being just a little bit either sub or superhuman and perhaps the real reason that some of us are afraid to be ourselves is that we are afraid to be caught off our guard. We're rather afraid of the real self. You know, we sometimes find ourselves saying, "I was caught off my guard." You know, it's rather a bad thing if you need to be on your guard and it does seem to me that it is a vitally important think that we should learn to be ourselves and to be real with people. I think it's not a commendable, a happy thing, that many of us have given the impression to men and women that we are in the worst possible sense the Lord's peculiar people. I think that people ought to see in us that warmth and humanity which marked the Lord Jesus who was truly man as well as being fully God.

Well, may I commend that first thought to you. "I am the true shepherd," says Jesus. May God make us true men in the ministry. The second mark I would suggest to you is the shepherdly care focused in the word gentleness. This is the characteristic of Jesus' shepherdly ministry which is both foretold of him and claimed by him in Scripture, if you will remember, in Isaiah 40, for instance, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." And when he came amongst men in the flesh in Matthew 11:29, we read, "I am gentle and lowly in heart." And when the Apostle Paul is dealing with men as their pastor, it is through this very characteristic of the pastor heart of the Lord Jesus that he appeals to them, "I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ."

Now, of course, this gentleness is part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the life of the child of God, but it seems to me that it must be supremely seen in the shepherd. Indeed, it will sometimes seem as if he is more like a nurse with children than a shepherd with sheep. The apostle in 1 Thessalonians 2:7 writes, "We were gentle among you as a nurse taking

care of her children." Now those of you who have children will know something of the exasperation of a nurse who has to deal with them, that this points to the fact, of course, that the great need for a nurse with children is the great need of a shepherd with sheep and that is patience and forbearance. And it's in this context that Paul writes to some of the believers as "My little children," and tells them that he was going through travail again for them, "My little children, for whom I travail again until Christ be formed in you."

Now this is the kind of care which the true pastor needs to learn under God for his flock. "The Lord's servants," says Paul in 2 Timothy 2:24 and 25, "The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness." That's a quality that comes to some of us more easily, of course, than to others. The whole question of personality and natural endowment comes in here, doesn't it? And that kind of gentleness and meekness, as we have often reminded our congregations, I imagine, is not a soft and sickly sentimentality, meekness and weakness, we have often said, and not to be confused with each other, but it is a strong unselfish love of which the New Testament speaks; a strong sense of care which yet has the capacity to be gentle and meek and forbearing.

Now there are some of us who might find that that came to us more readily than others, but I believe we all of us need to ask God that he will work it into our character and make us men who know what it is to be gentle with the flock. That doesn't mean there will not be times when we will know what it is to be stern and disciplining, but it does mean that we will learn this basic fruit of the Spirit of being gentle among you, and maybe one of the most difficult places to show it is precisely where the apostle refers to it in 2 Timothy 2:24 and 25, correcting his opponents with gentleness. That's something we need to exhibit one to another, brethren, as well as in the context of our flock, that gentleness of Christ, because the opposite of it, you see, sometimes can derive not from conviction but from self-inflation and one of the most difficult things in the world, I think, is to learn to be a man absolutely burning in your convictions and unshakably founded upon them, and yet to be gentle and loving and meek with those who disagree with you; a gentleness which will draw them where its opposite will often repel them.

The third thing I would suggest to you is a knowledge of which certainly Jesus speaks of in this chapter of John, and it's a knowledge which has three dimensions. The good shepherd knows his sheep. This is one of the great characteristics of the true shepherd who knows the sheep and is known by the sheep, but I would suggest to you that there are three areas in which this knowledge operates and, first of all, you will notice that it is a knowledge of the Father. Primarily the foundation of Jesus' knowledge of the sheep and their knowledge of him is the knowledge that he had of the Father and the Father had of him. "I am the good shepherd," verse 14, "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." So there is a link between his knowledge of the sheep and his knowledge of the Father and the primary knowledge which the shepherd needs to have in the context in which we are looking at it this evening, brings us right back to what we were speaking about on Monday night, the people that do know their God shall be strong and do

exploits, and it is our knowledge of the Father which is the primary knowledge which we need as pastors of the flock. It's possible, you see, in an unbiblical way to emphasize the need for knowing the sheep, getting out amongst the flock and getting to know them. It doesn't do a man any good if he knows the sheep and his knowledge of them is better than his knowledge of the Father.

The first knowledge in the pastor's heart is the knowledge of the Father, but the second knowledge, you will notice, is a knowledge of the pasture, and this takes us back to last night so that there is a kind of progression through which we have ourselves been moving. Verse 9, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." Now the point about the shepherd leading of the sheep, of course, is that he is leading them into the pasture. "He leadeth me," says the Psalm, "and the place that he leadeth me to is the green pastures." Now it is the function of the shepherd to lead his hungry sheep to the pasture. He knows where just the right pasture for them is to be found and it is part of his relationship with the flock that he not only knows them but he knows what pasture and leads them into a place where just the right pasture for their present needs is to be found, and he leads them to it. Now, you see, this is an application of what we were speaking about last night in this particular sphere, it is the task of the shepherd that he might know the pasture that the sheep need at this particular moment and that he might graciously and gently lead them into that particular pasture for which they are at that time starving.

Now this is the context of our pastoral ministry, brethren. We are not meant to be psychiatrists, we are meant to be men who are leading the flock of God into the kind of pasture on which they need to feed and this is why our primary knowledge is of the Father, our second knowledge is of the pasture, so that we may take them to this and say, "Now, this is where your need will be fed and met." And thirdly, it is the knowledge of the flock. Typical of this is Jesus' concern to know the sheep by name, you will notice. Verse 4, "when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice." In verse 3, "the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name. I am the good shepherd," verse 14, "and know my sheep, and am known by them." On this, of course, there is so much in it that I don't intend to spend time upon this evening, but it does imply that you will want to get to know your people and get to know everything about them that you can.

There is a certain danger, as I was suggesting to you last night, in a detached and doctrinaire interest in expository preaching which doesn't really bring it into a real, living, contemporary situation and apply the word of God to the people who are really there, and I suggest to you, brethren, that in the great majority of our ministries, this involves getting to know your people. I know there are some churches where people come from distances and it's impossible in that context to get to know them, but that's not true of 99% of us. We have been set by God amongst a people and we need to get to know them and to care for them and for the things that matter to them; to get to know their background; to get to understand the roots from which they are sprung; to understand their culture, their burdens, their fears, their problems, and so on. And I believe that there is a current need in our time for this kind of pastoral heart amongst people.

I would suggest to you, you may disagree with me, it's a personal conviction of my own, that this means that in the early stages of a man's ministry in a particular place, he may well find himself spending some time in this pastoral visitation just getting to know people. It was Tom Allen who once said to me when he came down to visit us one day to see the church where he was brought up, because he was born and brought up in our area and was brought up in our congregation many many years ago, he said to me, "You know, one of the things that I am learning these days," and as you probably know, Tom Allen who is now with Christ, moved in his theological position a very great distance over the years and moved spiritually and grew as a man of God as the years went by, and many of us have speculated and wondered just what he would have become if it had been in the providence of God for him to live longer, but he said to me when he came this day, "You know," he said, "one of the things I am learning these days is that you've got to earn the right to speak to men." You've got to earn the right to speak to men. Now I'm sure what he meant was this, that it was necessary to be ready to show men that we really did have an interest in them as people and that we cared for them as people, and this can mean that you may well spend some time in the early stages just getting to know them.

In a wider sense, I would suggest to you that this means that in your reading, you ought to be ready to submit yourself to the discipline of finding out about modern man and about the situation in which he lives, the way he's thinking and so on. You see, it's no good knowing about men 100 or 200 or 300 years ago, although in a very real sense men don't change, we all acknowledge this, but the pattern of life and the cultural background of our times is very different and we need to get to know it, I suggest to you, brethren.

I was greatly taken aback some years ago when I was speaking to one or two young people who came out to our evening service one Sunday night, and one of them said to me when we were discussing together, "You know," he said, "I wonder what you would think of Colin Wilson's 'Outsider' in this connection," in the connection of what we were speaking about, and you know, I had to confess that I had neither read nor heard of Colin Wilson's "Outsider," and yet it does seem to me that it's one of the important books for people to read and know, an inquiry into the thickness of modern man in the twentieth century.

Now I don't want to suggest that we are discouraged into thinking that we've got to cope with all the vast amount of rubbish that is exuded upon an unsuspecting public in our time, but I do believe that we need to be aware of the world in which we are living, and it's in this light of context that I think we need to know men. Of course, let me say again the supreme way to come to know men is through the word of God and through our Lord Jesus Christ who is the great kardiognostes, the searcher of the heart, but I believe that that doesn't disqualify us from the need for studying man in his modern context.

May I suggest to you, last of all, that the mark of the true pastor's heart will not only be genuineness and gentleness and knowledge, but what I can only focus in one word of sacrifice. Sacrifice. It's here that I want to link up with verse 11 in John 10, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." And the true shepherd,

again, is distinguished from the false in that when there is cost to be faced and danger to be met and tribulation to be undergone, the hireling flees. The good shepherd stays and he gives his life for the sheep. "The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep."

Now, of course, I say again, the context of this or the point of it is that our Lord is speaking of his own sacrificial and atoning death, but there is a sense in which we are identified with this in our ministry, and I would suggest to you that this is something at least of what the Apostle Paul is meaning in 2 Corinthians 4 when he is speaking about the ministry of this treasure that we have in earthen vessels where he acknowledges his trouble, his perplexity, the persecution that he is passing through, his being cast down, and sums it up in these terms, "We are always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, for we who live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake. Death worketh in us and life in you." Now as it was true in the saving ministry of our Lord that he gave himself for the sheep and his burden was that they might have life and have it more abundantly, there is a principle that is written into the word of God, brethren, that the way to see life working in the souls of men is through our being ready to be conformed to his death and to be sharing in his suffering. So Paul is able to say, "I die daily. I am always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus. I am crucified with Christ. So then, death worketh in us but life in you." And some of the sheer weariness and costliness and agonies through which a true shepherd of a flock passes through are what the apostle is speaking about when he speaks about being in deaths oft.

Within the context of this same epistle, he is speaking about the God who comforteth us in all our tribulations. We have the sentence of death in ourselves and I believe that so much of what he describes at the end of chapter 4 almost surprisingly as our light affliction, is in this very context of what the care of all the churches meant to the apostle. Brethren, I believe that we will discover this operating in our own lives, the very same principle that our Lord opened up to the disciples in John 15 where he spoke of fruit being produced by the Father who is the husbandman coming with his pruning knife and cutting deep into the vine in order that it may produce fruit, "My Father who is the husbandman," says Jesus, "when he sees the vine bearing fruit, he pruneth it that it may bring forth more fruit."

Amy Carmichael has a very lovely passage in one of her writings where she pictures the wounds that are inflicted, that to someone who is a stranger seems so odd and so unnecessary, some of the trials and hardships which seem so utterly remote and unconnected with the real ministry, and she says as this bleeding stump is left after the husbandman's knife has been laid upon it, we rest in the knowledge that in the hand of a tried and trusted husbandman, there is not one random stroke in it all, nothing lost that it would not be loss to keep and gain to lose, and this is the costliness of the ministry, brethren.

"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit," and I tell you there are many deaths to be died in a ministry that is going to be fruitful and telling and effective for God in the world in these days,

and some of them are to be found in the sheer costliness of a true pastor's heart going out for his people, and this is something that those others who are married will need to come to a clear understanding about with our wives, is it not, for they cannot be divorced from it. And there are many of us who are going to find this, we are going to find that in our own experience we know the words of the hymn, "I lay in dust life and glory, dead. O joy that seekest me through pain. I lay in dust life and glory, dead and from the ground there blossoms red, life that shall." Now there is the thing, you see, are you ready to lay in dust life and glory, dead, whatever that may mean and to allow God to prune and cut wherever he will so that there might be fruit to his glory? Then we will say with the apostle, "For this cause we do not lose heart, for though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen but to the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal but the things which are not seen are eternal." That's what gives confidence to the apostle's ministry. He is living for things that are eternal and ready to pay the price for the ministry that is going to be of eternal worth. May God give us the same heart that is ready to be offered up in the same sense for the glory of his name.

Now before we turn to our time of questions, may we bow before God together.

O Lord our God, who has been patient and forbearing with us beyond our understanding, whose compassions fail not, we praise and bless and adore thee this evening for thy grace and lovingkindness which thou hast shown to us, for thy patience and long-suffering with us when we have been thy difficult children, and when we have been thy faithless servants. We bless thee that our salvation as well as all our ministry is all of thy grace and we are dependent on thy grace alone, O God, and we come to thee this evening to cast ourselves afresh upon thee and to beseech thee that thou would so work in our hearts and lives, so send thy word through us to ransack our souls that we may be molded and fashioned by the hands of the Master Potter into vessels that thou wilt be pleased in thy mercy to use, and even though we acknowledge ourselves to be earthen vessels, we gladly would be that the excellency of the power may be of thee, O God, and not of us. So wilt thou give us grace this evening that we may learn to love with thy heart of love and that we may learn something of the meekness and gentleness of Christ so that our lives as well as our ministries as we move amongst men may be a savor of Christ to them? Lord, hear our prayer. We do not come to thee with our lips alone, our hearts are now drawn up to thee and we ask that thou wilt hear our prayer through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.