

INTRODUCTION

I'm sure there are pet lovers among us. Taking care of an animal is a lot of work. You have to feed it, clean it and take it to the vet when it is sick. Last week my wife helped take care of someone's dog when its masters were gone. Actually the dog belongs to another family that is now doing mission work overseas. My wife stayed in the house with the dog for those few nights. When you live with a dog, you have to follow its schedule. The dog nudged my wife to play outside even it was late at night. He also woke her up before sunrise, ready for his morning walk. Things were okay for the first few days. Then one day the dog sneaked through a gate when no one was home. He went into the master's bedroom and treated it as his bathroom. He did his things at a few different spots to mark his territory. He was ready to conquer the house when his masters were away. When my wife returned, she was so mad that she ordered the dog to go back to his couch. He dared not move because he knew he was in deep trouble. My wife then scrubbed the carpet and deodorized the area. After a week of dog-sitting was over my wife firmly told me that she would never have a dog. Ownership of an animal comes with responsibility. A good master has to be a good caretaker as well. In the Bible, God uses the analogy of shepherd and sheep to describe His relationship with us. Why sheep? Let's do a quick "sheepeology" to understand the nature of sheep. There are not many good things to say about them. Sheep are timid and can easily panic. Without any claw, sharp teeth or the ability to dash they do not have any means to defend themselves against predators. So they tend to gather in a herd to get a sense of security. The problem is, they may get into danger if they blindly follow the wrong leader. Sheep are also clumsy animals. A sheep needs help to get up if it flips over on its back. Otherwise, it will just lie there and starve to death. In sum, sheep have to depend on their shepherd to survive. No wonder the Bible portrays God as a shepherd. We are like sheep that can do dumb things and wander with the wrong crowd. We need a shepherd to protect us and provide for our needs. In John chapter 10 Jesus told His audience that He was the Good Shepherd. He cared for the well-being of His sheep. As Christians we can never go independent. But when we are in God's hands we will be in good hands.

EXPLANATION

1. Jesus is Our Protector 耶穌是保護者

First of all, Jesus told us that He is our protector. Jesus said in **verses 7 and 9** that He is the gate of the sheep pen. At that time a shepherd stood at the gate when his sheep came back in the evening. He checked to make sure that every sheep was alright. He pulled aside any sheep with a bruised nose or crippled leg for treatment. After he was done checking his flock he closed the gate. When night fell the shepherd slept by the gate to ensure that no stranger or wild animal could get in to harm the sheep. Therefore, the shepherd literally became the gate for his sheep. He protected his sheep by keeping enemies out and keeping the sheep in.

A. He Keeps Enemies Out 祂排除敵人

Jesus said in **verse 1**: “I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.” A thief or robber will not come in through the gate because the shepherd is right there to protect his sheep. Why do these intruders try to sneak in? Jesus told us in the first half of **verse 10**: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy...” These enemies took advantage of the sheep for their own gain. In the Old Testament false prophets promised peace when there was no peace but wars and suffering. There were revolutionists in Jesus’ time who led people to try to overthrow the Roman government by force. These thieves had their own agendas. We can also think of some political and religious leaders in modern history who led people astray. They painted a picture of their utopia and persuaded people to follow their dream. The results were devastation and death. From a spiritual standpoint Satan is the culprit behind every human scheme that leads people away from God. **1 Peter 5:8** tells us his goal: Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Jesus is the gate that protects us from enemies. We are safe in Him. At my previous home the next door owner rented his property for people to live there. Every year or two there would be new tenants. At one time the renters had two dogs that were very loyal to their owners. So much so that those pets treated me like their enemy. Every time when I came home they were not quite friendly to me. Fortunately, there was a fence between my house and theirs. The gate at the fence kept me from entering my neighbors’ property. The gate also prevented the dogs from running to me. Similarly, Jesus is the gate that screens out spiritual enemies. Nowadays our enemies use various ways to attack us and trick us. For example, there are tons of information on the internet. Some are beneficial to our spiritual life while others can cause harm to us. How can we the difference? We need to use God’s Word as a gate to screen it. Anything that does not have Biblical foundation may only be based on human wisdom. We also need to discern if the people who put together the information intend to draw us closer to God or draw us away from Him.

B. He Keeps Sheep In 祂包圍羊群

A gate does not only keeps the enemies out, it also keeps the sheep in. Jesus told us in **verse 9**: “I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.” A shepherd will only allow his own sheep to enter the gate. He will also ensure the well-being of his sheep. Similarly, only those who enter through Jesus belong to Him. Jesus said His sheep would be saved and be fed. Here the word “save” may be understood as safety. At the same time, the context tells us that Jesus was also talking about salvation of our souls. Jesus does not only save His sheep, He will also feed them with spiritual food, which is the Word of God. Jesus said in the second half of **verse 10**: “...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” This abundant life is not about health or material possession. It is about an intimate relationship with Jesus. He keeps us inside the fold to make sure that we are under His constant care. As humans we do not like to be bound by rules. I used to know a young man who had genuine interest to pursue the Christian faith. However, nothing could convince him to become a believer. He said to me: “Why be constrained by all the requirements in the Bible when I can live freely?” I knew this guy very well. So I was being blunt in my reply: “You may think that you live like a freeman. But in God’s eyes you are a homeless orphan.” Praise to God that finally he accepted Christ. Jesus keeps us in His fold to protect us. There is no such thing as a wild sheep. That bring us to an important question: how can we become the sheep of Jesus? Jesus told us that He is the only gate to His pen. He made it explicit in **14:6** of the same book: Jesus answered, “I

am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” The NIV Bible accurately translated the Greek text by adding a definite article “the” to denote that Jesus is the only way, the only truth and the only life that leads to the Heavenly Father. Some people may think that every main road leads to Rome, and all the religious beliefs are the same. But Jesus clearly told us that there is no other way except Him who can take us to the Father. Think about it this way: who makes the rule to permit people to come into my house? It is me, the owner of the home. Similarly, who decides whether person A or B can enter into heaven? It is not up to us to decide. It is God, the owner of heaven, who makes the call. Jesus is the gate-keeper of heaven. If you do not enter through Jesus you will never get there.

2. Jesus is Our Provider 耶穌是供應者

When we are in God’s hands we will be in good hands. Jesus is the gate and our Protector. Moreover, in the passage Jesus told us that He is our Provider. In both **verses 11 and 14** Jesus described Himself as the Good Shepherd. How does the Good Shepherd provide for His sheep? Jesus leads His sheep and He also lays down His life for them.

A. He Leads His Sheep 祂引領羊群

How does Jesus lead His sheep? Look at **verses 3-4**: 3 “The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.” Jesus leads His sheep by His voice. Jesus’ audience fully understood what He meant. Nowadays, people use shepherd dogs to tend their sheep. The dogs run to the left and right to contain the sheep and guide the flock to the right path. But in Jesus’ time the shepherds led the sheep by their voices. At that time it was not unusual for a few shepherds to share the same pen for their sheep. How did the shepherd know which sheep belonged to whom? In the morning when a shepherd was about to gather his sheep he called out their names. He might say: “Let’s go Big Ears. Come, Black Spots. When the sheep recognize their shepherd’s voice they will follow his order. What if a stranger calls their names? Jesus told us in **verse 5**: “But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” No sheep will follow me if I go into the fold and yell: “Come to papa, Short Legs. I’m taking you to the butcher to get some meat for my steam-pot tonight.” There is an intimate relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. Jesus described in **verse 14**: “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.” Here the word “know” refers to the kind of knowledge developed through relationship. You may know something about me: things like where I was from, which school I attended or my hobbies. But my family members know me way more than you do. It is because we live under the same roof and they have a close relationship with me. But above all, the Lord knows me more deeply than any human being because He is my Shepherd. God told His people in **Isaiah 49:15-16**: 15 “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! 16 See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.” It is unthinkable for a mom to forget her own baby. Sadly, there are a lot of such “moms.” Otherwise, there will not be so many abortions and orphans. But God said He engraved the names of His children on His hands. To God you are not a random number like a social security number. The Good Shepherd treats you as His precious sheep! He knows you by name,

and He knows your struggles. But do you recognize His voice, and do you follow His voice? God can surely speak through the cloud with an audible voice: “Johnny, I’m sending you to a seminary.” But He does not necessarily need to communicate with us that way. The Bible is called God’s Word for a reason. It is a collection of His messages conveyed through the Bible authors. The Bible is not a moral book that helps us live a better life, nor does it contains secret codes that no one can comprehend. God gives us the Bible for us to read, understand and follow.

B. He Lays Down His Life 祂為羊捨己

The Good Shepherd does not only lead by His voice, He also lays down His life for His sheep. In both **verses 11 and 15** Jesus told us that He lays down His life for His sheep. Under what circumstances did Jesus lay down His life for His sheep? Jesus described a situation in **verses 12-13**: 12 “The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.” When a wolf is coming to harm the sheep an ordinary employee would flee for his own life. However, the Good Shepherd is willing to fight with the wild beast to save His sheep. To be killed by a wolf would be considered an accident. No shepherd would intentionally die for his sheep by giving up his life to a wolf. Only our Good Shepherd voluntarily laid down His life for His sheep. Jesus elaborated in **verse 18**: “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.” Jesus obeyed the Father’s will to die for His sheep. Every now and then we read heroic stories in the news where people put their own lives on the line to save others. They may be soldiers, policemen, fire-fighters or simply ordinary citizens. At the Las Vegas shooting three weeks ago there were multiple accounts where husbands used themselves as human shields to protect their wives from the bullets. Some of those brave men died at the scene. Many others ignored the continuous gun-fire but went in and out of the war zone to carry injured people to safe places. Their selfless acts saved many lives. However, Jesus’ death on the cross does not belong to the same category. Jesus did not die to set up an example of love for us to learn from. That is not the reason for His death. Paul said in **2 Corinthians 5:21**: God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Theologians called it “substitutional atonement.” Jesus went to the cross to substitute us for the death penalty we deserve. The Good Shepherd laid down His life to save us. There is nothing we can offer to exchange for Jesus’ sacrifice. We can only love Him back. Recently, I thanked a sister who has been faithfully serving in the church. She said to me: “Christ died for us. It’s the least we can do.” That is the right attitude to repay Him who laid down His life for us.

CONCLUSION

When we are in God’s hands we will be in good hands. Is Jesus your shepherd? To accept Jesus as your shepherd first you have to admit that you are a lost sheep. Jesus redeemed you from sin through the cross. If you open your heart to accept Jesus by faith, and willing to follow Him the rest of your life you will be saved. Brothers and sisters: is Jesus your shepherd? Do you listen to Him only when you are in good mood? Do you treat His commands in the Bible merely as suggestions? The Good Shepherd promised to give you abundant life if you will listen to Him and follow His direction.