

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

John 10:1–30; Matthew 18:10–14.

LESSON 82 -- Primary Course

MEMORY VERSE: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).

The Sheepfold

In some countries across the sea, the shepherds still tend the sheep as in the days of long, long ago. The sheep are kept during the night in a pen called the sheepfold, and a man called the porter sleeps near the gate, inside the fold. When the shepherd knocks on the gate in the morning, the porter opens the gate, and the shepherd leads the sheep out to pasture.

Sometimes the young shepherd, wrapped in a sheepskin coat, sleeps on a flat roof overlooking the sheepfold. From there he can see the sheep in the fold, peacefully chewing their cud. Although the sheep are surrounded by high stonewalls and the door is locked and barred, yet the shepherd is constantly on the watch for thieves.

In the Bible land, the robber is not like our modern thieves; perhaps to him lock-picking is not known. So the shepherd need not watch the door; he knows that “he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.” Even though the shepherd may try to watch carefully, on a dark night while he sleeps soundly, a thief may climb the wall, cut the throats of some of the sheep and lambs, sling them over the wall to his helpers, and escape. Perhaps this is what Jesus referred to when He said, “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.”

The Shepherd’s Care

Let us picture in our mind a morning scene in a far-distant land. It is early dawn; the shepherd places in his bag some small loaves of bread, perhaps some cheese and olives for his breakfast and midday meal. When the porter unbolts the door the shepherd leads the sheep to pasture for the day. He never drives his sheep, but as Jesus said, “He calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him.” A “hireling,” someone who does not own the sheep but is hired to look after them, may be seen driving the sheep. The true shepherd does not do that.

He finds a grassy spot so that the sheep may eat; later he leads them to a stream of water where they may drink. All day long he watches them so that no harm will come to his flock. If the sheep hear a strange noise, they come running to their shepherd, knowing that he will take care of them. If a wild animal comes out of the woods, the shepherd will not let it harm the sheep, but will risk his life to protect them.

No doubt this is the kind of shepherd that David was. You remember that he slew a lion and a bear that came down to harm his flock. David risked his life for his sheep. Yet we have a far greater and more wonderful Shepherd in Jesus – the Good Shepherd – He gave His life for us, His sheep!

The Lost Sheep

At the end of the day, when the flock again returns to the sheepfold, the shepherd runs ahead and stands in the narrow doorway and counts the sheep as they pass one by one through the gate.

Jesus said that if a man owned a hundred sheep, and one of them should wander off and get lost, the shepherd would leave the ninety and nine and go out into the mountains in search of the lost one. No doubt a shepherd who has taken care of the sheep all day long would be very tired by evening; but if, upon counting the sheep, he discovers that one is missing, he goes out and searches until he finds that one. Perhaps the night may be dark and cold, and the shepherd may stumble over rocks on the mountainside, but he calls and listens for the faintest. “Baa-a, baa-a!” He immediately recognizes the cry of the lost lamb and follows the sound until he finds the lamb’ he lifts the shivering creature into his arms and carries it back to safety. The shepherd returns to the fold where the ninety and nine are cozy and safe. Although tired and worn, as the shepherd lies down to rest he rejoices more over

the one that was found than over the others that had not wandered away. Jesus was often very tired after He had been healing people and teaching them all day.

Jesus wants every one to come to Him and be saved; it grieves His heart when one soul is lost – when one who was once saved backslides and wanders far away from God, as the little sheep that wandered away from the shepherd. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, will do as the shepherd did: search and call for the wandering one to return. Sometimes people want to continue in their sin, and do not care to return to the Lord. But if, when the Good Shepherd calls, they answer and are again saved, and have the joy restored to their soul, there is also joy in Heaven. We read: “Likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance” (Luke 15:7).

The Good Shepherd

Who of us has not seen the picture of Jesus carrying a lamb in His arms, a shepherd’s crook in His hand, and the sheep following at His heels. This picture makes us think of the verse of Scripture that we find in Isaiah 40:11: “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom.” Jesus says that He is the Good Shepherd, and He calls the people the sheep. He does not drive His sheep, as do the shepherds of today in our land; but He leads them. He knows His sheep, and they know Him and know His voice.

Through the Door

In this story of the Good Shepherd, Jesus was teaching the people that there is only one way to be saved – and that is through the Blood of Jesus Christ. Some people try to get to Heaven without being saved; they try to work out a way of their own, or perhaps they think that they are good enough as they are. But Jesus calls such a person a thief and a robber – he is not entering in at the Door. Jesus said, “I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.” That shows us that if we want to be saved we must come to Jesus – He alone can save us and make us ready for Heaven.

Jesus also said, “I lay down my life for the sheep”; and surely He did. He willingly went to Calvary’s cross and suffered and died for your sins and mine; He was placed in the grave; but how thankful we are that if we want to be saved we must come to Jesus – He alone can save us and make us ready for Heaven.

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We who are saved are the sheep of His pasture, and can say as David said, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever” (Psalm 23:6).

QUESTIONS

1. Who is the Good Shepherd? John 10:11, 14.
2. Why does He not drive His sheep? John 10:4.
3. Does He know His sheep, and do they know Him? John 10:14.
4. What happens if one little sheep is lost? Matthew 18:12.
5. Is Jesus willing that anyone should be lost? Matthew 18:14; John 3:16.