

BOOK REVIEW: *THE MINISTER AS SHEPHERD*

A Book Review

Presented to

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by

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All too often pastors attempt to derive the essence of their leadership from the areas of business, academia, and even government in order to properly care for and grow their congregations. Charles Jefferson in his book *The Minister as Shepherd* argues that the Word of God delivers the shepherd motif as the most explicit image conceptualization of the pastoral office (5). Jefferson was no stranger to this notion. He ministered to the Broadway Tabernacle in New York, NY for over forty years as their pastor. In a very hard setting, Jefferson endured developing a robust and remarkable reputation with regards to his pastoral work as well as his preaching. In 1937 Jefferson passed away leaving behind a valuable ministerial legacy including penning more than a dozen books (5).

Summary

Originally, Jefferson delivered the material for this book as a set of lectures in 1912 (6). However, their age does not diminish the wealth of universal wisdom and eternal biblical truth which streamlines the entire work. Jefferson desires to communicate to his listeners the dire need for pastors to embrace the “shepherd idea” as the theme and defining characteristic of their ministry. This theme is the foundation for all of the content that he uses to persuade the reader to give heed to his concern.

In chapter one, Jefferson reflects upon the Scriptures as well as Christian history in order to show that the shepherd role of a pastor is the supreme understanding of his ministerial office (7). He begins his pastoral plea with a brief overview of nine different titles often used to identify the pastoral ministry. These nine designations are as

follows: bishop, presbyter, preacher, priest, clergyman, rector, parson, minister, and shepherd (7-10). Of course, Jefferson chooses “shepherd” as the official meaning of the word “pastor”. He supports this assertion by aligning the identity and function of the pastor to that of Jesus Christ who took upon himself the title “The Good Shepherd” (10). Working from this presupposition, Jefferson teaches that before men were compelled to name God as “Father”, they viewed him as “Shepherd”. He most clearly sees this impression from Psalm 23 (12). Likewise, Jefferson argues that the N. T. writers portrayed Jesus as shepherd especially in Christ’s reinstatement of Peter in Jn 21:15-17 and Peter’s denotation of Christ as shepherd in 1 Pet 2:25 (13-4).

As chapter one progresses, Jefferson continues to submit other historical sources such as the “The Shepherd of Hermas”, ancient Christian catacombs, and even Christian hymns as enduring examples of the “pastor” as being traditionally perceived as “shepherd” (16-9). Once he has sufficiently strengthened his argument with valid evidence, Jefferson exhorts the young preachers to become shepherds in their pastoral ministry in two main ways. First, they must study and emulate the life of the perfect Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Second, the pastor must become a man of prayer and benevolence developing in himself the mind of Christ (28).

In chapter two, Jefferson expounds upon the work of a shepherd. He analyzes seven main facets of a shepherd’s make-up according to an Asian understanding. First, a shepherd is a watchman and looks out for his flock from his own watchtower. Pastors are to be on surveillance for enemies of the cross and false teachings. Jefferson states that pastors are to be vigilant and alert with their eyes on the future and their minds familiar with the past (35-8). Second, shepherds are to be guards. Jefferson shows that prevention

and protection are both the work of a guardian heart (38-9). Third, the shepherd is a guide. According to Jefferson, a guide is both a leader and a demonstrator in terms of setting goals and determining how to meet them (40-2). Fourth, a shepherd is a physician. The pastor must care for and tend to physical and spiritual needs. He is to be an initiator and worker of healing (43-5). Fifth, the shepherd is to be a savior to the sheep. A true pastor has a broken heart for all of his people and thus will do whatever it takes to keep them all a part of the flock (46-9). Sixth, a shepherd feeds the sheep. For Jefferson, a good pastor must be a good preacher. The act and art of preaching, if properly done, is a means of performing many of the previous functions of the pastor (50-4). Seventh, the true shepherd loves his sheep. Jefferson uses the Scriptures to teach that this love is the same self-sacrificial love of Christ who was the Good Shepherd that commanded all other shepherds to follow him (55-6).

In chapter three, Jefferson reassures his readers that the age of the pastor is not gone (57). Using the issues such as self-independence, the increase in wealth, and the rise of the printing press, he demonstrates that people are in need of a shepherd pastor now just as much as ever (58-62). Jefferson prescribes that the minister must be a shepherd to individuals not focused upon reaching the masses with the eloquence and swagger of his preaching (72-5). The weathered pastor finishes this chapter calling for ministers to observe the culture in two main areas, efficiency and conservation, in order to mature their ability to save souls. Jefferson declares that too much energy is wasted and that too many people perish in their sins due to the lackadaisicalness of the pastorate (76-80).

In chapter four, Jefferson addresses two qualified examples of typical temptations for the pastor as a shepherd. First, he asserts that covetousness in the sense of

the “love of gain” is a threat to a person’s ministry (85). This sin causes the minister never to be content. Covetousness has the potential to lead to a variety of sins such as idolatry of self, conceit, vanity, carelessness, cowardice, and the demoralization of his laymen (86-93). Second, Jefferson points out ambition as a stumbling block for the shepherd. He defines the temptation of ambition as the “love for power” (96). The ambition of a shepherd leads to the swelling of his pride to the point that he cuts himself off from his people. Jefferson calls the pastor to a constant state of friendliness and humility (97-102). In addition, he notes that for a minister to lose a battle is healthy and cleansing for his personhood and his ministry (105-6).

In the final chapter, Jefferson consummates his classic work with five rewards which the shepherd can anticipate. First, the true pastor will be loved with deep affection by his flock (113-4). Second, the shepherd will receive personal gratification from being all of the things mentioned in chapter two that escorts his people into a relationship with God (116). Third, the shepherd will receive increased power and influence in the pulpit by becoming more aware of the wants, needs, and personality of his flock (122-5). Fourth, the shepherd’s spiritual life will grow in stature with respect to his character and maturity in Christ (135). Finally, the shepherd will receive what Jefferson named the “crowning reward” (140). This reward is the eternal joy and perfect happiness of dwelling forever in heaven with the glory of the Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ (140-1).

Critical Evaluation

Though Jefferson’s work *The Minister as Shepherd* is full of heart-felt care and sage wisdom, the book appears to be heavily one-sided in its approach to pastoral ministry. First, in this case, the strength of the book also poses as its weakness. The

shepherd imagery is indeed a major theme of the ministerial office; however, Jefferson is too exclusive in identifying the role of pastor as anything other than a shepherd. For example, in chapter one he lists eight other titles by which a pastor may be recognized yet sets them in opposition to the term shepherd (7-10). His portrayal of this particular church office is too narrow due to the fact that many of these other roles overlap in Scripture with the function of a shepherd (Eph 4:12; 1 Tim 3:1-7).

Second, Jefferson at times seems to be contradictory and confused concerning his understanding of the dual nature of a shepherd with regards to pasturing and preaching. At one point he asserts that a good pastor must be a good preacher, but then later adds that young preachers ought not to be discouraged if they cannot deliver great sermons leading them to develop a more pastoral understanding of their ministerial task (54, 82). Jefferson comes across reluctant to emphasize the role and necessity of quality preaching as an equal member in the pastor's identity while carelessly communicating that a good pastor in essence is primarily a shepherd of goodwill (72).

Third, Jefferson's plea for the pastor to function in all of the multi-faceted ways of a shepherd wholly leans upon his theological presupposition of a single-elder led church. In a traditional single-elder led church this scenario bears much more value to the solitary pastor bearing the whole burden of the congregation upon his shoulders. However, for those who would take a different biblical stance on this church polity issue such as a plurality of elders, a more even distribution of these responsibilities made be administered among the various leaders allowing for better "efficiency" and "conservation" within a church's ministry (76).

Conclusion

Despite its various flaws, Jefferson does succeed in illuminating this particular aspect of the pastoral ministry with poetic persuasion and an inspiring tone. This book was obviously written by a man who loved God, loved the Word, and loved people. No one who does not seek to be an “imitator of God” is able to care so much for people and to be so eager and emphatic for others to embody the heavy weight of being a shepherd in the context of Bible. Thus, Jefferson encourages his readers to recover this characteristic and live it out with vigilance and zeal. This book will help and assist ministers across the spectrum to keep a balance between the pastoral and preaching dichotomy of this church office. With respect to shepherd motif, this work provides not only a broad analysis of this subject but also a powerful demonstration of its theme from the tender care of Jefferson’s shepherd heart and pen.