

## Metaphors of Christ #8: Christ the Good Shepherd

Last time we talked about the sheepfold, and how Christ is the Door. He is the ONLY way to the Father, and the sheepfold can represent not only our salvation and eternal home, but more particularly, the place of rest that we can enjoy in this life. Heb. 4:11 – “Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. “

In John 10:1-18, Jesus is using two related metaphors about the sheepfold – he is both the Door, and the Good Shepherd. It can also be related back to the metaphor in chapter 1, where he is the Lamb of God. They are all true, but are showing different aspects of what he is, and has done for us.

### The Good Shepherd

What can we see about Jesus and his people, from this parable?

1. He knows his sheep, and calls them by name – 10:3
2. He goes before them – 10:4, 27
3. His sheep hear and know his voice, and follow him – 10:4
4. His sheep do not recognize the voice of strangers and so will not follow them – 10:5
5. Jesus gives his life for the sheep – 10:11, 15, 17-18
6. He gives to his sheep eternal life, and security – 10:28-30

### Why does he call himself the Good Shepherd?

We know that Jesus is the ultimate in “goodness” by which we mean such things as holiness, being without sin, being faithful through temptation, compassion, kindness, fairness and justice, etc. He is God incarnate, and is therefore the very antithesis of everything that is evil.

This general concept of goodness is appropriate to his being the Lamb of God, because the lamb had to be sinless and without blemish. I don’t believe that is the correct interpretation here, though. It seems more reasonable that he is the “Good” Shepherd, as compared to the hirelings and false shepherds (10:12-13).

False shepherds care not for the sheep, but for their own safety, and benefit. They see the sheep more as an investment that will provide them with wool, milk, meat, wealth, and perhaps status. Since their concern is really themselves, they will certainly not endanger themselves just to save a few sheep from a predator.

Jesus on the contrary, so loves the sheep that he would, and did, lay down his own life for them.

Why would Jesus do this? Some shepherds might die unwillingly, by being surprised by a vicious attack and mauled, but Jesus says he willingly lays down his life for the sheep. 10:15-18 Also Rom. 5:6-10.

Besides his willingness to die for the sheep, I believe he is the “Good” Shepherd because of the excellence of his care for his people, performing the same types of care given by shepherds to sheep.

How do shepherds care for sheep? They lead and guide them, bring them to pasture and water, protect them from thieves and predators, find safe places to rest, help ewes and lambs during birth, discipline as necessary, and sometimes do “search and rescue”. In all these things, Christ excels in his care for us. He is a better shepherd over his sheep than any human shepherd over real sheep.

### Knowing/Hearing/Following

1. Jesus knows his sheep and calls them by name  
He doesn’t just provide salvation for the world, and then wait around to see how many “take him up on the offer”. He calls us out and makes us a part of his flock. He knows each one of us as individuals, and calls us by name! In the future kingdom, we will even have new names (Rev. 2:17).
2. His sheep can hear and recognize his voice  
How do we learn his voice? By listening to him. If we never spend time in the word and prayer, how could we possibly hear his voice above the world’s distractions? How could we distinguish between his voice and all the others that are clamoring for our attention?
3. His sheep follow him  
It is not enough just to recognize his voice – when he speaks we need to get up and go.

#### 4. They will not follow a stranger

There are many “pied pipers” out there that are attempting to lead us to destruction. Vanity, lust, covetousness, envy, etc. Hollywood, universities, liberal journalism, talk shows, late night comedy, Facebook, Twitter, etc. God’s people should be able to recognize the siren’s call, plug their ears, and sail on.

#### “Other Sheep”

10:16 – “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also must I bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.”

This could partially mean that his flock would not just be those Jews living in the land of Israel, but that his flock would include people in far off lands (like those present on the day of Pentecost). Ultimately, it refers to God’s intention to call both Jews and Gentiles in one body. We Gentile believers were this “other flock”, but now he has made himself of twain (Jews and Gentiles) one new man. Eph. 2:11-19

#### Eternal Life and Security

Human shepherds provide everything the sheep need to live and thrive, but Jesus excels in that he gives his people eternal life. 10:28-29 His sheep have “eternal life”, they shall “never perish”, and “no man can pluck them out of my hand”. We have been given to the Son by the Father, and no one can pluck us out of the Father’s hand.

Jesus often used physical analogies. He told the woman at the well that she thirsted for physical water, but he offered better – his was the water that springeth up unto eternal life. While human shepherds preserve physical life in their flocks, Christ gives eternal life to his sheep.

#### He is the “Chief Shepherd”

1 P. 2:25 – Jesus is the “Shepherd and Bishop of your souls”. Pastor means “shepherd”. Bishop means literally, “overseer”. A shepherd is one who oversees the flock.

1 P. 5:1-4 – human pastors (elders, bishops) are to feed and care for the flock of God, and “when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”

In the OT, many people had such large flocks that they could not possibly watch them all. e.g., Abraham, Jacob, Job, or even Nabal. They had many shepherds, and would hire a “chief herdsman” to supervise all the shepherds.

While Jesus is the Chief Shepherd, he calls men to act as shepherds (“pastors”) over local groups of believers. They are called and gifted by God to exercise typical shepherd-like duties over specific groups of believers. They are to care for the flock and do all in their power to minister to the needs of the flock, and deliver them up safe in the end to the Chief Shepherd. At the end of their race (when they die or at Christ’s appearing), they will either receive rebuke for failing in their charge, or else rewards and crowns of glory.

A human shepherd can only know and adequately shepherd a relatively small number of sheep. The same can be said for church pastors. A man cannot personally pastor thousands of people. I don’t know what the limit is, but such a task is more than one man can do, or to which God would call him. But Jesus is not an ordinary shepherd. Being God, he can and does know each member of his kingdom as individuals, and each of them can know his loving care and guidance. We are to submit in love to these human shepherds God has put over us, but never to give to them the allegiance or obedience due to God alone. It is a joy to be in a church with a godly and faithful pastor, but all too often, people are forced to wonder if their pastor is a godly man, or an hireling.

#### Not Everyone is in His Flock

Even non-Christians may be familiar with, and quote Ps. 23 and Ps. 100 and think of themselves as being part of “the sheep of his pasture”. But the plain fact is that not everyone believes, and not everyone belongs to Christ. His sheep hear his voice and follow him. Jn. 10:26 says “But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep”.

If you cannot hear his voice, if you do not follow him, if you do not believe him, then you are not of his sheep, you do not have eternal life, and you are not “in his hand”. Jn. 3:16-18, 36

Does this apply to you? If so, then come to Christ NOW, while you have time and opportunity, and allow him to make you part of his flock.