

“Where This Shepherd Leads” | Rev. Tim Frickenschmidt | April 25, 2021

Ezekiel 34:1-6, 10

The word of the Lord came to me: 2 “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? 3 You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. 4 The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. 5 So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; 6 they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them... 10 Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

1 John 3:16-18

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 17 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

John 10:10-18, 27-30

The specter of an approaching apocalypse occupies the forefront of many minds in our times. Fear of impending disaster, whether environmental or political, begs the question, “What can we do about it?” The secular, worldly perspective of contemporary literature suggests the answer is a stark “Nothing,” but the Christian’s answer in John 10 offers an image that addresses this angst—the Good Shepherd.

**I. Why this image?**

**A.** Of the seven “I am” statements in the New Testament, only “I am the Good Shepherd” is personal and relational. Humans in our century and culture love dogs and understand the relationship between people and animals in reference to “man’s best friend,” but in the Ancient Near Middle East, where dogs were considered half-wild and dangerous, the link between sheep and people spoke more accurately to the relationship between God and his people. Families owned and loved their sheep.

God is a personal, relational being who wants us to have a relationship with him. He wants us to know his voice intimately and personally, and he designed humans to know that voice and to respond to it when we hear him speak to us.

**B.** Sheep need a protector. The anxious, fearful mood of John 10, as characterized by use of the words “thief,” “steal,” “kill,” “destroy,” and “wolf snatches” sends the message that it is not safe to be an utterly defenseless animal, such as a sheep. The passage refers to physical safety, but as humans, we need broader protection, especially in our spiritual lives. We require a protector.

Tim Keller says that we look back on our former selves and can’t believe we were so naïve and foolish, but we will look back in the future on ourselves as we are today and say the same thing.

Martin Luther called the ravages of sin a problem of *homo incurvatus in se*, man incurving back into himself, rather than open to God. Tim defines sin as an alien, invasive power that works to separate us from God and all those who love Him.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. 11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” 27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one.”

Sin makes us think we are capable of living our own lives. But sheep have the advantage over us in that they listen well. They have good hearing and can discern their own shepherd's voice above calls from other shepherds. *Peasant Life in the Holy Land* contains an account of a large flock of sheep mixed together from flocks of many shepherds separating themselves when the individual shepherds call the sheep. We, too, each have a particular voice to which we attend, but Jesus is not saying that he is the only shepherd calling us. Every morning the shepherds of the world call to us and we follow one. Is it the Good Shepherd or an imposter?

## II. Where does this image lead?

It leads Jesus to his death. In John 10, Jesus repeats “laid down my life” five times. This sacrifice for us, so that we can lead lives free from fear, makes Jesus the Good Shepherd. In the Ancient Near East, though, the hearers would have thought first of Ezekiel and the description of what bad shepherds do to the sheep, feeding on them, rather than feeding them. We might be following a bad shepherd, a hired hand, or worse yet, we may be a bad shepherd or even a wolf!

God sees us as his treasure, just as a good shepherd sees the sheep as his treasure. Jesus willingly laid down his life in place of us, for we are worth more to God than His own life. He took all of our rejection, abuse, robbery, divorce, fear, pain, regret, shame, guilt, mental anguish—He took it all and offered abundant life in exchange.

**Result:** We can become shepherds and give away the love Jesus gave to us. We can give it to those who are hurting and spiritually ill because we know we have a shepherd.

**Application:** Listen to Him, follow Him, shepherd others, lay down your life.

### **Discussion:**

What shepherds call to you? To those you love and care for? How can you get to know the voice of the Good Shepherd when you hear it?

Where is your flock—both the one to which you belong and the one you lead? Can you identify sheep who look to you for protection? How can you protect them against the call of sin? Are you teaching anyone else how to become a shepherd? How do you do it? What qualities make for a good shepherd in training?