

Armagh Baptist Church – Sunday 10th January 2010

'I am the Good Shepherd'

John ch.10:11-30

Introduction

We are currently making our way through the 'I am's of Christ in John's Gospel. We have got as far as John Ch.10 where we have found two of them:

'I am the gate for the sheep' (vs.7 & 9)

(which we looked at just before Christmas, and)

'I am the good shepherd' (vs.11 & 14)

They are obviously very closely related since they're both about shepherds and sheep. So let's see what we can learn tonight about the Good Shepherd:

We touched on this theme this morning when I read to you those verses from Isaiah ch.40. That passage which begins with the message:

'Comfort, comfort my people' says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, That she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.'

'A voice of one calling:

'In the desert prepare the way for the Lord;

Make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; The rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.'

'And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

'You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain.

You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah,

'Here is your God!' (or 'Behold your God!')

What is this God like? What is our God like?

*See the **Sovereign** Lord comes with power, and his arm rules for him.*

See his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

He tends his flock like a Shepherd; He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.'

In other words we have a prophecy here written 750 years before the time of Christ, and it tells us that when He would appear, when God would come among men, yes, he would come as a **Sovereign**, yes he would come with power, but he would also come as a **Shepherd** to his flock: He would gather the lambs in his arms; He would carry them close to his heart; He would gently lead those who have young. He would be a caring Shepherd!

So now we come to John ch.10:11 tonight, and we read:

'I am the Good Shepherd.

The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep!'

But it's not just Isaiah ch.40 that foretold that the Messiah would come like a shepherd. Perhaps an even clearer passage is Ezekiel ch.34.

Here God is accusing the Religious Leaders of his people Israel in Old Testament times of *not* shepherding the sheep that were under their care. Read Ezekiel 34:1-16 and 30-31. He promises that he will come and shepherd the sheep himself. He will look for the lost and bring back the strays. That is the OT background to John ch.10:11-30.

But not only does the Old Testament talk about God becoming our Shepherd, it also talks about us, as people, behaving like sheep. See Isaiah 53:6...

'We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.'

So each of us are like sheep, in that each one of us has gone astray from God's intended path for our lives. Each one of us has decided just to do our own thing – and not what God wants. We have messed up, we have sinned, we have all fallen short of the glory of God.

These are Old Testament illustrations, but when we come into the New Testament Jesus takes up the same ideas of sheep and shepherds and teaches us some very important truths here in John ch.10.

As we saw last time, he starts off in vs.1-6 depicting the scene of a shepherd and his sheep-fold as it would have been in the land of Israel in his day. The sheep-fold would have been like a round stone structure. They would be circular with an opening left in one side for the door. At night the shepherd would bring his sheep into the fold and then hire someone to stay there for the night, while he went home for a good night's sleep. This hired-hand or watchman would lie down across the gap in the wall and literally become the door or the gate for the sheep. No-one could get in over him, and no sheep would get out over him during the night.

In the morning the shepherd would come back to the sheep-fold, the watchman or hired-hand would get up from the gap and allow the sheep to go out. The shepherd would then stand at the gate, or just outside it, and call each of his own sheep by name, and the sheep would set out to follow their master to the pastures for that day. The sheep knew their own shepherd's voice and they wouldn't follow anyone else except him. They were afraid of a stranger's voice and would panic and run away when they heard a stranger. They just wouldn't go with anyone else except their own shepherd.

Now last time we saw Jesus saying in vs.1-10 that **He** was...

1. The Gate for the Sheep (vs.1-10)

Not this hired hand, not the watchman who was just paid for the night, and didn't really care anything about the sheep. But that He, Jesus, was actually the gate for the sheep. 'Whoever enters through me,' he says, 'will be saved, they will come in and go out and find pasture. (Read vs.9-10).

But tonight we want to focus on the next part of this chapter, from v.11 onwards, where Jesus says, not only is He the gate for the sheep, but He is actually the shepherd himself! '***I am the Good Shepherd***' he says in v.11. He's better than a hired hand to us. Look at vs.11-13. He cares about us! So now we want to move on to focus on:

2. The Work of the Shepherd (vs.11-18)

There are 3 things I want to highlight for you here:

1. He lays down his life for the sheep (v.11)
2. He knows his sheep (v.14), and...
3. He calls other sheep to him still (v.16)

(i) The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the Sheep (v.11)

Any of you who are farmers or shepherds know what it's like to go along to the Mart to buy more cattle or sheep, or whatever kind of animals you want. You go along, you inspect what's being sold, and then you bid a price for the animals you want at the auction.

The same is true of the Good Shepherd. He had to pay a price for his sheep too, for them to become his own. But he didn't have to bid for that price.

The price for his sheep was already set from the beginning of time.

The price for each sheep was a sinless life and a perfect sacrificial death.

His sheep were people who had sinned – the price to be paid for their sin was death – in both OT & NT: Genesis 2:17 and Romans 6:23a.

Jesus is the only human being who has ever lived a perfect sinless life, so he died that perfect sacrificial death for us in God's sight.

It all comes back to Isaiah 53:6...

'We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.'

Jesus was truly the Good Shepherd. He loved his sheep, and he wanted to buy them back for himself, so he had to pay the price for them, for their sin – one perfect, spotless sacrificial death. That was the price he had to pay, and so He laid down his life for his sheep, bearing our sins in his own body, taking our punishment at God's hand and dying in our place, paying the price for our sins. He totally identified with his sheep.

Look at vs.17-18 Why did men kill him?

Because he claimed to be God.

But in fact he was God.

So in reality, he laid down his life of his own accord (v.18) – willingly for us! And because He has paid the price for us, we don't have to pay it anymore. Salvation is offered freely to us. Forgiveness of sins is offered freely to us. We can't buy it. We just have to accept it (Romans 6:23b) as the Gift of God!

Have you realised yet that Jesus died for your sins?

That He has taken the punishment for your sins himself.

He has died for his sheep.

Why don't you accept that and believe it?

Have you ever seen yourself as one of those sheep that Jesus died for?

(ii) He knows His Sheep and His Sheep know Him (v.14)

Those sheep, who Jesus died for, and who accept the price he has paid on their behalf for their sins, enter into a new relationship with God through Jesus Christ. And Jesus says, '***I know my sheep...***'

Does Jesus know you as one of his sheep?

Do you know Jesus as your shepherd?

Christianity is not a religion; it is a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, on the basis of the price he has paid for our sins.

We foster that relationship through Bible reading and prayer, and we can know God leading us and guiding us throughout our lives until the day we see him face to face. Is that the kind of relationship you have with God?

Do you know him as your shepherd? Do you know you are one of his sheep?

(iii) The third part of the Good Shepherd's work is to call other sheep to himself. (v.16)

Jesus has already called many sheep to himself. The Gospel went first to the Jewish people alive at the time of Christ. But he goes on to say in v.16:

'I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen, I must bring them also.

They too will listen to my voice and

there shall be one flock and one shepherd.'

The sheep pen he was talking about here was the nation of Israel, as we saw last time. Up until that time only people from a Jewish background had trusted in Christ. But now Jesus says clearly that he had other sheep that didn't belong to Israel, that belonged to the other nations of the world, the gentiles.

Jesus says, '***I must bring them also.***' I must go in search of them too. But he was absolutely sure and certain, that '***they would listen to his voice.***'

And when they responded to his call, and began to follow him, then there would be '***one flock and one shepherd.***' That's what we've been seeing in the Acts of the Apostles – there wasn't going to be a Jewish sheep-fold, a Jewish Church, and then on the other hand a Gentile sheep-fold or a Gentile Church. No. God's plan was to have one flock of sheep, not two separate sheep-folds. And Jesus was going to be the one Shepherd for them all. To this day there is only one flock of God, there is only one Good Shepherd, the Lord

Jesus Christ. He is the only true Head of the Church, and the Church worldwide, in heaven and on earth, is made up of those who have truly believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and who are now part of the flock of God.

Jesus is still calling more sheep to himself even today. Maybe you are hearing his voice speaking to you tonight? If Jesus has been calling you, don't resist his call; respond to it instead; accept him as your Saviour and Lord, as your Shepherd, the One who has laid down his life for you and the One who will know you and lead you through your life here, and then lead you home to heaven hereafter.

So far in John chapter 10, we have seen the Gate for the Sheep, and the Work of the Shepherd. There's one more thing I'd like you to see in vs.27-30.

3. The Security of the Sheep (Read v.27 only)

Those who have heard his voice, those who know Jesus, those who have a personal relationship with Jesus, those who follow Jesus as their Shepherd, to these people and these alone Jesus gives eternal life (Read vs.28-30).

Isn't that a wonderful picture of security? It is in fact Eternal Security! Those who truly belong to God, belong to Him forever. When we trust in Jesus, when we get saved, when God gives us His Salvation, we are His forever – there are no sheep-stealers from Christ's flock!

1. No-one can pluck us out of the hand of Jesus.
 2. No-one can snatch us out of the hand of God the Father.
- So we are doubly secure!
We can know here and now that we are His forever.
Do you know you are saved? Do you know this assurance of salvation?
Do you know that if you were to die tonight you would go to be in Heaven?

If you believe that Jesus died for your sins on that cross in your place, if you believe that Jesus has taken God's punishment for your sins, if you are trusting in Jesus' death on the cross, and on that alone to make you right with God. If you believe all of that...

And if you have heard his voice calling you to himself for salvation, and if you know Him in your life in a real way and are following Him each day, then you are saved – the Bible says so. You are saved now and saved forever!

Do you know that assurance? It's so sad to meet people who are searching for God, who don't believe that they can be sure of salvation, so they keep searching and searching, and never seem to find this satisfaction and peace.

Read John 10:27-30. Read John 20:30-31. Read 1 John 5:12-13.

That's why John wrote so much of what he did – so we could be sure!

Let me tell you about a friend I was at college with. He was called Rob Parker. He was a Canadian. He was a hippy! He was working on an oil rig in Libya in North Africa, while his wife and family were living in Limerick at the time. As a family they had no thought of God whatsoever.

But then Rob's wife, Fran, got saved in Limerick while Rob was away working in Libya. She didn't know how she was going to tell him the next time he was on a home visit. But she decided she would just pack a Bible into his suitcase and send him back to Libya and say nothing. She would just pray for him! So when Rob was unpacking his case back in the Libyan desert, he discovered the Bible, and he started to read it, and he got saved in Libya!

He wasn't very long saved, when he had an experience. Obviously there are very few churches in Libya, and very few Christians at all. So Rob was totally on his own - it was just him and his Bible and God. As a new believer he was doubting whether he was really saved at all or not. He had just been reading this passage in John ch.10. Then he was out for a walk one day in the Libyan desert when he came across a group of Bedouin Shepherds with their sheep. He noticed that there were a number of flocks and a number of shepherds, but he watched as they all herded their sheep into the same narrow valley with steep sides, which acted like a natural sheep-pen among the hills. He watched as the shepherds sold some of their sheep to each other. Whenever a shepherd sold a sheep they tied the sheep's legs together and the sheep of course fell to the ground. These sheep were going to be killed for food. Now when all of the selling was done, each shepherd went, one at a time, and stood just at the opening to this valley, this natural sheep-pen. And each shepherd began to call his own sheep by name! When the sheep, who had all been panicking, heard their own shepherd's voice, they calmed down, and began to walk out from among all the other sheep and follow their master away. After each shepherd had done this, the only sheep left were those who were about to be killed, they were the ones left lying tied up on the ground!

That experience really spoke to Rob and he realised the truth of John ch.10. He had heard his Shepherd's voice and he had responded to his call. He was now in that Shepherd's hand and no-one could pluck him out of it. He was saved, and saved forever, and he's now serving the Lord as a pastor in Vancouver, Canada.

Do you know this salvation? Do you know that kind of assurance? Those sheep in Rob's story who didn't respond to their shepherd's voice were soon to be slaughtered. The same is true in human experience. Those who don't respond to the shepherd's voice will be destroyed in Hell.

Repeat v.16, 27-30.

If you hear the voice of Jesus calling you tonight, don't harden your heart, respond to him, come to him for salvation and **know** that you are saved.

