

May 15, 2011
Easter 4
Good Shepherd Sunday

"We Are Sheep Dependent on Jesus Our Good Shepherd"

JOHN 10:1-10

"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. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 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. 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. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. 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.

What an amazing difference there is between domestic sheep and sheep that run wild in the mountains. Have you ever seen a big horn sheep in places such as Glacier National Park? These sheep are able to jump to the mountain heights, find food and water and even defend themselves against mountain lions and wolves. And yet the domesticated sheep far outnumber the wild sheep because they depend on shepherds to take care of them. These sheep cannot jump to the mountain heights, they waddle more than run, they cannot find food and water, and they have no way of protecting themselves from predators. Yet they survive in large numbers because they have been bred to be docile and dependent on a shepherd for survival.

The Lord our God uses the picture of sheep dependent on a shepherd to teach us the importance of being dependent on him for our salvation. We are born into this world wanting to make up our own god and serve him in a way that we think is best. In his Word God uses the picture of sheep, domesticated sheep, to show us that we are hopelessly lost without his love and care. In his Word our God reveals to us how he protects and saves us from the judgment which is to come. Jesus says, "I am the Good Shepherd, I give my life for the sheep."

This morning our Lord Jesus takes us to a sheep pen to show us how important it is to be dependent on him and not on the false teachers who want to destroy us eternally.

We are dependent on Jesus for rescue and protection

"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber." Jesus is speaking these words to some

very religious people called the Pharisees. In the previous chapter of John we find these Pharisees accusing our loving Lord Jesus of breaking Sabbath laws by healing a blind man on the Sabbath. These people were dependent on saving themselves. They wanted to save themselves by keeping man made rules and regulations that were added to the laws of the Old Testament. They did not like it when Jesus called on people to become like sheep who were dependent on him for their salvation.

To help these people see their need for believing in him, Jesus directs their attention to the sheep pen. Do you see that sheep pen over there? It has walls made of stones and branches. The shepherd brings the sheep into this pen at night to protect them from the wild animals. There is only one gate or door in the sheep pen. The shepherd guards the door at night. Any man or animal that tries to get into the sheep pen by another way is a thief and a robber.

Sometimes it happened that shepherds would band together to build a large sheep pen for their sheep. They would bring their sheep into the pen at night. The door keeper guarding the door would recognize the voice of the shepherd and open the door for him as Jesus said, "The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice." The sheep were safe at night because they were dependent on following the voice of their shepherd. On another occasion Jesus told the leaders of the Jewish people, "My sheep listen to my voice, I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."

Jesus also describes himself as the gate for the sheep. "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved." Notice how exclusive the words of Jesus are. He says that the false teachers who came before him were thieves and robbers. As long as this world stands what Jesus says here is true. He is the gate for the sheep. Sheep need to be dependent on him for their salvation. If they put their faith and trust in false teachers they will not be saved. Satan will do everything in his power to raise up false teachers who will destroy people eternally by getting them to become dependent on themselves and dependent on false religions.

Every false religion in the world, without exception teaches that you can depend on yourself to make yourself acceptable to whatever god you believe in. On Friday morning before doing the final writing of this sermon I read from Isaiah 46 where the Lord God condemns the Babylonians for trusting in idols that are fashioned from gold with human hands and then foolishly praying to these idols which cannot help them. I also read from Romans 10 where Paul says his fellow Jews have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge. He says that that they sought their own righteousness and did not submit to God's righteousness. How true these words are about every religion of the world. People seek their own righteousness. They refused to accept and believe in what God freely gives them in Jesus.

A few years ago several sheep decided that they were going to go off in the hills east of Santa Maria. They climbed to the top of the cliffs along highway 166 and they could not get down. As cars drove by, they could see the sheep stranded on the cliffs without food and water. They tried to get water to the sheep and some food, but it would only be a matter of time before they died. Do some of you remember how the sheep were rescued?

The owners of the large crane company took their biggest crane, parked it along the road. With the long arm full extended, they were able to rescue the sheep.

What do you think of when you reflect on these sheep that wandered off and put themselves in danger? I think of myself and what the Bible says of me. "We all like sheep have gone astray each of us has turned to his own way." I think of the words of Ezekiel 34, "My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched for them and looked for them." I think of the stubbornness and foolishness that exists in my heart. Billy Graham used to show our need of being rescued by pointing to the words of Jeremiah 17, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" The crane company went to a huge expense to set up its crane to rescue those foolish, stubborn, independent sheep. Think of the expense that Jesus went through to rescue us. Later in this chapter he says, "I am the Good Shepherd, I give my life for the sheep."

Today you are safe in the sheep pen. Jesus is your Shepherd. You can joyfully say, "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want." That means I lack nothing in my life to be accepted by God. I don't want to listen to false teachers who tell me my life is hanging in the balance and I need to try and save myself. I want to listen to the voice of Jesus who says, "I am the gate for the sheep; who ever enters through me will be saved." Have you heard of the man in Oakland, California who is saying the world is coming to an end on May 21, this Saturday? These people from Family Radio have put up over 40 billboards in the Nashville area, and hundreds more all across the country. We don't know when Jesus will return for judgment. We don't know when our last hour will come. We do know that with Jesus our Shepherd we are safe with him. If he comes in glory this afternoon, we can joyfully say, "That's my Jesus. He is my Shepherd. He has come to take me home." "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

We are dependent Jesus to lead us through life

What if this is not the week that Jesus comes again in glory to take us home? What if he delays his coming? What if he gives you five, or ten or even 70 more years of life on this earth? Are you ready to face the challenges that life will bring you? Yes, dear Christian you are ready for whatever life brings, because you are dependent on the love that your Shepherd has for you. I direct your attention to verse 3 of John 10 that says, "He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."

"He calls his own sheep by name." Do you have a dog or a cat? Your dog loves to hear its name called, and maybe that is even true also of your cat. The shepherds at the time of Jesus were close to their sheep. They had pet names for their sheep. Jesus knows your name. He knows where you live. He knows everything about you. Psalm 139 says that he knows when we sit and when we stand. It also says that our Lord has thoughts more precious for us than the grains of sand. Later in this chapter Jesus says, "I know my sheep and my sheep know me." Your loving shepherd hears your prayers even before you pray them, that is how close he is to you. Isaiah 40 says of our Shepherd, "He tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in his arms, and carried them close to his heart, he gently leads those that have young." Jesus carries you close to his heart as we sing in the hymn, "Loves me every day the same, even calls me by name."

Jesus also says that he leads us out. What will tomorrow bring you, and the next day, and the day after that? You already know what the future holds, because you know who holds the future. Tomorrow the shepherd is going to open the gate. He is going to call you by name, and you will follow him as he leads you out to another day of challenges as you live your life for him in this present world. The shepherd has pleasant pastures planned for you, and mountain meadows, and cool refreshing waters, and places so beautiful they will bring tears to your eyes. And where does such an idyllic place exist? Oh, dear Christian, we find ourselves under the love that Jesus has for us. "Goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our lives." . The Shepherd tells us "I have come that they might have life and have it to the full." You can substitute the word love for the word life. I have come that they might have love and have it to the full. Sheep are victorious because they are dependent on the Shepherd's love. We are more than conquerors through him that loved us. Nothing will separate us from that love. There is no greater joy in life than being a sheep dependent on Jesus our loving Shepherd. The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. Amen.