

The Good Shepherd

John 10:1-21

In last week's Lesson Notes we examined Jesus' reaction to seeing the crowds following him. Jesus, filled with compassion -- that compulsory yearning to do something for the wounded and lost crowds, resulted in the Feeding of the Five Thousand (in Mark 6). We talked about Jesus' response and the imagery of verse 34, which says: *“When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.”* The imagery of a shepherd and his flock may not be as easy for us today to grasp as it was in the time of Jesus. He lived in a society where herding was a way of life for many people and was prevalent in society. The imagery of sheep and shepherds went far back in the roots of Israel's faith and history. “Comparing people to a shepherd and his sheep was common in the Middle East. Kings and priests called themselves shepherds and their subjects sheep. The Bible makes frequent use of this analogy. Many of the great men of the Old Testament were shepherds (e.g., Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David). As national leaders, Moses and David were both “shepherds” over Israel. Some of the most famous passages in the Bible employ this motif.”¹

One of the first times this image is used is in Numbers 27:15-17. When Moses is about to die, he intercedes with the Lord on behalf of the people he has led through the desert wanderings. They are about to enter into the Promise Land and are in need of a new leader. Read the description of who and how this leader is to watch over the Lord's people:

Moses said to the LORD, ¹⁶ “May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community ¹⁷ to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the LORD's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.”

We also looked at Ezekiel 34:1-15 where the Lord, through the prophet Ezekiel, speaks against the religious leaders of Israel who have served and fattened themselves at the expense of the flock. He says in verses 4-5 *“You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals.”*



Continue reading in Ezekiel 34 verses 11-16 and 23-4

Notice what the Lord says he will do in verses 23-24:

¹ Gerald L. Borchert, *New American Commentary – Volume 25a: John 1-11*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 328..

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I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.

Jeremiah 23:1-6 parallels this prophecy ending with:

5 "The days are coming," declares the LORD,
"when I will raise up to David*[up from David] a righteous Branch,
a King who will reign wisely
and do what is just and right in the land.
6 In his days Judah will be saved
and Israel will live in safety.

This is the name by which he will be called:

The LORD Our Righteousness."

And Hosea says something similar in 5:3: *Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.*

Have you noticed how all of these Old Testament prophets keep referring to David returning to shepherd Israel? David was long since gone, but he fits the model of the shepherd to come. Through David God illustrates many of the unknown qualities of Messiah. The first part of our lesson today will focus on King David. His story is told in 1 & 2 Samuel, and we will be spending quite a bit of time looking at passages from those two books. Please read the scripture references in your Bible as we go along.

Archetype of Messiah

David was the Shepherd King, literally drawn out of the flocks to shepherd Israel. The psalmist writes:

*He chose David his servant
and took him from the sheep pens;
from tending the sheep he brought him
to be the shepherd of his people Jacob,
of Israel his inheritance.
And David shepherded them with integrity of heart;
with skillful hands he led them.*

(Psalm 78:70-72)



Read 1 Samuel 16:1, 10-13

As we see in the first reference, David is literally called out of the flocks to be anointed by Samuel the Prophet. Where does David go after his anointing? Back to the flocks. It is not yet his time to become king. This anointing was done privately and would not be completed for another 15 years when he became king of Judah. In fact, he will be called again from the flocks to serve

King Saul during the early part of those 15 years. Saul, suffering from an evil spirit, requests David's presence to play music to sooth his mind. 1 Sam 16:19 records "*Then Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, 'Send me your son David, who is with the sheep.'*"

In 1 Sam 16:18, David is given this description: "*I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who knows how to play the harp. He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the LORD is with him.*" At this point David enters the service of King Saul as his armor-bearer and a musician where he would learn the necessary skills of being a military leader.

Messiah Will Protect and Safeguard

Read 1 Samuel 17: 33-37. As a shepherd David protected and safeguarded what was entrusted to his care. As a military leader and later, as king, we see he does the same. David's shepherding skills were a benefit to David when it came time to face Goliath. He learned how to fight against the threats to his flocks; and in Saul's military he would learn how to protect and safeguard the flock of Israel.

Humility

In 2 Samuel 7:8-20 God says he chose David and took him from his flocks and place him over God's own flock – Israel to be their shepherd. God promises David that one from his line will always rule over the Flock pointing to David's descendant Jesus.

Self-sacrifice

2 Samuel 24:1, 17. David sees that his own sin (which is 3 fold, and not insignificant, but also not pertinent to this point) and Israel's sin² is bringing judgment and destruction upon Israel and he presents himself to the Lord to receive the punishment himself sparing Israel. In this act we see something of a prefiguring of Jesus, who is sinless, taking on the sins of the world to spare judgment against mankind.

The Shepherd King

The Lord as Shepherd

Psalm 23 illustrates the *Lord* as Shepherd: "*The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want...*" "The psalmist employed the figure of a shepherd to recall the blessings he enjoyed from the LORD. The metaphor was a natural one for David, the shepherd-king. It was also a common metaphor in the ancient Near East, as many kings compared themselves to shepherds in their leadership capacity. The prophecy of the coming Messiah incorporated the same (Isa. 40:11), and Jesus identified Himself as that expected "Good Shepherd" (John 10:14). He is also called the "Great Shepherd" (Heb. 13:20) and "the Chief Shepherd" (1 Peter 5:4). Because the Lord was David's Shepherd, his needs were met."³ David's trust was complete in God's shepherding him as one of

² Note: 1 Chronicles 24:1 tells us that God's anger burned against Israel. Israel had done something to invoke his wrath. Yes David did sin, but evidently all of Israel had also turned against God in order for God to mete out this judgment.

³ Bible Knowledge Commentary

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Israel's sheep. As quoted above, Isaiah prophesies the coming messiah in terms of a powerful and protective shepherd who gently cares for and leads the weak and helpless among his flock:

*¹⁰ See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power,
and his arm rules for him.*

*See, his reward is with him,
and his recompense accompanies him.*

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.

Isaiah 40:11

All of these images would have been familiar to the people of Israel as The Shepherd King was well known image in Israel's history and culture. Israel should have recognized Jesus as the Good Shepherd. They should have anticipated him from the descriptions of the prophets Jeremiah, Isaiah, Micah, Zechariah, and even the Psalms; all of which describe the Messiah in terms of shepherding Israel. David was the living example of the Shepherd King. All these prophecies and ideas would have been playing in the background of Israel's history and faith, in the concept of the Messiah and King, which leads us to our second passage today: John Chapter 10.



Read John 10:1-18

The shepherding of a flock in the ancient near east bears little resemblance to what we may imagine from how sheep herding is done today. The relationship between a shepherd and his flock was somewhat intimate. There was a personal attachment between the shepherd and his sheep. He led them to safe grazing and fresh water, and they followed him. They recognized his voice and followed where he led. He spent all day with them standing watch for predators, dangers or injuries. He guarded them from animals and thieves prowling about the dark of night. Like with his parables, Jesus uses this image to illustrate spiritual truths.

Looking at verses 1-5 we have the description of the shepherd and the protective sheep pen. "The sheepfold was a place of security, not a place for intruders. Such a sheepfold would likely have been either a circular or square enclosure, probably constructed like a high stone fence or wall and perhaps topped with vines. The entrance would have been the only break in the wall, and once the sheep were safely inside at night, the watchman/guard (either a servant or a shepherd, usually an assistant) would lie down across the opening and serve both as the protector for the sheep and as a gate to the sheepfold. Unless an intruder was willing to confront the watchman, the only way into the sheepfold was to climb the wall.

Access for the shepherd was quite another matter. He could enter the sheepfold through the opening to check his sheep anytime he desired because he was known both to the watchman and to the sheep. In the mornings the shepherd would enter and lead the sheep out to their pastures and water holes by the sound of his voice. Indeed, the text emphasizes the intimacy that

existed between the shepherd and his sheep by indicating that the shepherd called his sheep by name.”⁴ The point of this illustration is that people come to God because he calls them and the proper response is to follow him. If an intruder enters the sheep pen, the sheep do not follow the intruder because his voice is not familiar and they do not recognize his voice. The people listening to Jesus didn’t comprehend his metaphor despite their surely understanding the relationship between the shepherd and his sheep. In their spiritual blindness they did not see Jesus as the Lord who is the shepherd described in scripture (Ps. 23, in particular).

Jesus then takes the shepherd/sheep metaphor in a different direction in verses 7-10. “After a shepherd’s flock has been separated from the other sheep, he takes them to pasture. Near the pasture is an enclosure for the sheep. The shepherd takes his place in the doorway or entrance and functions as a door or gate. The sheep can go out to the pasture in front of the enclosure, or if afraid, they can retreat into the security of the enclosure. The spiritual meaning is that Jesus is the only Gate by which people can enter into God’s provision for them. When Jesus then says, ‘All who ever came before Me were thieves and robbers,’ (v. 8) he referred to those leaders of the nation who cared not for the spiritual good of the people but only for themselves. [Echoes the Ezekiel passage] Jesus the Shepherd provides security for His flock from enemies (whoever enters through Me will be saved, or “kept safe”). He also provides for their daily needs (the sheep come in and go out, and find pasture).”⁵ Verse 10 tells us that the thief, the false shepherd, cares only for himself and not for the well being of the flock. He has come for the purpose of stealing a sheep in order to kill it (to feed himself) and thereby destroying part of the flock. But the Messiah came to care for and protect the sheep. He gives life that is overflowing with abundance. Where the thief comes to take life, the Messiah gives life to the fullest.

In verses 11-15 Jesus continues with the shepherd/sheep image, but develops it in yet another way. “When evening settled over the land of Palestine, danger lurked. In Bible times lions, wolves, jackals, panthers, leopards, bears, and hyenas were common in the countryside. The life of a shepherd could be dangerous as illustrated by David’s fights with at least one lion and one bear (1 Sam. 17:34-35, 37). Jacob also experienced the labor and toil of being a faithful shepherd (Gen. 31:38-40). Jesus said, *‘I am the Good Shepherd’* (v. 14). In the Old Testament, God is called the Shepherd of His people. Jesus is this to His people, and He came to give his life for their benefit. He is also the “Great Shepherd” (Heb. 13:20-21) and “the Chief Shepherd” (1 Peter 5:4).

In contrast with the Good Shepherd, who owns, cares, feeds, protects, and dies for His sheep, the one who works for wages—the hired hand—does not have the same commitment. He is interested in making money and in self-preservation. If a wolf attacks, he runs away and his selfishness causes the flock to be scattered. Obviously he cares nothing for the sheep. Israel had many false prophets, selfish kings, and imitation messiahs. The flock of God suffered constantly from their abuse (Jer. 10:21-22; 12:10; Zech. 11:4-17).

In contrast with a hired workman, the Good Shepherd has an intimacy with and personal interest in the sheep (cf. vv. 3, 27). *‘I know My sheep’* stresses His ownership and watchful

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⁵ John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, ed., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications, 1985), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 310.

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oversight. *'My sheep know Me'* stresses their reciprocal knowledge of and intimacy with Him. This intimacy is modeled on the loving and trusting mutual relationship of the Father and the Son. Jesus' care and concern is evidenced by His prediction of His coming death for the flock. Some shepherds have willingly died while protecting their sheep from danger. Jesus willingly gave His life for His sheep (vv. 11, 15, 17-18)—on their behalf as their Substitute (Rom. 5:8, 10; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18). His death gives them life.⁶

In verse 16 Jesus alludes to other sheep not of this flock: *"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."* "The other sheep... not of this flock refers to Gentiles who would believe. His coming death would bring them also to the Father. *'They too will listen to My voice'*. Jesus continues to save people as they hear His voice in the Scriptures. Acts 18:9-11 illustrates how this works out in the history of the church. "I have many people in this city" (i.e., Corinth), the Lord told Paul. One flock and one Shepherd speaks of the church with believers from Jewish and Gentile "sheep pens" in one body with Christ as Head (cf. Eph. 2:11-22; 3:6). Again Jesus predicted His death, saying four times that He would voluntarily lay down His life (vv. 11, 14, 17-18). The Father has a special love for Jesus because of His sacrificial obedience to the will of God. Jesus predicted His resurrection twice (He would take... up His life again [vv. 17-18]) and His sovereignty (authority) over His own destiny. His death was wholly voluntary: *'No one takes it from Me.'* Jesus was not a helpless pawn on history's chessboard.⁷

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Bible Knowledge Commentary