

VGF Study Guide - 10.8.16 - John 10:1:10: Sheep and Shepherds

They follow him: they are gently led, not harshly driven. They follow him as the Captain of their salvation; they trust in the power of his arm to clear the way for them. All their trust on him is stayed; all their hope on him they lean. They follow him as their teacher; they call no man "Rabbi" under heaven, but Christ alone. - Spurgeon

Review

We begin chapter 10 where chapter 9 left off. This is after Jesus healed the man born blind. When that man was thrown out of the temple for challenging the religious leaders, Jesus met him and revealed himself to this man. Jesus states that he has come so “that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” The Pharisees near by question this and ask if they are blind as well. Jesus replies that the fact that they do not recognize their blindness shows that their guilt remains upon them.

Shepherds and Sheep

Jesus goes on to use a figure of speech as an indictment against the Pharisees and religious leaders. He uses the picture of sheep and a shepherd. Now, we have to understand the context of Eastern shepherding as opposed to the shepherding we are used to here in America. When we think of shepherding, we often think of someone driving the sheep along from behind and using dogs to herd the sheep. The shepherd is detached from the sheep to an extent. Shepherding in the East, and even in the highlands of Scotland and Ireland, is different. The sheep are led along from the front. The shepherd knows each sheep and the sheep know their master. They will follow along and listen to the shepherd. These sheep trust the shepherd and listen to him or her. It is within this culture that we need to understand the metaphor. Jesus tells the people that the thieves and robbers desire to enter into the sheepfold by some other way than by the door. A. W. Pink describes how the sheepfold would have been at that time. “In Palestine, which in the pastoral sections was infested with wild beasts, there was in each village a large sheepfold, which was the common property of the native farmers. This sheepfold was protected by a wall some ten or twelve feet high. When night fell, a number of different shepherds would lead their flocks up to the door of the fold, through which they passed, leaving them in the care of the porter, while they went home or sought lodging. At the door, the porter lay on guard through the night, ready to protect the sheep against thieves and robbers, or against wild animals which might scale the walls. In the morning the different shepherds returned. The porter would allow each one to enter through the door, calling by name the sheep which belonged to his flock. The sheep would respond to his voice, and he would lead them out to pasture.” It is within this context that Christ teaches that the sheep hear the voice of the shepherd and flee from strangers, thieves and robbers.

The people did not understand what Christ was talking about initially. He went on to explain further by using similar imagery. He says that he is the door of the sheep. Those who came before him were thieves and robbers, but those who were truly God’s sheep would not listen to them. The sheep know their shepherd and they enter through the door to find life. The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy, but Christ came to bring life.

Pharisees and Poor Shepherding

What Christ is doing here is indicting the Pharisees for looking out for their own interests rather than taking care of the sheep who are of the fold of God. He is drawing upon Old Testament imagery here. Throughout the Old Testament, God berates the leaders of Israel for not taking care of his flock, but

rather taking advantage of them for their own game. We see this in Ezekiel 34 where the Lord accuses the 'shepherds of Israel', the religious leaders of Ezekiel's day for disregarding the sacrificial system. They were slaughtering the best animals, clothing themselves with its wool, while neglecting to shepherd the people of God. 'You 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.' (Ezekiel 34:4) Carson points out, "If this background is primary, then in the context of Jesus' ministry the thieves and robbers are the religious leaders who are more interested in fleecing the sheep than in guiding, nurturing and guarding them. They are the leaders of ch. 9 who should have had ears to hear Jesus' claims and recognize him as the revelation from God, but who instead belittle and expel the sheep."

We will explore this theme of Christ being the good shepherd over the next few weeks, but Christ is clearly indicting the Pharisees for not being the shepherds that God called them to be as leaders. Christ has come to be the shepherd that the people needed. The Pharisees were leaders that came to steal and kill and destroy because they were of their father the devil. We will discuss these themes as time goes on, but today we will zero in on two application points from this text.

Intimacy

One thing that we see is that the shepherd cares deeply for his sheep. There is a degree of intimacy in being one of Christ's sheep. It isn't a distant relationship, but rather it is a close, caring relationship. The sheep aren't beaten by the shepherd, but rather they are loved and cared for. We see in the text that the sheep hear his voice and they are called by name. This is a mark of close relationship. They aren't yelled at generically but they are called by name! We see Christ doing this throughout his life. He called his sheep to him by name. We can see this with Matthew, Zacchaeus, Philip, and Lazarus. He called them by name and they respond to him. His sheep know his voice when they are called by name.

Following Jesus is an intimate and loving thing. We need not draw back from him in fear or shame, but we must rest in his love for us as believers - as his sheep. This means that we have access to him for him to meet our needs and guide us in paths of righteousness. He is the good shepherd.

Life Abundant

Christ came to give us life, not to give us death. Following Him is the most joyful and wonderful experience in the world. He guides us and keeps us safe. We would wander and hurt ourselves irreparably outside of Christ's amazing love as the Good Shepherd. We will flesh this theme out in the next few weeks.

Discussion Questions

Look up Ezekiel 34:1-16; Isaiah 56:9-12; Jeremiah 23:1-4; and Zc. 11 and read them aloud. What is God communicating to the leaders of Israel at that time?

How does John 10 relate to that? How is Jesus a better Shepherd than they?

Look up and read Psalm 80:1; Isaiah 40:11 and Psalm 23. What does this communicate to us about God? How is Jesus seen in these passages?