# Editorial Jesus Our Good Shepherd Dr Jason Hubbard

Editorial: ‘Jesus, our Good Shepherd’ – Dr Jason Hubbard

Jesus, our Good Shepherd

In John 10, Jesus makes an audacious claim during the Jewish Feast of Dedication, known today as Hanukkah or the Festival of Lights.

“I am the good Shepherd… The good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”

The emphasis is on the adjective ‘good’. Literally it reads in the Greek text, “I am the Shepherd, the good.” The word ‘good’ hear means noble, praiseworthy, beautiful, fair, or important! He is the best shepherd, the one who will feed his sheep with abundance and bring them into good pasture! He is the shepherd of Ezekiel 34:15,

“I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and strong I will destroy. I will feed them justice.”

If he is our good shepherd, then we are his sheep! Although most of us would like to be lions, we inherently know that we are basically sheep, easily frightened, easily distracted, very needy and profoundly insecure. However, we have a good shepherd who loves us, nurtures us, guides us and brings us into abundant life!

“I am the good shepherd,” says Jesus!

Jesus employs this imagery during the Feast of Dedication. The Bible mentions the Feast of Dedication by name in the Gospel of John.

“Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon’s Colonnade” ( John 10:22–23 ).

This was an 8-day feast, held in the winter, during the darkest and coldest time of the year. John states, ‘at the time of the feast of dedication’ meaning, what he had just proclaimed in John 10 and following was during the feast of dedication. John uses this statement as a marker to help us understand the context of what Jesus was sharing and demonstrating to the crowds and religious leaders. This is also the scene in which Jesus claims oneness with the Father, for which the unbelieving Jews try to apprehend and stone Him (verses 24–39).

This feast was not prescribed in the Old Testament but was initiated out of a painful time in Israel’s history. From 175 BC to 164 BC a powerful leader in the Middle East, Antiochus Epiphanes, ruled over all of Palestine. His headquarters were in Syria. He was devoted to Greek culture and ideals and wanted to Hellenize the world, changing all policy and culture to a Greek worldview. He wanted to civilize the world and destroy all ideas of a Sovereign God who leads and directs human history. He was a modern-day secular humanist. He believed man is the measure of all things, man determines what is right and wrong, and man shapes his own destiny. This, of course, put him in conflict with the Jews of Palestine.

Antiochus decided he needed to rid the earth of this religion. First, he began slowly and patiently, gradually changing policies and structures towards a Greek worldview. And then suddenly in 170 BC, he attacked Jerusalem and murdered eighty thousand Jews. The survivors were sold into slavery. He wiped out the Jewish treasury. He determined it was now illegal to own a copy of the Jewish law, the Torah, and anyone who did would be punished with a capital offense. He outlawed the observance of the sabbath, and circumcision. Mothers who circumcised their children were crucified and their children were hung around their necks. He took the Jerusalem temple as his own and set up an altar to the Greek god Zeus. He turned the priest’s rooms into a brothel. Finally on the 14 th of Chislev, 167 BC, he offered swine blood on the altar.

This abomination and desecration of the temple continued for 3 years, until Judah Maccabee and his brothers rose up in heroic military revolt. They conquered this evil dictator and his Seleucid empire.

Judah Maccabee whose name means, “hammer” cleansed the temple, reinstituted the sacrifice and re-dedicated the temple to Yahweh! The feast of dedication was instituted each year to remember the oppressive reign of Antiochus Epiphanes and celebrate together the Maccabean revolt and re-dedication of the temple.

Watch the accompanying Jesus our Good Shepherd Video!

During the Feast of Dedication, Jews remember the courage and victory of Judah Maccabee and his brothers and most importantly remember with great joy the Living God’s promise to come one day and shepherd the people of Israel himself!

According to rabbinic tradition, the original Feast of Dedication involved a mighty miracle. When the Jews re-entered the temple they could only find one small, sealed jug of olive oil that had not been profaned or contaminated by the Seleucids. They used this to light the menorah in the temple. Although this oil was only enough to last one day, it miraculously lasted eight days - time for more oil to be made ready. This is the reason Hanukkah lasts for eight days. Because of this, some have referred to this Feast as the Festival of Lights and quite possibly an extension of the Feast of Tabernacles, celebrating God’s gracious and abundant provision in the midst of a difficult and painful season in Israel’s history!

During the 3 years of desecration and persecution by Antiochus Epiphanes, a number of priests betrayed their office as shepherds. The priests were the most respected leaders at the time, and yet many of them stood by and allowed Antiochus and the Syrians to pollute the holy place. Some of them even participated in this desecration and defiled the sanctuary with acts of sexual immorality. During the Feast of Dedication, the people would remember this awful betrayal where the shepherds of God’s flock deserted their sheep in their time of need. One of the texts of Scripture read each year during the temple service was Ezekiel 34, which speaks of God's judgment against the shepherds of Israel who had not been faithful to shepherd the flock under their care.

It is in this context that Jesus declares himself to be the ‘Good’ Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (John 10). He doesn’t abandon the sheep but protects them and leads them to good pastures! Jesus claims the promise of Ezekiel 34:15,

“I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and strong I will destroy. I will feed them justice.”

This is why the Jewish authorities took up stones to throw at Jesus. They understood he was claiming to be the one to do for the flock of God what God himself promised to do! In essence Jesus is saying (paraphrase),

“I am the noble shepherd of Ez. 34, who comes to feed my flock, to seek my lost sheep, to bring back the scattered, and to bind up the broken. I am the fulfillment of the promise that God would come to be your shepherd! Where your previous shepherds had fled, like hired hands, who cared nothing for you, I lay down my life for you!”

During this Feast of Dedication, and celebration of the reinstitution of the sacrifice on the temple altar, Jesus declares he will offer his life as the once and for all sacrifice. Four months later during the Feast of Passover at the very time the Passover lambs were being sacrificed, Jesus becomes the ultimate and final “Passover Lamb.” As a good Shepherd, he becomes a lamb, and lays down his life for his sheep!

This phrase ‘lays down his life for’ is substitutionary language. It means ‘in behalf of,’ or ‘in place of.’ This death is on behalf of someone else!

God to us as one of us … he is described as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world… it is so appropriate that Jesus was born in Bethlehem … Bethlehem was just 7 miles outside of Jerusalem… it was a small city set aside to breed lambs for one purpose - sacrifice - these were Bethlehem Lambs bred and born for sacrifice in the temple … the daily burnt offering sacrifices (morning and evening) and the Lambs needed for Passover – it was so appropriate that shepherds first attended the birth of Jesus, because they always attend the birth of lambs – especially sacrificial lambs … out on the hills of Jerusalem, shepherds would attend the birth of baby lambs, wrap them in swaddling clothes to protect them, and place them in mangers (feeding troughs) – this is why it was a sign to the shepherds – when they saw the Infant Jesus, looking into the very face of God – they understood him to be the Lamb of God - born for one purpose - to give his life as a Lamb!

Jesus is qualified as a Good Shepherd because he gave his life as a Lamb, he will lay his life down for his sheep!

Jesus gives us four basic principles in John 10 during this Feast of Dedication.

1. Security.

“Truly, truly, I say to you. I am the door of the sheep”-John 10:7

“My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand”- John 10:27

Jesus promises that no one can snatch you out of his hand! You are held in the noble shepherd’s hands. He doesn’t promise us an easy life. The wolves will still come, snarl at us and maybe even bite us, but they can never snatch us out of the good shepherd’s hands!

Jesus declares that He is the door/gate in John 10:7. In the Middle East there were two kinds of doors or gates used to protect the sheepfolds. The ones out in the fields, were often small caves, protected on three sides but without a door on the fourth side. Jesus is saying “I am the door…I lay in the open space! No sheep goes out unless it crosses my body, and no wolf gets in except over my body…” Jesus promises us that he will never desert us or lose us as his sheep. He promises to protect us from the wolves who come to steal, kill and destroy. We are safe and secure in his grace as we hear his voice and follow him! GLORY!

Sheep are not herded from behind. Sheep are always led from someone in front of them. Jesus calls us to new pastures. The noble shepherd is always leading us to new places we have not been before. His call is not ‘go on,’ but rather, ‘COME.” Jesus is not behind us, he is out in front of us inviting us to Come and Follow his good and perfect leadership!

2. Intimacy.

“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father”-John 10:15

Jesus the good Shepherd desires an intimate, close, and personal relationship with us. In John 10:15, the word for ‘know’ is a word used for personal knowledge, or experiential knowledge. This is a staggering statement. He is saying even as the Father knows me, and I know the Father…I know my own and my own know me! Jesus is inviting us to come and experience him with the same depth of intimacy that he has with his Father! We are fully known and perfectly loved! To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. However, to be loved and yet not known is superficial. To be fully known and perfectly loved by our ‘good’ Shepherd transforms us!

3. Communication.

“The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before him and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.”-John 10:3-4

Four times in John 10 Jesus says, “my sheep know me or know my voice” (V3, 15, 16, and 27). Palestinian sheep were raised primarily for their wool. They would be with their shepherd for a long time. The Shepherd would come to know each of his sheep personally. A shepherd would give a separate and unique name and sound for each one. A sheep would even ‘Dance’ to the whistle of the shepherd’s voice! Jesus knows each of his sheep by name! He warns us of danger, woos us to his side, guides us through hills, leads us to nurturing pastures, and shows us the way forward. My sheep here my voice and they follow!

4. Nurture.

John 10:9, “I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.”

The word pasture in John 10:9 implies nurture, feeding, and comfort. Jesus promises us a rich and abundant life. He has given us free access to all the blessings of the kingdom! He came to give us life and life to the full! I love the promise of Psalm 23:1, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” In Jesus there is no lack. He laid down his life for us and through his cross, he has provided all that we need! He promises to nurture us, to lead us to good pastures where we can find true rest, abundant provision, and secure protection!

Security, Intimacy, Communication, and Nurture!

No one speaks the way this man speaks!

For the Supremacy of Christ in all things,

Dr. Jason Hubbard – Director International Prayer Connect