

## The Good Shepherd

HN 30/07/05 pm

Reading: Luke 15, Hebrews 2

Study Text: John 10:11-14

Sing Psalms: 121, 84:1-5, 84:8-12, 145:1-3

*There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance* (Luke 15:7). Jesus spoke the parable of the shepherd and his one hundred sheep to tax collectors and sinners, and to Pharisees who were as usual hanging around to complain. Though brief, this parable aligns with what we are studying in John 10. The *ninety-nine* just/upright persons are the Pharisees who think they see when they are really blind – they have need of repentance said Jesus ironically.

This parable focuses on the shepherd's total commitment to each individual sheep, to the extent that he will risk all to find one that is lost. Many would say 'hey we can lose one or two – that will make no big difference to the flock. We have to consider the good of the majority'. We live in a world that increasingly is following such a philosophy. Many people are being disregarded in the fight to get rich or famous. This is after all the teaching of the theory of evolution. But it is not the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said *I am the good shepherd*. What a tremendous declaration! Do these words bring assurance and comfort to your soul?

### Good shepherd

Why does Jesus call himself the good shepherd? Before we look at this question, note that this is the fourth 'I am' declaration so far in this gospel. 'I am' as we have seen is a divine title. *Before Abraham was I am* said Jesus (8:58). Jesus was with the Father in the beginning – he is eternal. He was sent by the Father into this world to do the will of God. In Ezekiel God promised *I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out. I will establish one shepherd over them and he shall feed them* (Ezekiel 34:11, 23). Jesus fulfils this prophecy.

The good shepherd. The word translated 'good' (*kalos*) means more than just a moral uprightness. It also carries the idea of beauty – we have it incorporated into the word 'calligraphy'. Some translate it as 'the beautiful shepherd'. There is indeed something attractive, something beautiful about the picture we have here of Jesus as our shepherd.

The good shepherd stands in great contrast to the hired hand. Let us see some of these points of contrast. Remember what Ezekiel said of the shepherds of Israel – *they did not search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed my flock* (Ezekiel 34:8). The Pharisees were following in the footsteps of their fathers!

### Owns

The sheep belong to the shepherd. He is not just looking after them for a wage. No – he owns them. He purchased them and they are precious to him. Remember I Corinthians 6:19-20? – *you are not*

*your own, you were bought at a price.* That price is the precious blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We are redeemed, bought back from captivity, by the blood of the lamb. He paid the price for our sin.

The parable in Luke 15 reminds us of the great concern, the great love; the shepherd has for each and every one of his sheep. He will not abandon the least of them—all are precious in his eyes. And no one shall *snatch them out of my hand* (10:28).

Friends and even family may desert you like the hired hand. But be assured if you are a child of God, if you are a sheep in the flock of Jesus Christ, you are loved and you will never be abandoned.

### **Knows his sheep**

The great truth that Jesus is the good shepherd is reinforced by repetition in the closing words of our text (10:14). And Jesus adds the words *I know my sheep and am known by my own*. He owns the sheep and he also knows each one intimately. He knows their name and calls them by name as we saw back in verse 3.

In our herd of dairy cows each one was given a name. And each one had a different nature. I still remember Socks. She was a good milker, but very naughty. She could get through most fences – she would almost lie down and roll under. But she was also clever enough not to get caught. She would always be back with the herd in the dairy the next morning – after raiding the oats paddock during the night. My Dad knew all about Socks but he still kept her in the herd.

Jesus knows everything about everyone one of us. It is not just a computer-like knowledge, or a knowledge gained by surveillance from a video camera. It is not just a detailed list of everything you have done. It is detail about your thoughts, about things done in secret, about your desires, about your sorrows, about your pains. *O Lord you have searched me and known me* said David...*you know my thought afar off*. And still he does not disown us! He does not leave us to perish. How wonderful is our good shepherd.

### **Cares**

This knowledge is not just for the sake of knowledge. It is not for the purpose of trapping you or for blackmail. It is for the purpose of helping you, of saving you; Jesus cares for his sheep. Jesus knows your needs. He leads his sheep out to find pasture. He leads them beside the still waters where they can quench their thirst. He leads and he feeds his sheep. They will never want for any good thing.

As helpless sheep we often find ourselves at our wits end. What can we do? We see no way out of our difficulty. We may be tempted to give up – the way ahead is too tough. Have you lost your job, your friend, your marriage, your health, your money, your house or something else? And the world is saying to you get over it – ‘when the going gets tough the tough get going’. But you don’t feel tough, you feel weak and exhausted. Well Jesus says ‘come to me, I care for you’. I am here and I will help you.

Jesus owns his sheep and he cares for them. He is able to supply their every need and protect them from every danger. Do you believe this? Do you cry out to him when you are in need? Do you cry

with confidence, with assurance that he hears you because he loves you, he owns you, he cares for you and that he died for you?

If you doubt that Jesus understands your difficulty, remember that he has been where you are right now. He was made like you in every way, except without sin. He suffered intensely in this fallen world. He can sympathise with you in your weakness. He will deliver you for he is God the Son and he cares for you.

Jesus has been along the same path that you are on. He has gone before you. He is the *pioneer and perfecter of your faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God* (Heb 12:2). He is the good shepherd. We can follow him with confidence.

### **Lays down his life**

We come in these words to the real reason why Jesus is the good shepherd. He lays down his life for the sheep. A shepherd's life had its dangers. Lions and wolves roamed the hills of Palestine back then. David told Saul how he would go after the wild animal that attacked his fathers flock and kill the animal to rescue the lamb (1 Sam 17:34).

However, no shepherd reckoned on dying for his sheep. If he did his sheep would be left without a shepherd and would be scattered. Jesus says that *the good shepherd lays down or gives his life for the sheep*. He later speaks of this as a necessity not just a possibility. For Jesus Christ of Nazareth, this was the defining feature of his work as the shepherd. This is why he is the good shepherd. He lay down his life that his sheep might have life.

Jesus came that the sheep given to him by his Father might live. They were lost, they were perishing. He gave his life, one holy, sinless life, given to save the many. How much more, wrote Paul, *through one man's righteous act, the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life* (Romans 5:17).

He gives his life 'for' the sheep. 'These words indicate a sacrifice. This preposition, itself ambiguous, in John always occurs in a sacrificial context. In no case does this suggest a death with merely exemplary significance; in each case the death envisaged is on behalf of someone else. The shepherd does not die for his to serve as an example (D.A. Carson)'.

Let us be very clear on this point, for many today, even in the church, especially the Church of Rome, portray the death of Jesus as merely exemplary. 'It is the type of death we should all strive for, the death of a good man, the death of a martyr'. No. The death of Jesus was unique, it was vicarious, it was a death that actually saves and gives life.

No other shepherd could do this. Only Jesus, God the Son, could save his people by laying down his life. This is the cost of your freedom. This is the cost of your life. You were bought at a price.

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