

JESUS, THE GOOD SHEPHERD



Scripture:

John 10:1-18

10¹Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.’ ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷So again Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

¹¹I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes* it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.’



A PSALM OF PEACE THAT WAS BORN FROM CONFLICT

To understand the Good Shepherd of the Gospels, we must begin with a psalm composed by a boy named David. David played his harp, and composed songs that he sang to the tormented King Saul who was weary from battle and haunted with nightmares.

Our beautiful psalm of David was not born of peace, but it comes from conflict; it comes from combat not serenity. And yet, this worry and these

troubled days produce our favorite of all the Hebrew prayers. These words still seem relevant. It has comforted weary soldiers for thousands of years.

In a moment, I’m going to ask you to say it after me. But say it as if you were the weary Saul, not as a sing/song chant. Can you imagine hearing that song of comfort for the first time?

When I sing to you of a green pasture, still waters, I want you to picture them as if we are sitting beside them. And when I sing about the

valley of death, think of the killing fields and places where you have had to confront life's most difficult lesson. When we proclaim that you should fear no evil, and know of the Lord's comfort, I want you to remember when someone brought you comfort and new life... someone who listened to your complaint.

I KNOW THE SHEPHERD

I don't know much about sheep administration, but I understand caring for lives that depend upon you. Real sheep will follow you, once you gain their trust, and they can become dependant upon their shepherd for everything from water, to food, to lodging and protection from the wolves. But my qualifications to tell you about herding sheep don't come from my own skills and experience. They come from somewhere else: I know the Good Shepherd. I met him on the road to Emmaus. I met him in a hospital. I dined with him at a dinner with my wife and my mother. The Good Shepherd symbolizes the one who loves us.

**God's blessing will outlast your troubles,
they will outlast your lifetime;
and God's goodness and his mercy are
available to you at every moment,
all the days of your life.**

Every challenge you have ever faced has revealed your God. The blue nights, and the raging days have exposed your true colors like a polarizing lens.

THE 23RD PSALM

I know this shepherd. This is the shepherd that has brought me safe thus far, and who will lead me safely home. I want you to know him too. Repeat these words:

- The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;
- He makes me lie down in green pastures.
- He leads me beside still waters;
- He restores my soul.
- He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.
- Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
- Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;
- and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. -- Psalm 23

Jesus the Good Shepherd is my favorite person in the New Testament The word "pastor," comes from this function of caring for the animals with whose lives we are charged.

Caring for the sheep, in the time of Jesus was important work. It still is. It's like the Army veterinarians who must preserve the food supply. It's like the supply sergeant who made sure that people were issued warm wool clothing.

The Good Shepherd comes from a time when sheep were brought into homes at night. The farm animals occupied the first floor of a typical home at the time of Christ. Their body heat was part of the warmth that was delivered to those sleeping above in the second floor rooms, and those who slept in the upper room on the third story. Tending sheep trained a person to care for a family. Before he was King, David had been a shepherd.

GOOD SHEPHERD MOSAIC FROM RAVENNA

The picture on the bulletin comes from the world famous mosaics in Ravenna, Italy. Ravenna is located on the western shore of the Adriatic. This city was both capital of the Roman Empire and the Byzantine Empire at various times in its history. This mosaic is part of a chapel wall created in the 5th and 6th centuries. Centuries ago a mosaic crafts-

man illustrated our scripture lesson in quarter-inch colored tiles. Every stone was cut to size and shape. Colors were matched and blended. The mosaic is its own story of faith. So you and I behold in an instant a mosaic that was created over the larger portion of a lifetime. Looking back over his career, someone said to his family, "I created the picture of Jesus caring for the sheep. I wanted people to remember this man Jesus who the Bible said was like a shepherd to his followers."

FAINTING GOATS

Mathew 9: 36 - "When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, like sheep without a shepherd."

I know the shepherd, and I also know something about fainting goats. They are called by several names - Myotonic Goats, Tennessee Fainting Goats, Nervous Goats and scare goats. The names refer to myotonia congenita, a condition in which the muscle cells experience prolonged contraction when the goat is startled. The temporary stiffness associated with these contractions can cause the goats to stop moving, stiffen, and fall down. This is not true fainting, more of a temporary paralysis generated by an overloaded nervous system. The degree of stiffness varies widely from goat to goat based on a number of factors, including age, species purity, and degree of fright.

As strange as this may sound, these little critters have actually served an historical purpose. Shepherds often kept the myotonic goats in with their flocks as insurance in case of predator attacks. The theory was that as wolves would come down from the hills to attack a flock of sheep, the goats would become startled and they would faint. The sheep would make a clean getaway. And the wolves ... well, the wolves were distracted, and selected the easier targets. Not great if you were one of the scare goats, but dandy if you happened to be a sheep.

The breed has gained popularity in recent years. First they are efficient reproducers, and have good meat. Others raise them for the "novelty" aspect of the goats. You'll find videos on You Tube.

DON'T FREEZE UP

**So there is a lesson here too:
when you get frightened, don't freeze up.
It just makes you an easy target. Stay agile;
be ready to move in new directions.
Don't freeze in place, but have the courage
to step out and get moving again.**

A psychologist would say that freezing up is a sign of depression or illness. Even anger is better, because it is the beginning of hope. But dropping out, or dropping over, or giving up won't save you from very much.

PAIN IS TEMPORARY

Here's a good place to drop in a Lance Armstrong quotation. "Pain is temporary. It may last a minute, or an hour, or a day, or a year, but eventually it will subside and something else will take its place. If I quit, however, it lasts forever.

"Winning is about your heart, not your legs."

SO HERE IS WHAT I KNOW ABOUT THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

He had the right credentials. – Born of Mary, in Bethlehem, out of Egypt and providing the rage of his enemies.

He called out properly and the sheep recognized his voice.

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 recognized the familiar voice of his master. "His

sheep knows him," said the judge. "Case dismissed!"

HE COMMANDS PROPERLY

When the shepherd calls forth his sheep, he goes before them and they instinctively follow him. He doesn't have to drive them; that is for goats. He just leads them out and they follow close behind. When souls are saved by the grace of God, they will have a desire to follow the Good Shepherd! When people are saved and their hearts are right with God, they do not have to be begged to come to worship, to make a gift, to share their faith, etc. They have been called out by the Shepherd and have a burning burden to worship Him. (2 Corinthians 5:17) Their heart's desire is summed up by 1 Corinthians 10:31. "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God."

And on Easter we remember that His concern was proven by His sacrifice. Jesus explained the difference between the concerned shepherd and the hireling. The hireling is there only for the paycheck. When trouble comes, he runs away and leaves the sheep to be devoured by the wolves. The shepherd, on the other hand, owns the sheep and has a vested interest in their welfare. Therefore, the good shepherd is willing to pay any price to protect the sheep, even if it means that he has to give His very life for them.

Jesus saw the danger that the sheep were in and did not run away, but did everything in His power to save them. The Bible says that people are like wayward sheep. (Isaiah 53:6) This waywardness, or sin, that is in us has separated us from both fellowship and relationship with God. (Isaiah. 59:2)

So that's what I know about the Good Shepherd.



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