

February 27, 2013

I Am the Gate/Good Shepherd

John 10:1-21

LESSON FOCUS

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." John 10:11a**Today's Bible Lesson:****Jesus tells a story about a Shepherd and his sheep****John 10:1-10**

1 Jesus said, 'I tell you the truth. Only thieves climb over the fence of a sheepfold. Someone who does not enter through the gate is certainly a thief. 2 But the person who enters through the gate is the shepherd. He takes care of the sheep. 3 The person who guards the gate opens it for the shepherd. The sheep know their shepherd's voice. When he calls them, he uses each sheep's own name. And he leads them out. 4 When he has led all his sheep out, he walks in front of them. The sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 The sheep will not follow a person that they do not know. They will run away from a stranger, because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.'

6 Jesus told this story to the people. But they did not understand what the story really meant.

*7 So Jesus explained it to them. He said, 'I tell you the truth. I am like the gate for the sheep. 8 All those who came before me were like thieves. But the sheep (God's people) did not listen to them. 9 I am like the gate. Everybody who comes in by means of me will receive *salvation. Such people will go in and out. And they will be like sheep that find green fields with grass. 10 The thief (the devil) comes only to steal and to kill. He comes only to destroy. I have come so that people can have life. They can have it completely.'*

Jesus told many stories that would help people to understand about spiritual truths. The other three Gospels contain most of these stories. The stories were about familiar situations in people's daily lives.

Verses 1-5 at night, shepherds put their sheep into a sheepfold. This kept the sheep safe from dangers, for example wild animals and thieves. Often, the shepherd slept in the sheepfold in order to guard his sheep.

Shepherds often spent all day and all night with their sheep. They were able to identify each one. Each sheep had a name. The shepherd used their names to call them in and out of the sheepfold. This was necessary because sometimes several shepherds used the same sheepfold. Always the shepherd walked in front of his sheep and they followed him. He could watch out for any dangers ahead. The sheep followed the shepherd because they knew his voice. They would never follow a stranger, because they did not recognise a stranger's voice. A stranger's voice made them afraid.

The Old Testament writers often referred to a shepherd and his sheep when they wrote about the ideal king. An ideal king knows all his people really well. He protects them from dangers and from their enemies. He guides them and he leads them. They follow him because they trust him. In *Psalm 23*, David wrote the words: *'The Lord is my shepherd.'* He compared God's care for people to a shepherd's care for his sheep.

Jesus did not actually refer to himself as the shepherd in verses 1-5. But he was comparing himself with the shepherd. The thieves and strangers meant evil leaders who did not care about the people.

Verse 6 However, the people did not understand what this story meant. So Jesus explained it further.

Verses 7-8 He said, 'I am like the gate for the sheep.' This was because the shepherd was the means by which the sheep could enter the sheepfold. The shepherd provided the way to safety, away from danger. In the same way, Jesus is the only means by which people can come to God. He is the only way to receive salvation and to be safe from the results of sin.

False leaders may pretend to know other ways to come to God. But these false leaders are like thieves. Only Jesus can offer salvation to us.

Verse 10 Jesus gives life to us. He gives it to us immediately. This life makes us content inside our minds, even when bad things happen to us. This life continues even after we die.

The devil is like a thief. His purpose is to spoil and to ruin people's lives. His plan is to deceive people. So he tries to convince them that Jesus is not the only way to receive salvation.

Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd

John 10:11-21

11 Jesus said, 'I am like the good shepherd. The good shepherd is ready to die on behalf of his sheep. 12 A worker who receives wages to look after the sheep is not like the shepherd. That worker does not own the sheep. So if he sees a wolf (wild dog), he will leave the sheep. He will run away. Then the wolf will attack the sheep. And the sheep will scatter. 13 This is because such a worker only cares about his wages. He does not really care about the sheep.

*14 I describe myself as the good shepherd. I know my sheep (my people) and my sheep know me. 15 This is like my relationship with the Father. The Father knows me, and I know the *Father. And I am ready to die on behalf of the sheep. 16 I have other sheep, too. They belong to me, but they are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. Then there will be one flock (group of sheep) with one shepherd.*

17 The Father loves me because I give my life. But I will receive my life back again. 18 Nobody takes my life from me. I give my life because I want to give it. I have the authority both to give my life and to receive it back again. My Father has ordered me to do this.'

19 When he said this, the people had different opinions about him again.

20 Many people said, 'He has an evil spirit in him! He is mad! We should not listen to him.'

21 But other people said, 'A person with an evil spirit in them could not say these things! An evil spirit cannot make a blind person see!'

Verses 11-13 A person who receives wages to look after sheep does not really care about them. The sheep do not belong to him. He is doing the job just to get money. He cares more about his own safety. So if there is danger, he will leave the sheep. But the shepherd, who owns the sheep, really cares about them. When a wild animal attacks, the shepherd will protect the sheep. The shepherd will risk his own life so that his sheep will be safe.

Jesus used these familiar ideas to show how much he loved people. He loved them so much that he was ready to die instead of them.

Verses 14-16 The Greek word 'good' meant also 'beautiful' or 'attractive'. This did not refer to physical beauty. It meant that Jesus had qualities that attracted people to him.

When we *believe in Jesus, we belong to him. He is like our shepherd. When Jesus referred to 'sheep' in the previous verses, he was talking about the Jews. His audience would already be familiar with this idea from the scriptures (see note on 10:1-5).

But Jesus came also to save the Gentiles. The Gentiles were the meaning of the 'other sheep' (verse 16).

Verses 17-18 The Jewish leaders wanted to kill Jesus. And Jesus knew that he had to die as a sacrifice to save people.

Verses 19-21 C.S. Lewis, a 20th century writer, said that we can believe only one of three things about Jesus. Jesus said that he was God's Son. If this was not true, then Jesus was either mad or wicked. A mad

person believes things that are not true. A wicked person lies about something very important in order to deceive people on purpose. (To deceive means to persuade people that a lie is the truth.) So if Jesus was not mad or wicked, he was telling the truth. He was God's Son.

Jesus' audience had to make a decision about him, too. Some people in the audience said that he was mad or wicked. But other people recognized the truth about him. They believed him because of the miracle that they had seen. Only God's power could cure a man who was born blind.

WELCOME ACTIVITY

Marshmallow Sheep

Have the following items on the tables for when the children arrive:

1 bag of large marshmallows

1 bag of miniature marshmallows

1 box of pretzel sticks

Have the children create sheep using only the items on the table. They can tear apart the marshmallows and break the pretzel sticks if desired. Have the children decide which sheep are the funniest and the most realistic.

While working on their projects, explain that today's lesson is about The Good Shepherd, and how a shepherd takes care of sheep. Ask the children if they have ever seen a real sheep. What was it like?

BIBLE STORY

John 10:1-21

Open your Bible so children can see you "reading" God's Word. Show them your Bible and the words to they know what you're saying is coming from God's Word. Use Tell the Story idea below. Use The Beginners Bible page 98-104 to help children see the story.

The Bible tells us that we are like sheep! No, we are not wooly and we do not make sheep noises. We are like sheep because sheep need someone to care for them.

Sheep do not always know what they should do. They do not think very well sometimes. Sheep need a very good shepherd. Sheep may not be smart enough for some things, but sheep know the voice of their shepherd and will follow him anywhere.

Sheep need a good shepherd to show them where the cool water is. They need a good shepherd to show them where the green grass is. Sheep need a good shepherd to protect them from hungry bears and angry wolves. Sheep also need a good shepherd to pick them up and carry them home when they have wandered away. And sheep need a good shepherd to keep them from dangerous things.

And just like sheep, we need someone to care for us. Jesus is our Good Shepherd! Just like sheep need cool water and green grass, we need to read the Bible and hear it being taught. We need protection from things that are dangerous. We need someone to remind us when we are not doing the right thing. Jesus, our Good Shepherd, does these things for us. He does them when we learn about the Bible. He uses our Bible Study leaders and our parents to help us know what is right and to remind us to stay away from what is wrong.

Jesus cares for us! Jesus cares for YOU!

Discussion Questions:

1. What does a shepherd take care of? (*Sheep.*)
2. Does a good shepherd lay down (or give) his life for the sheep? (*Yes.*)
3. In our Bible story, does the good shepherd know his sheep? (*Yes.*)
4. Do the sheep know the good shepherd? (*Yes.*)
5. Do we have a good shepherd? (*Yes.*) Who is our Good Shepherd? (*Jesus.*)

GOD'S WORD IN MY HEART

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." John 10:11a

Talk about shepherds and sheep. Explain to the children how sheep are not very bright, and they need a shepherd to take care of them, to bring them to green grass and pure water to drink. A good shepherd makes sure the sheep are happy and safe. Have the children recite the verse several times. Then ask the following question:

Jesus tells us that He is our Good Shepherd. What does this mean to you?

IDEA: Bring a cane, a bathrobe and a stuffed sheep toy to class. Allow your students to act out the story.

PLAYING

Who is the Lost Sheep?

Children take turns being the lost sheep while the shepherd guesses who is missing from the flock.

Materials:

Old white bed sheet
Blindfold
Masking tape

Preparation:

Use masking tape to create a large square on the floor, about 6 feet on all sides. You may need a larger square if you have a large number of children. All but two children will need to fit into the square with some room to move around.

What you will do:

First you will choose one child to be the shepherd. All the other children will stand inside the square, and pretend to be sheep by moving around continuously and saying, "Baa, baa, baa." Then place a blindfold on the shepherd. Next, you will choose one of the sheep from inside the square and have them move to another area of the room. Cover them with the sheet. This child is the lost sheep and can say, "Baa, baa, baa," but must stay under the sheet without moving.

Then take off the blindfold and let the shepherd guess which child is the lost sheep by looking at the remaining kids (sheep) inside the square. Remember that the sheep inside the square should be constantly moving around and saying, "Baa, baa, baa" to confuse the shepherd.

When the shepherd correctly identifies the lost sheep, that child becomes the shepherd. Choose another child to be the lost sheep under the sheet. Continue until everyone has a chance to be the shepherd, or as time permits.

What you will say:

Actually being lost can be very frightening. Jesus told the people a parable about a shepherd who had 100 sheep and one was lost. He went out to look for it, and when he found it, he rejoiced greatly. A good shepherd knows his sheep, and will look for any that are lost. Jesus also said, "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. *John 10: 14-15.*

Who is our Good Shepherd? (*Jesus*)

That's right, Jesus. Because He is our Good Shepherd, we don't ever need to be afraid of being lost.

The Good Shepherd and the Wolf

Materials:

None

What you will do:

Start by choosing one child from the class to be the first "wolf." Have everyone else form a large circle about one arm's length apart and then sit down. All of the children sitting in the circle are "sheep," except one who will become the "shepherd" as determined by the wolf.

The wolf begins by walking around the outside of the circle. While doing this, he or she will tap the head or shoulder of each child in the circle, saying, "Sheep." The wolf can say "sheep" to as many kids as he or she wants. However, at some point, the wolf will say, "Shepherd" while taping the head or shoulder of one child.

Upon hearing this, the shepherd must get up and chase the wolf around the circle. The wolf tries to get back to the empty spot left by the shepherd before being tagged. If the wolf gets to the empty space in time, the shepherd becomes the next wolf. If the shepherd is able to tag the wolf, the shepherd gets to return to the circle, and the wolf tries again.

Continue play until the majority of the children have a chance to be either the wolf or the shepherd. If the wolf is unable to get to the empty space after two tries, go ahead and pick someone else to be the wolf.

(To make it easier for the children to know who has had a turn and who has not, you can have each winner stand up in the circle instead of sitting back down. The wolf can only choose someone who is still sitting down to be a shepherd.)

What you will say:

We are going to play a game called "The Good Shepherd and the Wolf." Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Jesus is saying that we are like sheep, and He is the one who will save us. Isn't it good to know that we have Jesus as our shepherd?

Sheep depend on their shepherd to keep them safe. There may be wolves out there, just waiting to snatch up a tiny sheep. The shepherd is always on the lookout for wolves. When one is spotted, what does the shepherd do? He chases it away. In our game, we will see if the wolf can get away from the good shepherd.

ACTING

**Think of Jesus as a shepherd, you His special lamb.
Pretend you're in His flock of sheep, to help you understand.**

Say baa

**The Shepherd will protect you, no matter what the cost
He'll gladly give His life for lambs, so not one lamb is lost.**

Make cross with fingers

**The Shepherd knows His lambs by name, and they can trust His call.
He leads them safely through each day, because He loves them all.**

Cross arms over heart

**When day is done and lambs are led to rest in the sheep pen,
This Shepherd is the only One the gatekeeper lets in.**

Beckon with arm

**So little lambs, now hear His voice, for He is life and love,
The Good Shepherd is Jesus, the way to heaven above.**

Point to the sky

CLOSING ACTIVITY

Blessing:

**May God, who is all around you,
pour his love upon you.**

**And Jesus, his life a sacrifice,
walk right there beside you.**

**And may God's Holy Spirit,
the one who lives inside you,
keep you strong,
comfort, lead and guide you!**

Beginning at the bottom of the circle, slowly

make a large circle with your hands. Finish by bringing your hands down and wiggling the fingers to resemble rain.)

Slowly make a large sign of the cross. Then move your hands out to the sides.

Cross your hands over the heart.

Move to a "strong man" position. Then

cross your arms with the hands on corresponding upper arms to communicate comfort. Bring one hand forward with "lead" and the other with "guide" to complete the blessing.)

Let's sing Jesus Loves Me.

Sing: Jesus Loves Me

***Jesus loves me, this I know
For the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to Him belong,
They are weak, but He is strong.***

***Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
The Bible tells me so.***