



The Good Shepherd and His Sheep

A shepherd was looking after his sheep one day on the side of a deserted road, when suddenly a brand new Porsche screeches to a halt. The smartly dressed professional-looking driver gets out, and asks the shepherd: "If I can tell you how many sheep you have, will you give me one of them?"

The shepherd looks at the large flock of grazing sheep and replies: "Okay."

The young man parks the car, connects his laptop to his mobile, scans the ground using his GPS, opens a database with 60 Excel tables filled with calculations, and prints out a 150-page report on his high-tech mini-printer. He turns to the shepherd and says, "You have exactly 1,586 sheep here."

Rather surprised, the shepherd replies, "That's correct! You can have your sheep."

The young man takes an animal and puts it in the back of his Porsche.

Just as the man is about to drive off, the shepherd asks him:

"If I guess your profession, will you return my animal to me?"

The young man answers, "Yes, why not?"

The shepherd says, "You are an IT consultant."

"How did you know?" asks the young man.

"Very simple," answers the shepherd. "Firstly, you came here without being called. Secondly you charged me a fee to tell me something I already knew, and thirdly, you don't understand anything about my business. Now please can I have my dog back?"

We might think looking after sheep is a simple task, but it isn't. Looking after sheep is a highly specialised job. It takes a good shepherd years to learn his trade, and there are many skills involved.

One of the most notable passages about the Lord as a Shepherd is of course in Psalm 23. What is not so well known is that actually, Psalms 22, 23 and 24 form a trilogy.

Psalm 22 The Good Shepherd giving His life for the sheep.

Psalm 23 The Great Shepherd tenderly caring for the sheep.

Psalm 24 Prophetically portrays the Chief Shepherd coming as the King of Glory to reward His sheep, as referred to in 1 Peter 5:4. "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away."

Psalm 22 is called the "Psalm of the Cross."

Psalm 23 is called the "Psalm of the Crook."

Psalm 24 is called the "Psalm of the Crown."

But in this sermon we're going to concentrate on another passage, John 10:1-18, and see what it reveals about Jesus as the Good, Great and Chief Shepherd.

John 10:1 “Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.”

The sheep pen or sheepfold was the place where the sheep could stay protected overnight. It was made of walls of piled up stones, or pieces of wood or bushes. It didn't have a roof, but was a roughly constructed place to protect the sheep from wild animals, thieves, etc.

The Church is of course the pen for God's spiritual sheep. We need to beware of false teachings and ideas coming into the Church. When sheep trust someone, they tend to follow without thinking. They follow the crowd without considering the consequences. That's why Jesus focused on this problem.

In a way, each of our lives is like a sheep pen. The world has plenty of people with false philosophies, teachings, ideas, values and standards of behaviour. We need to be very careful what we let into our minds – but we can and should let the true Shepherd, Jesus, in at any and all times.

Here's an illustration from *A Thief and Robber* by Scott Hoezee, *Through the Gate*:

“Eight or so years ago, there was a story carried in various newspapers about a woman from Missouri who was startled out of a deep sleep one night, by some desperate cries of ‘Help! Help!’ You know how it is when you awake to some sound: you are not at all certain whether you really heard something or if it was just a dream. At first she thought perhaps her husband had cried out, but he was sleeping soundly next to her. Then suddenly she heard the cries again: ‘Help! Help!’ Finally she threw back the covers and headed downstairs toward their living room. ‘Help!’ went the plaintive voice yet again. ‘Where are you?’ the woman replied. ‘In the fireplace,’ came the rather shocking answer. And sure enough, dangling in the fireplace with his head sticking through the flue was a burglar, upside down and quite snugly stuck! The police and fire department got him out eventually, though not before having to disassemble the mantle and some of the masonry. Perhaps the best part of the story was what this woman did in the meantime. She flipped on all the lights and videotaped the whole thing. I don't know what the two talked about while waiting for the police and company to arrive, but had I been she, I think I would have hauled out a Bible and given the crook a pointed reading of John 10: ‘Verily I tell you, anyone who does not enter by the door but climbs in another way is a thief and a robber!’”

John 10:2 “The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.”

Jesus is the Shepherd who built the sheepfold of the Church and of our lives, so He has the right to enter at any time. And He only enters with things of benefit and value for us. But sometimes we don't want to let Him in. We think He will demand too much from us, or take away our pleasures.

Revelation 3:20 “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.”

Be sure to let Him in!

John 10:3 “The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”

The gatekeeper could be thought of as the Holy Spirit, who opens our eyes to the truths of God's Word and Way, working with our minds to let Jesus into our lives. There were communal sheepfolds where all the village sheep were sheltered, so each shepherd called out his own flock. Sheep only respond to the voice of their Shepherd. If someone else tries to call them, they won't come.

How do we hear Jesus' voice? Through reading the Bible, in sermons, articles, radio and T.V. programmes, or godly friends, and the creation around us.

Sometimes sheep stupidly or stubbornly fail to respond to the Shepherd's call, and stumble around bleating and baa-ing! I wonder how often we seem like that to Jesus, when He just wants us to get moving and following Him.

John 10:4 "When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice."

He doesn't stay behind and drive us (apparently that is what is needed with goats), but He goes on ahead and shows us the way to follow, as a true leader.

He says "I am the Way," but we tend to go our own way ('that way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is death' – Proverbs 14:12; 16:25.)

Just as sheep will blindly follow others along dangerous trails, so we stupidly follow the crowd who are often wrong. We don't want to be different from others.

Isaiah 53:6 "All we like sheep have gone astray."

Humans are a proud, independent and stubborn lot.

John 10:5 "But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."

We are always surrounded by counterfeit shepherds who would have us believe they have our best interests at heart. They might be authors, preachers, broadcasters, politicians, members of our family, or friends. We need to be sure not to follow them.

Colossians 2:8 "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ."

The only safe place for sheep is close to the shepherd, within earshot of his voice. We need to be so grounded and attuned to our Master's voice that any other voice, any false idea, will alert us to danger. Here's a good illustration of the point made in verse 5:

A man in Australia was arrested and charged with stealing a sheep. But he claimed emphatically that it was one of his own that had been missing for many days. When the case went to court, the judge was puzzled, not knowing how to decide the matter. At last he asked that the sheep be brought into the courtroom. Then he ordered the plaintiff to step outside and call the animal. The sheep made no response except to raise its head and look frightened. The judge then instructed the defendant to go to the courtyard and call the sheep. When the accused man began to make his distinctive call, the sheep bounded toward the door. It was

obvious that he recognised the familiar voice of his master. “His sheep knows him,” said the judge. “Case dismissed!”

John 10:6 “Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what He was telling them.”

The Pharisees didn’t know what He was talking about. So He made it plain by applying it to Himself.

John 10:7-9 ⁷“Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture.”

Many hillside sheep pens were walled shelters with no door, or gate, but just an opening, where the shepherd would lie down at night, and no sheep could get in or out except over his body, so he was literally the door!

It’s interesting to remember also that the Passover lamb’s blood was put on the doorposts of the Israelites’ homes. So Jesus, the Passover Lamb, is our doorway to real life. (Ephesians 2:18). Through Jesus alone we have access to God, and to salvation.

John 10:9B “They will come in and go out, and find pasture.”

We find wonderful pasture – rest, richness of food and blessings – in God’s Word, which we can chew on, over and over.

John 10:10B “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

When we walk with Jesus, we have a new vitality and superabundance of life – real life, spiritual life.

John 10:11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

Something which did happen in Palestine: Quote from Barclay ‘John’ page 70:

Dr W.M. Thomson in ‘The Land and the Book’ writes: “I have listened with intense interest to their graphic descriptions of downright and desperate fights with these savage beasts. And when the thief and the robber come (and come they do), the faithful shepherd has often to put his life in his hand to defend his flock. I have known more than one case where he had literally to lay it down in the contest. A poor faithful fellow last spring, between Tiberias and Tabor, instead of fleeing, actually fought three Bedawin robbers until he was hacked to pieces with their khanjars, and died among the sheep he was defending.” The true shepherd never hesitated to risk, and even to lay down, his life for his sheep.

John 10:12-13¹² “The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own 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. ¹³The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”

The hired hand didn’t own the sheep. He was there simply and solely for the pay he could get out of it. It wasn’t a calling for him, but a means of making money. He didn’t truly love and

serve the sheep, he would pack up and go anytime to a place where he would make more money, or have an easier life.

John 10:14 “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.”

It's an encouraging thought for us that Jesus knows each of us intimately. He has handled His sheep so often that He knows our every trait, habit and characteristic. And He still loves us! He knows all our thoughts, as David said. It's important that we know Him as well.

John 10:15 “just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

This is what made the Pharisees so mad at Jesus that they decided to kill Him.

John 10:30-31 ³⁰“I and the Father are one. ³¹ Again His Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone Him.”

John 10:16 “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.”

A shepherd can have lots of sheep in his flock, but they can be scattered throughout a number of pens or sheepfolds. So Jesus has lots of spiritual sheep distributed all over the world, but they are in many different denominations, groups and movements.

The criterion of who is in the family of God is not determined by a church name or a set of doctrines, but “Do they hear the voice of Christ?”, “Do they have the Spirit of God?” (Romans 8:9 “If anyone doesn't have the Spirit they don't belong to Jesus Christ.”)

The Jews believed they were God's chosen people and the only nation God worked with. But Jesus knew they were chosen to be a light to the Gentiles, and the time was coming when the Gentiles were going to have the opportunity to join spiritual Israel.

The time is coming when all people will be under Jesus as their Shepherd, Jews, Gentiles and Christians of many denominations.

John 10:17-18 ¹⁷“The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸ 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 wasn't dragged unwillingly to His death like an animal struggling against the priest who was going to slaughter it. He didn't lose His life, He gave it. He wasn't forced – He chose to die willingly, because of His love for us.

Verses 19-25 move to a different subject, so we can drop down to verses 26-29 to finish this topic.

John 10:26-27 ²⁶“but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”

We are intimately connected to Jesus. We abide in Him. We follow His every wish. We are in Him and He is in us. If we leave Him, we are like sheep straying away from their shepherd – they are walking into disaster.

John 10:28 “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.”

He gives us eternal life. What is eternal life? That is shown in John 17:3 “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” To know Jesus Christ and dwell with Him. As long as we do that, we will live for ever, and with a wonderful spiritual level of life that is unknown on the physical plane. An ever-renewed, ever-refreshed, life of vitality and absolute joy and fulfilment.

You can look at this picture of David and his sheep and think of it as illustrating the relationship between Jesus as the shepherd and yourself as the sheep.



John 10:29 “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all*; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.”

*The NIV footnote here comments that many manuscripts say “What my Father has given me is greater than all” – i.e. the keeping of the sheep, the preservation of His people, is the most important thing in God’s sight!

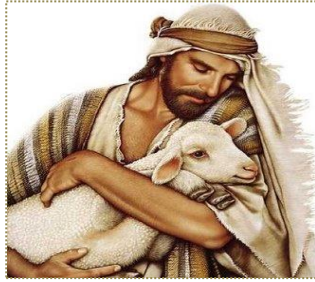
We are very precious to God, just as the sheep are to the Shepherd who is willing to die for them. So, “no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand”. We don’t have to worry, God won’t let us go, as long as we continue to want to be in His hand.

In conclusion, have a look at these verses that sum up the relationship between the Good Shepherd and His Sheep:

Psalms 95:7 “**for He is our God and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care.**”

Psalms 100:3 “**Know that the LORD is God. It is He who made us, and we are His; we are His people, the sheep of His pasture.**”

Isaiah 40:11 **“He tends His flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart; He gently leads those that have young.”**



Jesus the Good Shepherd - Clipart

1 Peter 2:25 **For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”**

Hebrews 13:20-21 **Benediction:**

“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 ²¹ 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 forever and ever. Amen.”