

The Parables of Jesus - The Good Shepherd

(John 10:1-5;7-18)

The "Parable of the Good Shepherd" is only found in the Gospel of John. There has been some "debate" whether this actually is a parable or not. It is the only "parable" found in the Gospel of John. The writer of the Gospel of John does refer to it as a parable given by Jesus. (John 10:6) Therefore, if the author, who happens to be

the Apostle John, deems these words spoken by Jesus to be a "parable," who am I to disagree.

In John 7:10, it tells us that Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. This was Jesus' second to last visit to Jerusalem. John 7:1 tells us that it was dangerous for Jesus to go into Jerusalem. "... *he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him.*"

Nevertheless, Jesus still went to Jerusalem, secretly, to fulfill the mandate of God that all Jewish men were to attend the Feast of Tabernacles. Based on Deuteronomy 16:16, there were three of the annual "Feasts of the Lord" that required the attendance by the males of each Jewish family. They were to meet at the "appointed place," which ultimately became the Temple in Jerusalem. These three mandatory "Pilgrimage Feasts" were: The Feast of Unleavened Bread; Shavuot (Feast of Weeks/Pentecost), Sukkoth (Festival of Booths/Tabernacles)

While in Jerusalem He of course is tracked down by the religious leaders. They continually question and make numerous accusations concerning who Jesus really is and who He is not. The main "theme" and purpose of the Gospel of John was to clearly express and answer without any uncertainty "where" Jesus was from and who His "father" was. John delves into this extensively throughout His Gospel account.

This questioning of Jesus while He was at Jerusalem went on for about 2-3 months. We read in John 10:22 that it now was the time of the "feast of dedication" (Chanukah). Jesus had just healed a man who was "born blind." He performed this healing on the Sabbath. (John 9:1-13) Of course this "healing on the Sabbath" again made the religious rulers angry because it was done on the Sabbath.

This leads to a discussion concerning "spiritual blindness." Jesus rebuffs the Pharisees concerning their "spiritual blindness" in that they were "blind" to see their own sin. Therefore, being blind in their own sinfulness, they were also blinded to "see" the fact that Jesus was the "Good Shepherd" who would heal, not only a person's physical blindness but most importantly He would bring healing to the individual's "spiritual blindness" and lead them out of the "spiritual bondage" caused by their sin. Jesus then brings forth the parable and teaching on "The Good Shepherd."

The "Parable of the Good Shepherd" - John 10:1-5 - *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers."*

To get a better understanding of what Jesus was teaching through this parable we must first have an understanding of the "culture" and "characters" of the parable

- The "sheepfold" - A "sheepfold" is a place used by shepherds when they were out in the fields with their flocks for extended periods of time. These would be located outside the "city limits" and in the fields and meadows that surrounded the cities. It was a large enclosed area usually made of large stones. The walls would not be very high - just high enough so that none of the flock would be able to jump over and get out. The shepherds would keep their flock in the "sheepfold" at night to protect them from wild animals, thieves and robbers. One thing to note is that this "sheepfold"

usually was a shared sheepfold. There would be many sheep from different shepherds and flocks that would be in this "sheepfold" during the night.

- The "doorway" - There would be only one "doorway" to the "sheepfold." This was actually more of an opening than an actual door or gate.
- The "porter" - A "porter" in those times, was the one who was given the "authority" to let people enter a household, or in this case, allow the shepherd's sheep in or out of the "sheepfold." In other words they were the "gatekeeper" of that particular sheepfold. They would also be the ones charged with making sure that only the "shepherds" of the flocks in that particular "sheepfold" would be allowed to enter the "sheepfold" to either get their sheep or to care for their sheep as needed.
- The "shepherd" – This was obviously the one whose responsibility it was to watch over the flock that was entrusted to him. Shepherds did not own the flock they were watching over but had an "ownership mentality" in tending to their flock. In other words they cared for and loved the flock as if they were their own. At night the shepherd would sit or lay himself along the "doorway" or opening of the sheepfold to make sure that the sheep do not get out and to protect the flock from any wild animals, robbers or thieves that would try to enter. He literally would be "laying his life down" for the sheep.
- The "thieves and robbers" - These thieves and robbers know that the shepherd is at the doorway so they would try to "hop the fence" or in this case, the wall of large stones, and steal the sheep if at all possible. The shepherd would fight and give His life rather than allow any of the sheep to be stolen away.
- "Hireling" - This was not a true shepherd but rather it was person who pretended to be a caring shepherd. He really didn't care for the flock but was just doing the task for the money or for whatever he could get out of it. When danger came he would take off and leave the sheep defenseless and vulnerable to the danger. He would not be willing to give his life for the sheep.

As mentioned previously, there may have been more than one flock in the "sheepfold." The shepherds would take turns in the doorway keeping watch over the sheep. In the morning the "porter" would allow the shepherd to enter and "call" their flock making sure the sheep would go with their shepherd and not another. The sheep would "know the voice" of their shepherd and go and follow him out of the sheep fold for the day. The sheep knew and trusted that their shepherd would lead them to "still waters" so they could drink and he would take them to "green pastures" so they can feed and "lie down."

Jesus continued on with His teaching as He gives an explanation of the parable in John 10:7-18 - *"Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father."*

Jesus clearly states that He is referring to Himself in this parable as He declares, “**I am** the good shepherd...” He is letting the religious leaders know that He is the true “Good Shepherd” over the flock of God’s people (John 10:11, 14). This was as clear rebuke, if not in so many words, to the religious leaders who thought of themselves as the “shepherds” of God’s people.

In the parable, Jesus refers to "thieves and robbers." He is referring to those who had come to God’s people throughout their history who were "false prophets" and "false Christs" prior to His coming on the earth. The historian Josephus writes of many who came in those days saying that they were the Messiah and be the "savior" of the Jewish people from the bondage of the Romans. These false prophets tried to "hop the fence" and lure the “sheep” away from their true Shepherd.

The Jewish people as a whole, would not and did not "recognize the voice" of these false Messiahs because their “voice,” their words and message seemed to be foreign and unrecognizable to them. They did not recognize their words because deep inside it did not line up with their master’s voice – God’s Word. These "false Messiahs" came as tools of the enemy, the devil, to steal, kill and destroy God's people. (John 10:10)

Jesus also refers to "a hireling." As mentioned previously this was not a true shepherd but rather it was a "wannabe" shepherd. They wanted to be a shepherd but they really did not have the "heart" of a true shepherd. They did not truly care for the sheep that were entrusted to them. They only cared about what was in it for them - their wages. When the wolf (referring to any enemy of God's people) would come, they would flee and leave the “gate” or opening of the sheepfold wide open for the wolf to come and harm the flock.

Jesus was specifically referring to the religious leaders of that day - the Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, etc. - that were not doing the job of a shepherd but rather they became “hirelings” who were greedy and covetous and not truly protecting, feeding and comforting the Jewish people as they were entrusted to do.

As the Good Shepherd, the “sheep,” the Jewish people, were now entrusted to Jesus by their true “owner,” the Father. Jesus was the “owner’s” son therefore they were also His “sheep.” Jesus went on to say that the sheep will hear and know His voice. Jesus was saying that those Jewish people who desired and yearned for the Good Shepherd would “hear” not only His words but they would “hear” His heart for them. They will hear the Good Shepherd’s voice of love and truth and they will willingly and joyfully follow Him.

The “sheep” in this "sheepfold" are those (Jewish believers) who believe in Jesus Christ (John 10:9, 16, and 27-28) and as a result hear and know the voice of the true Shepherd. They hear His voice with joy and gladness. They choose not to follow after another (John 10:27-28). Those who follow anyone other than Jesus Christ are not His "sheep." (John 10:26)

Jesus makes it clear that a Good Shepherd is willing to give His life for the flock. Jesus would do that on the cross of Calvary so that His flock (the Jewish people) would have the availability of life and life more abundantly. (John 10:17-18).

In this parable we see that Jesus symbolically fulfills many roles in the lives of His sheep.

- Jesus is the "doorway" that leads the sheep into the "Household of faith." (John 14:6 - "*Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*")
- Jesus is the "porter" who carefully makes sure that the correct sheep (those that hear the voice of love and truth and believe in who Jesus is) goes with their "Good Shepherd." The scriptures show us that many will say they are of His flock but He will say to them that He “never knew them.” (Matthew 7:23)
- He is the "Good Shepherd" (John 10:7, 11) who leads the flock to "still waters" and "green pastures." (Psalm 23) Jesus is the only way to eternal life and He is the One who keeps His "sheep." (John 14:6)

- He is the "Good Shepherd who "lays down His life to protect His sheep from the wolves, the thieves and the robbers. (John 10:11)(Romans 5:8; Philippians 2:6-8)
- Jesus also, "opens the door" for "other sheep" who were not originally of this "fold." (John 10:16) He was referring to the Gentiles that would one day hear the "voice" of His heart of love and hear the voice of the truth of God's Word. They would hear the Good News of salvation through Jesus and receive it, believe it and become a part of His "flock" that will become known as the "One New Man in Christ." (Ephesians 2:15)

Jesus, as the Good shepherd told the Pharisees and everyone who would be listening, that He received His "commission" as the "Good Shepherd" by the one and only - Father, God. Not only did the Father commission Jesus for the role of the "Good Shepherd," He also loved and delighted in Jesus because He would give His life for the Jewish people as well as for "the other flock" (the Gentiles). Jesus was telling the Pharisees that His ministry here on this earth was validated by His Father - Yahweh, Adonai. (John 10:15-18)

The idea that Jesus' Father was God was so foreign to their way of thinking. This was their main stumbling block. They could not get past the fact that Messiah was to be "divine," the "Son of God." They were blind to their own scriptures that revealed this most important truth. This is still true for the Jewish people today.

We read in John 10:19-21, that once again some of the leaders and people became angry at His words. However, some were beginning to believe. His sheep were beginning to hear the voice of their Good Shepherd and beginning to follow.

Jesus concluded this theme of Him being the Good Shepherd that later on that day when He was in Jerusalem at the "feast of the dedication." (John 10:22) Upon entering the Temple and being in a section of the Temple known as "Solomon's porch," He was asked point blank by the religious leader "If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." In John 10:25-30 Jesus answers and reiterates to them concerning who He is by saying, "...I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one."

How plainly could have He told them? They again did not receive or hear His "voice." They took up stones to stone Him. They looked upon His answer as blasphemous. They had such a hardness of heart that they refused to hear and believe God's true Good Shepherd to His flock. Jesus slipped away and left Jerusalem.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Are you one of the "sheep of His pasture?" Or is your heart so hard that you refuse to hear His voice? Let those who have ears to hear, hear the voice of their Good Shepherd. He will surely lead His sheep (Jewish and Gentile believers) in the way of Psalm 23.

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures: he leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul: he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."