

## **The Sacrificial Love of the Good Shepherd**

"Note four things about Jesus the Good Shepherd. He owns the sheep; they belong to Him. He guards the sheep; He never abandons them when danger is near. He knows the sheep, knows them each by name and leads them out. And he lays down His life for the sheep, such is the measure of his love." ~ Billy Graham

### **The Lord Is My Shepherd**

The picture of God as a shepherd is a humbling one, for the occupation of a shepherd is a lowly one with no recognition, no fame. Who but the sheep know whether the shepherd is doing his duty? A shepherd is motivated by the love for his sheep that he bought and paid for. It can be a lonely job. He calls his sheep by name, but having a meaningful conversation with them might be a bit difficult! The shepherd's life is always in peril as he must protect his flock from the beasts in the wild (1 Samuel 17:34-36).

David wrote the 23rd Psalm and understood all the implications because he was a shepherd; the boy shepherd who became King of Israel. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who is the King of Kings.

#### **Reflection:**

Read Psalm 23 aloud alone or with your small group. List the provisions made for the sheep by the Shepherd. Then read John 10:11-18 and make another list. Compare the two lists.

### **Biblical Shepherds**

- Abel gave the proper sacrifice. *Now Abel was a keeper of sheep. . . Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering (Genesis 4:2, 4) By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks (Hebrews 11:4) . . . to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel (Hebrews 12:24).*
- Abraham had many livestock. God substituted the lamb (ram) for the sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22:8, 13).
- Jacob tended flocks of Laban 14 years – for Leah and for Rachel (Genesis 29:20, 30).
- Israel (Jacob) blessed Joseph and said, *"The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to*

*this day. . . (Genesis 48:15 NIV) and prophesied concerning Joseph, Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall. With bitterness archers attacked him; they shot at him with hostility. But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber, because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel (Genesis 49:22-24 NIV).*

- Moses was a shepherd in Midian for 40 years (Exodus 2:15-3:2).
- David's experience as a shepherd enabled him to kill Goliath and lead the people of Israel as king (Psalm 78:70-72, 1 Samuel 16:11-12, 2 Samuel 7:8).
- Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would reign on David's throne (Isaiah 9:6-7).
- Ezekiel described the reign of Jesus in the Davidic kingdom (Ezekiel 34, 37:24).
- Shepherds witnessed the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:8-14).

**Reflection:**

How did the shepherds of the Old Testament point to the coming of the Good Shepherd?

**The Good Shepherd, the Lamb of God**

Prayer: the people ask for the Shepherd's help: *Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock; you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth between Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. Awaken your might, come and save us. Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved (Psalm 80:1-3 NIV).* – God is called the Shepherd of Israel 80 times in the Bible.

The Lord God cares for His flock: *Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young (Isaiah 40:10-11).*

The Lamb gives His life for His sheep: *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth (Isaiah 53:6-7).*

The Lord will gather the scattered flock (Israel): Jeremiah 31:10-12

The Shepherd rejoices over one sheep. Matthew 18:12-14, Luke 15:1-7

The Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world. John 1:29

The Good Shepherd had compassion on His sheep. Matthew 9:36, Mark 6:34

The Good Shepherd is the Guardian of our souls. 1 Peter 2:25

The Chief Shepherd will bring reward to His under-shepherds. 1 Peter 5:1-4

The Good Shepherd offered Himself as the sacrificial Lamb, one sacrifice for sins of all time. Hebrew 10:12

The Good Shepherd is also The Resurrection and The Life. Hebrews 13:20

The Lamb is praised. Revelation 5:11-12

The Church, the Bride of Christ, is made ready for the Bridegroom, the Lamb. Revelation 19:7

The Lamb sits upon the throne. Revelation 22:1-4

### **Reflection:**

How is the will of God accomplished through the Good Shepherd? Who does all the work?

### **The Sheep**

Sheep go astray. Isaiah 53:5-7 Read Acts 8:25-35. Why do sheep go astray? Isaiah 43:25

Sinners regarded as lost sheep: Jeremiah 50:6, Ezekiel 34:6, Matthew 9:36, 15:24, 18:12

Sheep are in the midst of wolves: Matthew 10:16

The family of God compared to a flock: Psalm 78:52-53, 79:13, 100:3, Isaiah 40:11, Zechariah 9:16, Matthew 10:16, 26:31, Luke 12:32, Acts 20:29

Scattered by persecution and false shepherds: Jeremiah 23:2, Ezekiel 34:12, John 10:12, 16:32

Act as under-shepherds: Number 27:15-17, Jeremiah 3:15, 23:3-4, Acts 20:28-29, 1 Peter 5:2

Hear the voice of their shepherd: John 10:3-5, 14

## **Reflection:**

What is the role of the sheep?

### **False Shepherds/Hirelings**

Description: *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves (Matthew 7:15).*

Scatter the flock: *"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!" says the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: "You have scattered my flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings," says the Lord. But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, or shall they be lacking," says the Lord. "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness: A King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. (Jeremiah 23:1-6).*

Lead sheep astray: *My people have been lost sheep. Their shepherds have led them astray (Jeremiah 50:6).*

Prey upon flock: *And the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock." (Ezekiel 34:1-3).*

Forsake the sheep: *But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep (John 10:12-13).*

## **Reflection:**

How can the sheep recognize the false shepherds?

### **Separation of the Sheep and the Goats**

- Matthew 25:31-46. Who was Jesus' primary audience in this discourse? See

Matthew 24:3 and 26:1.

- As in the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30), the division will be made at judgment day. Is there any way to recognize the tares or the goats before that time? John 10:26, 1 John 4:1-3
- Is there a relationship between the thieves and robbers Jesus mentioned in John 10, false prophets mentioned throughout scripture (Matthew 7:15, 2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15), false Christs (Matthew 24:4-5, 11, 23-27) and the goats?

### **The Good Shepherd, The Under-Shepherd and The Sheep**

*Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Feed My lambs.' He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord' You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed My sheep.' (John 21:15-17).*

**Reflection:** Why do you think Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him? What did He say would be evidence of Peter's love? What does that say to you?

How does understanding what the Good Shepherd does for you affect the way you live?

*"Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb . . . for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes (Revelation 7:10, 17).*