

38. Jesus Is the Good Shepherd

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain to others how they can have the abundant life that Jesus offers. We saw that He is the Door to that eternal life. In our topic today, we are also going to see that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep.

Jesus had given the Jews an illustration about a shepherd and sheep. In our last topic, we saw that Jesus is the Door through which people enter into eternal life. In this topic, we are going to see what Jesus said that He would do because He is the Good Shepherd. John 10:11-14 says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, *he who is* not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My *sheep*, and am known by My own.” In these verses, we see another of the “I AM’s” in the book of John.

Jesus said in that He is the Good Shepherd. This is a clear statement that Jesus is the fulfillment of Psalm 23. That Psalm begins in Psalm 23:1, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.” The word translated “good” means *that which is excellent in nature, noble and praiseworthy*. That word certainly describes Christ. Jesus also made it possible for us to do good works. Titus 2:14 says, “Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.” He is the One who did the work that no one else could do. He is the One who gave His life for the sheep.

In contrast, Jesus described the religious leaders of the Jews as hirelings. A “hireling” is someone who is hired to do a job but has no interest or concern for the people. Ezekiel 34:2-3 says, “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, “Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: ‘Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, *but* you do not feed the flock.’”” These verses show us that the religious leaders of Israel had no concern for the people. Instead, their concern was to use the people to satisfy their own desires.

In these verses, we learn more characteristics of the religious leaders in the time of Jesus. The Good Shepherd protected the sheep from the wolf. In contrast, the hireling sees a wolf coming and flees because he has no concern for the sheep. Jesus and Paul both used the wolves to describe false teachers. Matthew 7:15 says, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.” Then, Acts 20:29 adds, “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.” These verses point out the fact that what was true in the day of Jesus is still true today. Jesus knew that the religious leaders of Israel were very hungry wolves. Paul knew that the church would experience similar false teachers. Hirelings or religious leaders who just seek self-gain have no concern to protect Christians from such false teachers. In contrast, Jesus knows His sheep and His sheep know Him.

Jesus also told the people what He was going to do because of His concern for the sheep. John 10:15-18 says, “As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock *and* one shepherd. Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.” Jesus spoke about His relationship with the Father before He explained His concern for the sheep.

The Jews had been rejecting the words of Jesus every time He spoke about His relationship to the Father. We will see that is exactly what happens again this time. Jesus had just said that He knows His sheep. Now, He said that Father knows Him. The word translated “knows” means *to have understanding or knowledge of*. Jesus had been with the Father from the beginning. As a result of that fact and the fact that the Father and Jesus are both God, they had a perfect understanding of each other. The Father had a perfect understanding of Jesus and Jesus had a perfect understanding of the Father.

Jesus was talking to Jews. He told these Jews that He had other sheep in addition to His sheep that are Jews. The other sheep are the Gentiles who would believe and become one in the church with the Jews. Ephesians 2:11-13 says, “Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” Since most of us are Gentiles, Jesus gave us a wonderful promise when He said that He would bring these other sheep into this fold. Christ told the Jews that these other sheep would hear His voice. Jesus also said that there would be one fold and one shepherd.

Then, Jesus went on to talk about His relationship with the Father. He shared with the Jews that the Father loved Him. The Father and Jesus were both going to show their love for one another. Jesus would show His love for the Father by laying down His life for the sheep. The Father would show His love for Jesus by raising Him back to life. Peter spoke of this in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:23-24 says, “Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.” Jesus could not be held by death because the Father raised Jesus from the dead.

Jesus also explained that no one would take His life from Him. He would lay His life down of His own will. Psalm 40:7-8 says, “Then I said, ‘Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book *it is* written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart.’” In the prayer of Jesus to the Father in the Garden the night before He was crucified, John 17:24 says, “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.” Jesus

chose to come to this earth to carry out the will of the Father. However, the will of the Father was also His will because we see that He told the Father that it was equally His desire to save those that the Father had given Him. Jesus had both the power to give His life and to take it again because He is truly God. At the same time, He was carrying out the command of the Father.

By these statements, Jesus made His relationship with the Father very clear. These statements caused division to develop among the Jews. John 10:19-21 says, “Therefore there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings. And many of them said, ‘He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?’ Others said, ‘These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?’” Here, we see that the words of Jesus forced the Jews that heard Him to make a decision. Each person had to decide for himself if he would accept or reject the words that Jesus had spoken to them.

Many of the Jews there that day decided to reject the words of Jesus. Those who chose to reject Jesus said, “He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?” We see that a large part of the group chose to say that Jesus had a demon. The word translated “mad” means *one who speaks so that he seems to not be in his right mind*. By this statement, they were saying that Jesus was crazy because He had a demon. This large group had already made the decision to reject Jesus. They chose to ignore the miracles that Jesus had done. They said that He was not in His right mind. The Pharisees had earlier said in Matthew 12:24 after Jesus had healed a man, “Now when the Pharisees heard *it* they said, ‘This *fellow* does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.’” Many of the Jews that heard Jesus that day made the same choice.

In contrast, there were others in the crowd who chose to think about what Jesus had said and recognize the signs that He had performed to show that He is God. These people said, “These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?” These people were willing to consider all of the evidence that Jesus had given to show that He is God. They said that the words of Jesus could not be the words of a man who had a demon. They recognized that a demon did not have the power to open the eyes of a person that had been born blind. As a result, this group of people would continue to think about the words of Jesus. Jesus had said in Luke 8:18, “Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him *more* will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him.” This second group was giving serious thought to the things that Jesus said and did. Many in this group were probably a part of those who repented and placed their faith in Jesus either on the Day of Pentecost or in the days that followed that time.

Today, we still have people like each of these two groups. Many want to deny Jesus by rejecting His words and works. However, there are also those who want to hear and learn more about Jesus. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain to those who want to learn more how they can receive forgiveness of sins. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain how to receive forgiveness.