

GOSPEL OF JOHN

Encounter Jesus – The Son of the Living God

The Good Shepherd

During the riots in Palestine in the middle 1930s a village near Haifa was condemned to collective punishment by having its sheep and cattle sequestered by the Government. The inhabitants however were permitted to redeem their possessions at a fixed price. Among them was an orphan shepherd boy, whose six or eight sheep and goats were all he had in the world for life and work. Somehow he obtained the money for their redemption. He went to the big enclosure where the animals were penned, offering his money to the British sergeant in charge. The NCO told him he was welcome to the requisite number of animals, but ridiculed the idea that he could possibly pick out his “little flock” from among the confiscated hundreds. The little shepherd thought differently, because he knew better; and giving his own “call”, for he had his nai (shepherd’s pipe) with him, “his own” separated from the rest of the animals and trotted out after him. “I am the Good Shepherd and know my sheep—and am known of mine.” – Eric F. F. Bishop, *Jesus of Palestine: The Local Background to the Gospel Documents*

This is a perfect illustration of what Christ does for us as our Good Shepherd. Like that shepherd boy who had his sheep in mind when he went to redeem them, Jesus had each of us on His mind and in His heart when He came to earth to redeem us from our sins!

If you think back to our last lesson, you might wonder, ‘How can Jesus be the Door and the Shepherd at the same time?’ McGee answers, “Actually, there was no literal door that swung on hinges and had a padlock to secure the sheepfold. The man who was guarding it slept across the doorway so that he himself was the door. Jesus is not only the Door, but He is also the Good Shepherd, the One who stays in the doorway. He is the Door which opens to eternal life; He is the One who protects His own; He is also the Good Shepherd.”

Read John 10:11-15 (ESV) ¹¹ *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.* ¹² *He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.* ¹³ *He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.* ¹⁴ *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,* ¹⁵ *just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.*

In verse 11, we find the fourth of the seven *I AM* declarations of Jesus. The background imagery is still shepherding in the open country. In these open fields, the shepherd must lay his own life on the line to protect his sheep from wild animals just like David, the shepherd king, had rescued his sheep from death in the lion’s mouth.

Jesus says He is the Good Shepherd who was prepared to do likewise. Jesus was pointing forward to the time when He would lay down His life for the sake of His people.

There was a big difference between a shepherd from one of the families who owned the sheep and someone outside the family who was just paid to do a job. This is the background to Jesus' next statement: *He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees.*

Another picture we see here is that under the law, the sheep died as a sacrifice for the shepherd and the nation; but under God's matchless grace the Good Shepherd was sent to die for the sheep! In this passage, Jesus declares more than once the sacrificial nature of His death. He did not die as a martyr, killed by men; He died as a substitute who willingly laid down His life for us.

Most of us admit that if something belongs to us, we are more likely to cherish that item. Jesus paid a great price for His children. The price was His life. He will not run away and leave us stranded, even when we 'feel' He has. All we need to do is listen for His voice.

We have just examined how Jesus is both the Door and the Shepherd. Now, let's look into how Jesus is both the Lamb and the Shepherd. In **John 1**, Jesus was called the Lamb of God. **John 1:29** *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* How can He be the Lamb of God and at the same time be the Good Shepherd? This may sound like mixed images, but instead it is one of the most glorious truths in Scripture. He came down and identified Himself with us who are the sheep -- but He is the Shepherd also. The fact that He became a Lamb emphasizes the humanity of Jesus Christ. The fact that He is the Good Shepherd emphasizes the deity of Christ. David, the shepherd of his father's flock was not a hired hand. He was the owner's son. The shepherd's role was to rescue the lambs. Nevertheless, in the Old Testament, the lamb's destiny was to serve as a sacrifice for sins.

Read John 10:16 (ESV) ¹⁶ *And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.*

This is a remarkable verse. Jesus wanted His Jewish listeners to understand that He came for **everyone** - Gentiles included. That's us – anyone who is not a Jew is a Gentile

One of the things that John and I first realized when we went into the prison ministry is this: No matter where people are, who they are or what they have done, they are still people and loved by God. Paul put it this way in **Galatians 3:28 (ESV)** ²⁸ *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* As the sheep of Jesus, we must remember that today in this time of racial and political divisions in our country, the person we like the least, may be just the person the Good Shepherd is longing to bring to His fold.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, He gave His followers His missionary mandate in the form of the Great Commission to take the gospel to all nations. **Matthew 28:19 (ESV)** ¹⁹ *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.* Jesus also spoke of the power that comes with that mandate in **Acts 1:8 (ESV)** ⁸ *But you will receive*

power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

John 10 makes it clear that Jesus is the fulfillment of that Old Testament Shepherd prophecy. The best loved chapter in the Old Testament for many is the 23rd Psalm. David may have composed this psalm while yet a shepherd boy watching his father's flocks on the very same Shepherd Field where 1,000 years later, the angels announced the birth of Jesus. With the birth of Jesus, the Good Shepherd was ushered into humanity to become the Lamb of God who was slain from the foundation of the world for our sins.

Sometimes in our self-centered thinking, it is easy to forget that Jesus died for all. The Israelites wanted to believe that the Coming Messiah would be their king alone. However, Jesus, the Shepherd foretold by prophets of old, was the One destined to die for all! Yes, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, died for all sheep everywhere but only sheep who accept the protection of the blood He shed gain entrance into His sheepfold as His personal lambs – recipients of Jesus' promise to live forever!

Read John 10:17-18 (ESV) ¹⁷ *For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may 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 I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."*

Some might wonder if Jesus meant that He **earned** the Father's love by laying down His life. No, the Father and the Son have always loved one another. Jesus said in **John 17:24 (ESV)** ²⁴ *Father, ... you loved me before the foundation of the world.* I interpret Jesus' words concerning the Father's love to mean that the obedience of Jesus brought out the Father's love in a fresh way.

The main point to remember is the fact Jesus was not forced to die. His humanity was different from ours. We begin to die as soon as we are born because we are created with the DNA of death inherited from Adam – the deadly virus of Adam's sin. It was different with the body of Jesus because He was not born with Adam's inherited sin DNA. Our Lord Jesus Christ was the Sinless One who came into the world with a body that could die, but did not have to die. He had in His own power the ability to die or to live on for endless years. But He died out of love for our guilty souls and out of love for the Father, because He came to do the Father's will.

These words are shadows of the cross that was looming on the horizon for Jesus. But, not only shadows of the cross but visions of the glorious resurrection that would follow Jesus' death.

When someone gives us a gift, we do not want them to give us that gift because they feel "obligated" to do so. When Jesus, the Good Shepherd, became the Lamb of God who died in our place, He did so because He wanted to take our place. The human side of Jesus and the God-side of Jesus were both in agreement that He would make the sacrifice. Scripture does not tell us at what point the human side of Jesus realized that He was going to be the Lamb. I personally think He was very young when He came to that realization. My mind goes back to a scene between Abraham and his young son Isaac as they trudged up a mountain together to make a sacrifice. **Genesis 22:7-8 (ESV)** ⁷ *And Isaac said to his*

father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”⁸ Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” ... We are familiar with a ram being caught in a thicket taking the place of Abraham’s son on the altar. I don’t know if Isaac had a clue until Abraham tied him to the altar and raised the knife that he was to be the sacrifice. There would be no ram in the thicket for God’s Son and God’s Son knew that beforehand and yet He remained willing to die that we might live.

What does Jesus do for us? Jesus, our Shepherd, cares for us. Especially in this Covid shutdown, it is easy for even the most cheerful to have a ‘pity party’ or just feel downright ‘irritated’ with our current world on so many levels. We must remind ourselves who we are – we are God’s children who live under the care of the Good Shepherd. Jesus came to do the *will of the Father* and that is what we should be doing. We only know what the will of the Father is when we listen to the voice of our Good Shepherd.

And now here we go again! Surprise! Surprise! The people are divided in their opinion of Jesus!

Read John 10:19-21 (ESV) ¹⁹ *There was again a division among the Jews because of these words.* ²⁰ *Many of them said, “He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?”* ²¹ *Others said, “These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”*

Note that word *again* (**John 7:43; 9:16**). The old accusation that Jesus was a demoniac was hurled at Him like it had been before (**John 7:20; 8:48, 52**). For some reason, His oppressors could not come up with a new argument when it came to Jesus. However, some in the crowd recognized the truth because they said: *These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?* That miracle they just couldn’t forget it! Their faith was growing!

How is your faith? Is it growing? Are you daily remembering the miracles of God in your life? It is easy to let fear overcome faith especially in fearful times. Throughout God’s Word, people are told to *Fear not!* We have a Good – Good Shepherd! He knows what is best for us. He knows where to lead us!

Psalm 23:1-6 (ESV) ¹ *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.* ² *He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.* ³ *He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.* ⁴ *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.* ⁵ *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.* ⁶ *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

So, when you find yourself feeling a little ‘blue’ or even a whole lot discouraged and fearful, remember this: Our Good Shepherd is in control no matter what is happening in our world. Look to the Shepherd!