

The Good Shepherd

John 10:14 I am the good shepherd; and I know my sheep, and am known by My own.
Sunday, April 25, 2021 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- Introduction

Lloyd Ogilvie, the former Chaplain of the Senate and Pastor of Hollywood Presbyterian Church tells of being in the Middle East and watching a group of shepherds walk a large flock down a hillside one evening. As they got nearer each man called to his sheep and out of this huge mass the sheep moved to follow the voice they knew. They then led them into their pen and with a fire near the doorway settled down, literally sleeping in front of the opening, just as Jesus describes. The contrast with the shepherd is even greater for the shepherd knows each sheep by name and his sheep follow his voice alone.*

- Set the stage

Jesus, in His famous speech in John 10, describes Himself as the Good Shepherd who knows His sheep, who leads them and will lay down His life for them. He is the one who came that people may have life and have life abundantly. The image evokes a gentle leader of a flock of sheep, who trust Him. I believe that to be an accurate image, but there is more to it than that.

- meaning of shepherd

The word for "shepherd" literally means "feeder" or "one who supplies food". In addition to people who care for sheep as a career, the title applies also to political and religious leaders. It is a title taken up by God as well.

- Ezekiel 34:11-17

An example of the depth of meaning behind the phrase is the context in which God Himself claims the title of "shepherd" of Israel. Ezekiel prophesies the return of Jews scattered throughout the nation back to Israel and also that He will judge; judge the enemies of His people and also between those people who have taken unfair advantage over those weaker than them. This theme of judgment as well as care runs throughout the Scriptures along the theme of the Lord as a Good Shepherd who knows His followers and they know Him.

One example is the Old Testament rebellion of the clan of Korah against Moses in Numbers. Moses respond to their opposition to him by suggesting that they both stand before the Lord, prepared to lead the people in worship and let the Lord signal who He has chosen. This is how the account follows: Numbers 16:4-7 "So when Moses heard it, he fell on his face; and he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, Tomorrow morning the Lord will show who is His and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to Him. That one whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him, Do this: Take censers, Korah and all your company; put fire in them and put incense in them before the Lord tomorrow, and it shall be that the man whom the Lord chooses is the holy one. You take too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi!"

It is in His choosing that the Lord reveals that as Good Shepherd, He has authority over and the right to judge His sheep. Moses is affirmed and things do not go well for the clan of Korah. All this adds to the concept of the Good Shepherd being the kind one who watches over and feeds His flock. He does that, but there is more to being a Good Shepherd than that.

- Application

The application, I believe, is found in the hope and prayer offered at the end of the book of Hebrews, which says: (13:20-21) "Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus

from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." While we are proactive in improving ourselves as best we can, we recognize that making us complete-mature-and active in all that we are put on this earth to do, is under the authority of the Good Shepherd, so make this verse the subject of your prayers when you can.

- Conclusion

Jesus is, famously, the Good Shepherd, and we rightly enjoy the comforting vision of a gentle leader who can be trusted by us and others in His flock. But Shepherd is also a word of power, judgment and authority used to describe nation leaders and God Himself. He know who are truly His and who are not, and He is the ruler of our souls and the leader of our destinies to whom we can look for guidance and strength in order to live the best of all possible lives.

* <https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/73914/good-shepherd-by-sermon-central>