

The Good Shepherd - John 10 verses 1 – 21:-

Over half of my working life has been involved in the practical business of farming in various forms, both here in the U.K. and overseas. Sheep, like other animals, are all individuals with their own likes and dislikes and sometimes weird behaviour! Having had experience with pastoring both sheep and human beings, I can understand why it was important for those great leaders of the Old Testament – Moses and David, to serve an apprenticeship in practical shepherding. (see Exodus chapter 2, verse 15 to chapter 3, verse 1 and 1 Samuel chapter 16, verse 11). Sheep are like most people, get their trust and you can lead them anywhere. If you try to drive them, they will look at you in sheer disbelief – and go the other way! Jesus said *“I am the Good Shepherd; I know my own and my own know me . . . and they will heed my voice. So shall there be one flock, one shepherd.”* (John 10, verses 14 and 16).

The link between chapters 9 and 10:- In chapter 9 Jesus performs a miracle; the man blind from birth is healed and is brought before the Pharisees. The man is then “cast out” (verse 34).

Reading back from chapter 10, the Good Shepherd seeks him and finds him (chapter 9, verse 35). The man is then led to faith and acknowledges Jesus as Lord (chapter 9, verse 36). The dialogue with the Pharisees then runs from chapter 9, verse 40 through to chapter 10 verse 6 which forms the introduction to the claim of Jesus to be *“the Good Shepherd”*. For background read Ezekiel chapter 34 especially verses 1 – 4 and verses 23 – 24.

John 10, verses 1 – 6:- These verses can be seen as a accusation levelled at the “blind guides” who are guilty of misleading the sheep of Israel. The ancient sheep-folds were walled with only one entrance. The watchman / gatekeeper slept across the doorway to prevent entry by thieves, robbers and wolves. The true shepherd has right of access to the sheep-fold, the “gatekeeper” (“watchman” or “porter” in some versions) allows access only to the true shepherd. The Father in heaven has the authority to give those He is calling into the care of the Good Shepherd. See verses 27 – 30. (See also John 6, verses 37 – 40). Notice that the Good Shepherd calls his sheep by name and leads them out. They follow and trust him because they know his voice. Remember Genesis chapter 3, verses 8 – 10.

Verses 7 – 10, “I am the (Door) Gate” - Obviously ‘the shepherd’ cannot be ‘the door’! Jesus changes the metaphor in order to emphasise his role as Saviour. If we come to him and believe in him we then enter into his fold and become a member of his flock. In the early mission of the church it was recognised that the Lord himself was calling people to him as they heard the Good News preached by the disciples. e.g. Acts chapter 2, verse 47 and chapter 11, verse 21.

Verses 11 – 18, “I am the Good Shepherd” - Jesus, as the Good Shepherd was to *“lay down his life for the sheep”* (verses 11; 15 and 17 – 18). The relationship between the Lord Jesus and his sheep is to be as intimate as that between Jesus and his Heavenly Father. (verses 14 – 15). Notice verse 16 which foretells the inclusion of the Gentiles, those *“not of this fold”*. This is re-enforced in this Gospel in chapter 11, verses 40 – 52. Jesus is to gather into one fold *“the children of God who are scattered abroad”*.

Verses 19 – 21, the cause of division – As in the teaching of Jesus on the “Bread of Life” (chapter 6, verses 60 – 66), the preaching and actions of the Lord Jesus Christ causes divisions among his hearers. He suggests that his hearers should recognise the good works that he is performing as the works of God the Father. Again the emphasis that he is teaching and working with the authority of God the Father. (see verses 37 – 38).

*Souls of men, why will ye scatter
Like a crowd of frightened sheep?
Foolish hearts, why will ye wander
From a love so true and deep?*

*Was there ever kinder shepherd
Half so gentle, half so sweet,
As the Saviour who would have us
Come and gather round His feet?*

Frederick W. Faber 1852