

THE GREAT SHEPHERD JOHN 10:11-21

INTRO

TWO MEN WERE CALLED ON, IN A LARGE CLASSROOM TO RECITE THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM. ONE MAN WAS A PUBLISHED ORATOR TRAINED IN SPEECH TECHNIQUE AND DRAMA. HE REPEATED THE PSALM IN A POWERFUL WAY. WHEN HE FINISHED, THE AUDIENCE CHEERED AND EVEN ASKED FOR AN ENCORE THAT THEY MIGHT HEAR HIS WONDERFUL VOICE AGAIN.

THEN THE OTHER MAN, WHO WAS MUCH OLDER, REPEATED THE SAME WORDS-**“THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD, I SHALL NOT BE IN WANT. HE MAKES ME LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES, HE LEADS ME BESIDE QUIET WATERS, HE RESTORES MY SOUL. HE GUIDES ME IN PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR HIS NAME’S SAKE. EVEN THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH, I WILL FEAR NO EVIL, FOR YOU ARE WITH ME. YOUR ROD AND STAFF, THEY COMFORT ME.**

YOU PREPARE A TABLE BEFORE ME IN THE PRESENCE OF MY ENEMIES. YOU ANOINT MY HEAD WITH OIL, MY CUP OVERFLOWS. SURELY GOODNESS AND LOVE WILL FOLLOW ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE, AND I WILL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOREVER.”

THE OLDER MAN FINISHED; BUT NO SOUND CAME FROM THE LARGE CLASS. THERE WAS NO APPLAUSE. INSTEAD, PEOPLE SAT IN A DEEP MOOD OF DEVOTION AND PRAYER.

THEN THE FIRST MAN, THE ORATOR, STOOD TO HIS FEET. “I HAVE A CONFESSION TO MAKE,” HE SAID. “THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WHAT YOU JUST HEARD FROM MY OLD FRIEND, AND WHAT YOU HAVE HEARD FROM ME IS THIS: I KNOW THE PSALM, MY FRIEND KNOWS THE SHEPHERD.”

THIS IS A VERY INTERESTING OBSERVATION BY THIS ORATOR. THERE ARE MANY CHURCH PEOPLE THAT DEFINITELY CAN QUOTE SCRIPTURE, BUT THERE IS A DEFINITE DIFFERENCE IN RECITING SCRIPTURE AND TRULY KNOWING THE SHEPHERD.

AS I BRING THE MESSAGE THIS MORNING, I WANT EACH OF US, MYSELF INCLUDED, TO ASK OURSELVES THIS VERY IMPORTANT QUESTION, “DO I REALLY KNOW THE SHEPHERD?” WE’RE GOING TO BE LOOKING AT THE PASSAGE IN JOHN CHAPTER 10 WHERE JESUS IDENTIFIES HIMSELF AS “THE GREAT SHEPHERD.”

IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN, THE AUTHOR PAINTS MANY IMAGES OF WHO JESUS WAS. JOHN, IN BOTH HIS GOSPEL AND ESPECIALLY THE BOOK OF REVELATION USES THE NUMBER SEVEN, WHICH MEANS COMPLETENESS, MANY TIMES OVER TO DESCRIBE THINGS JESUS SAID AND THINGS JOHN SAW THROUGH HIS VISIONS.

I WOULD CHALLENGE US THIS MORNING TO TAKE A LOOK AT ALL OF THE SEVEN "I AM" STATEMENTS THAT JESUS CLAIMED IN THE BOOK OF JOHN AND TO RECOGNIZE WHAT JESUS MEANT BY EACH OF THESE STATEMENTS.

IN SAYING EACH OF THE "I AM" STATEMENTS, JESUS WAS CLAIMING TO BE GOD. IN EXODUS CHAPTER THREE, WE READ THE ACCOUNT OF MOSES BEING CALLED BY GOD THROUGH THE BURNING BUSH. REMEMBER, THE BUSH WAS LIT UP, ON FIRE, BUT WASN'T BEING CONSUMED BY THE FIRE.

WHEN MOSES QUESTIONED GOD AS TO HIS NAME, GOD IDENTIFIED HIMSELF AS "I AM." THIS WAS THE NAME MOSES WOULD GIVE THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL TO LET THEM KNOW WHO THEIR DELIVERER OUT OF EGYPT WAS. THROUGHOUT THE OLD TESTAMENT, THE WORDS "I AM" BECAME DIRECTLY ASSOCIATED WITH GOD.

JESUS' USE OF THESE WORDS SPEAKING OF HIMSELF CAUSED SOME PEOPLE TO QUESTION WHETHER HE TRULY WAS GOD. FOR OTHERS, THIS WAS BLASPHEMOUS AGAINST GOD HIMSELF. WE ARE ONLY GOING TO FOCUS ON ONE OF JESUS' "I AM" STATEMENTS, BUT I WOULD LIKE FOR YOU TO WRITE THE OTHERS DOWN AND THEN SET ASIDE A TIME TO LOOK UP EACH OF THEM AND THINK ABOUT WHAT THEY MEAN.

THE "I AM" STATEMENTS FOUND IN JOHN ARE **"I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE" IN JOHN 6:32, "I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD" IN 8:12 AND AGAIN IN 9:5, "I AM THE GATE" IN 10: 7 AND 9, "I AM THE GREAT SHEPHERD" IN 10: 11 AND 14, "I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE" IN JOHN 11:25, "I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE" IN JOHN 14:6, AND "I AM THE VINE" IN JOHN 15: 1 AND 5.**

FOR OUR STUDY THIS MORNING, I WANT TO FOCUS ON JESUS SAYING HE IS THE GREAT SHEPHERD, FOUND IN JOHN 10:11-21. PRIOR TO SAYING THIS, YOU WILL NOTICE AT THE BEGINNING OF CHAPTER TEN, JESUS MAKES ANOTHER CLAIM ABOUT HIMSELF. LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT IT.

JOHN 10: 1-10

JESUS USES THE IMAGERY OF A SHEEPFOLD TO ILLUSTRATE HIS POINTS. THIS ILLUSTRATION WOULD HAVE BEEN FAMILIAR WITH JESUS' AUDIENCE BECAUSE SHEPHERDS WERE COMMONPLACE THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL. THE VERY FIRST PERSON THE BIBLE RECORDS AS A SHEPHERD TAKES US BACK TO THE TIME AFTER GOD'S CREATION. IN GENESIS 4, WE HAVE THE STORY OF CAIN AND ABEL. VERSES 2-3 TELL OF OFFERINGS BOTH BROTHERS BROUGHT BEFORE THE LORD, CAIN'S BEING FRUITS OF THE SOIL, AND ABEL'S FAT PORTIONS FROM SOME OF THE FIRSTBORN OF HIS FLOCK.

AFTER NOAH AND THE FLOOD, WE ARE INTRODUCED TO ANOTHER SHEPHERD WHO PLAYED A MAJOR PART IN ISRAEL'S HISTORY, ABRAHAM. IN GENESIS 13, IT SAYS THAT ABRAM WAS VERY WEALTHY AND WAS WITH HIS NEPHEW LOT, WHO ALSO HAD FLOCKS OF SHEEP. AND ABRAM'S COMPANY BEGAN HAVING DIFFICULTIES WITH LOT'S COMPANY TO THE POINT, THAT BOTH MEN DECIDED IT BEST TO GO IN OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS. ABRAHAM PASSED ON MANY OF HIS POSSESSIONS, INCLUDING SHEEP, TO HIS SON ISAAC. AND ABRAHAM'S GRANDSON, JACOB, ALSO WAS A SHEPHERD.

ALTHOUGH SHEPHERDING WAS A TRADE THAT WAS WIDELY DONE, WE LEARN AT THE END OF GENESIS 46, THAT THE EGYPTIANS DETESTED SHEPHERDS. JOSEPH TELLS HIS BROTHERS THIS IN VERSES 31-33.

IN EXODUS, WE READ HOW MOSES WAS A SHEPHERD. NOT ONLY WAS MOSES A SHEPHERD OF SHEEP, BUT MOSES WOULD GO ON TO BE THE FIRST SHEPHERD OVER ALL OF GOD'S PEOPLE. MOSES WOULDN'T SIMPLY LEAD GOD'S PEOPLE, MANY TIMES HE WAS THERE MEDIATOR, MILITARY LEADER AND JUDGE OVER THEIR DISPUTES. BEFORE HE WOULD BECOME GOD'S SHEPHERD, HE WOULD SPEND 40 YEARS LEARNING WHAT IT MEANT TO SHEPHERD A FLOCK OF SHEEP.

ALL OF THE ISRAELITES WERE SHEPHERDS. YOU WILL REMEMBER THAT THE TRIBES OF REUBEN, GAD AND MANASSEH WANTED THE LAND EAST OF CANAAN, BECAUSE THAT LAND WAS DEEMED FAVORABLE FOR THEIR FLOCKS AND HERDS.

KING DAVID ALSO WAS A SHEPHERD. HE TOLD SAUL BEFORE GOING OUT TO FIGHT GOLIATH HOW HE MANAGED TO KILL A LION AND A BEAR TO SAVE THE SHEEP IN HIS FLOCK. (1 **SAMUEL 17:34-35**)

AND THE PROPHET AMOS SAID THAT GOD TOOK HIS FROM HIS FLOCKS TO GO AND PROPHECY AGAINST ISRAEL. **(AMOS 7: 14)**

GOD HIMSELF THROUGH MANY OF THE PSALMS WAS CALLED THE "SHEPHERD OF ISRAEL."

IN THE CHRISTMAS STORY WE READ HOW SHEPHERDS WENT TO SEE THE CHRIST CHILD USING A STAR AS THEIR GUIDE. ISN'T IT INTERESTING THAT THESE SHEPHERDS WERE TOLD OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS AND THEY LOOKED UPON THE GREAT SHEPHERD HIMSELF.

THE NEW TESTAMENT ALSO IDENTIFIES THE ELDERS OF THE CHURCH AS SHEPHERDS, ESPECIALLY IN 1 PETER 5. VERSE 2 SAYS, "**BE SHEPHERDS OF GOD'S FLOCK, THAT IS IN YOUR CARE, SERVING AS OVERSEERS.**" NOTICE THAT THE FLOCK IS IDENTIFIED AS GOD'S. GOD ENTRUSTS THE FLOCK TO THE ELDERS OF THE CHURCH. THEY ARE GIVEN WITH A RESPONSIBILITY UNTO GOD HIMSELF.

THERE ARE MANY EXAMPLES IN SCRIPTURES, WHICH TALK ABOUT SHEPHERDS. MOST OF THEM ARE GOOD EXAMPLES, BUT THERE ARE SOME THAT AREN'T, SUCH AS THOSE DESCRIBED IN EZEKIEL 34. JESUS CLAIMED TO BE THE GOOD SHEPHERD IN JOHN 10.

JESUS SAYS IN JOHN 10: 7, JESUS SAID THAT HE WAS THE GATE FOR THE SHEEP. A SHEEP PEN HAD AN ENCLOSURE USUALLY WITH ONLY ONE ENTRANCE. THE SHEPHERD WOULD LITERALLY BECOME THE DOOR IN AN EFFORT TO PROTECT THE SHEEP. THIS IS WHAT JESUS IS DESCRIBING. HE SAYS THAT ALL THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE HIM, WERE THIEVES AND ROBBERS. THE SHEPHERDS GOD HAD CALLED TO LEAD HIS PEOPLE WERE BASICALLY HIRED HELP. THEY SAW THE JOB ONLY AS A WAGE. THEY WERE ONLY INTERESTED IN THEMSELVES. JESUS LOOKS AFTER THE SHEEP AND KEEPS THEM FROM HARM. HE CARES AND LOVES EACH SHEEP IN HIS FOLD. HE STANDS AS THE DOOR TO KEEP ANY SHEEP FROM RUNNING OUT INTO DANGER ON HIS OR HER OWN. HE SAYS IN VERSE 9, "**I AM THE GATE; WHOEVER ENTERS THROUGH ME WILL BE SAVED. HE WILL COME IN AND GO OUT, AND FIND PASTURE.**"

WHAT AN IMAGE THIS DESCRIBES OF THE BLESSING FOUND IN CHRIST.

NOW LOOK AT WHAT FOLLOWS: **JOHN 10: 11-13**

HERE JESUS CONTRASTS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HIMSELF AND THE HIRED HANDS. THE HIRED HANDS DON'T INTIMATELY KNOW THE SHEEP, SO WHEN DANGER COMES, THEY SAVE THEMSELVES. THEY MIGHT RISK SOME DANGER, BUT THEY EXPECT TO COME OUT ALIVE.

NOT SO WITH THE GOOD SHEPHERD, WHO IS WILLING TO LAY DOWN HIS LIFE IN PLACE OF THE SHEEP. EVERY WEEK, WE OBSERVE THE LORD'S SACRIFICE WHICH WAS MADE ON OUR BEHALF. JESUS PROVED HE WAS THE GOOD SHEPHERD BECAUSE HE SAW THAT HIS SHEEP WERE IN DANGER AND DIDN'T RUN AWAY. HE DID EVERYTHING HE COULD IN HIS POWER TO SAVE THEM.

THE BIBLE SAYS MANY TIMES IN SCRIPTURE, THAT PEOPLE ARE LIKE WAYWARD SHEEP, PRONE TO GO THEIR OWN WAY.

CONSIDER TWO PASSAGES IN ISAIAH:

ISAIAH 59:2 "BUT YOUR INIQUITIES HAVE SEPARATED YOU FROM YOUR GOD; YOUR SINS HAVE HIDDEN HIS FACE FROM YOU, SO THAT HE WILL NOT HEAR."

AND ISAIAH 53:6 "WE ALL, LIKE SHEEP, HAVE GONE ASTRAY EACH TO HIS OWN WAY. AND THE LORD HAS LAID ON HIM THE INIQUITY OF US ALL."

THIS INIQUITY, JESUS WILLINGLY PAID FOR WITH HIS LIFE. HE DIDN'T RUN AWAY AS A HIRED HAND WOULD DO. WHEN WE THINK OF THE TOTALITY WITH WHICH HIS DEATH CAME, THE WHIPPING, THE CROWN OF THORNS, THE SPITTING, THE MOCKING AND INEVITABLY BEING NAILED TO THE CROSS-, WE START TO APPRECIATE JESUS BEING THE GOOD SHEPHERD THAT HE CLAIMED TO BE.

JOHN 10: 14-18

THIS IS A VERY IMPORTANT PASSAGE IN SCRIPTURE. JESUS SAYS "I KNOW THE SHEEP AND THE SHEEP KNOW ME." WHEN SPEAKING OF HIMSELF AS THE GATE, JESUS INDICATED THAT THE SHEEP KNEW HIS VOICE. HE SAYS THAT THE SHEEP WOULD RUN AWAY AT A STRANGERS VOICE, BUT THEY FOLLOW THE VOICE THEY KNOW.

A MAN IN AUSTRALIA WAS ARRESTED AND CHARGES WITH STEALING A SHEEP. BUT HE EMPHATICALLY CLAIMED THAT IT WAS ONE OF HIS OWN THAT HAD BEEN MISSING FOR MANY DAYS. WHEN THE CASE WENT TO COURT, THE JUDGE WAS PUZZLED, NOT KNOWING HOW TO DECIDE THE MATTER. THEN HE ORDERED THE PLAINTIFF TO STEP OUTSIDE AND CALL THE ANIMAL. THE SHEEP MADE NO RESPONSE EXCEPT TO RAISE ITS HEAD AND LOOK FRIGHTENED.

THE JUDGE THEN INSTRUCTED THE DEFENDANT TO GO TO THE COURTYARD AND CALL THE SHEEP. WHEN THE ACCUSED MAN BEGAN TO MAKE HIS DISTINCTIVE CALL, THE SHEEP BOUNDED TOWARD THE DOOR. IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT HE RECOGNIZED THE FAMILIAR VOICE OF HIS MASTER. "HIS SHEEP KNOWS HIM," SAID THE JUDGE. "CASE DISMISSED."

THIS STORY TAKES US BACK TO THE VERY QUESTION I ASKED THIS MORNING. "DO I REALLY KNOW THE SHEPHERD?" DO WE RECOGNIZE HIS VOICE WHEN HE SPEAKS?

EVERY DAY OF OUR LIVES, WE GET BOMBARDED BY MANY VOICES. WE HEAR THE VOICES OF THOSE AROUND US, SUCH AS OUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS. WE HEAR THE VOICES OF THOSE WE WORK WITH AND OTHERS WE COME IN CONTACT WITH.

WE HEAR THE VOICES OF THOSE ON OUR TELEVISION SETS AND RADIO STATION, THE MUSIC WE LISTEN TO. WE HEAR THE VOICES OF OUR OWN EMOTIONS THAT MOST OFTEN DICTATE OUR COURSES IN LIFE.

SOMETIMES THE VOICES WE HEAR TELL US TO DO THINGS WE KNOW ARE WRONG. SOMETIMES, THE VOICES AROUND US TELL US WHAT WE WANT TO HEAR AND NOT WHAT WE NEED TO HEAR.

WITH ALL OF THE CLUTTER THAT PRESENTS ITSELF AROUND US, DO WE KNOW THE VOICE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD? IS IT A VOICE THAT WE RECOGNIZE? WE CAN GET PULLED IN SO MANY DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS THAT LEAD US DOWN PATHS WE OUGHT NOT TO GO. AND WHEN THE SHEPHERD CALLS US, DO WE FOLLOW AT THE SOUND OF HIS VOICE OR DO WE NOT RECOGNIZE THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE?

JESUS SAYS ABOUT HIS SHEEP, IN VERSE 3-4, **"THE WATCHMEN OPENS THE GATE FOR HIM, AND THE SHEEP LISTEN TO HIS VOICE. HE CALLS HIS OWN SHEEP BY NAME AND LEADS THEM OUT. WHEN HE HAS BROUGHT OUT ALL HIS OWN, HE GOES AHEAD OF THEM, AND HIS SHEEP FOLLOW HIM BECAUSE THEY KNOW HIS VOICE."**

JESUS SPEAKS OF THE BOND THAT EXISTS BETWEEN THE SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP. THEY KNOW HIM AND WILL NOT FOLLOW ANOTHER, AND THE SHEPHERD KNOWS HIS SHEEP. THE INDIVIDUAL SHEEP MAY LOOK ALIKE TO AN UNTRAINED EYE, BUT NOTICE THAT THE GOOD SHEPHERD CALLS HIS OWN SHEP BY NAME. HE KNOWS EACH OF HIS SHEEP INTIMATELY AND INTRICATELY. HE KNOWS THE PARTS THAT MAKE US UNIQUE. HE KNOWS WHAT EACH SHEEPS STRENGTHS AND

WEAKNESSES ARE. THE GOOD SHEPHERDS KNOWS EVERY JOY AND EVERY BURDEN. HE STANDS READY TO HELP IN OUR TIMES OF NEED.

BUT THERE ARE SHEEP THAT ARE NOT IN THE SHEEP PEN THAT NEED TO BE. SOME MAY HAVE LEFT THE PEN AND ARE LOST WHILE OTHERS HAVE NEVER BEEN IN THE PEN AT ALL. JESUS SAYS, **“I MUST BRING THEM ALSO. THEY TOO WILL LISTEN TO MY VOICE, AND THERE SHALL BE ONE FLOCK AND ONE SHEPHERD.”**

I CAN'T HELP BUT RECALL TO MIND THE PARABLE JESUS TELLS IN MATTHEW 18:10-14.

MATTHEW 18: 10-14

JESUS SAYS THERE IS MUCH REJOICING OVER FINDING THE LOST SHEEP AND BRINGING IT HOME THAN THE NINETY-NINE WHO NEVER LEFT THE FOLD. AND IT'S NOT BECAUSE THE NINETY-NINE FAITHFUL SHEEP AREN'T AS IMPORTANT, BUT THE GOOD SHEPHERD LOVES AND CARES SO DEEPLY FOR HIS SHEEP THAT IF ANY OF THEM BE LOST, HE WANTS TO FIND THEM AND BRING THEM HOME.

BUT SADLY, MANY STILL DON'T KNOW THE VOICE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD. WHAT'S EVEN MORE SAD IS THAT MANY WITHIN THE CHURCH DON'T KNOW HIS VOICE. IT IS SO EASY TO COME TO CHURCH AND WEAR OUR CHRISTIAN MASKS AND NEVER TRULY KNOW THE LORD. IT'S SO EASY TO RESPOND TO THE MANY VOICES WE HEAR THROUGHOUT OUR DAYS AND WEEKS AND THEN WE COME TO CHURCH IN HOPES OF JUSTIFYING OURSELVES INSTEAD OF REACHING A POINT OF HUMILITY AND REPENTANCE.

WHEN JESUS CLAIMED TO BE THE GATE AND THE GOOD SHEPHERD, HE WAS MET WITH DIFFERENT OPINIONS AS WELL. LOOK AT VERSES 19-20.

JOHN 10: 19-20

WHICH SIDE OF THE FENCE ARE YOU AND I THIS MORNING? ARE WE EAGERLY LISTENING AND HEARING THE VOICE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD? DO WE FOLLOW HIS VOICE WHEN WE HEAR IT?

OR DO WE MAKE FOLLOWING JESUS A GAME THAT WE PLAY. SOMETHING WE PRETEND, BUT IN TRUTH WE NEITHER RESPOND TO HIS VOICE NOR FOLLOW HIM?

IT MIGHT BEAR HEARING AGAIN THE WORDS OF JESUS AS HE INDICATES THE FINAL OUTCOME OF THOSE WHO OBEY HIM AND THOSE THAT DON'T. HE VIVIDLY TELLS OF THIS IN MATTHEW 25:31-46.

MATTHEW 25: 31-46.

INVITATION