

July 17, 2022

“I Am the Good Shepherd”
John 10:1-21

FCF: The need for a shepherd

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus has come as our shepherd.
(magnet) We must rely upon Him.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Clement of Alexandria lived from 150 A.D. to 215 A.D. He is known as “the theologian of the intelligentsia.” As an adult, he sought out truth from teachers in Greece, lower Italy, Syria, Palestine, and Alexandria, a city of perhaps one million inhabitants. Clement opened his own school, a cycle of conferences drawn out over years. Here’s a quote from his writings ([READ](#)):

In our sickness we need a savior, in our wanderings a guide, in our blindness someone to show us the light, in our thirst the fountain of living water which quenches forever the thirst of those who drink from it. We dead people need life, we sheep need a shepherd, we children need a teacher, the whole world needs Jesus!

Consider how long ago that was written. And consider that nothing has fundamentally changed.

We’re in a summer series looking at Jesus’ “I Am” statements recorded for us in John’s Gospel. This morning is the fourth in that series. Jesus says, “I am the Good Shepherd.”

SCRIPTURE READING: [John 10:1-21](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

To start, let’s own the barriers to the topic of shepherding. Tim Laniak, OT professor at Gordon-Conwell Seminary, notes there are four misconceptions. First, “it is abusive and heavy-handed.” Possibly but not necessarily. Second, “it merely implies one-on-one counseling.” That minimizes the intent of the metaphor. Third, “it is irrelevant in our day since most of us don’t live in an agrarian setting.” Many don’t but it is still a central image. Fourth, “it’s unworthy. We need bold CEO’s and executives.” That may be a felt need but it’s not what God is saying.

Let’s try this from another angle. Of all the animal husbandry images Jesus could have used, why shepherding? Why not the raising of cattle, camels, or chickens? Part of it has to do with the times. Part of it has to do with numbers. Sheep are referred to nearly 400 times in the Bible - often of us. Shepherds around 100 times - often of God. It is a vital metaphor. In fact, taking a step back, it’s clear this is key to understanding who we are, who God is, what He has done for us, and how He feels towards us. So it makes sense Jesus would use this image. And that’s where this text is driving. Jesus has come as our Shepherd. And we must rely upon Him.

Now what would it mean to rely upon Jesus in this way? To get at that, we need to consider these three things. First, the need. Second, the problem. And then, third, the solution.

I. THE NEED

First, the need. The Bible says we are like sheep. That’s interesting. What does it mean?

A) The Image

1. The picture we have

The image many of us have here is of soft, white, wooly lambs. They’re cute and cuddly.

2. The reality

But to understand what Jesus is saying, that picture needs a bit of reality. Douglas MacMillan was a minister in the Free Church of Scotland. In reflecting upon this, he wrote ([READ](#)):

A sheep is a stupid animal. Sheep lose their direction continually as cats and dogs and other animals do not. In addition, sheep are extremely obstinate. Even when you find the lost sheep, it is very difficult to round them up and bring them home unless you have a dog to scare them. The lost sheep rushes to and fro. When you find it, you must seize it, cast it down, tie its legs together, and put it over your shoulders to carry it home...Sheep are not at all the clean, cuddly creatures they appear to be at a distance. On the contrary, they are subject to nasty pests and need to be regularly thrown into strong chemicals in order to rid them of lice, ticks, and worms.

B) *The Insult*

The point being this image is not meant as a compliment at all. It's a stark insult.

1. Helpless

Sheep are helpless. They are totally dependent on the shepherd for protection, grazing, watering, shelter, and tending to injuries. They would not survive in the wild without the shepherd.

2. Foolish

Sheep are helpless. They are also foolish, prone to wander and unable to find their way back to a sheepfold even when it is in sight. And this is the glorious image God uses to describe humanity.

That gets us to the reality of our need. For we can be so very helpless and foolish.

Illustration:

Here's a paragraph from an *Associated Press* news story from a few years ago ([READ](#)):

First one sheep jumped to its death. Then another and another, and then dozens more. Having left their herds to graze while they ate breakfast, stunned Turkish shepherds now watched as nearly 1,500 others leapt off the same cliff. The first 450 animals died under the billowy pile.

How did it happen? Likely, they got off the trail and started following the tail in front of them.

Application:

That's what sheep tend to do - follow the tail in front of them with little thought of the destination. I wonder if we're willing to own that that is us. Yes, there are other images in the Bible used to describe God's people - servants, citizens, and children. But this is there as well.

Jesus has come as our Shepherd. This is getting to our need to rely upon Him.

II. THE PROBLEM

The need then takes us to our problem. We are sheep. And the shepherds we look to are flawed. I've said before in this series we have to read back and broad to grasp these sayings.

A) *Ancient Precedent*

We need to do that here as well. Reading back to an ancient precedent in Ezekiel 34.

1. Bad motives

We read this earlier. We heard of the bad motives of the leaders - taking care only of themselves.

2. Bad practice

And the bad practice. That of both neglect and abuse, sins of both omission and commission.

B) *Current Situation*

Now fast forward six and a half centuries to the current situation we see in John 10.

1. Immediate context

The immediate context is this exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees, the religious leaders of His day. Don't be fooled by the start of a new chapter. The events of chapter 9 - the healing of a blind man, the investigation by the Pharisees, and their throwing him out of the synagogue - all flow right into chapter 10. Their rejecting this man instead of rejoicing with him is the context.

2. Thorough critique

That is what births this thorough critique by Jesus, the contrast He makes between a hired hand and a shepherd. This is why He warns against those who fleece the flock and flee from danger.

And that makes for the problem. We are sheep. And it would seem without a shepherd.

Illustration:

Has anything changed? Think of our leadership crisis. One recent headline ([READ](#)):

Americans are less confident in major U.S. institutions than they were a year ago, with significant declines for 11 of the 16 institutions tested and no improvements for any.

Everywhere we turn we see either incompetence or a lack of integrity. We have a problem.

Application:

Given that we are sheep, it seems that we cannot govern ourselves. We look around us and see nothing but shepherds who are either unable or unwilling to help. Then we hear from the Bible and can't help but wonder if perhaps this is something true for a long time and all over.

That would be true. And Jesus has come as our Shepherd. So we must rely upon Him.

III. THE SOLUTION

That's the third point, the solution. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the true shepherd.

A) Long Promised

We see this in Isaiah and Jeremiah, but think back to the ancient promise in Ezekiel.

1. God Himself

God condemns the shepherds of Israel for exploiting the people - using them for their own gain and pleasure instead of caring for them as they should have. And then He takes matters into His own hands, saying that He will shepherd His sheep. It's repeated several times, "I will..."

2. The Davidic King

But how? ([READ Ezekiel 34:22-23](#)) So on the one hand, God says He will do it. But, on the other hand, He says David will do it. Yet David has been dead for 500 years by this point. How is this possible? The solution will come through God coming in the flesh, in the line of David.

B) Finally Come

And that's who is speaking to us in John 10. It's Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

1. The only means to life

He is the only means to life, the only way of entering God's kingdom. That's what the door metaphor is about in vv.7-10. It's not really a separate "I am" statement apart from His being the

Shepherd. The shepherd would stand at the door of the pen as the sheep came in at the end of the day and sometimes lay across it at night. Again, the idea being Jesus is the only means to life.

2. The only hope we have

And the only hope we have. He alone fulfills the role of the Shepherd. Guiding - going out in front. Providing - supplying the sustenance and restoration we need. Protecting - vigilant and on guard against enemies that would prey upon us. And to do so, He pours out His life for the ones He knows so well ([READ John 10:11, 14-15, 17-18a](#)). Our Shepherd is also the sacrificial lamb.

He is the solution. He is the Good Shepherd. He is the one we've been looking for.

Application:

And to the degree we embrace that and let it take root in our hearts, it will begin to heal our hearts. Let me give you examples of two ways. First, in how we look towards the future. Many of us know something of the tyranny of worry and anxiety. It can come out in all sorts of ways. We might withdraw and hide. We might try and seize control of our circumstances. Or rage in anger. Do you know any of those - withdrawal, control, or anger? At the root of them all is often fear. And knowing Jesus as your Good Shepherd can really begin to root out that fear.

So that's looking to the future. Then there's looking to the past, perhaps with resentment. Remember the words from Douglas MacMillan and how he said there are times a sheep needs to be seized, thrown down, have its legs tied together, and be thrown over the shoulders of the shepherd? And then perhaps be dipped into a chemical bath to be rid of the pests? My guess is that a sheep doesn't much appreciate that. And may wonder if the shepherd hates it. Do you have times you can look back and say the same? Well, perhaps something else was going on.

Again, consider Jesus' words. He has come as our Shepherd. We must rely upon Him.

CONCLUSION:

Pulling all this together, where does that bring us? If you are a disciple of Jesus, you need to know He is not just your Savior. He is your Shepherd. We need Him not just eternally but daily, not just in the hard, confusing, frightening times but the easy, clear, and calmer times. We need to know we must and we can go to Him all the time with anything. He is our Shepherd.

But what would make that possible? What would free our hearts to know that? The bond between this Shepherd and His sheep. Tim Laniak tells the story of Mrs. Aref. Mrs. Aref lives in a small village in Jordan and cares for a flock of 45 sheep. And she loves her sheep ([READ](#)):

One day, to her immense distress, Mrs. Aref lost track of one of her ewes. Because sheep regularly mingle with other flocks at common pastures during the day, she checked with her neighbors that night to see if the ewe had gone home with someone else. But none of them had seen the missing creature. She inquired among more distant neighbors over the next week, but no one had noticed a stray or found unidentified remains. Weeks turned into months without a sign of the missing ewe.

Then one day, two months later, a large flock came through the village led by a hired shepherd. As was still her habit, Mrs. Aref asked the young man if he had come across a lost sheep. As the words passed her lips, one of the ewes in the solid pack of passing sheep lifted her head, immediately recognizing the sound of her owner's voice. Mrs. Aref screamed with delight and rushed through the startled mass to embrace her lost sheep. It didn't take long before the whole village heard the commotion and shared the reunion.

That's the bond between the Good Shepherd and His own, between Him and us today.

That's why we can and need to go to Him not just when we're in trouble or have time. That's why we need to yield not just a portion of our lives but the whole. Truly, we have no right to privacy with our Shepherd. And shouldn't want it. Such is our need. And such is His care.

Jesus has come as our Shepherd. He has come as our Shepherd. We must rely upon Him.

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