

The Good Shepherd

John 10:1-21

KV 14 “I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me”

How many people have played follow the leader when they were kids? Ever since we were little, we have always had this instinct to follow others, to do what they do. In kindergarten, there was a kid who wanted to copy everything I did. If I said “What are you doing?” he would say “What are you doing?” If I colored my snowman blue, he would color his snowman blue. Later when I got into high school, I wanted to be like Michael Jordan. I would practice some basketball moves in the privacy of my home, and make up some of my own. Well, sheep are the same way, and they are always looking for something to follow. The leader of the sheep is usually simply the first sheep that moves, and they all follow. Without a shepherd, this could mean trouble. In 2005, in Turkey, 1500 sheep jumped off a 45-foot cliff because they were following each other. 400 of them died, which cushioned the fall of the remaining 1,100. In a sense, we are all like sheep. Whether we know the person or not, we all follow someone, there is always someone influencing the direction we take our lives – the question is, where will you ultimately be led? Do you know who you are following, and is this person a good shepherd?

The Pharisees were the ruling class of the Jewish people, they were the shepherds of God’s flock. It was their job to feed, to protect and to care for God’s people, but they were not fulfilling their responsibilities. Instead, they treated God’s people brutally and harshly. Last week, we learned that Jesus had healed a man who was born blind from birth. When this man testified to the Pharisees what Jesus had done, they were indignant, and replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” They threw the man out of the synagogue, which was about the same as destroying his life and livelihood. This was unbelievable cruelty – here is a poor man who had just had his sight restored, but instead of welcoming him into a new level of fellowship, they threw him out to the streets. In this passage, Jesus exposes their hypocrisy, and teaches them what it means to be a good shepherd.

He begins in v.1, “I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.” The Pharisees claimed to be disciples of Moses. We know Moses as the person who led millions of Israelites out of slavery in Egypt to the land the Jews were residing in now. Moses was a picture of a good shepherd, and the Pharisees claimed to be his disciple. As Jesus was beginning his story, he describes 2 types of people – a shepherd, and a thief, but at this time, the Pharisees do not know that he is talking about them.

Jesus continues, from verse 3, “The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” The sheep pen usually held the sheep of several different families, and at night there is a watchman in the sheep pen to protect them. Only the owner of the sheep has the authority to go to the pen and take his sheep. Notice that this shepherd knows each and every one of his sheep by name – and they do not come to him. They recognize his voice, but the shepherd goes into the pen and leads them out. Think of this like picking up your kids from preschool. The classroom is like a sheep pen, full of cute little sheeps from different flocks. When my mom came to pick me up, I was so happy to

see her! I knew her voice, and she knew my name, and took me by the hand to lead me home. But if it was a stranger, and this person called my name, I would run away from him as fast as I can in the opposite direction. The shepherd knows his sheep by name, and his sheep recognize his voice.

Look at v.6, “Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.” The Pharisees were intellectually the best and the brightest in society, which is why they thought they had the right to rule over the people, however, they were spiritually blind. They had witnessed some of Jesus’ great miracles, such as healing a paralyzed man and giving sight to a man born blind, but they were blind to see that Jesus was the Son of God. They were also blind to this parable. They probably wondered why he was suddenly talking about thieves and sheep, but he was not talking about physical things, but spiritual things. Jesus uses this figure of speech in v.1-5 in order to hide spiritual truths, but they also turn out to be a great learning tool. 60 years after these events, when the book of John was written, the author remembered these words clearly. And actually, we all are blind to spiritual truths, unless Jesus reveals the meanings to us. Thank God, that Jesus tells us all what he means in the following verses.

Look at v.7-8, “Therefore Jesus said again, ‘I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.’” Ah, so Jesus is the gate. The man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. Real shepherds need to enter the sheep pen through Jesus. This means that Jesus must have the authority over the shepherd’s life, and the shepherd feeds his flock by teaching about Jesus. The Pharisees denied Jesus’ authority, and they had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue (John 9:22). We see then, they did not enter through the gate. They are not real shepherds, but thieves and robbers.

In Eze 34:2-4 the Lord speaks about these shepherds of Israel, “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You rule them harshly and brutally.” And we see that this is what they did. When Jesus healed a paralytic man, they questioned him for picking up his mat. When Jesus healed a blind man they threw him out for telling the truth. A shepherd who enters through the gate obeys the Lord and takes care of his flock. They feed and water his sheep, they care for the sick and search for the lost. I am thankful that when I was lost, one of God’s shepherds found me, brought me to church and taught me the Bible. I am also thankful for other shepherds with whom I serve now, who have counseled with me, prayed for me, and continue to help me grow in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is not only for shepherds, but for all the sheep too. God’s people, including shepherds, are his sheep. If you are a child of God, then you are a part of God’s flock. We see why shepherds need to go through the gate, but let’s see why shepherds and sheep, why all people, need to go through the gate. Let’s all please read v.9 together, “I am the gate; whoever

enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.” Jesus says whoever enters through ME will be SAVED! Through Jesus is salvation! Saved from what? Look at v.10 really quick: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. Jesus has come to bring salvation from DEATH. He has come that we may have life, and have it to the full, forever, eternally. But Jesus is the gate, he is the ONLY way to salvation.

Salvation is hard-wired into all of our hearts, nobody wants to die – we try very hard to preserve our lives. Fantasy stories talk about the “fountain of youth.” However, there is only one way to be saved, and that is through faith in Jesus Christ alone. There are really only 2 paths out of the sheep pen: one is through the gate, the other is by a thief. In the same way, there are only two religions in the whole world: God-centered, or man centered. There are 2 methods people think they can be saved by, but only one is true. We are saved either by grace, or by human effort. Jesus is the only one who offers salvation by grace, everything else is salvation by works. Grace is getting something we do not deserve, and works is trying to earn our reward.

In Buddhism, you try to do good works all your life, but you still will never know what you reincarnate into. With Islam, Allah will weigh your good deeds and bad deeds after you die to determine if you can go to heaven. You have no assurance, no security that you will go to heaven. How can you count your good deeds and your bad deeds? Jesus says even your bad thoughts count as bad deeds (Matt 5:28). According to the Bible, we cannot save ourselves (Rom 7:24). That means all the other ways to salvation are false. They are lies and deceptions, because they know that after you die, there is no second chance. The thieves and robbers have come to kill and destroy – Jesus has come that you may have life, and have it to the full.

The thieves and robbers can never give you assurance of your salvation, because they really do not offer it. But Jesus does give us assurance, those who believe in him have the Holy Spirit as a deposit (2 Cor 1:22). Those of us who have been saved can testify that we are being transformed. We are being sanctified, made holy, each day. We are being changed and conformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We can come in and go out of the sheep pen freely. Outside of the sheep pen, we find pasture, and food. Inside of the sheep pen we find comfort, safety and security. It is only through the gate we come to have this freedom. Only through Jesus can we be free indeed, and have life to the full.

Jesus taught that he is the gate, and that any genuine shepherd must come through Him. He exposed that the Pharisees were thieves and robbers, and now Jesus will build on to that figure of speech, to give us more insight into another spiritual truth. Look at v.11-12, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it.” Jesus is the gate, but he is the Shepherd too? Yes, he is both. In his parable he is both the gate and the good shepherd, and he can be both because he is the way to salvation, and he leads us to salvation.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, but the hired hand runs away. The good shepherd really cares for the sheep, and he proves it by giving his life to shepherd them, but the hired hand cares nothing for the sheep. Jesus is not the hired hand. He proved this to us by

dying on the cross for our sins. A good shepherd is willing to risk his life for the flock. When King David was a boy, of only about 15 years old, before he became king, here's what he told King Saul: "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized by its hair, struck it and killed it. (1 Sam 17:34-35)." He was 15 years old, and he chased after lions and bears!

When the hired hand sees trouble coming, he abandons the sheep. It's in times of trouble when the true character of a person is revealed. The hired hand and the shepherd may look the same initially, and on the outside, but when times of trouble come you can tell the difference by who stays and who leaves. A hired hand is in it for the money, but not for the love of the sheep, or of the owner's flock. The shepherd is the owner of the flock, and he has a vested interest in it. In the same way, when we are in God's flock, we are owned by our Lord Jesus Christ, and we can take comfort in the fact that Jesus does have a vested interest in our lives. He gently leads us to pasture and he protects us.

Let's all read v.14 together: "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me" The sheep and the good shepherd know each other. The sheep recognize his voice. What is more important is that the shepherd knows his sheep. Ask yourself – do I know Jesus, can I recognize his voice? But more importantly – does Jesus know me? Am I truly his sheep? Do I listen for his voice daily? Jesus is the good shepherd because he knows everyone in his flock. Even the hairs on our head are numbered! Now look at what also makes Jesus the good shepherd in v.15 "just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep." Jesus knows the Father. This is huge- Jesus is the Son of God! We can trust him, we can trust that he can do anything he says, because He is the Son of God. Jesus also reiterates that he lays down his life for the sheep. It may be one thing for a mere man to lay down his life for the sheep, but for God to lay his life down for sheep: what a wonderful amazing love! That is amazing grace!

This grace reaches out to the whole world. Jesus says in v.16, "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." The Jews thought that salvation would only come to them, and even the early church struggled with this. They were shocked that non-Jews (Gentiles) were being saved, but Jesus says it here. I once had envy for the Israelites, and had wished that I was a descendant of Jacob, because of the stories I read in Genesis about how God blessed them. I eventually got over that feeling, but here Jesus says we shall be one flock and one shepherd. We are equal heirs with the chosen people of God! We are heirs of the same promise, and all who believe in Jesus – whether Jew, Greek, American, Korean, African – are all one, all have one shepherd, and all will receive eternal life.

Jesus revealed himself as the Son of God, equally important is what he says in v.17-18, "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. This command I received from my Father." Jesus reveals that He is God. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons within one God, but they are one and equal in power. It's a mystery how they are one, but it's the same mystery of how

with a husband and wife, two become one. Jesus is God, and he has the power and authority of God. Jesus says, “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life.” God already loved Jesus, but Jesus is commending himself to that love by loving us. It’s like, Mary loves me, I know she does, but I still serve her to commend myself to that love. Here’s the amazing thing: this shows us how much God loves us, that God loves the Son even more because the Son also loves us, and gave his life for us.

Jesus has the authority over life and death. When we die, we cannot take our lives back up again. We cannot reconnect our souls with our bodies. Jesus is different – because Jesus can take his life back up after death. This is his power as God. Nobody else in the heavens and the earth has this power – Jesus holds the power of life and death. What does this mean? It means that the Pharisees and Romans who crucified him did not take his life, but he gave it to them. Why did Jesus have to die? Could he not save the world with a snap of his fingers? I believe he can, but in order to show the world the reality of sin and what it cost, he had to die. In order to show he CAN triumph over death, he had to die, and rise again. In order to be a satisfactory sacrifice, his life needed to be given up. Our sins require death, but Jesus came to taste death for all that are his. The wrath of God was poured out on him, and the perfect life he lived, so that we could be saved from eternal death, and be reconciled with God.

Finally, look at the responses of those who heard him, in v.19-21: “At these words the Jews were again divided. Many of them said, ‘He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?’ But others said, ‘These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?’” Here you can almost tell who are his sheep, and who might be. Many people thought he was crazy. Who calls himself a gate and a good shepherd? Who can claim to take up or lay down their life? And that one question they ask is particularly revealing: “Why listen to him?” The sheep listen to his voice, but obviously, this group had no interest in listening to what he said. The other group has some hope, however. They defended Jesus, especially right now at a time when loyalty to him could cost your livelihood. Perhaps Jesus knew some of them by name.

What is your response? Do you think that Jesus is making some wild claims, or will you consider that he is telling the truth? If you believe his words, enter through him. Come to Jesus, and come under his shepherding care. There are really only 2 ways out of the sheep pen: you can be carried away by thieves and robbers who come to steal kill and destroy, or you can enter through Jesus – and there you can come in and go out, and find pasture. Do you know the good shepherd, Jesus? More importantly, does He know you? I’ll close with this word of encouragement from Psalm, 23:1-4: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”