

# Are you a good shepherd and a good sheep?

Time: 30 minutes

## Introduction

Two men were called on, in a large classroom, to recite the Twenty-third Psalm. One was an orator trained in speech technique and drama. He repeated the psalm in a powerful way. When he finished, the audience cheered and asked for an encore that they might hear his wonderful voice again. Then the other man repeated the same words--'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want...' but when he finished, no sound came from the class. Instead, people sat in a mood of deep devotion and prayer.

Then the first man stood to his feet. "I have a confession to make," he said. "The difference between what you have just heard from my friend, and what you heard from me is this: I know the Psalm, but my friend knows the Shepherd."

Last week we talked about Chapter 9, how the blind man is the one truly sees God. Chapter 10 is a continuation from chapter 9. At the end of chapter 9, when the Pharisees ask, "What? Are we blind too?"<sup>9:41</sup> Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains." (John 9:40-41) In contrast with the blind man, the Pharisees do not actually know who Jesus is, because they don't have the proper relationship with him. Following this incident, Jesus continues with a parable of the shepherd, to explain his relationship with his people.

## 1. The good shepherd and the door

This chapter is interesting, and could be a bit confusing, Jesus claims he is the shepherd (v.11), but at the same time he claims to be the door of the pen (v. 7) There are also the thief and the hired man, seem to

indicate different type of people. The Pharisees seem to be the false shepherds, but at the same time they are the sheep that do not belong to Jesus.

Now what are the characteristics of a good shepherd?

1. He is appointed by God. 10:1 "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. 10:2 The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep.
2. He knows his sheep. 10:3 The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice.
3. He calls them. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.
4. He leads the sheep. 10:4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and 10:27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.
5. The sheep will follow and recognize his voice. his sheep follow him because they know his voice. 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."
6. Lays down his life for the sheep. 10:11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 10:12 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. 10:13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.
7. Know each other. 10:14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— 10:15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.
8. Love Gentiles. 0:16 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.

9. Authority to die and raise up. <sup>10:17</sup>The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. <sup>10:18</sup>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.”

10. Eternal life and protection. <sup>10:28</sup>I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. <sup>10:29</sup>My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.

Out of these qualities, I would emphasis a few of them.

### **Calls them by name**

First, he knows and calls them by name. How many sheep a shepherd looks after? 20-100? Probably not a lot, and from verse 3 we know that there maybe several families having a common pen for the sheep. Therefore they require to hire a watchman, and during the day the shepherd needs to call his own sheep out. Well, to you and me, sheep are just sheep. Unless they are significantly different in colour, most will look to us alike. But to a good shepherd, they are different in his eyes. He can distinguish which one has a leg injury, which one has a black mark at the back, maybe even which one has suffered depression. Sheep is not just a collective term, he knows them individually. He calls them by name. He knows which one is Gary, Tammy, Eric, John, David, Judy, Paul, Haha, etc. He knows everyone of them, and he knows what they have been through, and what they really need. He knows how they may grow, what kind of pasture is best for them, how to make them stronger. He knows them. Do you still remember the in OT, God is not only the God of Israel, but also the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, God is not only the God of all, he is also the God of each one. Therefore, Jesus is telling us, he is a personal God. And his relationship to the sheep is a loving one, he loves them. He is even willing to die for them.

**Lays down his life**

If there is a quality that is most striking for me, this is the one. He has the authority to die, and to resurrect. Yes, Jesus was killed and crucified, but from this verse 17-18 we know it is his own will and nobody has the power to take his life if he doesn't will it first! His death on the cross is planned. Perhaps you can say Jesus murders himself. He murders himself for the sheep.

Once I asked a vet, if both a dog and a man are drowning, which one would you save? I was teasing him because he really is a dog lover. He said, please kill me first, it is too tough a question to answer. I tried to search online if that is in general for every dog lover. On an online forum, someone risks her life to save her dog during a fire. She first ran out of the building leaving the dog behind, later she ran back up to save the dog, while the fireman chasing after her. Seeing her risking her life, the fireman looked at her with disgust. She came very close to the fire, felt the heat on her like she was in an oven, choked and coughed for days afterwards. Well, afterwards she considers the situation, she probably would not die for the dog, but she may risk her life for it. She said if someone asks her whether to kill the dog or kill her, she will choose to kill the dog. Following her story, most people claim they will only risk their life for the dog when it is not too dangerous, and they will prefer to save people rather than their pets. Therefore in general, people won't die for their pets, they may risk it, but they won't die for them. Jesus is different, not only he risks, he wills to die for it. His death is carefully planned, even before Adam's sin. That is how he loves the sheep, he has thought about it, but he is still willing to die for the sheep, in order for them to gain life. This life is based on Jesus and us knowing each other.

**Relational**

We all agree that there are different degrees of knowing. Among your friends you will distinguish those who are close and those who simply saying hi and bye. Some couples they are so close with one another, after been together for a long time, sometimes they don't have to talk but just look at each other they

will realise what they want. How can they do that you wonder? Because their knowledge about each other has gone beyond mere words, they live together for so long they know each other's characters. God truly knows us, we know from previous chapters that God knows people's heart. The knowledge that Jesus depicts here is relational. It is not just head knowledge, but knowing who he is, what he is like, what he likes. Jesus' sheep should seek to follow him, to trust him, to seek his will, to find out what he wants for his sheep, to long for him, to connect with him, that is the knowledge Jesus talks about here. He wants an everlasting, and close relationship with his sheep, and he even associate this relationship to the kind of relationship between him and the Father. He wants us to enjoy such intimacy and oneness, similar to his relationship with the Father. He said, "I and the Father are one." (v.30) and he said, 10:14 I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— <sup>10:15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father

When you look at these 10 qualities of the good shepherd, I realize an important aspect – Jesus is relational. The imagery of a shepherd is an imagery of dependence with full trust and love. Jesus wants to relate to us. Remember I said during the weekend away that we want to be a relational church? This imagery vividly demonstrates how Jesus relates to us. He is appointed by God to restore our relationship with God. He knows us and he calls us by name. We are his sheep, he is our shepherd, we depend on him for our security and our comfort. We know his voice. Not only he relates to Israel, but he relates to the Gentiles, because his relationship to mankind is universal. He loves the sheep, willing to die for them, and by coming and dying he became the life of the sheep. Through this knowing relationship he gives the sheep eternal life. He is also the ruler of the sheep, for he leads and gives them direction.

But Jesus didn't stop here, he claims also to be the door to the pen. In verse 6, the scriptures says,

10:6 Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. <sup>10:7</sup> Therefore

Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep."

What are the characteristics of a true door for the sheep?

1. Salvation. <sup>10:8</sup>All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>10:9</sup>I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.
2. Security and comfort. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.
3. Life, to the full. <sup>10:10</sup>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 being the door for the sheep. There are three characteristics. First, the only way to be saved is through Jesus. All others before him were thieves and robbers and will only lead people to destruction. Second, he can give us comfort. Pasture symbolize a place of rest. Israel has long been trying to enter the promised land, but they have never enjoy true rest. Jesus is saying through him we can find true rest. Third, he is coming to give us life, what is attractive it is not just life, but have it to the full. What does it mean by having it to the full?

Last Wednesday in our En Gedi group we watched a film. The film describes a football coach who lost a lot of games. He has low income, was getting fired, his car dies down on him and his doctor says he is the one causing infertility. He then turns to Jesus and things are getting better, the entire college was revived. Although there are failures along the way, finally they win the state championship, he got a pay raise, a new van, and his wife is pregnant. Is this what Jesus is saying, is his life a life living to the full?

What if the movie has a different ending? What if he still loses his job, still have a broken car, still can't have children and still seems to be a loser from others point of view, didn't win the state champions. Would you still say that he has the life to the full? I hope so. I prefer seeing him praising God for

everything, not just the football game. You see, have it to the full definitely doesn't mean that you will have a long life, otherwise those disciples won't face persecution but killed. But it is something nothing can take away. The Apostle Paul rejoice in suffering, therefore life to the full doesn't mean that you won't have afflictions. It means no matter what happened in your life, your heart still have complete joy and peace. I would like to see the couch praying to God, praise you Lord, even you took away all I have, I still want to praise you, my joy is complete in you. Therefore the key is not winning or losing, but you give glory to God when you lose or win. Continue relying on him the sheep may gain not only life, but life to the full. I could say this, the more we listen to him, the more we depend on him, the more our life will be abundant and joyful.

## **2. The bad shepherds and the bad sheep**

During Jesus speech, he also mentions bad shepherds and bad sheep.

Who are the bad shepherds? Jesus didn't state clearly, but from verse 8-10, perhaps he refers to the false Messiahs before him. These false Messiahs will lead people to destruction. Verse 12 mentions the hired man, again Jesus didn't mention who is the hired man, perhaps the main purpose for mentioning it is to contrast with the good shepherd. When you link this passage with Eze 34, perhaps the hired man are those leaders of Israel who lead people astray. Either way, Jesus is referring to some false leadership, which lead people away from the true shepherd. Put it in context, the Pharisees are definitely one of the bad shepherds. They have been accusing Jesus of healing on the Sabbath, without understanding the true meaning of the law of Moses. Now they also lead people to stone Jesus. Bad shepherds are not shepherds at all, they seek their own glory.

Interestingly, at the same time they are also the bad sheep. Jesus said in verse 26, because of their

disbelief, they are not his sheep. The Pharisees are both the bad shepherds and bad sheep. All their effort is self-seeking, rather than truly worshipping God.

In contrast to the bad shepherds and bad sheep, the blind man is a good sheep. He decided to follow Jesus. He has gained life. But what about bad sheep? When a bad sheep trying to find the pasture his own way, or listen to those who are not true shepherds, the sheep maybe be stolen and slaughtered, and not able to enjoy true peace and rest. Unfortunately there are still lots of bad shepherds and bad sheep among us. A bad sheep will not listen, not follow, not relate, always on his own, finds his own pasture, not relying, and finally face destruction.

### **3. Are you a good shepherd and a good sheep?**

Are you a good shepherd? These religious leaders suppose to be the ones bringing people to Jesus, but instead they wanted to stone Jesus. Some spiritual leaders fail their duty of bringing people to God. These leaders don't care about the sheep, they only care about themselves.

This week I heard a sister sharing. She has been to our church for about a year. She says every Sunday when she comes to the service. She feels like home. She enjoys the sermons, and the songs, but after the silent prayer at the end of the service, all of a sudden she feels lost. She feels isolated, and not feeling part of our church family. She said after the service not many talking to her. Yes, she will talk to me and a few people who she knows, but often these people are quite busy and can't talk long with her. She feels lonely after the service. During the tea time she doesn't know she should stay or go home, because she feels she just has to stand there and pretending she is busy doing something, but in face she really wants people to talk to her. I told her, normally I will try to talk to people, and depends on the age group I will also ask others to care for those standing alone there feeling disoriented. She knows that she needs to be



more open to talk to others. We try to encourage her to look after those new comers, that way she herself will not feel isolated and at the same time she can make others not feeling isolated. Sadly this phenomenon does exist in our church. We are not the only one, because I know many churches have this issue, that they only care about their group of friends, or only talk to those they know. When Jesus said 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. Jesus means the Gentiles, those non-Jewish will be brought to him, becoming his sheep. I sincerely hope that our church can be one that is welcoming. All of us can be good shepherds, willing to bring Jesus' other sheep to Him. If Jesus died for his sheep, we need to learn to die for the new comers. Yes, they may have different cultural background, different personality than us, but that should not stop us caring for them. Sometimes you need to let your culture die in order to speak the language of others.

If you want to imitate Jesus, in order to be a good shepherd for his sheep, you need to learn how to sacrifice. It may mean you need to sacrifice catching up with your old friends, but look after new friends.

1-1 relationship is more important than you think. Each of you is a shepherd and a sheep at the same time. In your 1-1 relationships have you prayed for your spiritual partner constantly, or just during your session? Have you given them too much of your opinion but not bring them to God? A good shepherd loves the sheep. But that does not mean you should not rebuke the sheep. Have you been speaking the truth in love? Are you a good sheep? A good sheep will listen and follow Jesus and willing to accept biblical teachings to change our life. Do you try your best to listen to Jesus' voice or you are still trying to run life your own way. Do you only give praise to God when you are successful, or you give praise to God when you are weak too? Are you a good shepherd and a good sheep?

## Conclusion

Jesus didn't just lay down his life, if so the story will end without a shepherd. The sheep will be wondering where is the pasture? Where is my good shepherd? But Jesus died in order to raise up again. He promised his sheep eternal and abundant life, he himself will live to lead his sheep into that life. Do you want that life? Are you a good sheep? Do you know him? I mean do you really know him? Let's wish our church is full of good shepherds and good sheep, willing to lead and listen. Lead the sheep to the good shepherd, and listen to him only.

Let's pray.