

Video of countryside walk – introduction and welcome

I try to do some walking each day – sometimes it is just 20-30 minutes around the block, but my wife, Caroline, and I have a longer favourite local walk – we call it the ‘sheep walk’ – because, well, at certain times of the year the fields are filled with lambs and sheep! It is the one I am walking today – but sadly no sheep today!

Today our Bible reading is about sheep.

Recently I read this... – it was by a vet - who also raises sheep:

“I can tell you to be called ‘a sheep’ it is not a complement. Sheep are a herd - if one sheep bolts for no reason, the majority - if not the entire flock - is likely to do the same thing. They are really dumb. They know how to eat, drink, reproduce . . . and that's about it. The only thing with a more questionable intelligence than a sheep is the idiot that chooses to raise sheep!”

So, if you want flattering, today's Bible reading about sheep - at first – may not be the obvious place to go!

. . . Welcome to Digital Church.

Opening video titles

Call to Worship

Thank you for “tuning in” (that phrase is not in common use these days). Wherever you are, alone or with others, in church or at home, whether it is a Sunday or a weekday - we join together to listen to God's word, to pray and praise God through the marvels of the Internet – it doesn't where we are or when it is – after all - God is above time and space!

We will have a short time of silent prayer as prepare to praise God – praising Him in words taken from Psalm 145.

Dear LORD, how glorious You are! Father, Your majesty fills our world!

How awesome are Your wondrous works of creation, which surround us daily.

Help us to open our eyes to Your splendour.

LORD, you reveal Yourself to us in nature.

Your creation is our first vision of You, but You are so much more than Your creation.

You are the Creator and Sustainer of All!

Thank you for the beauty of the trees, the birds and the flowers.

Thank you for the babbling brooks and rushing rivers.

Thank you for the majestic mountains and the tiny fireflies which fill our minds with wonder.

Thank you for the star-filled nights and the day-filled sunshine.

You have blessed us with eyes to see and ears to hear that we might take in Your wondrous works which fill our world.

Thank you, Father, for all the daily blessings and provisions that You have given to us.

Father, open our eyes to the many wondrous works which You have accomplished for all of us.

You provide the food we eat, the shelter we inhabit.

You provide the air we breathe and You alone give us life each day.

Thank you, Father, for your “awesome deeds” which we so often take for granted.

Thank you, Father, for Your most wondrous work of all, the salvation and gift of eternal life, which You have provided through Your Son and our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

May we meditate often on all these wonders, may we never take them for granted.

May we speak often of your awesome deeds

and cause others to consider the multitude of blessings You have given to all humankind.

Help each one of us to declare Your greatness so that all might look to You and praise You, blessing Your holy name forever.

May You alone receive all the glory! In the name of Jesus our Saviour. **Amen**

[written by Peggy Harvey – West Park Baptist Church]

We continue in praise with the Song “Great and Wonderful are Thy wondrous deeds O Lord God the Almighty”

Song Great and Wonderful

Great and Wonderful are Thy wondrous deeds
O Lord God, the Almighty
Just and true are all Thy ways, O Lord
King of the ages art Thou
Who shall not fear and glorify Thy name, O Lord?
For Thou alone art holy, Thou alone . . .

All the nations shall come and worship thee
All thy glory shall be revealed
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah, amen!
Lai, lai, lai, lai, lai...

(repeated 3 times and with instrumental parts)

TITLE: Great and Wonderful

BY: Stuart Dauermann

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Gospel Reading – John 10 v1-18 - Jesus the Good Shepherd

(Jesus said)“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. 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. 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.”

Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me - just as the Father knows me and I know the Father - and I lay down my life for the sheep. 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 reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

Reflection

SHEEP

Sheep depend heavily on their vision. I have read that sheep have good peripheral vision and can see behind themselves without turning their heads. However, they have poor depth perception and that they cannot see immediately in front of their noses. We might describe it as a ‘blind spot.’

WHY SHEEP?

As I mentioned in my introduction, according to a vet who raises sheep – they are rather dumb! This is may not be the most flattering of analogy for human beings, who are made in the image of God, but one, which the Bible finds appropriate for its purposes. My Bible concordance puts the number of references to sheep and shepherds in both Old & New Testaments - as numbering 13.

The analogies of shepherd and sheep in the Bible are there to help us to understand the relationship between God and humankind.

The most obvious example of this is Psalm 23 with its theme of nurturing, caring, protection. The psalmist calls God his shepherd with those beautiful opening words:

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (NIV)

God gave the Old Testament prophets the illustrations of sheep and shepherding to help the Israelites – and all since – to understand humankind's failure to follow God who is often called the “shepherd” of Israel. For example, from Isaiah 53 (v6)

All of us, like sheep, have strayed away.
We have left God's paths to follow our own.
Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all. (NLT)

The analogies of shepherd and sheep are also there to help us understand the responsibility of human leadership toward the people. Leaders of the Israelites were also described as shepherds - not often positively. In Ezekiel 34 v1-3 the ‘shepherds’ are criticised:

The word of the Lord came to me:
“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel;
prophesy and say to them:
‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says:
Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves!
Should not shepherds take care of the flock?

The leaders were required to be good shepherds – to be a reflection of God – the Shepherd of His people, and so to the New Testament where Jesus uses the illustration of sheep and shepherd, and He is the Good Shepherd, the Good Shepherd who continues to seek stray sheep with the strong references of nurturing and caring (Matthew 18 v12-14 and Luke 15 v3-7). Jesus - The Good Shepherd who sacrifices His life for the sheep.

CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Why does the Bible frequently use the sheep and shepherd analogy for its purpose? This is partly because the Bible is set in largely rural communities where sheep were a unit of wealth and a source of food, drink – milk, and clothes, and shepherds were a familiar sight in Palestine.

- To understand the analogies of sheep and shepherd more fully in the Bible it is helpful to keep in mind the several differences between sheep rearing in 1st-century Palestine and 21st-century Western Europe.
- Shepherds led their sheep in the East rather than being driven to fresh grazing
- There were no fenced fields.
Out on the common grazing lands the dangers were human rustlers, roaming wolves and, in Old Testament times, lions and bears looking for food. A shepherd's life could at times be dangerous.
- At night - for protection, sheep were herded into dry stone enclosures.
The shepherd might lie at the entrance, acting as a human gate, to prevent animals intruders entering. (v9 Jesus can say “I am the gate...”)
- Sheep responded and followed their shepherd - knowing his distinctive call.
Apparently, an intriguing sight in Palestine is watching several flocks of sheep merge as one at a water well and then separate again as each shepherd walks away using their individual call signs – the sheep knowing the shepherd and responding to his voice.

An interesting link with this is that the modern-day vet I quoted goes on to say:

...the sheep I need to bottle rear are much more adept and adaptable than their field counterparts. There is likely an argument here for nature vs nurture, as they remember the person...

JESUS – THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Having awareness of Jesus' listeners' cultural background in mind helps us to see more clearly the picture of God's care. When Jesus refers to Himself as the ‘Good Shepherd’, the Jews listening, would be reminded of the prophet Ezekiel's scathing rebuke of the evil leaders of Israel that I read a few minutes ago.

God – through Ezekiel – continues the rebuke (34 v1-6):

“You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them”.

Then - through Ezekiel – God says that He would take charge as the good shepherd.

“For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘I myself will search for my sheep and look after them’”. (v11)
Jesus is identifying Himself with God – the shepherd who would search out and care.

FOR US

Through the words of Jesus – in our reading - we have a picture of God's care for us, offering us reassurance that:

- God knows us personally by name

- which means He knows all about us
- He leads us through life.

We know that Jesus experienced the difficulties of life that we face - testing, hunger, persecution and mocking, fear, mourning of loved ones, rejection by companions. He has been there!

- He rescues and saves us - both eternally and, at times, temporally.

There is of course a requirement for the sheep to know and follow the shepherd's voice, and some dismiss this picture of the Good shepherd as sentimental. However, this picture of God's care provides a necessary counter to the harshness of lives in which the law of the jungle seems to prevail. God will not abandon us.

Jesus: description of Himself as the "Good Shepherd" – gives us something of the close relationship that is possible between Himself and His followers - this is a stark contrast with "the hired hand"! who does everything in his own self-interest and readily flees when danger comes.

- Jesus the Good Shepherd owns the sheep and is devoted to their care, offering - leadership and guidance, constant companionship
- unfailing care
- so greater a love that He did what only a genuine Shepherd would do - give His life for us His sheep.

A WORLDWIDE FLOCK

Finally, Jesus is telling us that just as the sheep in Israel recognised their shepherd's voice - so will God's people recognise Jesus. Jesus' vision - is a worldwide mission – His flock includes "other sheep". [v16]

- Will the many "other sheep" – in our world, in our country, in our communities, hear about God's love and see it in action - through our lives?
- Will the many "other sheep" - hear from us - about the salvation that is offered through faith in Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection to new life?

Christ has no body but yours,
 No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
 Yours are the eyes with which he looks
 Compassion on this world,
 Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
 Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
 Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
 Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
 Christ has no body now but yours,
 No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
 Yours are the eyes with which he looks
 compassion on this world.
 Christ has no body now on earth but yours. — *St. Teresa of Ávila*

Psalm 23 (video)

introduction and Prayer of Confession followed by Assurance of Forgiveness

Introduction:

The religious leaders of Jesus' day had been entrusted with spreading the Word of God but Jesus criticises them for neglecting to share this special gift fully with the people.

Much has been entrusted to us - especially the good news of the Word made flesh - Jesus Christ.

The more industrious we are in sharing this good news with others, the more opportunity there is for faith to increase in the lives of those who hear and respond to our witness.

Prayer of confession:

Merciful God,

forgive us when we invest our energies into increasing our personal prosperity

rather than enriching people's lives with the good news of Jesus Christ

and when we squander our gifts by failing to use them to build people up.

Forgive us when we conceal the wideness of your mercy by our lack of compassionate behaviour.

Forgive us when we fail to be adventurous in spreading the gospel around.

Increase our capacity to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed

even if this means taking risks and expending whatever energy we may have.

Help us to hear Jesus' words addressed to us about being eager to share the spiritual treasure that we have, knowing that as we do, more, much more, will be given.

This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

Assurance of Forgiveness: (1 Thess. 5 v9-11)

“God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us.

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up...”

in the knowledge that in Jesus Christ we are enriched, we are loved, we are forgiven.

Thanks be to God! Amen

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Song

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1 The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want
He makes me lie in pastures green
He leads me by the still, still waters
His goodness restores my soul
<i>And I will trust in You alone</i>
<i>And I will trust in You alone</i>
<i>For Your endless mercy follows me</i>
<i>Your goodness will lead me home</i></p> <p>2 He guides my ways in righteousness
And He anoints my head with oil
And my cup, it overflows with joy
I feast on His pure delights
<i>And I will trust in You alone . . .</i></p> | <p>3 And though I walk the darkest path
I will not fear the evil one
For You are with me, and Your rod and staff
Are the comfort I need to know
<i>And I will trust in You alone . . .</i></p> <p>4 For Your endless mercy follows me
Your goodness will lead me home (for Your endless mercy)
For Your endless mercy follows me
Your goodness will lead me home (for Your endless mercy)
For Your endless mercy follows me
Your goodness will lead me home</p> |
|---|---|

TITLE: The Lord's My Shepherd (Psalm 23)

BY: Stuart Townend

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Sending out prayer

May we fix our eyes on the Lord.

May we place our hand in His Hand,
trusting in His guiding and comfort.

May we go into this world,
that needs so much the words of healing love,
and bring the good news of God's absolute love
and presence to all people. **Amen**

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Digital Church

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