

The Good Shepherd

John 10:1-21

The prophet Ezekiel received this word from the Lord, “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, thus says the Lord God: Ah shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?”

Israel’s teachers were indicted for not strengthening the weak, for not binding up the injured, for not seeking to bring back the straying, for not seeking the lost, and for ruling with harshness. The Lord Jesus came as the living word of God who taught the truth of God’s word for the nourishment and blessing of his people.

The Lord Jesus Christ promised a future day when he would rescue his scattered sheep. He told them that “...they shall know that I am the LORD their God with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Lord GOD.

The prophet Ezekiel had this word from the Lord. “And you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord GOD.” (Ezekiel 34:30-31)

Our Lord Jesus Christ spoke of himself in the same way. He described himself as the “good Shepherd.” And he taught us that God’s people can’t be fooled about their Master’s identity. They will hear and recognize his voice. As the good Shepherd, he made claims about his person that were narrow, even dogmatic.

He claimed to be the only way to God. He alone is the door of the sheep. It is in him alone that his sheep are saved and find the spiritual nourishment that they need.

He claimed to be the one author of life for this world, and for the next. Abundant life is in him.

But the heart of the matter concerns the reality of Christ’s love for his own. He tells us that he is not a mere hireling. “He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep; see the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”

This text has been taken seriously by many pastors down through the years. They have labored in places that either would not or could not give them the support that they needed.

But this text has also been ignored by many, for various reasons. Some seeking “professional advancement” ignore this teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ in order to move on to “greater things.” Some are afraid of the wolf. Opposition arises and they immediately begin to think about moving away from the difficulties that Satan has thrown in their path.

But the Lord Jesus Christ was not like that. When opposition came from Sadducees and Pharisees, he did not run away. When the evil one himself came to tempt him in the wilderness, he remained faithful.

And, when the time came for him to die in the place of the sheep, to offer himself as a sacrifice for sinners, he did not turn away from that task. He, who could have called upon ten thousand angels to come to his rescue, died a cruel death on the cross.

Christ had not rejected the will of his Father to come to earth, and take to himself the likeness of sinful human flesh. And, he would live a life of righteousness for our sake, and die a death of substitution for our sake. He would lay down his life for the sheep.

In doing this he would accomplish redemption for the lost, and he would bring into being a people composed of the redeemed of the Old Testament ages, as well as the host of the saved of every race and nation. There would be one flock saved by the blood of the Lamb of God who was paradoxically the true Shepherd from God.

And all of this would come about as a willing sacrifice. He would lay down his life willingly, and he would take it up again. In so doing he would demonstrate his authority and would prove his love and obedience to the Father who had sent him.

