

Sermon AMC- The Shepherd that Cares and the shepherds that Snare

Scripture: John 10:1-10

Sunday, May 7, 2017

This week we are going to revisit the Gospel of John. Now because of where we are going to be in John, I need to give you a quick overview of the first part of the Gospel that is the context of our passage today. The Gospel of John is a fascinating document whose purpose is declared clearly in 20 verse 31: *But these are written so that you might continue to believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing that you will have life by the power of His name.* The purpose of the book is nothing less than directing the reader to the source of eternal life! So how does the author go about organizing the info in this Gospel to achieve its incredible purpose. Firstly, this book is divided into 2 parts. The first part which is the 12 chapters, focuses on what Jesus did and taught. The second part of the book from chapter 13 to 21 is an extended passion narrative. Our portion, Jesus' teaching on the good shepherd and the gate comes almost at the end of the teaching section of John. When you look closer at part one you will notice that it begins with an introduction to the whole book in Chapter 1. This introduction has two parts, an opening 18 verse poetic description of Jesus and a second part that is dedicated to John the Baptist's introduction of Jesus and Jesus recruiting of his first disciples. During his recruiting process, Jesus checking with his newly recruited disciples who they think he is. This is like the pretest, where Jesus is testing his students with how much they already know. They come up with 6 different titles for Jesus, Rabbi, Messiah, Lamb of God, Son of God, King of Israel, Jesus of Nazareth. To those titles Jesus adds one more, Son of Man and with that we have 7 titles of Jesus right in chapter 1. Now the rest of the book is all about how Jesus takes this starting knowledge and teaches his disciples so much more about Himself. He presents 7 "I am" sayings and 7 "miraculous signs". Each of these signs show Jesus' miraculous power. But each sign also

generates controversy in some way. For example, in one instance Jesus does something spectacular by healing a man born blind, and through that makes the point that he is the Light of the world. But he also does this on a Sabbath. This generates a lot of controversy among the other teachers, the Pharisees. So, at the end of the story the listeners have to figure out whom they are going to side with, Jesus or the Pharisees. Every one of Jesus' teaching modules in John follows is same basic pattern.

Now I want you to apply this pattern, to our passage today. When you look at our text, Jesus is teaching about two kinds of shepherds. And he introduces two metaphors to describe himself, the good shepherd and the gate. In general, you never want to mix metaphors, but in this case when you see the cultural context you will see that these two metaphors are interrelated in a fascinating way.

Let's take a closer look. Firstly, in the middle east where grazing land and resources were limited, it was a common practice for shepherds to share a sheep pen. Typically, about 4 flocks to a pen. By day the shepherds would graze their flock, then at night they would bring them back into a walled sheep pen. The pen would have stone walls about 8 feet high, so the wild animals would not be able to jump over them. It would have one narrow doorway without any wooden door, just an opening. Once the flocks were all safely in, usually the shepherd's assistant or sometimes the shepherd himself would sleep right across the doorway blocking it. So, the shepherd literally became the door. If any one wanted to get to the sheep, they would have to go over the body of the shepherd. So, it was shepherd by day, door by night! You can imagine this would make for a very uncomfortable night. So the shepherding team would take turns being to "door". In the morning, the shepherds would all come to the door and call out to their sheep. Now the sheep would have a very intimate bond with their shepherd, know and recognize their voice and respond only to their respective shepherd. So the sheep would

all separate themselves out automatically from the big group and follow their own shepherd out into the fields for grazing and water.

That brings us to something very special that I want to point out about the communication between a sheep and a shepherd. **The shepherd calls and the sheep recognize his voice.** And that brings us to the next concept that is in this image here. Jesus is not just presenting himself as a shepherd, he is presenting himself as the good shepherd. Which means there are many “not good shepherds” as well. So, Jesus is saying, there are two kinds of shepherds out there and if you follow the right kind of shepherd, you will have eternal life. If you follow the “not good shepherd” it will result in big time disaster in the end. Now whether you are following the right shepherd or not depends on your ability to discern or “know” the voice of the good shepherd.

To understand this business of “recognizing the voice” of the good shepherd, I have an analogy of my own that I want you to consider. And this analogy is taken from the field of cell biology. So please pay careful attention. There are 100 trillion cells in the human body. These cells are arranged into 210 cell types and 11 major organ systems, like the respiratory system, nervous system etc. So, to keep your body functioning, these 100 trillion cells actually need to communicate between each other, between the cell types, between organ systems and even within the individual cell itself. You can imagine what an incredibly complex network of communication exists within your body. All disease is when something breaks down in one tiny segment of this communication. At the basic level, this is how the communication happens. Between two cells that are trying to talk to each other there is a transmitter, the message molecule and a receiver. So, for example, when you think of how food that you eat gives you energy, well the food is digested in the stomach and part of the food is converted to glucose pushed into the blood stream. But your body is designed to make sure that whether you are starving or stealing sugar cookies when no one is looking, it is the job of the beta cells in your

pancreas to make sure that your blood sugar is always within a range. So when it senses an increase in blood sugar your pancreases start talking to every other cell in your body saying, time to take in some glucose. Now the fascinating thing is that this message can only be received by the cell if it has a specific “insulin receptor” whose job is to hear the insulin signal. You may have all the insulin signals coming in but if your insulin receptors are not functioning, your cells will literally be starved of energy in spite of the blood around it being full of glucose. That is one of the reasons people become “diabetic”. Only the “insulin receptors” can recognize the message that the pancreatic beta cells are sending. No other kind of receptor can hear the voice of the pancreatic beta cells. If the receptors do not recognize the voice, the whole body becomes diseased.

Now why did I take so much time to describe this process within our cells? I believe as we learn more and more about the way God has designed the human body, we understand more about how God thinks. And we have new metaphors to understand what God is trying to tell us. Only the elect sheep recognize the voice of the good shepherd. The good shepherd calls and those whom he has chosen from the foundation of the world, somehow recognize the good shepherd.

So how does the elect sheep recognize the voice of the good shepherd? What are those special signs that signal to his elect that this is the “good shepherd” talking? I believe our passage gives us three criteria to recognize the good shepherd.

The first is that the good shepherd comes in through the door and not sneaking over the wall. The good shepherd comes through the door and not over the wall. What does that mean? It means that **Jesus Christ does not do anything by deception or in secret.** His coming was announced by over 353 prophecies starting all the way in the 3rd chapter of Genesis to the last book of the OT, Malachi. When he started his ministry, he had the greatest prophet in the history of Israel, declare the arrival of the Messiah. Throughout his ministry he was very open about what he taught. These are Jesus’ own words, John

18:20. *"I have spoken openly to the world, Jesus answered. "I always taught in the synagogues and at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret.*

The shepherd who comes through the gate comes openly, without sneaking and deception.

Coming through the gate and not from the left or the right has one more meaning. It means that Jesus never deviated from his intended message either to the left or to the right. He does not compromise his message under any circumstances. John 12 *49I have not spoken on My own, but the Father who sent Me has commanded Me what to say and how to say it. 50And I know that His command leads to eternal life. So I speak exactly what the Father has told Me to say"*. Jesus does not sugar coat his message, he does not give people what they want to hear, he does not modify his message so that it would make life easier for himself. Not at all. Jesus speaks exactly what His heavenly father wants Him to speak. So coming through the door means "speaking openly and without deception, and speaking without compromising the truth". Now of course from time to time Jesus communicated in cryptic form and sometimes he even used hyperbole. But he never compromised his message. The sign of the "good shepherd" is that the good shepherd teaches openly and without deception, never compromising the truth. This is the first sign that the elect sheep use to recognize His voice.

The second thing that characterizes the good shepherd is that fact that, the good shepherd is also the gate. You see in verse 6 Jesus now changes metaphors to go even deeper. Earlier when he said that he is the good shepherd is the one who goes through the gate, his listeners did not understand him. So, to make things even more clear, he changes the metaphor with a new "I am" saying. This time he declares, "I am the gate". Now what does that mean? Earlier I talked about how at night the shepherd lies down at the threshold of the pen becoming a physical gate, right? But metaphorically, what

Jesus is saying is that, if the sheep what to get to the green pastures. There is only one way and that is through Himself. John 14:6 declares this same idea when He says, “I am the way, the Truth and the life and no one comes to the Father but by me”. Now I must say though that, for the sheep most often, this is not obvious. This is where things get challenging, because from the sheep’s perspective, when the sheep are following their good shepherd, very often it does not look like green pastures. Many times, it looks more like dark and dangerous valleys. But here is the deal, for the elect sheep, even when they can only see the dark valleys around them, somehow deep in their receptor cells deep in their body they know that they are being lead to green pastures. On the other hand, the non-elect sheep, enter a dark valley and they have the opposite response. They doubt the good shepherd and they quickly run away looking for other shepherds to follow. But Jesus is very clear, **he is the gate**. The second sign of the good shepherd is the recognition that he is not one of the ways to greener pastures but the only way to the green pasture for your soul.

There is a third mark of the good shepherd right here in our passage. Jesus says, judge the good shepherd by his works. What are the works he is talking about? Well, Verse 11 is very clear about this. Jesus says, I am the good shepherd and the good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. Jesus is clear, he says, it is not just that the good shepherd is recognized by the purity and openness of His teaching, it not just the fact that the good shepherd is the only means to getting to that green pasture, you can recognize the good shepherd by what he is willing to do for you. You see, because only the good shepherd has a stake in your eternal welfare, then when the wild animals come, he faces the dangers on your behalf, even to the point of giving up his own life. The false shepherds or hired hands will do the exact opposite. They will sacrifice you to protect themselves. That is a big difference. Jesus puts it like this in verse 11-13 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. ¹³The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

You see the false shepherd deceives the sheep when in fact he cares nothing for the sheep. Now you may ask how do sheep fall for false shepherds when those shepherds care nothing for their sheep? Well, the sad reality of life is that some sheep just want to believe the lies, because it suits them for the moment. It is kind of like you watching a magic trick. It is much more entertaining to believe that the magician is someone pulling the rabbit out of the hat than to think of the possibilities that maybe he is just pulling the rabbit out of the secret compartment somewhere but making it look like it is coming out of the hat. Some people just want to be fooled for the moment because at this moment it feels good. But remember this, false shepherds will fool you just long enough to steal your soul and destroy you for eternity. On the other hand, the good shepherd may not exactly be making you comfortable but look at what He is willing to do for you his sheep. He is willing to sacrifice everything for their sake. The good shepherds sacrifice is the third signature that helps his elect sheep recognize his voice.

Three unique traits of the good shepherd: his comes through the door- openly and with pure teaching, he is the door itself- the only means to get to green pasture, and finally he work is unique, he is willing to sacrifice it all for his sheep. Our task then is to ask ourselves, am I His elect sheep? Do I recognize his voice? If you do, follow him faithfully. And then go tell every wandering sheep out there about this amazing shepherd you are following. Let us pray.