

STUDY ON THE TEACHING OF JESUS

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Read John 10:1-18

Introduction

Jesus has pronounced a series of woes on the religious leaders of his day because of the type of shepherd they were. He said they:

1. Prevented the people from entering the Kingdom of God (Luke 11:52)
2. Made deceptive oaths (Matthew 23:16)
3. Tithed scrupulously, but neglected mercy, justice, and faith (Matthew 23:23-24)
4. Took advantage of widows and tricked them out of their houses (Matthew 23:14)
5. Looked good on the outside but were unclean within (Matthew 23:25-27)
6. Burdened the people with laws, but wouldn't lift a finger to help them (Luke 11:46)
7. Travelled land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, they make him twice as much a son of hell as themselves (Matthew 23:15).
8. Made a big show of their piety to be praised by men (Matthew 6:1-18).

We have seen many occasions in the gospel of John where they ignored the miracles and those who were healed, but rather sought to kill the miracle-worker. As a result, God's people suffered. For example, this chapter (chapter 10) follows after the great conflict with the religious leaders regarding the man born blind. The religious leaders had shown themselves to be so unhelpful and cruel to the man, his parents, and the common people in general that Jesus felt it necessary to talk about the contrast between His heart and work as a leader to God's people and the heart and work of many of the religious leaders of His day.

Ezekiel the prophet had spoken the mind of God about this type of shepherds...

“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds: “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. So, they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered.” (Ezekiel 34:2-5)

“Thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand; I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them.” ‘For thus says the Lord God: “Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day.” (vv10-12)

Following this prophesy, Jesus is God Himself (v11) searching His sheep and seeking them out.

The Sheepfold and the Shepherd (10:1-2)

In this first analogy, Jesus speaks of thieves who would try to climb over the fence to steal a sheep. A shepherd or the owner of the sheep would use the gate, which would be closed and guarded; only thieves or bandits would try to get in undetected some other way.

The "thieves and robbers" in this analogy are, of course, the religious leaders who take advantage of their positions of trust to ravage God's flock. Jesus explained that not everyone among the sheep is a true shepherd; some are like thieves and robbers. One mark of their being a thief and a robber is how they gain entry among the sheep.

Q: How do we recognise the thieves and robbers (bandits) today?

The Sheep Recognize the Shepherd's Voice (10:3-5)

In the spiritual picture Jesus spoke of, the door for the sheep pen had a doorkeeper – one who watched who came in and who went out. The doorkeeper knows the true shepherd and appropriately grants him access.

Q: In this context, who is the doorkeeper?

The shepherd calls the sheep by name, showing that the shepherd has a personal connection with the sheep. The shepherd leads them, providing direction and leadership – without driving the sheep.

The sheep knows its shepherd's voice.

I believe that one of the neglected, seldom-taught skills necessary to be a disciple, is to learn to discern Jesus' voice. We hear many voices -- the pressures of our society's expectations, our family's desires, and our own selfish desires. It is possible to hear Jesus' voice and distinguish it from the others, but we must make a practice of learning which is which. I don't know any way to learn this without making some mistakes in the process, so it is good to learn this with the help of a more mature Christian brother or sister.

Once we learn to discern Jesus' voice -- the leading of the Spirit, same thing -- then he can guide us, teach us, and use us much more effectively than before. Read the Book of Acts and look for instances where the Lord speaks to his servants -- Peter, Paul, James, Philip. This exercise will demonstrate to you how very important it is to hear Jesus' voice.

Q: How did you learn to hear the Shepherd's voice? Or how will you develop your ability to further hear the Shepherd's voice?

I Am the Door for the Sheep (10:7-9)

The statement "I am the door," found in John 10:7, is the third of seven "I am" declarations of Jesus recorded only in John's Gospel. These "I am" proclamations point to His unique, divine identity and purpose. In this "I am" statement, Jesus colourfully points out for us the exclusive nature of salvation by saying that He is "the door," not "a door." Furthermore, Jesus is not only our Shepherd who leads us into the "sheepfold," but He is the only door by which we may enter and be saved (John 10:9). Jesus is the only means we have of receiving eternal life (John 3:16). There is no other way.

Jesus is vividly contrasting Himself with that of the religious leaders of His time whom He describes as "thieves and robbers" (John 10:8). When Jesus says, "I am the door," He is reiterating the fact that only through Him is salvation possible. This is far removed from the ecumenical teachings popular in today's liberal religious circles. Jesus makes it clear that any religious leader who offers salvation other than the teachings of Christ is a "thief" and a "robber."

One who believes the gospel (Hebrews 11:6) and repents of sin (Luke 13:3) is assured of being in "the fold" and of having entered by "the door." As followers of Christ, Jesus is both our Shepherd and the Door to the sheepfold who provides for all our needs. Knowing that the world is full of predators whose

sole intent is to destroy us (1 Peter 5:8), we are always under His protection. More importantly, we are fully confident that “when the Chief Shepherd appears, [we] will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (1 Peter 5:4).

Jesus seems to say that His sheep are evident because they will not hear (follow after) the voice of the thieves and robbers who come after the sheep.

Abundant Life (10:10)

Jesus is the sheep herd's protection against thieves -- the false Jewish religious leaders, whose only motive is to exploit the sheep for their own benefit. Jesus' motive is for the sheep to have a full life -- protection from wolves and thieves, as well as pasture, water to drink, and the shepherd's experienced hands to rescue them and bind up their wounds.

In verse 10b, "to the full" (NIV), "abundantly" (NRSV, KJV) is the Greek word *perissos*, "exceeding the usual number or size ... pertaining to being extraordinary in amount, abundant, profuse," here, "going beyond what is necessary."

Jesus, your Good Shepherd promises to give you a life so extraordinary – going beyond what is necessary.

Life is a matter of degrees. Some have life, but it flickers like a dying candle, and is indistinct; others are full of life, and are bright and vehement – that is,

- Someone with a lot of life has stamina.
- Someone with a lot of life has increased energy.
- Someone with a lot of life has a large sphere of living.
- Someone with a lot of life has the ability to do things.
- Someone with a lot of life has an overflow of enjoyment.
- Someone with a lot of life has what it takes to win.

I Am the Good Shepherd (10:11-13)

Jesus said it so plainly there could be no mistake what He meant. He fulfils the ideal of shepherd-like care for the people of God as illustrated in the Old Testament and in that culture. What Jesus described as a good shepherd is actually a very remarkable shepherd. Shepherds may take risks for the safety of the sheep, but it is probably rare to find one who would willingly die for their sheep.

It was assumed that wild animals (the wolf) or bandits (the thieves and robbers previously mentioned) would threaten the sheep. The question was, “How will the shepherd respond?” The bad shepherd (a hireling) will not defend the sheep and thinks the flock exists for his benefit, but the good shepherd lives and dies for the good of the sheep.

Of course, when Jesus talks about laying down his life for the sheep, he is not talking merely about taking risks to protect the sheep from predators. This is a thinly veiled reference to his death on the cross, to bear the sins of the sheep, and deliver them from sin and its consequences. We see this especially in verses 17 and 18.

This theme of the shepherd laying down his life for the sheep is repeated five times in this discourse. It is therefore vital for us to grasp its importance.

"The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (10:11)

"I lay down my life for the sheep." (10:15)

"I lay down my life -- only to take it up again. (10:17)

"No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." (10:18a)

"I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again." (10:18b)

Verses 17 and 18ab talk about laying down his life, but verses 11 and 15 give the reason: "for the sheep," indicating a sacrifice made on behalf of another.

One flock and One Shepherd (10:14-18)

Jesus is referring to the mutual, intimate knowledge of the shepherd for the sheep, the shepherd who can call each of them by his or her special name (verse 3). He knows their peculiarities and weaknesses and accommodates for these as he shepherds them. And in turn, they trust their shepherd because he always looks out for them, rescues them when they get lost or caught in something. He brings them to the best places to graze and water. They can trust him, so when he speaks, they listen and follow.

Verse 15a suggests that this intimate knowledge and love between the shepherd and his sheep is a picture of the intimate knowledge, love, and trust between the Son and the Father.

My dear friend, how intimate is your knowledge of your Shepherd? How much do you trust him to lead you better than you can lead yourself? How much do you love him? How much do you listen for his voice, or do you let it be drowned out by the noise of the world? He longs for you to know him and love him as he knows you -- and as the Father and Son love each other!

Jesus speaks about "other sheep". Who are the "other sheep that are not of this sheep pen"? Clearly, these are sheep that are not found in Judaism, but Gentiles who will come to faith in the future. A fold of sheep is a part of the flock in its own structure or enclosure. A shepherd might separate the sheep into different groups to care for them better. There is one flock and one shepherd; but Jesus calls His sheep from more than one-fold (group or structure of people).

Looking at verse 17, the unity of purpose and trust, the love that exists between the Father and Son, makes itself visible in obedience -- the Son's obedience to carry out the plan of salvation by going to the cross (10:17-18) and our abiding in the Son (15:9-10).

Verse 18 is fascinating. Jesus doesn't act on his own but based on the authority granted by God. "Authority" (NIV, ESV), "power" (NRSV, KJV), used twice in verse 18, is *exousia*, "a state of control over something, freedom of choice, right", that is, the "right" to act, decide, or dispose of one's property as one wishes. So the Son acts freely, based on his own wishes, which conform exactly to his Father's command. He doesn't die martyr's death -- one forced upon him by his enemies (10:18a) -- but he dies as a voluntary sacrifice for our sins, according to the plan of salvation of God the Father, fully agreed to by the Son.

Also observe that not only the crucifixion was part of the plan of salvation, but also the resurrection.

We continue this chapter next week:

