

JESUS IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

John 10:1-11

Key Verse: 10:11

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

In Chapter 9, we learned that Jesus opened the eyes of a man born blind. He shined his light into the man’s life. But the Pharisees ignored the work of God and pressured the man to give a false testimony against Jesus. They kicked the man out of their community. But Jesus found him. He opened the man’s spiritual eyes to meet the Savior personally. Jesus became his good shepherd. Today’s passage teaches us about the beautiful relationship between shepherd and sheep. Jesus contrasts the good shepherd and the false shepherd. We learn why Jesus is our good shepherd. This is very important for us in two ways: (1) we want to be happy, knowing our good shepherd Jesus is with us; (2) we want to be good shepherds for young people, following the footsteps of Jesus.

First, good shepherd takes care of his sheep (1-2). Look at verses 1-2. *“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.”* In these verses, Jesus teaches us that there are two kinds of shepherds. One is the good shepherd. The other is the false shepherd. The good shepherd takes care of sheep but the false shepherd is a thief and a robber. Jesus was talking to the Pharisees. He hoped that they would become good shepherds for God’s sheep. The Jewish leaders were chosen as shepherds for God’s flock, not only for the people of Israel but for all peoples of the world (16; 17:20-24). However, they ignored God’s purpose for them and became like thieves and robbers. They robbed the glory of God.

Jesus also teaches us that shepherd must have a right motive in entering the sheep pen. He must take care of the sheep, not take advantage of them. Jesus said this because the Pharisees came to the blind man to threaten him to tell a lie about Jesus (9:24). The Jewish leaders should not have used the man to advance their political agenda; rather, they should have helped him to display the glory of God, since they were chosen to be shepherds of his people.

Second, good shepherd knows his sheep’s name (3). Verses 3-5 describe the beautiful relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. Look at verse 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.”* The good shepherd knows his sheep by name.

In the Bible, a person’s name represents more than the identity of the person. It is the embodiment of the person’s character, faith, integrity, virtue and vice. Verse 3 says, *“He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”* The good shepherd knows his sheep’s name. He knows everything about his sheep. He knows when his sheep is

hungry, thirsty or tired. He knows when his sheep is cold or hot. The good shepherd knows his sheep because he cares for the sheep and loves the sheep. During our Bible study, Msn. Pauline Hwang compared this shepherd-sheep relationship to the parent-children relationship. Good parents are good shepherds for their children. We love Mary Lee and know a few things about her, like she is a good piano and violin player, and a very good soccer player, scoring most of goals for her team. But compared to her parents, we don't know much about her. Msn. Caleb and Pauline know all her strengths and weaknesses, because they are her good shepherds. Even then, some young people may complain to their parents, saying, "You just don't understand me." It's true that sometimes even parents or close friends don't seem to understand us. No one can read another person's inner thoughts. But there is one person who really knows us. Our good shepherd Jesus knows each one of his sheep. He understands us because he is the Creator of our lives. Jesus not only knows us, but cares for each one of us, because he is our good shepherd.

Our Lord knows each one of us personally. He knows what's on our minds. He knows our joys and agonies. He knows us even better than we know ourselves. He even knows how many hairs we have on our heads (Lk 12:7). Some people may ask how God knows each person when there are more than 6 billion people in the world. They ask such a question because they don't know God personally. Hagar, the servant of Abraham's wife Sarah, experienced the God who knows each person. After meeting with the angel of the Lord in the desert, she confessed, "You are the God who sees me" (Ge 16:13). The Samaritan woman in John 4 was deeply touched by the Lord who knew her so well, even though they had never met before. Her village people did not understand her agony. They only judged her for her immoral life. But Jesus knew all about her sinful life and yet did not condemn her. After meeting the Savior personally, the woman testified to her village people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (Jn 4:29) David confessed to God, "You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways" (Ps 139:2-3). Our shepherd Jesus knows us by our name. Isn't it so comforting to know that our shepherd Jesus knows us and cares for us?



Third, good shepherd goes on ahead of his sheep (4). Look at verse 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.*" What does it mean the shepherd "goes ahead" of his sheep? It means that the good shepherd leads his sheep by example. The shepherd sets good examples for his sheep to follow. The good shepherd is not like a cowboy who drives his cattle from behind. Jesus, the good shepherd, set good examples for us. Before he told us to love one another, he loved sinners like us to the end, until he gave his life on the cross. Before telling his disciples to wash one another's feet, he washed their

smelly feet. He said, “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet” (Jn 13:14). Jesus prayed in the early morning hours, before telling his disciples to pray. He taught the Bible in season and out of season before telling them to feed his sheep. He obeyed God’s will, before he told us to obey God’s word. Everything we do as his disciples is what Jesus had already done. We follow his footsteps.

Going ahead of sheep also means that a shepherd must be faithful in taking care of his sheep. Sheep do not have a good sense of direction. The shepherd must lead them to the right direction so that they may not go astray. If the shepherd takes his eyes off his sheep, they may get lost. When sheep are left alone to graze, they may follow only their food, not realizing they may get close to a dangerous cliff. While helping students with God’s word, we often find that this is true. Many young people do not have a spiritual sense of direction. They are easily influenced by peer pressure or pleasure-seeking trend of this world. If we take our eyes off a sheep, the sheep may wander around the fleeting things of the world. He or she may follow only their physical desires and walk into Satan’s trap. Therefore, the shepherd must lead them to green pastures. The shepherd must be faithful to the end.

Fourth, good sheep knows his shepherd’s voice (4-6). Look at verses 4-5 again. *“When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.”* These verses teach us how we can be good sheep. Sheep are in general simple-minded and forgetful. They are weak. They are prone to parasites and insects. They have no defense mechanism. They have no horns like rams or fast feet like gazelles. They lack a sense of judgment. Sheep will graze land to death, eating grass to the soil and even pulling up roots. If they are not moved from pasture to pasture, the lands will lay waste. Sheep are also timid and easily panicked. Even a stray rabbit jumping from behind a rock can stampede a flock and do damage.

So sheep are not so bright and don’t know much. But one thing they do know—they know the voice of their shepherd. In Greek, there are two words for the verb “know.” One is “*ginosko*,” which refers to the knowledge obtained through learning or experience (*a posteriori* knowledge). The other is “*oida*,” which refers to inborn knowledge (*a priori* knowledge). The sheep have the innate knowledge to recognize the voice of their shepherd and follow the shepherd.

A man in Australia was arrested and tried for stealing a sheep. But he insisted that the sheep was his own that had been missing. The judge in the case used an unusual method to try the case. He had the sheep brought into the courtroom and asked the plaintiff and the defendant to call the sheep. When the plaintiff called, the sheep made no response, but when the defendant made a distinctive call, the sheep immediately recognized the voice and moved toward him. The case was dismissed.

God is our good shepherd. We are his sheep. Our knowledge is very limited; we have so much to learn even after many years of learning. But God gave us inborn

knowledge to know him. The Bible teaches that if we say we don't know God, we deliberately suppress the truth of God (Ro 1:18-21). A psalmist says that only foolish people insist there is no God (Ps 53:1). They are like children who cover their eyes with their hands and say there is no sky. King David was a man of great achievements. He conquered many enemies and united the kingdom of Israel. But he acknowledged God as his shepherd. He said in Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures ..." (1-2). David was happy, not because he was successful, but because God was his shepherd. He was happy as long as his shepherd was with him. David in turn became a good shepherd for his people. Jacob in Genesis was a man of struggles. He cheated his brother to take his birthright from him and struggled for 14 years to marry his love. He struggled to build his wealth. But in the end, he confessed that all was possible because of God. He said, "God ... has been my shepherd all my life to this day" (Ge 48:16).

Is Jesus your shepherd? Are you his good sheep? Do you personally hear and recognize his voice as you study the Bible? Do you follow him as you hear his voice? Do you hear him when he says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"? (Mt 11:28) Would you be willing to make a decision of faith to obey him when he says, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me"? (Mk 8:34)

Unfortunately, the Pharisees were not willing to hear the voice of the Lord. Jesus really wanted to help them to be good shepherds. So he taught them how to be a good shepherd, using a figure of speech (6). But they did not understand Jesus' teachings, because they did not want to understand. They were not good sheep; so they couldn't be good shepherds. Nonetheless, Jesus continued to teach them.

Fifth, Jesus is the gate for the sheep (7-10). Look at verse 7. *Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep."* Jesus says, "I am the gate." Jesus is the only door through which we can enter the kingdom of God. In the biblical times, the sheep pen was usually a circular structure with stone walls. There was only one opening. At night the shepherd would lie down across the opening, effectively becoming the door. No outsider could come in and no sheep could get out without his knowledge.

The purpose of a gate is to keep certain people out and to allow certain people in. Suppose you are a basketball fan and want to see a game in the Madison Square Garden. You go there and can almost hear the excitement inside. But they would not let you in unless you have a ticket. Entering the kingdom of God is the same way. We need a ticket. We cannot buy this ticket, however. It is given to us when we have faith in Jesus and commit our lives to him. Salvation is a free gift and open to all people (Jn 3:16). But those who refuse the free ticket will not enter the kingdom of God. Jesus says in John 14:6, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* Jesus is the only way to heaven. He is the gate through which we can find salvation and eternal life. Let's read verse 9 together, *"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture."*

Sixth, Jesus came to make our life abundant (10). Look at verse 10. *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”* Our good shepherd Jesus came to give us life. We were dying in our sins. We were doomed to eternal death. But Jesus came to save us. He gave his life on the cross to set us free from sin and death. Jesus says, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” What does it mean to have a life to the full? Some people have a lot of money, but they feel empty. Some people are very successful in their career, but they don’t feel they are satisfied. Without Jesus as our good shepherd, we cannot but feel empty and unsatisfied. We all know that, no matter how successful we are in this world, our life will end in the graveyard, unless we have the assurance of eternal life. Life is empty until we have the good shepherd Jesus with us. Only Jesus can help us to have life to the full. Only Jesus can give us eternal life!

In this passage, we learned that Jesus is our good shepherd who knows our name and leads us to green pastures. May God help us faithfully follow our good shepherd Jesus! May God help us to hear his voice as we study the word of God and pray! May God help us to be good shepherds for young people of our time!