

The Old Paths

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“Sheep Of God’s Pasture”

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As one reads the Bible, it becomes clear that God is called the shepherd, and His people are called His sheep. Some make sarcastic remarks in reference to this, calling folks “sheeple” or implying that being a sheep in God’s pasture is demeaning in some way. Nothing could be further from the truth.

When we read the Bible, we see that the illustration of shepherd to sheep describes a relationship of love, care, protection, supplying needs, sacrifice, and the like. This is evident when we read Psalm 23 and learn all the things the Lord does as our shepherd. Not only in Psalm 23, but also in John 10, we read about Christ’s contrast of the true shepherd and the hireling (Jn. 10:1-18). How thankful we ought to be for the love, care, nourishment, protection, sacrifice, and blessings God has afforded those of us who are His sheep!

In this article, I wish for us to look at things from a little different angle. Instead of a study about the Shepherd and what He does for us, let us look at His sheep. Let us ask what kind of sheep we are. Are we acting in a way that would please the Shepherd? Since we are to be the sheep of His pasture (Ps. 79:13), what kind of sheep are we?

Listening Sheep?

Jesus said that His sheep listen to Him and in fact listen for their

name, because He knows them by name (Jn. 10:3). In fact, these sheep are listening so intently, and are so tuned to the Shepherd’s voice that if someone else tries to call for them, they run away from that person (Jn. 10:5). Are we like this? Do we listen for our Master’s voice as we read and study the word of God daily (I Tim. 4:16; II Tim. 2:2)? Are we listening for the Shepherd’s voice as we hear the words read and preached during worship?

Could it be that we are listening to other “voices” instead of the voice of the Shepherd (Jn. 10)? Other voices are ultimately calling us into sin and destruction because they are leading us away from the Good Shepherd (Jn. 10:11), the Chief Shepherd (I Pet. 5:4) who loves us so much that He died so that we might be saved (Matt. 20:28)! Are we listening to the devil, who tells us that God’s ways are “unreasonable”, or are “not realistic” in our current environment? Do we not realize that such “voices” are calling us away from Christ, and are leading us to destruction? Do we even care?

Hebrew 3:15 says, *“Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts”* In connection with this, Jesus said, *“the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers”* (Jn. 10:3-5).

What if someone speaks false-

hoods to us (II Pet. 2:1-3)? Do we run away from false doctrine, or do we draw near, wanting to hear what is said, like the Athenians did (Acts 17:21)? Sadly, some “sheep” are looking for the “new”, the “different”, and the “popular” to soothe their itching ears (II Tim. 4:3-4). “New”, “popular”, “and “different” are not words which describe the old Jerusalem gospel! It is the same truth that has been in existence for 2000 years! It is this same truth which will save, or set us free from sin (Rom. 1:16; Jn. 8:32). Friend, for what are we listening? Are we the listening sheep that bring glory and honor to the Chief Shepherd?

Wandering Sheep?

Jesus lamented when He saw people wandering like sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:36; Mk. 6:34). This was the way many people were then, and how many people are today. They go through life as if they have no “chart or compass” and then wonder why their lives are in such a mess. Could this be said of you? Be honest! (Jer. 10:23)

In thinking about wandering sheep, I remember that Jesus spoke a parable about a shepherd who had to leave his 99 sheep to go after one who had wandered away (Lk. 15:1-7). Yes, the shepherd was happy when he found his sheep, and the point was made that in like manner there is rejoicing in Heaven when one sinner repents of his sin and returns to the “fold” (Lk. 15:5-6). Yet, have we considered the fact that the shepherd would not have had to spend his time and effort searching if the sheep hadn’t wandered off in the first place? I am not questioning the Lord, and there ought to be rejoicing on earth just as there is rejoicing in Heaven when a lost one returns. Yet, let us remember that the worry, work, energy, and effort used on that lost one could have been used in other ways if the sheep would have just

“Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.” (Jer. 6:16)

stayed where he belonged and had not wandered off!

Could it be that as we read these lines, we can see ourselves as that wandering sheep in the parable of Luke 15? I would like to think that the events described in Luke 15 produced a sadder, but wiser sheep, who then knew not to wander off anymore. What about us? Let these thoughts be a “wake-up” call to the wandering sheep today. Please repent and come back to God before it is too late. Have we wandered off due to our ignorance? If so, then listen to the voice of Christ, calling you through the gospel to return to Him (II Thess. 2:14). Listen to friends and loved ones who are calling you back to the “fold” (Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:19-20). Open your eyes and recognize what your sin has done to you and to those near you (Rom. 6:23; Ecc. 9:18). You are wandering further from the light, and further into darkness. There is nothing to be gained by this, and everything to lose! (Matt. 7:13-14)

Following Sheep?

Go back to Psalm 23 and see the illustration of the sheep and shepherd. When we are sheep in the Lord’s pasture and are following Him, we “shall not want”, i.e., shall not lack (Ps. 23:1). We shall be nourished well (Ps. 23:2). Too, we will be well-protected with the Lord’s rod and staff. Even when going through the saddest and lowliest of valleys, we are protected, loved, and cared for by our Shepherd (Ps. 23:4)! This is what He gladly does for us.

John 10:4 speaks of the sheep of the Lord who follow Him and know His voice. This thought is repeated in verses 14 and 27 as well. Those who follow know Christ, the Shepherd. Thus, we

ask the question, “Do you know Christ?” If you say you know Him, but are not following Him, you are a liar. This is the sentiment of I John 1:6, as well as John 10.

To follow Christ means we are active in this work on a daily basis. It is not a “hit-and-miss” type of lifestyle, but a steady, ongoing, way of life (I Cor. 15:58). It fills our days with concern over pleasing the God of Heaven and bringing precious souls to Him (Mk. 16:15; II Tim. 2:2; Eph. 6:4).

The sheep who follow the Good Shepherd are those who follow Christ “*through the valley of the shadow of death.*” You know, it is easy to follow Christ to “*green pastures*” and “*beside the still waters.*” Yet, where are we when the sun goes down and the winds blow? Where are we when people curse us for following Christ (I Pet. 4:4)? Where are we when “*evil men and seducers ... wax worse and worse*” and we are the subjects of their evil words and deeds (II Tim. 3:13)? Where are we when hard times come in marriages, or in other family relationships? Where are we when our friends act hateful toward us? Do we give up and quit? The Hebrew writer said that those Jewish Christians were “*not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul*” (Heb. 10:39). Could he say the same thing about us if he wrote

this letter today? Are we truly the “following sheep” that we ought to be?

Conclusion

In simple terms, it comes down to a matter of trust. Who do we trust? The point Jesus was making in John 10, and the point David was making in Psalm 23 was that His sheep trust Him implicitly. They hear His voice, and no other. They trust Him and no other. They follow Him and no other. Could Christ say that about us, right now? If not, then it is time we corrected this attitude while we still have the chance to do so (II Cor. 6:2). So long as we are not trusting the Lord, Satan has a door through which he can “call”, beg, coax, cajole, and tempt us to turning from the Good Shepherd and following him instead (I Jn. 2:15-17; I Pet. 5:8). Friend, are we going to hear His voice and obey? Who do we trust?



A thought concerning the strength of the church

“Remember, the CHURCH increases its strength ONE MEMBER AT A TIME! YOU are responsible for YOUR strength in Christ Jesus. How strong are YOU?”

- Mike Davis

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