

The Rainbow-Colored Sheep



Glenn Slade Clark, Jr.

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Books by Glenn Slade Clark, Jr.

Cry, Wolf

The Great Debate

Metrognomes

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“So when they had dined, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me more than these?’

‘Peter said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’

‘Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’

‘Jesus said to him again, the second time, ‘Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me?’

‘Peter said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know I love you.’

‘Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep.’

‘Jesus said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me?’

‘Peter was grieved, because Jesus said to him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ and he said to him, ‘Lord, you know all things; you know I love you.’

‘Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep.’”

—John 21:15-17

It happened one day that the master rose and said to his shepherd that he would be leaving, for a time, but would soon return. The master was gentle and kind, and he loved us all—the sheep of his flock. He loved us, and he knew us in each and every aspect of our individual ways. He had raised a multi-colored flock.

Before the master left, he said to his shepherd, “Feed my lambs. Watch over my sheep.” He handed the shepherd a book of instructions for our care, and then he went away. He had business with his father, who lived in a kingdom far, far away.

Times were trying in those early days, just after the master’s departure. The wolves were ravenous, and they came out of the wilderness to harm us, but the shepherd kept the flock secure, and we managed to survive.

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Now that the master has been gone for so long, my brothers concur that living as his sheep has surely grown easier. I turn my head, for I disagree, but I keep my thoughts within.

Though the master loved us all, the shepherd has grown insane and now tends only select members of the flock with the love we *all* once knew. The flock had once been so diverse, so beautiful and colorful, but the shepherd has changed that. I do not deny that, without the shepherd, the flock would not have lived at all in the master's absence. At the same time, however, I will not deny that the shepherd is a liar and a fiend.

The master has been gone far longer than any of us expected, and I know that the shepherd does not truly believe that he will return at all. That is why the shepherd has no fear to twist the instructions in the master's book. He has no fear when he wishes to impose his own twisted will upon the flock—even against the master's loving nature.

The master picked us all by hand—a multi-colored flock. This makes it impossible for me to understand what has happened—what the shepherd says is written in the master's time-scarred book.

He tells us now that the master wrote to only feed the white-woolen sheep. When the master returns, only the sheep with pure-white wool may follow him to his father's kingdom. How can this be! How can the master pick us all by hand and love us every one, only to forsake any he picked that were not white!

Now it seems the shepherd has his way. All the flock is white now—waiting on the master's alleged return. All the flock, that is, save me—the rainbow-colored sheep.

I love my brothers. I cannot leave, even though I know that I am not welcome anymore. The master loved me. This I know, though the shepherd does not tell me so. His words are harsh and unkind to me. He has turned my brothers against me with his lies and fearless prejudice. While some will gladly speak their mind, most of my brothers treat me well when the shepherd is not standing over them, but even so he has tainted their thoughts. I know what they think; that I do not belong. I hear them talk when they think I cannot hear.

I love my brothers! I love them more than words can say! But they fear me now, for the shepherd's lies! It is

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no longer right for them to love me. Why can they not just love me! I know that my fleece is not considered appropriate for the flock, but I am not asking them to trade in their own white fleece for a coat as colored as mine. I ask them only to love me for who I am beyond my wool.

My coat does not define me. I think and love the same as they do. And I do not believe that just because my fleece is not white, I am not a good sheep too. I do not believe what the shepherd says; that the master is not pleased with me; that the master will not have me. If that were true, then why would I even be here to begin with? Was it not the master himself who added me to his flock in the beginning?

The other colored sheep are lost. When the shepherd stopped feeding them, they fled into the forest. The wolves are in the forest, but they feel the risk is worth it to escape the hurt of staying with the flock. Even though they love their white brothers still, they could not bear to live in a place devoid of both love and nourishment for themselves. The wolves may kill them, and I worry to the core of my soul, but at least they feel community with each other. They have no shepherd to

care for them, but at least they have among themselves love and acceptance—though I know they miss the flock, and I know the flock misses them, but these are matters forbidden to discussion.

I often wonder about the master's return. Will he go into the forest himself and rescue my colored brothers? Or will he look at me crossly and send me to join them?

Will he return at all?

Day by day I waste away. The shepherd will not feed me. The flock will not defend me. My colored brothers in the woods do not know why I stay. The white sheep of the flock do not know why I refuse to hide myself in flour or chalk. It offends them that I choose to stay *and* let my colors shine.

I alone know why I stay, and I alone am suffering. I stay because I love the flock. I stay because I fear the wolves.

Tonight I sleep alone beneath a tree that has no leaves. The rain comes down and soaks my rainbow-colored wool. My only comfort is in the fact that the rain-drops hide my tears. The shepherd has taken my

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brothers beneath a tree that has so many leaves. They cannot feel the rain at all, but they had no room for me.

My pain is unbearable. My tears are unending. I am all alone, so wet and cold. My body is starving and so is my soul. I miss my brothers in the woods. They scold me for not joining them, for they so detest the shepherd and his book. I am tempted by them. I *could* leave, but I could never be happy because of it. It is just as well that I am unhappy where I already am.

I miss the love and approval of my brothers in the flock. They tempt me just as well. I *could* cover myself in white flour, but I could never be happy because of it. It is just as well that I am unhappy with the colors I already have.

This division has torn me, and I know that my master would never have approved. He loved me, I know, so why don't they?

It's almost a pity that I cannot hate anyone. If I could hate, then I could choose.

About the Author

Glenn Slade Clark, Jr. is the author of three books. He lives in Dallas, Texas, where he is the youth program director at White Rock United Methodist Church and serves on the North Texas Conference Council on Youth Ministries.

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