

Study Eleven The Good Shepherd

Shepherd

A person who tends and rears sheep

In John 10, John again gives us a rather lengthy discourse from Jesus on who He is and why He has come. This time, Jesus compares Himself to a shepherd. This week, we are going to take an in-depth look at this imagery in the cultural and historical context to better understand what Jesus was saying.

John 10, chronologically, follows right on the heels of the miracle of the healing of the blind man in John 9. For this reason, it is unsurprising that Jesus begins with a strong statement against the religious leaders that have been persecuting him and recently threw the healed man out of the synagogue. He says, "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber."¹ This statement would very likely have immediately called Ezekiel 34 to the minds of His listeners. The prophet Ezekiel brought a strong indictment against the religious leaders of that day as well:

The word of the Lord came to me:
"Son of man, prophesy against the
shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say
to them: 'This is what the Sovereign
Lord says: Woe to the shepherds of

¹ John 10:1 NIV

the flock who only take care of
themselves! Should not shepherds
take care of the flock?"²

Just as during the time of Ezekiel, the religious leaders of Jesus' time were far more concerned with their own traditions, comfort, power, and way of life than they were with the welfare of the people God had entrusted to them.

In contrast, Jesus talks about His role as the good shepherd, sent from the Father for His flock. The word for good used here, *kalos*, means "beautiful, handsome, excellent, eminent, choice, surpassing, precious, useful, suitable, commendable, admirable."³ In other words, Jesus is the best shepherd. And He goes on to elaborate why He can rightfully be called by this title: "I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep."⁴ Jesus is the best shepherd because He lays down His life, sacrificially, for His sheep. The imagery of the shepherd laying down his life for his flock is not merely metaphorical – that he might lay down his life because he is willing – rather:

by the strong language Jesus uses,
he points beyond the metaphorical
world to himself. He does not merely
risk his life, he lays it down, in line
with the Father's will. Far from being
accidental, Jesus' death is precisely

² Ezekiel 34:1-2 NIV

³ Kalos. Blueletterbible.org 18 July 2013.

⁴ John 10:14 NIV

what qualifies him to be 'that great Shepherd of the sheep.' And by his death, far from exposing his flock to further ravages, he draws them to himself.⁵

Jesus is the best shepherd because He knows each of His sheep intimately and calls them by name.⁶ In that day, many flocks might have spent the night in the same fold, or sheep pen. In the morning, the shepherds would have stood outside the fold and given their own particular call and their sheep would come to them.⁷ The connection between the shepherd and his or her sheep would have been so strong that the shepherd would lead the flock by walking in front and calling to his or her sheep, and they, knowing the sound of their master's voice would follow. The depth of this connection was such that if the shepherd died, the whole flock would have had to die because they would not follow another's voice.⁸

Could the same be said of us? Are we so attuned to and so loyal to the voice of our shepherd that we refuse to follow any other voice? Sheep are not brilliant animals; in fact, they are rather foolish and are often getting into scrapes and mischief, needing the shepherd to rescue them. However, in spite of their silliness and sometimes headstrong nature, they do follow the shepherd when they hear His voice. As we end this

⁵ Carson, D.A. p. 386

⁶ John 9:3 NIV

⁷ Carson, D.A. p. 382

⁸ Vander Laan, Ray. In the Dust of the Rabbi.

semester, let us tune our hearts to hear His voice and set our mind to follow wherever the Shepherd of our hearts may lead.

Scripture Reading: NIV

John 10:1-18

"Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2 The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them. ⁷Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. 9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.[^a] They will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. 11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay

down my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. 17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to 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 authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

Ezekiel 34:1-16

The word of the LORD came to me: ²“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? ³You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. ⁴You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. ⁵So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. ⁶My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them. ⁷“Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ⁸As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock, ⁹therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ¹⁰This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am

against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them. ¹¹“For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹²As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. ¹³I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. ¹⁴I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. ¹⁶I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

Scripture Meditation:

John 10:14 “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – ”

Partner Assignment:

Meet with your prayer partner from this week and Read chapter ten of the Gospel of John. Answer the following questions together:

- A. What does this chapter teach us about Jesus' identity?
- B. What does this mean for you?
- C. How can you take what you've learned this semester and apply it to your life?
- D. What are some changes you need to make to live as a disciple as you go home (or wherever you will be over upcoming break/breaks)?

GOJ Study Eleven, Sample Questions for Discussion:

Pre-Article Questions:

- 1. For those of you who met with your prayer partner last week and did the assignment, do you have any questions or comments about Chapter Nine?
- 2. What is one thing you have learned about Jesus this semester that you never knew before?

Post-Article Questions:

- 1. What has it meant to you in the past when you heard that Jesus was your shepherd? What pictures did that bring to mind? If you had never heard of Jesus being the Good Shepherd before today, what was your first impression of that idea? Now that we have done a little contextualizing, what do you think about that statement?
- 2. How are you like a sheep? Are you silly, stubborn, headstrong? Do you wander? Are you in need of a shepherd to rescue you? Have you learned to hear the voice of the Shepherd? Do you consistently follow Him? Why or why not?

- 3. What were your initial thoughts when you learned that if the shepherd of a flock dies, the rest of the sheep have to be killed because they will not follow anyone else? Have you ever experienced some of this kind of loyalty (either your own loyalty toward someone else or their loyalty toward you)?

Post-Scripture Reading Questions:

- 1. Why did Jesus speak the way He did to the Pharisees? (*Hint: Look at John 9 if you've forgotten what just happened in the story*). How are these leaders like the ones that the Lord speaks to in Ezekiel 34?
- 2. What are some of the things the Lord promises to do for His flock in Ezekiel 34? Which of these particularly speaks to or comforts you?
- 3. How does viewing Jesus as the Good Shepherd influence your day-to-day relationship with Him?

If you have not made a decision yet to follow Jesus, after doing this study for the past twelve weeks in the Gospel of John, is there anyone here who is sure they would like to put their faith in Him tonight?

In Closing:

Read out loud Psalm 23 all together and then spend some time specifically talking to one other person in your Life Group about which part of this passage is speaking the most to you and why. Commit to memorizing one verse together this week and texting it to one-another as the week unfolds.