

| Series: Easter 2020 | Reference: <i>Mt 16:21-25</i> | Title: Shepherd | Date: 04.12.2020 |
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| Website Writeup: | | | |
| The concept of sheep is a good metaphor for us. Sheep are interesting, goats have to be herded, whereas sheep listen to the Shepherds voice & follow. We have a God who died on our behalf, and rose from the dead to conquer sin & death - why wouldn't we follow that voice? | | | |

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

Memory Verses for this Series - about 1 every 2 weeks

¹⁴The Word became flesh & made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one & only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace & truth. (Jn 1:14)

¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his one & only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (Jn 3:16)

²⁴God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit & in truth.” (Jn 4:24)

³⁵Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. (Jn 6:35)

³¹To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³²Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (Jn 8:31–32)

³⁶So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (Jn 8:36)

³⁴“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (Jn 13:34–35)

⁶Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (Jn 14:6)

⁵“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (Jn 15:5)

²⁹Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (Jn 20:29)

Happy Easter! If you have a Bible, open to John 10.

Right now small businesses are struggling. Owners are married to their business. Managers depend on paychecks, but it's not their baby - they won't sacrifice, or inject their own cash, it's not theirs. A business, to its creator is an extension of themselves. Employees might slack off for a manager, but when they hear the owners voice they snap to it. Jesus speaks of the Church in a similar way in John 10 as he paints our next portrait of Jesus as Shepherd. Let's read starting in v1...

"Very truly I tell you Pharisees (the prideful religious leaders), anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief & a robber. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name & leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

Jesus has been very patient & clear with these religious leaders, giving them every opportunity to understand & accept who He is to them. Although they've understood what He claims to be & even seen signs of His divinity, they choose not to put their faith in Him. He'll now use the image of a Shepherd, and of a gate to communicate Himself one more time to them & others.

A shepherd's job, as night descended in Palestine, was to protect from predators who'd love to have a plump little sheep for dinner. He'd keep them in a circular sheep pen about 10 feet high with a single opening for a door at night. Several shepherd flocks might be placed in one pen. Shepherds took nightly turns sleeping in the doorway so anything harmful would have to go through the shepherd to get in.

How does this illustration speak to these prideful religious leaders? Remember, we saw last week they're stuck, blind by choice, unable to rectify Jesus speaking truth & healing people - He doesn't fit their mold. Maybe you're stuck today in how you view Jesus, but I'm hoping God adjusts our focus on Him today!

Up to this point Jesus has spent most of His time in the courtyard of the Temple teaching Jews. In other words, speaking to His sheep, in His pen, since Jews were the chosen people of God & the Temple was considered God's dwelling place on earth. Later He'll claim there are other sheep not in His pen as of yet - referring to non-Jewish peoples who'd later choose to follow Jesus.

He's using the Temple walls with its Gate as a metaphor. Within those walls some will recognize His voice, while others won't, since they're not His sheep. In other words, to some present, Jesus was Shepherd, and for others He's not, and still others He'll bring in from the surrounding gentile nations - which we see over time. He's not saying, "I'm a shepherd among shepherds." He's saying there's only one true shepherd of humankind, He's Lord & He'll fill His Temple with those who follow His voice.

As we've said, several flocks may share the same sheep pen. However, when a particular shepherd walks up to the door & calls, only his sheep recognize & respond to his voice. Others don't. They know his call, following him in & out, while the others stay behind.

An Australian man was arrested & charged with stealing a sheep, claiming it was his. When the case went to court, the judge asked the sheep be brought into the courtroom. He ordered the plaintiff to step outside & call the animal. The sheep didn't move. He asked the defendant to go out & call the sheep. When the accused made his distinctive call, the sheep bounded toward the door. It was obvious he recognized the voice of his master. Case dismissed! When a shepherd calls his sheep, they instinctively follow. He doesn't have to drive them as one would goats, they follow his voice.

He continues in V7...*Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who have come before me are thieves & robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in & go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal & kill & destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

Standing in the Temple courts using the structure as a metaphor for a sheep pen, Jesus highlights the gate, reminding us of 1 Tim 2:5, *For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God & men, the man Christ Jesus.* Jesus is the one gate in which we come into the presence of God & Jesus is the one Shepherd who leads us through that Gate.

Continuing in V11...¹¹*"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand is not the shepherd & does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep & runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock & scatters it. ¹³The man runs away because he is a hired hand & cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep & my sheep know me - ¹⁵just as the Father knows me & I know the Father - and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I 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 & one shepherd.*

Jesus is the Shepherd of the sheep because He entered the world through the gate according to God's plan & timing. Virgin born as prophesied in Isaiah 7:14 & fulfilled in Matt. 1:21-23. Born in Bethlehem as prophesied in Micah 5:2 & fulfilled in Matthew 2:4-6. Come in the fullness of time as seen in Galatians 4:4. Brought out of Egypt as prophesied in Hosea 11:1 & fulfilled in Matthew 2:14-15. And His arrival provoked the rage of the enemy as prophesied in Jeremiah 31:15 & fulfilled in Matthew 2:16-18.

Jesus...the right person, born in the right place, arriving at the right time, summoned from the right country, attended by the right signs. The Shepherd who came through the gate to call his sheep (Luke 4:18-19; Isa. 61:1-2). The only gate to God in the sheep pen of life - Jesus (Eph. 2:18; John 14:6; Acts 4:12). The Shepherd who willingly lays down his life for His sheep. The Gate by which we enter new life with God.

The imagery of Jesus in John's gospel is plentiful & multifaceted. We've seen in past weeks, He's the Living Water, the Sheep Gate, the Bread of life, the Fountain of life, the Son of Man, the Word of God, the Savior, the Teacher, the Great Physician, the One who Satisfies. Today we see Him as Shepherd & Gate. But if you didn't catch it, He alludes to

yet another role He plays for us. An important one on this Easter Sunday, the one who lays down His life...the perfect sacrifice...the Unblemished Sacrificial Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Christmas tells us God entered the world in the form a child. Quoting the Prophet Isaiah, Matthew tells us in chapter 1:22–23 of his gospel...*All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ “The virgin will conceive & give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).* That child, the Bible tells us, grew to be a man, performed miracles, cared for the poor, healed the sick & never once sinned - that is, never once did He ever transgress God’s moral law. Jesus, who said of Himself in John 14:6, *“I am the way & the truth & the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* God with us, the Shepherd, the Way, the Truth, the Life & the only gateway to knowing God.

Good Friday tells us, this God-Man actually did give His life for His sheep, just as prophesied, as He alluded to in John 10, and stated would happen in Matthew 16:21, after Peter proclaimed Him as the one sent from God to save mankind. It says... ²¹ *From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem & suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests & the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed & on the third day be raised to life.*

This was the Messianic call as stated in the prophets before - the Messiah would lay down His life for people. It’s what a loving God does, lives among us, walks with us, experiences more pain than we could endure & dies in our place. Doing for us what we can’t do for ourselves - His death heals our crooked hearts. Many of America’s small businesses won’t recover. They’ll die, no matter how much effort an owner puts into it. They’ll be gone & eventually forgotten never to provide anything to a customer again as the lifeblood flow of cash is drained away. There’s no return from death.

On Friday Jesus was led to death on the cross, something we adorn ourselves with today. The electric chair is the modern equivalent of that ancient cross. Crucifixion was Rome’s means of capital punishment. Wearing a cross in first century Palestine would be like wearing a miniature electric chair around your neck today - people would think you strange & morbid.

To die on a cross was brutal, if you didn’t pass out from the pain of having spikes driven through your wrists & ankles, you may when they lift you up, and drop the base of the cross into a 2 foot hole to anchor it. Or from pressing your broken ankles against that metal spike to lift yourself, desperately trying to catch a breath. That’s death by crucifixion, not by blood loss, it’s a struggle for breath from beginning to last. As you hang there your body collapses your lungs & you slowly suffocate. Add in the heat & sting of sweat in open wounds, and it’s probably the most, inhumane way to take a life. That’s how Jesus died...an excruciatingly painful death - His heart stopped, blood ceased to flow, and His chest no longer rose & fell with breath any longer. Dead.

How does such a symbol of pain & death become for Christians around the world the symbol of ultimate life & joy? If that had been the end of the story, we’d not be wearing a cross as jewelry & I’d not be speaking to you right now. Hope would’ve died that Friday! This story would’ve died out along with the millions of others crucified by Rome

throughout history. Just like 10 years from now, we won't remember the names of all the small businesses which died off during the Corona Virus Pandemic.

But at some point in the interior of that quiet tomb eyelids began to flutter. Blood began to flow. A heart began to beat, maybe slowly at first. The cold stiff pallor of Jesus' dead face turned again to warm springy flesh. There was a gasp of breath, maybe a cough. Eyes opened, desperately trying to focus in the dark via one little crack of sunlight from between the rocks. He stood & stretched, and somehow that stone was rolled away & He emerged alive as He'd predicted & promised!

Today we celebrate, not just Jesus *willingness* to lay down his life in a brutal death - that in itself would be noble if accomplished, but still not enough! We needed more, but we weren't asking for it - He did this of His own will. But if Friday happened without Sunday it would fall painfully short of our need! A willing death does nothing for you & me! There has to be a victory, a conquering of death...death which seeped into the world at the beginning of days when humankind collectively turned our back on God & fell out of relationship with Him bringing sin into the world! Sin which separated us from a holy God, but that Christ erases by paying its price. Because sin cannot cohabitate with holiness, nor would we want it to, God's holiness & peace is all we long for!

Never mind all the horrific acts done by others throughout history, the most obvious of sin, that which is so easily labeled sin by even the greatest skeptic or atheist. That might leave my seemingly trivial disobedience to the high moral call of God off the hook - but it doesn't! Even if I've twisted one small truth, uttered one small lie, hated one person even just in my heart for one second, I've fallen into the company of all of humanity in that I have not held up the great standard of God's moral law - none of us have, none of us can. We've all sinned & fallen short of the glory of God if we're honest.

We needed Jesus' sacrifice on Friday, and equally so, His resurrection on Sunday! His sinless sacrifice opened the door for relationship with God the Father once more - it mended the broken relationship. We needed the power of His resurrection! The power to conquer death's stranglehold on us!

Friday leads to Sunday when that stone was rolled away, and the angels said to the women who came to attend His burial site, *"Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified & on the third day be raised again.'*" (Lk 24:5-7)

Focus on that word 'must'. It had to happen. Jesus must be delivered over, must die & must rise again - that's what we celebrate today. Not sentimentality, but reality of death conquered - a well documented account of a powerful work of God. The moment on which all of time & eternity pivot. The Shepherd who willingly gives His life for His sheep, BUT who also takes it back up again for them. The one blameless sacrifice covering over all of humanity's ills, sins, fallen nature & mistakes intentional, or unintentional. The Good Shepherd who brings life to anyone who'd follow his voice!

Not just His words were a parable, but His life was as well. It wasn't until after His death & resurrection that statements like He made in John 12:23-24 made any sense... *"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel*

of wheat falls to the ground & dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. His death was necessary to pay the cost of our weighty sin - and not one person in their right mind can say anyone except Jesus is innocent of sin. If you do. You're blind. That sin we don't need to take to our graves forever separate from God the Father, because Jesus willingly took it to His grave for us - only a sinless sacrifice like His could accomplish this! As He said in John 10 - He willingly lays down His life for His sheep! Like a seed dying in the dirt, Christ's one substitutionary death produced life for many! As a seed 'dies' it births new life - if Jesus stayed in that tomb, none of this would be worth it! But He didn't - He rose & new life began! And when the seed of that new life falls on an open heart, good soil to receive it, it produces new life! So Fridays pain leads to Sundays joy! All pain leads to new life in some way. What you're experiencing with this virus may be painful, but God will bring new life from it. Maybe it got you on this Webinar to hear about Christ for the first time today. Maybe it's broken you of some old bad habits. Maybe it's slowed you down to get you to think of mortality & eternity for once.

When trouble hits, managers leave, owners stay. He's speaking to the Pharisees - the Guardians of Truth, so steeped in their learning pride's taken over. They no longer recognize the voice of God & seek to control the crowd for their own purposes. They're the hired hand, the robber who climbs in over the wall caring nothing for the people.

Jesus speaks of the bond that exists between sheep & shepherd. They know Him, He knows them. Sheep all look alike to me, however a good shepherd can tell them apart, often because of their defects or peculiar traits. A man who was tending his sheep explained this to a friend. "See that sheep over there?" he asked, "His toes point inward. That one has a squint. That one's missing a small a patch of wool on its back. That one has a small black mark, and the one closest to us has a small piece torn out of its ear." Observing all of them, the other guy thought about Christ, who also knows the individual weaknesses & failings of His children & watches over us with love & understanding. With infinite concern He notes the doubts, fears, trials, conflicts & defeats which disturb our peace, and He leads us in & out to beautiful pasture.

The Shepherd knows His sheep. He knows everything there is to know about you (Matt. 10:29-31; Matt. 6:8). He knows every strength & every weakness. Every joy & burden. Every mountain & valley. He knows every victory & battle. He stands ready to help us times of need (Heb. 4:15-16). He's our Good Shepherd & will look after us (Ps 23:1-6).

When someone tunes a piano there are thousands of pounds of pressure put on the strings. You are dealing with micro distances in tuning. Each note has three strings which have to be tuned to each other. You can't tune a piano to another piano, but a thousand pianos tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other. God pressures to tune us to the voice of the Shepherd which brings unity in love & direction as we're all tuned to one voice. We can't tune ourselves to a person, or the lies of the Enemy, only to Jesus. Guardians of Truth hear the words but tune themselves to something different. Spiritual health takes pressure, redirection & following. Jesus is the only Gate to enter back into relationship with God, tune yourself to the Shepherd who leads us into an abundant full life of wholeness again.

EXTRA THOUGHTS FOR STUDY

Jesus is the good shepherd, how do we become familiar with his voice?

The concept of sheep is a good metaphor for us. Sheep are interesting animals, goats have to be herded, whereas sheep listen to the Shepherd's voice & follow. Sheep left unattended go astray, left to their own devices will eat themselves sick. Sheep are vulnerable to attack & need protection. Sheep live in community, they're not individual animals like a snow leopard, or polar bear. Sheep need shepherding, they need to be led. I'd imagine there is a time after a sheep is purchased, or born into a fold, where they do not know the voice of the Shepherd, they must learn to follow it. They hear it the first time they're brought into the fold, but it must become familiar to them, they must learn to trust it. How do you recognize & become familiar with the voice of Jesus? Because there are many different voices out there vying for our attention. But only Jesus wants & can lead you into full life.

Firstly, you will find His voice in Scripture which will give you the ability to identify falsehood. This is why your personal quiet times are so important for your spiritual formation; to recognize falsehood from Truth. Because many of us believe lies about ourselves & others which are contrary to the Scriptures. Things such as, "I am no good." "I cannot get past this." "I will never be free." "I am ugly, no one likes me." "I can't do this." "They did that on purpose." We could keep going, but one thing to do is to start replacing these lies with Truth directly from the Scriptures. Truth about who Jesus is, and who yourself & others are in light of Him.

Included below is a list of Truths about who you are in Christ - this is certainly not exhaustive - there are too many! But it is a starting point. Amos 3:3 says, *How can two walk together unless they agree?*

To walk with Jesus you must agree with Him & His assessment of you - not anyone else's, not even your own. Many of us make agreements with the Enemy which are spiritual vows like the ones we have stated. Here are a few more... *I will never be dependent on anyone! / I won't feel this pain! / This is too hard to work on myself so I am going to avoid the issue. / I won't get close to anyone so I won't get hurt! / I'm dirty and bad and I won't ever let anyone see the true me. / If they knew who I was really was, they would reject me.* These are all lies which Satan convinces us of, they are agreements/vows we make with him, not Jesus - and there are so many more. And we must remember the promises of Christ & how different they are than what we have believed or been told.

Who I Am In Christ

"How can two walk together unless they agree?" Amos 3:3

You need to know who you are in Christ so that you can live an abundant life with Jesus. The more you *agree* with God about your identity in Christ, the more your behavior will reflect your God given identity. Learn to see yourself as God sees you. Accept what God says about you & become the whole person you're meant to be. Understanding who you are in Christ will give you a strong foundation to build your life on. Your identity doesn't depend on something you do or have done. Your true identity is who you are in Christ. When you are in Christ you are a new creation, the old has passed away. It's time to stop living out of who people say you are & take hold of the truth of God's word.

- I am loved - 1John 3:3
- I am accepted - Ephesians 1:6
- I am a child of God - John 1:12
- I am Jesus' friend - John 15:14
- I am a joint heir with Jesus, sharing His inheritance with Him - Romans 8:17
- I am united with God and one spirit with Him - 1 Corinthians 6:17
- I am a temple of God. His spirit and life are in me - 1 Corinthians 6:19
- I am a member of Christ's body - 1 Corinthians 12:27
- I am a Saint - Ephesians 1:1
- I am redeemed and forgiven - Colossians 1:14
- I am complete in Jesus Christ - Colossians 2:10
- I am free from condemnation - Romans 8:1
- I am a new creation because I am in Christ - 2 Corinthians 5:17
- I am chosen of God, holy and dearly loved - Colossians 3:12
- I am established, anointed, and sealed by God - 2 Corinthians 1:21
- I do not have a spirit of fear, but of love, power, and a sound mind - 2 Timothy 1:7
- I am God's co-worker - 2 Corinthians 6:1
- I am seated in heavenly places with Christ - Ephesians 2:6
- I have direct access to God - Ephesians 2:18
- I am chosen to bear fruit - John 15:16
- I am one of God's living stones, being built up in Christ as a spiritual house - 1 Peter 2:5
- I have been given exceedingly great and precious promises by God by which I share His nature - 2 Peter 1:4
- I can always know the presence of God, He never leaves me - Hebrews 13:5
- God works in me to help me do the things He wants me to do - Philippians 2:13
- I can ask God for wisdom and He will give me what I need - James 1:5
- I have been justified - Romans 5:1
- I am assured that God works all things out for good - Romans 8:28

This list is not exhaustive, there is so much more! Simply choose to believe what God says about you. Try reading the above list every day for a month, preferably out loud. The more you know who you are in Christ, the more your behavior will reflect your true identity; *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind"* Romans 12:2. To walk with Jesus you need to know and believe who you are in Him. Understanding your identity in Christ is crucial to your walk with Him. The best way to renew your mind & experience transformation is by knowing, thinking, and speaking who you are in Christ. Train yourself to say the same things that God says in His word about you.

The second way you hear His voice is through *personal & corporate prayer & worship*. The Christian life is *not an individual pursuit* - it's within the context of community. Corporate worship & your Community Groups are important for your spiritual formation. Experiencing community across life stages, the kids in this church are vital to your spiritual growth, as you are to them. So we should gather, worship & pray together (we do our best while in a social distancing situation & we'll get back into the room together) Rachel's doing a great job in developing our prayer ministry. Utilize the prayer team, they are there to intercede for you.

GOD BLESS & STAY CONNECTED THIS WEEK!