

Church Illustrated

The church is like a flock

John 10:1-16

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HDBC

What do these statements have in common?

Laughter is the music of the soul.

America is a melting pot.

She has a heart of gold.

The world is a stage.

My kid's room is a disaster area.

Life is a rollercoaster.

These are metaphors. One website defines a metaphor as . . . a literary device that draws a comparison between two unlike things. It does this by stating that Thing A **is** Thing B. Metaphors can help explain concepts and ideas by linking the unknown to the known; the abstract to the concrete.

There are a number of metaphors in the New Testament for the church. These are word pictures designed to help us understand the nature, function and purpose of the church. They also help us understand our roles and relationships in the church. So, this morning we are starting a series called **Church Illustrated**. We'll be looking at five metaphors for the church. Some are explicitly stated as such. Others are more implied.

Today we will consider how the church is like a **flock of sheep**. The imagery of sheep and shepherds is found throughout the Bible. The **patriarchs** were shepherds. David was a shepherd before becoming king. One of the most famous chapters in the Bible presents the Lord as a shepherd and people as sheep. Even the announcement of the birth of Jesus was first made to shepherds.

And so, we are not surprised to find that the New Testament uses the image of sheep and shepherds to help us understand the church. Primary passage will be John 10:1-16. However the picture of the church as a flock of sheep is used in other places. For example . . .

Matthew 26:31. Then Jesus *said to them, “You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, ‘I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.’” Jesus was the shepherd and the group of disciples were the flock.

Luke 12:32. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. Once more, Jesus refers to his followers as a flock.

Acts 20:28-29. Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; Paul was speaking to a group of pastors and he referred to the churches as flocks.

1 Peter 5:2-3. Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. Once again a local church is referred to as a flock of sheep.

No less than three different writers used the metaphor of a flock to illustrate the church. More than any other, Jesus used this word-picture to help us understand the church and his relationship to it. So what can we learn from this picture?

Let's look at words of Jesus in John 10:1-16. **Read it.** Jesus introduces it in the first 6 verses then offers explanation in 7-16.

The roles are clear. In this illustration, the shepherd is Jesus. The sheep are people. The flock is the church. So, what does it mean?

In some way He is like a shepherd.

In some way we are like sheep.

He is to us what the shepherd is to the sheep.

We are to him what sheep are to the shepherd.

So, I think there are two clear takeaways from this illustration of the church.

Every sheep needs a shepherd.

Every sheep needs a flock.

There you go. Just two main points. Now, let me show you why they are both true. Remember, it's not really about sheep but about people. It's not really about a shepherd but about Jesus. It's not really about a flock but about the church.

1. Every sheep needs a shepherd

The most important relationship that a sheep can have is with a good shepherd. A sheep without a shepherd is in trouble.

Sheep are not very smart. They tend to be wanderers. They have very little means of finding their own food and water. They could easily die of starvation or thirst. They need a shepherd to guide them to green grass for their nourishment and to safe bodies of water to quench their thirst.

They are targets of predators who want to eat them. They have no natural means of protecting themselves from those predators. They need a shepherd who will come to their rescue when they are under attack. They need a good shepherd who will bring them into a place of safety at night, when the dangers increase. Every sheep needs a shepherd for protection.

Sheep are the targets of thieves who would lure them away to their death. They need a good shepherd whom they can trust, who will have their welfare in mind and will protect them from bad people who would come after them.

It was common for villages to have one communal sheep pen or corral for all the sheep to be gathered into at night. You might have 50, 100, or 200 sheep belonging to as many as 5-7 different owners.

During the day the shepherds would have them out in pastures to graze. In the evenings they would all be brought into the pen through a single door protected by a doorkeeper. It was the only legitimate way into the flock. To get in you had to come through that gatekeeper, that door.

Jesus used this common picture to remind us that every sheep needs a shepherd. Why?

They need a shepherd to lead them.

They need a shepherd to provide for them.

They need a shepherd to protect them.

Now watch what Jesus did. In the first 5 verses He shared the illustration. Then beginning with verse 7 He explains its meaning. It's really not about sheep and shepherds. It's about people and Himself. Every sheep needs a shepherd = **Every person needs Jesus.** Why?

1) Jesus is the only way to eternal life (7-9)

Here, Jesus reaffirms what He and others have taught throughout the New Testament. There is only one way to be saved (spiritually) and that is through Him. It's not through religious works. Not through our good deeds. Not through our moral goodness. It is through faith in Him. He is the door. Everyone needs Jesus because He is the only way to Heaven.

2) Jesus is the only way to abundant life (10)

We have an enemy who not only wants to keep us from eternal life, but wants to rob us of any joy and fulfillment in this life. He is a thief who comes to steal, kill and destroy. But notice what Jesus, the good shepherd comes to do. He comes to give abundant life. This is a life with meaning, purpose, satisfaction and fulfillment. Everyone needs Jesus because He is the way to a satisfied, fulfilling life.

3) Jesus is the good shepherd (11-15)

He is not **a** good shepherd. He is **the** good shepherd.
That is demonstrated by His . . .

a) Sacrificial love for us (11)

The good shepherd is willing to give his life for the sheep. Jesus gave His life to save our souls for eternity. He paid the greatest price anyone could pay. He truly demonstrated just how much He loves us by giving such a great sacrifice.

b) Unwavering commitment to us (12-13)

He sticks with us, in good times and bad. When trouble comes to the sheep, hired hands flee. Those who are only in it for the money, will not risk their lives to protect them. No one has the kind of unwavering commitment to us as Jesus. He not only gave His life to save us from our sins, but He sticks with us all the way through, making sure we get to Heaven. He will not bail out on us. He sticks. How refreshing in a world

where the first reaction to trouble by many is to find the first door of escape.

c) Intimate relationship with us (15)

He knows His sheep and they know Him. In those days, when the shepherd came back to the common pen in the morning to get his sheep, he simple called them to come and they did. They knew his voice and he knew their names. There was an intimate relationship between shepherds and sheep. The relationship between the good shepherd and his people is much, much deeper. He knows you, by name and loves you as an individual.

2. Every sheep needs a flock

The second most important relationship a sheep can have is with other sheep. **Sheep are not meant to live as loners.** They thrive when they are with other sheep. They are meant to be together. Every sheep needs a flock. In a flock, there is warmth, encouragement, comfort and protection. In a flock there is a sense of belonging, as well as a sense of security. Sheep need other sheep.

A lone sheep is a sheep that is lost and needs to be found.

Jesus told a parable to illustrate this truth. If the shepherd, in counting his sheep as they enter the corral, finds that one is missing, he goes to find it. It is a sheep that needs to be found. Sheep are made for the flock. They are not made to live alone.

A lone sheep is disconnected and needs fellowship

I don't much about the relationships that sheep have with each other. But I know this, most often they are seen in flocks. There must be something about being with other sheep that is comforting. I know that is true of people. We really do need fellowship, relationships, connections.

A lone sheep is in danger and needs to be protected

A lone sheep is an easy target for predators. Being in a group provides a level of protection that is completely missing when the sheep wanders alone. Remember what the Bible says in 1 Peter 5:8.

Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

I want to show you a video that illustrates this truth in a better way than I can with just words. From YouTube and is the short version of a video called *Battle at Kruger*. If you're squeamish about videos of animals hunting other animals, you might want to cover your eyes.

Play Video – Battle at Kruger

Every sheep needs the shepherd.

Every person needs Jesus.

Every sheep needs a flock.

Every believer needs a church.

So, do you have a relationship with Jesus? If not, why not today?

Do you have a strong connection with a local church? If not, why not today? More than just a connection with the larger church, do you have a connection with a group? Those are the ones who will be the first to come to your defense when the lions attack. If not, why not today?