**30th April 2023, John 10 1-10, Jesus the Shepherd, by Dr Maxwell Reid**

This passage of John comes after the story of the healing of a blind man. This man, who can now see, claimed that this healer must be sent from God to do the things he has done. Such a statement had the propensity to stir up considerable controversy because the Pharisees view such a statement as a challenge to their powers.

Consequently, they challenged these claims. It was seen as imperative that Jesus be discredited. For example, he came from Galilee, not from Bethlehem. Secondly, he healed on the Sabbath, and he does not bear the expected indications of the long-awaited Messiah. Put more simply, he was not the right type! Of course, this trumped-up evidence was about as threadbare as the evidence for the tooth fairy.
I can see modern-day parallels where for example, in England you must be the right type, er, that is from the right school for various kinds of social credibility. In reality, most New Zealanders don’t give a hoot what school you went to, but while this British elitism might nowadays have been the very graveyard of the British motoring industry, the Pharisees thought it worth a try 2000 years ago. To answer the questions of the Pharisees, Jesus gave a simple analogy, the analogy of a flock of sheep and a shepherd.
First, to better understand the purpose of a shepherd during the times of Jesus, it is helpful to realise that sheep were utterly defenceless and totally dependent upon the shepherd. Sheep were always subject to danger and must always be under the watchful eye of the shepherd as they graze. Heavy rainfalls may sweep them away, robbers may steal them, and wolves might attack the flock. Driving snow in winter, blinding dust and burning sands in summer, long, lonely hours each day—all these the shepherd patiently endures for the welfare of the flock. Consequently, the occupation of a Middle Eastern shepherd of biblical times was a dirty and dangerous one. Many times, all the shepherds had to fight off wolves and other wild animals was a staff with a crook. At night, it was the common practice of Shepherds to enclose their sheep in communal pens for safety. So, how do they sort them out in the morning? Apparently, the sheep are familiar with their own shepherd, and these who belong to his flock, knew him and he knew them. He was so familiar to them that he could call them by name, and they would respond.
Sheep are skittish animals and “spook” easily, but because they knew the shepherd’s voice, they would calm down and follow him, and nobody but him. Consequently, several flocks would mix together, and when the flocks’ true shepherd spoke, they separated and followed him. If a thief came, the sheep would not follow him because they do not know his voice. At night the shepherd lay down at the gate to the pen, to give his life if necessary to protect his flock. That’s what makes the relationship between the shepherd and his flock so special.
I can believe that, if we put all of our dogs in a pen, and when we opened the gate our dogs would come to my voice, and Sharon’s two would go to her. Mind you, I would like to see someone try it with cats!
So, what comfort can we Christians draw from Jesus being our shepherd?
As Christians, when we acknowledge that Jesus is acting as our shepherd there are a few principles we can be sure of. Firstly, Jesus Cares. “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” Much as a shepherd looks after His flock, so does Jesus look after us, God’s children. As written in [John](https://www.biblestudytools.com/john/10-11.html), a shepherd will lay “down his life for his sheep.” That’s exactly what Jesus did for us on the Cross. Jesus spoke in this fashion before dying on our behalf. This is all the more reason to cement our faith and believe. Secondly, God Provides. “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.” ([Psalm 23](https://www.biblestudytools.com/psalms/passage/?q=psalms+23:1-3))

A herd of animals may survive on their own in the wilderness, but a herd taken care of by a good shepherd is bound to live a more [abundant life](https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/4-ways-that-jesus-gives-you-abundant-life.html). The same applies to humanity when we strive to live lives in tandem with Jesus. Much like this psalm, Jesus acts as our Shepherd guiding us. “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.” ([Psalm 23](https://www.biblestudytools.com/psalms/23-4.html))

This passage draws a comparison useful even in modern society. There are those who believe Jesus, some after seeing miracles, and others just take him at his word. And there are others who do not believe. While we are not able to physically watch Jesus perform miracles, we still have the choice of believing his word and joining his flock. From John’s testimony, we can see the loyalty he upholds for those who follow him.

We need to listen and declutter the noisiness of everyday life.

Jesus is our gateway to living and we need to spend time in pastures of peace with self-reflection, far away from the commercial advertising messages that can affect our self-image, away from feelings of worthlessness. We as individuals, and as families need to explore ways in which our sense of self as beloved children of God may have been compromised by the unholy expectations of a commercialised society where these expectations can translate into personal desires. Failure can leave us feeling parched and empty of divine grace. We must unmask the unhelpful clutter of life portrayed by the media as a success and be willing to follow the greener pastures of Christ, who is the gateway to abundant living. This attentiveness will increase the likelihood that Christians will learn how to resist the deadly messages of rampant commercialisation. Remember, the sheep listen to their shepherd, and ignore the other outside temptations.

The word shepherd should paint a picture to us of the unceasing vigilance and patience of Jesus. The gate is therefore a portal to abundant life. It is not a one-time exit to life, as it would be if John was only speaking of the afterlife. Instead, the sheep go in and out to find pasture, but the gate offers protection form those who would kill or destroy. The gate is therefore a metaphor for salvation. Whoever enters by me – the fully human and divine Jesus, - not a messenger of false prophet of doctrine, - will come and go finding a life of green pasture in the abundant and rewarding world of Jesus Christ. Life can be a dull and dispirited thing, but when we walk with Jesus, there comes a new vitality, a superabundance of life. It is only when we live with Christ in our lives, that the life becomes really worth living and we begin to live in the real sense of the word.

Amen