

ESF, Lord's day service message
6/9/2019

The Good Shepherd

John 10:1-5

"Very truly I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper 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. 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."

The Bible proclaims that human beings are like sheep: *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way* (Isaiah 53:6). In what sense are we like sheep? We are like sheep in the spiritual sense. Sheep are weak and defenseless. They easily go astray. So, they always need a shepherd who takes care of them.

Spiritually speaking we are weak and defenseless against the attack of evil spirits. We are spiritually ignorant. We wander without knowing where to go. We choose wrong ways and fall into trouble. So, we need a shepherd who can protect us and guide us to the right path.

The Bible says that God is our shepherd (Genesis 48:15, 49:24; Psalm 23, 80:1). In the book of John chapter 10, Jesus claims that he is the good shepherd. What does Jesus mean by this claim? How can we live under the care of the good shepherd?

The gate

Jesus claims that he is the gate of sheepfold. In ancient days, the typical sheepfold had only one gate. Shepherds went into the sheepfold through

the gate and slept near the gate at night. But thieves entered the sheepfold not through the gate but over the fence.

What does Jesus mean by the gate? In the Bible there are two kinds of gates. One gate opens to the pathway that leads to sin and to death (Job 17:16; Isaiah 38:10). Another gate opens to the pathway that leads to righteousness and to God's presence (Psalm 118:19; Isaiah 6:2). Jesus claims that he is the gate in the latter sense.

There is a small metal door painted white on the side of a tiny mission church in Johannesburg, South Africa. This door is changing lives. On it are painted the words "door of hope." That is exactly what it is for to various babies within the city. On average some forty to fifty babies a month were being abandoned on the streets to die of exposure or starvation. That was before the mission installed their door to a baby bin allowing mothers to anonymously deposit their unwanted babies and have someone love and care for them. Now the mission is saving over 100 babies a year. What an incredible door.

Jesus is the door that takes in the unwanted, that saves lives and brings hope. How can Jesus be the door? Hebrews 9:11-12 explains how: *When Christ came as high priest of the good things ...He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.* According to these words, Jesus is the gate through his blood.

This is the mark of every true shepherd whom God sends - he comes by the gate, that is, the blood of Christ. All the learning at schools will never make a spiritual shepherd. All the eloquence in the world will never make a spiritual shepherd. The mark of being a true spiritual shepherd is having the power of the blood of Christ, and leading souls to God through the blood of Christ.

The true spiritual shepherd speaks of sin because he believes all men are sinners. The true spiritual shepherd speaks of the blood of Christ, because he believes that only the blood of Christ has the power to forgive sins.

So, if you want to find a secure place for your soul, stay with such spiritual leaders and the spiritual power in the blood of Christ. As long as you are staying with those who have the power of the blood, you are safe and secure.

The voice

To live under the care of the good shepherd, the sheep must listen to the voice of the good shepherd. *The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice....* (verse3). There are many voices in this world. But there is only one voice that comes from the good shepherd. How can we distinguish the voice of the good shepherd from all other voices, especially from the voices of the thieves and robbers of our souls?

Let's see what kind of voices we may hear in this world.

The voice of man:

The voice of man is easy to recognize. It is the audible voice of another human being. Sometimes the voice of man may give wise advice or encouragement. But the voices of men may conflict with each other.

The voice of Satan:

The voice of Satan was first heard by man when Satan spoke to Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1,4,5). Satan's voice seems very sweet. But inside the sweetness there are always deadly lies and temptations. The voice always attempts to lead man into sin away from God. When we hear the voice of Satan, we will disobey God's word, we will sin and sin will destroy us.

The voice of yourself:

You can hear your own voice. Sometimes the voice from yourself may be a good voice. But the voice of yourself may lead you into temptations, discouragement, self-harm. There is a good example of this in Jonah's life. When he heard his own voice, he wished to die (Jonah 4:8). Jeremiah 10:23 warns against such negative voices of oneself: "*I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps.*"

The voice of the good shepherd:

There is the voice of the good shepherd. The mark of the voice of the good shepherd is to "*call his own sheep by name*" (verse 3). This means that the good shepherd has complete knowledge of his sheep and loves them individually. As the good shepherd, Jesus has complete knowledge of every one of us and loves each of us individually.

Do you remember Zaccheus, when he was a stray sheep (Luke 19:1-10). He was rejected by all the people because he was a tax-collector. He was regarded as a traitor and one of the worst sinners. One day when Jesus was passing by his town, he climbed up a tree to see Jesus. He had never seen or met Jesus. But Jesus called his name personally. Jesus knew the biggest problem in Zaccheus' life. Jesus knew that he was suffering from condemnation and rejection. And Jesus told him that he would like to stay with Zaccheus at his house that day (Luke 19:5). Jesus offered him forgiveness, acceptance and intimate friendship. That was the voice of the good shepherd.

In the book *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, Eric Butterworth tells the story of a college professor who had his sociology class go into the Baltimore slums to get case histories of 200 young boys. The students were asked to write an evaluation of each boy's future. In every case the students wrote, "He hasn't got a chance."

Twenty-five years later, another sociology professor came across this earlier study. He had his students do a follow up on the same 200 boys

who were now men. With the exception of 20 boys who had moved away or died, the students learned that 176 of the remaining 180 had achieved more than ordinary success as lawyers, doctors, and businessmen. The professor was astounded and decided to pursue the matter further. Fortunately, all the men were in the area and he was able to ask each one, "How do you account for your success?" In each case the reply came with a comment, "There was a teacher."

The teacher was still alive, so he sought her out and asked the old but still alert lady what magic formula she had used to pull these boys out of the slums into successful achievement.

The teacher's eyes sparkled and her lips broke into a gentle smile. "It's really very simple," she said. "I loved those boys."

Their success was based on the love of a teacher.

Our success as followers of Jesus is based on the love of the shepherd who knows our names and calls our names with personal love.

So, when you hear a voice, check whether the voice is coming from the good shepherd. To be the voice of a good shepherd, the voice should not be a voice of hatred, but a voice of love. The voice should not be a voice of violence but a voice of peace. The voice should not be a voice of condemnation but a voice of forgiveness. The voice should not be a voice of discouragement but a voice of encouragement. The voice should not be a voice of hopelessness, but a voice of hope.

Listen to the voice of love, peace, forgiveness, encouragement, and hope. That is the voice of the good shepherd.

The guidance

Sheep are weak, vulnerable and easily scared. Sheep do not like swiftly moving water. In fact, they will not drink from swiftly moving water because it scares them so badly. Sheep do not lie down on the grass until they have fully eaten and until they feel completely safe.

Good shepherds lead their sheep to a place where they can find both enough food and calm water. Good shepherds always lead their sheep to a place where the sheep feel safe and secure. So, when a good shepherd goes before the sheep, they follow him. When he says, 'Let us go to the well', they follow him. When he says, 'Let us go down to that valley', they go after him (verse 4). As the good shepherd of our souls, Jesus always guides us the best way.

After a hijacked plane slammed into the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, many people inside the building were trapped by a cloud of thick, blinding smoke. Police officer Isaac Hoopi ran into the blackness, searching for survivors, and heard people calling for help. He began shouting back, over and over: "Head toward my voice! Head toward my voice!" Six people, who had lost all sense of direction in a smoke-filled hallway, heard the officer's shouts and followed. Hoopi's voice led them out of the building to safety. "Head toward My voice!"

That's also the invitation of Jesus. Jesus as our Good Shepherd that always calls us to a place of security and peace. In John 16:33 He declares, *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

In the books of the gospel, there are stories of the disciples who were frightened when facing storms on the sea (Matthew 8:23-27, 14:22-33; Mark 4:36-41, 6:45-51; Luke 8:22-25; John 6:15-21). But every time, Jesus came to them and calmed the storm. We are just like them. We are scared in the midst of the storms in our lives. We are like sheep who are frightened by troubles. But Jesus as our Good Shepherd always calms the storms and leads us besides "still waters" (Psalm 23:2b).

What if we take the wrong way instead of following the shepherd? What if we refuse the guidance of the shepherd and take our own way? We will be lost.

Then what will the shepherd do for us?

He will keep watching over us. He will keep calling us to turn away from the wrong way to his way. But he will not force us to follow him. He will wait patiently until we are willing to follow him, or we surrender our will to his will.

In the Highlands of Scotland, a sheep would often wander off into the rocks and get into places that they couldn't get out of. The grass on mountains is very sweet and the sheep like it, and they will jump down ten or twelve feet, and then they can't jump back again, and the shepherd hears them bleating in distress. They may be there for days, until they have eaten all the grass. The shepherd will wait until they are so faint, they cannot stand, and then he will put a rope around him, and he will go over and pull that sheep up out of the jaws of death. "Why don't they go down there when the sheep first gets there?" a traveler asked the shepherd. The shepherd said, "Ah! they are so very foolish they would dash right over the precipice and be killed if we did!"

That is how our shepherd the Lord takes care of us. When we think that everything is going well, or we are proud of what we can do or have, we may not follow the guidance of the shepherd. But when we face troubles, when we have lost everything and are broken, we surrender to the shepherd. We are then willing to follow the guidance of the shepherd. He will deliver us from our troubles and guide us to the right path.

Put Jesus, the good shepherd, before every step of your life. Jesus never asks you to go where he has never gone himself. He leads you to the place where he has been. When he leads you to a road of suffering, he has been there already and knows how to overcome the suffering. So, do not be alarmed when you are called to suffer. When you choose the wrong way and are lost, remember the love of the patient and merciful shepherd. Surrender yourself to him. He will deliver you from all your troubles and guide you to the right path.