

Jesus – “I am....”3 – The Good Shepherd

Reading: John 10:11 “.... *I am the good shepherd* ¹”

Introduction:

This is the third lesson in the series on the “*I am*” statements made by Jesus in the gospel of **John**. The aim of these lessons is for us to learn more about the nature and attributes of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

In **John 9**, we have the account of Jesus healing on the Sabbath a man who had been blind from birth (vs.1-14). The man was brought before the Pharisees to explain what happened (vs.15). However, some of the Pharisees considered that Jesus was not from God because He had healed the man on the Sabbath (vs.16). After further interrogation of the man, plus his parents (vs.18-23), the Pharisees still refused to accept the miracle and that Jesus was the Son of God (vs.28-34).

In **Matthew 23:16, 17, 19, 24, 26**, Jesus described the Pharisees as being the ones who were truly blind. They were supposed to be leading the people closer to God, but what they were actually doing was “... *shut(ing) up the kingdom of heaven against man ...*” (vs.13). And so as we move into **John 10**, Jesus made a comparison between Himself and the religious leaders of the day. For in **John 10:11**, Jesus said, “*I am the good shepherd*.”

LESSON

1) The sheepfold and role of a shepherd

In **John 10:1**, Jesus refers to a “*sheepfold*”. This was a walled structure, usually with no roof, that was often made from stones. It provided protection to the flock inside from wild animals, the weather, and from robbers. There was one door through which the sheep could enter and leave the fold.

In a village setting, it was not unusual for more than one flock to be kept in the fold, *i.e.* it was a communal fold used by those in the village who had care of sheep. Of a night, someone would be designated to be the gate-keeper to watch over the fold and the sheep. The gate-keeper would know all the owners and/or shepherds of the sheep under his or her care, and would not allow any stranger access to enter the fold.

During the day, the shepherd would lead their flock out of the fold and into the pastures and ensure that they were fed (**Ezekiel 34:2**). The shepherd knew his sheep by name, and when he called them, his sheep would follow him because they knew his voice (**John 10:4**). If one of the sheep went missing, then the shepherd would go out to find it (**Luke 15:4**). If wild animals came and threatened the flock, then the shepherd had to be prepared to defend the sheep with his life (**1 Samuel 17:34-35; John 10:11-12**).

The focus of the shepherd was to be on his sheep, not on himself. His primary responsibility was on their welfare.

2) The failure of the Pharisees as shepherds

In both the Old and New Testaments, God uses the term “*shepherd*” in relation to the religious leaders of His people (*e.g.* **Isaiah 56:11; Jeremiah 23:4**;

¹ All biblical quotes are from the New King James Version Bible.

Jesus – “I am....”³ – The Good Shepherd

Ezekiel 34:2; Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:20). During the time of Jesus’ ministry, the Pharisees were the religious leaders of the day (**Matthew 23:2**). However, like so many of their forefathers (*e.g.* **Ezekiel 34:2-6**), they did not act like faithful shepherds. In **Matthew 23**, Jesus pointed out some of their failings;

- :3** they set a bad example – they did not do as they told others to do.
- :4** they put a lot of burdens (*e.g.* rules and regulations) on people, but did nothing to help the people comply.
- :5-7** whatever works they did were done simply to get the praise of men, not God.
- :13** they prevented the people from coming to know God and His kingdom.
- :14** they took advantage of the poor widows, then pretend to make long prayers.
- :15** they searched out far and wide for converts, and then made them worse than themselves.
- :16** they considered gold to have greater worth and value than the house of God, the Temple.
- :23** they paid attention to the minute details of the law², but neglected the weightier things, such as justice, mercy and faith.

The result was that the people of Israel were “.... *weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd ...*” (**Matthew 9:36**).

Therefore, God was going to replace these shepherds. As far back as the time of the prophets³, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, God had said that He would provide His own shepherd to watch over His flock;

“¹⁰*Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold His reward is with Him, and His work before Him.*

¹¹*He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young.”* (**Isaiah 40:10-11**)

- see also **Jeremiah 23:2-5; Ezekiel 34:11-16, 23**

Jesus would be that shepherd.

3) Jesus is the true shepherd

In **John 10:11**, Jesus said;

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”

Jesus contrasts Himself with the thieves and robbers – He is the *good* shepherd. The thieves and robbers have no legitimacy, and so they try to get to the sheep by climbing the wall (**vs.1**). Their focus is on themselves, not the sheep. They come to destroy, not to save (**vs.10a**). Even the hired servant abandons the sheep to the wolves, rather than to provide protection and defend them (**vs.12-13**).

² It is right that they should pay attention to detail – see what Jesus said in the last part of verse. But the problem was that they ignored the “big things” which should also be done.

³ Around 700-600 BC.

Jesus – “I am....”³ – The Good Shepherd

But not so with Jesus. He is the legitimate shepherd who was sent by the Father (**John 5:30b**). Those who came before Him were thieves and robbers.

Note: This is a generalisation. People like Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah and the other faithful prophets would not be included in this generalisation, for they spoke and did as the Lord commanded. Jesus' statement would be referring to those who we read about in passages such as **Ezekiel 34:2-6; 18-21**, and, given the context of **John 10**, the Pharisees⁴.

Jesus can enter via the door (vs.2). In fact, He calls Himself “*the door*” (vs.7), because it is through Him that the sheep can enter and have safety, and can go out and access the green pastures (vs.9). He is prepared to give His life for the protection of His sheep (vs.11). He knows His sheep, each by name, and His sheep know Him (vs.14). And what is the result of having Jesus as the shepherd? Perhaps David said it best in **Psalm 23**;

- :1 The sheep will never want for anything, for the Shepherd will meet their every need.
- :2 The sheep are never hungry or thirsty, because the Shepherd leads them to green pastures and still waters (“*still waters*” being restful water. The sheep can drink easily and calmly).
- :3 The soul is restored – it is healed. It is no more in turmoil from the guilt of sin. The Shepherd leads the soul to live a godly and wholesome life.
- :4 The sheep have no fear of those who are out to attack them. The Shepherd is all powerful, and He protects and comforts the flock.
- :6 Goodness and mercy are always there.

These sheep are blessed by having the Lord as their shepherd, for He cares for each and every one of His sheep.

4) Application

In **Psalm 100:3**, we read;

“Know that the Lord, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.”

Literal sheep, if left alone, will wander all over the place and be vulnerable to the extremes of weather and to wild animals. The end result can be their destruction.

As spiritual beings, if we are left to our own devices, we will inevitably drift away from being the way God wants us to be, with the result that we can be lost in sin (**Proverbs 16:25**). We see examples of this repeatedly during the Old Testament, particularly in the book of **Judges**. There, the people “.... *did what was right in their own eyes*” (**Judges 17:6; 21:25**), and it usually meant that, after having been reconciled to God, they moved away again from God and sinned (**Judges 2:11-13; 3:7, 12; 4:1, etc**).

⁴ There were other false prophets that are specifically mentioned in **Acts 5:36-37** – Theudas and Judas.

Jesus – “I am....”3 – The Good Shepherd

In the New Testament, the religious leaders in the time of Jesus’ ministry had failed in their role as shepherd. The result was that God’s people were like “.... *like sheep not having a shepherd*” (**Mark 6:34**).

The point is this: we need a spiritual shepherd to lead us, to guide us, and to watch over us (**Jeremiah 10:23**). Jesus is that shepherd.

- He leads us into the green pastures of righteous living by giving us His word to follow (**John 14:26; 16:13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17**).
- His truth provides us with a defence and protection against the thieves and robbers of false doctrine (**Ephesians 4:11-14; 6:13, 17**).
- He cares for us by providing the things we need for this life (**Matthew 6:31-33**).
- He watches over our souls by not allowing us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear (**1 Corinthians 10:13**). And even then if we still sin, His blood will cleanse us if we repent (**1 John 1:7**).
- He showed how much He loves us by giving His life for us (**John 10:17-18; 15:13; Romans 5:8**).
- It is through Him that we have every spiritual blessing (**Ephesians 1:3-12**).

But notice also that, in order to enjoy these blessings, the sheep have responsibilities as well. They need to hear His call and follow Him (**John 10:3-4**). They need to get to know Jesus (**John 10:14**). They need to follow Him, and not some other pretender (**John 10:5**). This means that we stick with His word, and not allow themselves to be deceived and led astray by either the philosophies of the world or other religious teachings (**Galatians 1:8-9; 2 Timothy 1:13; 1 John 4:1**).

Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and we are the sheep of His pasture. Stay close to the Shepherd.