

“JESUS - THE GOOD SHEPHERD”

John 10

Stephen Semple – Bramalea Baptist Church – January 31, 2016

FOCUS

Probably one of the least flattering images in the Word of God for Christians is when we are compared to sheep. I'm not a sheep rancher, but here are some things others have said about sheep.

- Sheep, for instance, commonly choose a soft spot of comfort where they can lie down, only to discover later on that the soft footing does not allow them to get up on their feet again. In this position they are an easy target for an attacker.
- Also, I am told, if a sheep gets turned over on its back it cannot turn itself over again on its own due to its peculiar center of gravity. The sheep need the help of the shepherd in such cases to get up and get out of danger.
- Sheep are animals of habit and will repeatedly follow old trails, graze on the same hills, and drink at the same waterhole unless guided elsewhere. They have apparently also been known to destroy themselves by adhering to these same old habits, instead of seeking fresh water, new trails, and a new source of food. (Well maybe that does sound like us)

Yes to be called a sheep, as the Word of God does, is not very flattering, but is perhaps very fitting. There is one good thing though about being called sheep and that is that we have a Shepherd. We would be lost, stuck in our old ways, open to attack and without peace if not for Jesus our Good Shepherd.

In John chapter 10 Jesus identifies Himself as our shepherd in one of the 7 “I AM” statements in the gospel of John. I want you to notice some encouraging truths about Jesus our Good Shepherd from John 10.

1/ JESUS IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD OF HIS SHEEP (vv11,15)

Twice in John 10 Jesus describes himself as the “Good Shepherd”. The word “good” is the Greek word “*kalos*”. It is a word that describes an inherent beauty - beauty through and through. In our language we use the word “Calligraphy” from the same root, meaning - beautiful writing. One translation put Jesus’ words this way - “*I Am the Good Shepherd, the Shepherd Beautiful*”. And notice that Jesus said – I am THE Good Shepherd, not just a good shepherd, but the Good Shepherd.

The image and allegory of Jesus as the Good Shepherd would have one that people would have fully understood in that ancient and agrarian society. Shepherding was one of the major occupations of people in Palestine. People would immediately relate to the

image of Jesus as our Good Shepherd. Jesus is one who guides, and guards and gives himself for his sheep.

Lynn Anderson, in the book - *"They Smell Like Sheep"* - tells a story about when he was in Israel and was riding tour bus through the countryside. The tour guide was giving a heart-warming portrayal of the ancient shepherd/sheep relationship. He told how the shepherd builds a relationship with his sheep—how he feeds them and gently cares for them. He pointed out that the shepherd doesn't drive the sheep but leads them, and that the shepherd does not need to be harsh with them, because they hear his voice and follow. And so on...

He then explained how on a previous tour things had backfired for him as he was giving this same speech about sheep and shepherds. In the midst of it he suddenly realized he had lost his audience. They were all staring out the bus window at a guy chasing a 'herd' of sheep. He was throwing rocks at them, whacking them with sticks, and siccing the sheep dog on them. This of course torpedoed the guides enchanting talk.

The guide told the group that he had been so agitated that he jumped off the bus, ran into the field, and said to the man, *"I was just spinning a charming story about the gentle ways of shepherds, and here you are mistreating, hazing, and assaulting these sheep. What is going on?"*

The bewildered man replied – *"You've got me all wrong. I'm not a shepherd. I'm a butcher"* This poor fellow had just provided the tour guide and all of us with a perfect example of what a 'good shepherd' is not.

Jesus – the **Good** Shepherd - contrasts Himself in John 10 with the bad robbers and thieves whose intent is to destroy and steal. As sheep we are in desperate need of protection, provision, care, direction and salvation from our Good Shepherd. Left to ourselves we would be hopelessly lost. We would wander forever in our old habits and sin, and never know the goodness of God. Isaiah 53:6 declares - *"we all, like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way"*. We really have no hope as sheep apart from Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

2/ JESUS HAS A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS SHEEP

Notice the words of verses 14,15:.

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father"

Two wonderful truths are given by Jesus about the special relationship He has with his sheep.

A) HE KNOWS THEM

When Jesus says he "knows" his sheep he is talking about a relationship of trust and intimacy. He knows, loves, and cares for his sheep completely and personally.

Have you ever been down to the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair? I am amazed at the judging that takes place with the animals - ever seen that? I know I sound like a city

slicker, but they all looked the same to me. One sheep for instance may have a first place ribbon and the one next to it a 3rd place, but unless you know something about sheep it is hard to see one's merit over the other.

I came across a story about a man who was tending a large flock who explained to his friend how you look for peculiar features of the sheep to tell them apart. “*See that sheep over there?*” said the shepherd. “*Notice how it toes in a little. The one behind it has a squint; the next one has a patch of wool off its back; ahead is one with a distinguishing black mark.*” Looking over the flock, the friend was impressed that the shepherd could be so familiar with each animal. This is the picture that Jesus is giving of his special relationship with his sheep in John 10. He knows, loves and cares for his sheep through and through.

And because Jesus knows his sheep, and loves each and every one of us he'll do all he can to protect, provide, and guard and guide us.

Remember the story Jesus told us in Matthew 18. If a person owns 100 sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the 99 on the hills and go look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it – he will be happier about that one sheep than about the other 99 that did not wander off. That's the kind of relationship Jesus has with us. He knows us and loves us.

B) AND, THEY KNOW HIM

I read a story of a man in Australia who was arrested and charged with stealing a sheep. He emphatically argued that it was one of his own sheep that had been missing for days.

When the case went to court, the judge wasn't sure how to decide the matter so he asked that the sheep be brought into the courtroom. He then asked the plaintiff to step outside and call the animal. The sheep made no response except to raise its head and look scared.

Then he asked the defendant to do the same. When the accused made his distinctive call, the sheep bounded toward the door. He knew his master's call.

“*Case dismissed.*”, said the judge.

The picture of the special relationship that exists between Jesus and his sheep is given even greater strength with Jesus' words of v15.

How does Jesus know his sheep and his sheep know Him? What is the nature of this special relationship? Jesus says in verse 15 - it is “*just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father*”. That's a pretty special relationship, isn't it?!! There is none more intimate. There is none more full of love. There is none more perfect than the relationship that exists between Jesus and the Father. And, wow!, Jesus says that's the relationship that is open between Jesus and his sheep.

3/ JESUS MADE THE SUPREME SACRIFICE FOR HIS SHEEP (vv11-13, 17,18)

Part of what Jesus came to do as the Good Shepherd was to give His life for His sheep. In vv11-13 Jesus contrasts His actions with those of a hired hand. A hired hand would have no personal interest in the lives of the sheep. If they were in danger he would just run.

The Mishnah, which was the interpretation and application of the Mosaic law by Rabbis at the time of Jesus, stated that if a wolf attacked, the servant was actually required to defend the sheep. But if 2 wolves attacked the servant would not be blamed. It would be called an unavoidable accident. You weren't expected to go too far in protecting your boss' sheep.

It is possible that a shepherd who owned the sheep may die in the course of his or her duties. There were many dangers. Often a shepherd would be out all alone in the fields and could be open to attacks from wild animals or thieves. But generally in all cases the death would be the result of an accident. Most shepherds would not be willing to give up their life for their sheep. But this is exactly what Jesus did for us.

Three times, verses 11, 15 and 17 is repeated the significant phrase - he "*lays down his life for his sheep*". This a unique phrase in the New Testament. No other NT writers use this other than John to capture the truth of the sacrifice Jesus made on behalf of others. Jesus' death was no accident. He laid down his life for his sheep. Jesus emphasizes this in vv17,18a.

The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.

If you read through the gospel of John you may notice something interesting about all the times so far that Jesus had avoided capture and execution even though there were many who wanted to do him in.

John 5:18 states of Jesus' enemies among the religious leaders, "*for this reason they tried all the harder to kill him*". Well, how hard could it have been to kill Jesus if they had wanted to?

In chapter 8:20 Jesus upset some of the religious leaders. John writes that "*no one seized him, because his time had not yet come*". When Jesus made a statement at the end of chapter 8 claiming to be God Himself, his enemies among the Jews took up stones to stone him to death. John tells us though that somehow Jesus was able to hide himself and escape from the mob in the Temple grounds.

Again in 10:39, his enemies were going to stone him because of his claim to be God. v33. Then, v39, "*they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp*". John was emphasizing that no one was able to do anything to Jesus.

It was only when Jesus declared in 12:23 that "*the hour has come*" that his enemies were able shortly after to arrest him, try him, and have him crucified. It could only happen then because it was part of God's plan and purpose in giving up the life of Jesus.

All this emphasizes Jesus' words in chapter 10. He voluntarily and willingly gave up His life for His sheep. As the Good Shepherd he laid down his life for sheep who have gone astray into sin, rebellion, and unrighteousness.

Again as Isaiah 53 declares – *"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."*

Final Thoughts

As we close I'll read from the familiar passage – Psalm 23 – but in the Message translation. As I do – take a moment to reflect on what it means to you personally that Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

*God, my shepherd! I don't need a thing.
You have bedded me down in lush meadows,
you find me quiet pools to drink from.
True to your word, you let me catch my breath
and send me in the right direction.*

*Even when the way goes through Death Valley,
I'm not afraid when you walk at my side.
Your trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure.*

*You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies.
You revive my drooping head; my cup brims with blessing.*

*Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life.
I'm back home in the house of God for the rest of my life.*

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21)

Questions for Reflection

1. How does it make you feel to be called a sheep?
2. In what ways are you like a sheep?
3. In what ways do you need a shepherd?
4. When you think of Jesus as your shepherd what images, thoughts and feelings come into your mind?
5. What truths was Jesus seeking to teach in his story in Matthew 18:12-14?
6. Why is it significant that Jesus voluntarily, vicariously and victoriously laid down his life for you?
7. What other truths about Jesus the Good Shepherd and his relationship to us do you find in these verses – Psalm 100:3 / Psalm 80:1 / Isaiah 40:11 / 1 Peter 2:25, 5:4 / Psalm 23?
8. How will knowing Jesus as your Good Shepherd change your week ahead?