

John10:11-21 – The Good Shepherd

This study is closely related to our last study on “I am the door”. We are in the same chapter of John and in the same conversation that Jesus was having with the Pharisees, following the healing of the blind man. But we have a new metaphor, “I am the good shepherd”, a new picture of who Jesus is.

The use of the shepherd picture to describe the Israel's leaders or kings is frequently used in the Old Testament. Moses was a shepherd who became the leader of the people in the Exodus. When his time came to depart, he asked God to appoint a man to lead the people “so that the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd” (Numbers 27:15-17) and Joshua was appointed. Later, David was called from tending sheep to be the king of Israel. When Ezekiel, in chapter 34, describes the ideal king as a shepherd, his model seems to be “the shepherd-boy David, who became the king after God's own heart.”¹ However, the Old Testament also speaks about God being Israel's shepherd, particularly in the Psalms. Psalm 23 is the prime example, but also Psalms 28,78 and 80 refer to God as shepherd.

If we have any understanding of the Old Testament, we will know that Israel and Judah had a history of some good kings but many bad kings. Eventually, as a result of successive bad leadership, the people were sent into exile and the Temple was destroyed. The prophets of the exile, Isaiah and Ezekiel, prophesied of a time when God would restore his flock and provide his shepherd to lead them. At the time of Jesus, people were looking for this Messiah who would lead the people. This was the context in which Jesus declared to the Jewish leaders, who had cast out the healed, blind man, “I am the good shepherd”.

Open

- Why do you think the former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, was called “the iron lady”? What did this metaphor say about her leadership style?

Study

Read together : John 10:11-21

1. What is the difference between the good shepherd and a hired hand? What do you think is the point that Jesus is making in this comparison? (John 10:11-13)

Consider

2. In what ways does Ezekiel help us to understand what Jesus is saying here? (Ezekiel 34:1-16)

¹ Wright, T. (2004). *John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-10* (149). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

The “I am” sayings of Jesus

3. “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep”, how well does Jesus know us? (John 10:14 cf John 10:3, 1:41 and 47-49, Psalm 139:1-4, 15-16)

4. When Jesus says he knows the Father and the Father knows him, what kind of knowledge is he talking about? How does that relate to how Jesus knows us and we know him? (John 10:14-15, 17, cf John 17:6-8, 20-23)

5. “I have other sheep”, who do you think are the original flock and who are these other sheep? Why would some of his hearers take offence at this? (John 10:16,19)

Consider

6. “The Gentiles are no longer the enemy. They are sheep who have not yet been brought into the sheepfold. Take a moment to think through how this announcement must have sounded in a world—Jesus’ own world—filled with hatred and suspicion, with violence and counter-violence.”² Who might you be shocked to see being added to the church?

7. “I lay down my life for the sheep.” A dead shepherd cannot protect the sheep, why is it different with the good shepherd? (John 10:14-18)

² Wright, T. (2004). *John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-10* (153). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

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8. In Ezekiel 34 the prophet speaks of God becoming the shepherd (vs 11-16) but he also speaks of David (i.e.the Messiah) becoming the shepherd (vs 23-24). How does John 10 answer the dilemma of which is the shepherd? (John 10:14-21, 30)

9. Many said he is possessed, or mad but others said, “a demon cannot cause the blind to see, can it?” How did this answer to the critics point to who Jesus really is? (John 10:19-21, Psalm 146:8, Exodus 4:11)

To chew over until the next study:

Verse 15 - **“and I lay down my life for the sheep**—How sublime this, immediately following the lofty claim of the preceding clause! It is the riches and the poverty of “the Word made flesh”—one glorious Person reaching at once up to the Throne and down even to the dust of death, “that we might live through Him.”³

For us, ‘good’ can sound a bit cold or hard, merely moralistic. The word John uses can also mean ‘beautiful’. This doesn’t refer to what Jesus looked like. It’s about the sheer attractiveness of what, as the shepherd, he was doing. When he calls, people want to come. When they realize he has died for them, they want to even more. The point of calling Jesus ‘the good shepherd’ is to emphasize the strange, compelling power of his love.⁴

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. ⁵

³ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Jn 10:15). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

⁴ Wright, T. (2004). *John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-10* (154). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

⁵ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Heb 13:20–21). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.