

The Good Shepherd

Lesson 8

John 10:9-18

Opener

Jesus used many different illustrations to describe himself to the people. So far, we have looked at Jesus as the the Word, the Light, the Living Water, and the Bread of Life. In this lesson, Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd.

Think of a shepherd. How would you describe a shepherd? (someone who leads sheep, guide, provider).

Now think of a GOOD Shepherd. This would be someone who really takes care of the sheep and goes out of their way for them—maybe even risking their lives to save the sheep. A good shepherd would also be kind, gentle, loving and patient. A good shepherd would seek to heal the wounded sheep and look for the lost sheep.

In Luke 15:1-6, Jesus tells a story about a shepherd who has 100 sheep. One of the sheep strayed from the group and got lost. So the shepherd left the other 99 sheep to search for the one lost sheep. When he found it, he was overjoyed and carried the sheep back on his shoulders.

Jesus is our Good Shepherd, and he wants to find us and carry us home.

Scripture

Key Verses: “Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. Wherever they go, they will find green pastures. The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give life in all its fullness.”

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. . . . I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.”

- John 10:9-11, 14-15

Discussion

In the Old Testament, there were many prophecies telling of the Messiah that God would send to save his people. The Jewish leaders had tried to shepherd the people by teaching them that obeying laws would save them. But most of the leaders didn’t really care about their people. They weren’t good shepherds. So in this passage, Jesus contrasts himself, the Good Shepherd, with all of the Jewish leaders who had come before him.

vv. 9-10

Jesus is trying to tell the people that they can only have salvation if they believe in him. In other words, they can only have a relationship with God if they go through Jesus Christ, the Gate to God. This must have sounded strange to them—especially to the Pharisees, who didn't believe Jesus was the Son of God.

Notice Jesus says he is “*the*” gate—not “*a*” gate, but the only gate to God. Acts 4:12 speaks of Jesus as the only way of salvation: “There is salvation in no one else! There is no other name in all of heaven for people to call on to save them.” This is exactly what Jesus wants people to grasp in these verses. He *is* the Messiah they have been waiting for to save them.

Jesus goes on to say that the life he gives is abundant life: “life in all its fullness.” Once a person accepts Christ, they gain eternal life, with all of the joy of being a child of God. This is abundant life. Your bank account may not increase, you may not become more successful by the world's standards, but you are receiving an eternal inheritance—in heaven!

vv. 11-13

God is described as a shepherd several times in the Old Testament. In Ezekiel 34, God tells the Israelites: “As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. . . . I will tend them in good pasture. . . . I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak.” (vv. 11-12, 14, 16)

In Isaiah 40:11, Isaiah describes God as a gentle, loving shepherd: “He tends his flocks like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart.”

And of course Psalm 23: “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.”

God had tried to be a shepherd to the Israelites, but they kept looking to other things or people to save them. And so Jesus came to show them the way and to be the ultimate good shepherd—he would “lay down his life for the sheep.”

Jesus knew that everyone who came before him did not have the interests of the people in mind. They were merely “hired hands” who would run if there was any danger in sight. But Jesus shows us how much he loves us. Not only would he risk his life, he would freely give it.

vv. 14-15

Jesus repeats his statement that he is the Good Shepherd, and goes on to say that he knows his sheep, and they know him. Shepherds who really cared about their sheep would be able to tell them apart and sometimes had names for them based on their appearance (Short Nose, Big Ears, etc.). Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, knows his sheep. In fact, he knows everything about us.

Not only does Jesus know his sheep, but we can know him. That is the meaning of eternal life: “to know God” (John 17:3). Jesus, by giving his life, made the way for us to know God.

vv. 16-18

The “other sheep” Jesus refers to in v. 16 are all those who are not Israelites—that means US! Aren’t we glad God chose to save ALL people, not just his chosen people?

In v. 17 Jesus again refers to his death on the cross, but this time he gives hope of his resurrection when he says “I lay down my life that I may have it back again.” Jesus knew he had to die and that he would be raised three days later. He wanted the people to understand too.

He also wants us to understand that he didn’t have to die—he did it “voluntarily.” Why would he choose to suffer? Because he loves us.

Application

It may be hard for us to understand why Jesus would love us. After all, we’ve all done a lot of dumb things. We are a lot like sheep. I’m told sheep are not very smart animals. They do stupid things like run off and get lost. They will also follow whatever the other sheep are doing, even if it’s harmful. Sounds a lot like us!?!

The good news is that God loves us not because of the things we do but because he made us. We are his creation and he loves us—enough to die to prove it.

Ask: Are you living like a sheep with no shepherd—wandering around in the wilderness of life with no one to guide you to the other side?

Jesus can be your Good Shepherd. He has already done what it takes to have a relationship with you. Are you willing to follow him? All you have to do is turn away from sin and ask him to live in your heart and you will never be lost again.

**“Jesus is the great Shepherd of the sheep by an everlasting covenant, signed by his blood.”
—Hebrews 13:20**