

The good shepherd John 10 by James Watson

This sermon is about Jesus and his church. The Bible word for church is ecclesia – which means “called out ones”

And the word church which we use instead of the bible word also comes from a Greek word meaning “Belonging to the Lord”

Funny how over two thousand years we were happy to accept the fact that we belong to God, but we seem to have distanced ourselves from the biblical name which implies that we listen to God. And that is the take home point of today’s sermon:

“It is one thing to believe in God; it is quite another to believe God” RC Sproul

This passage is all about a group of people called by the Lord because they belong to the Lord. The New Testament uses a number of images that show Jesus authority over his people [the church] In the synoptic Gospels Jesus speaks of God as a Father and we are his children Paul’s favourite image was Jesus as Lord [slave owner] and he cast himself as a slave [then he asked people to be like him]

One of the analogies that features in John’s Gospel prominently is that of the shepherd and the sheep

The point is whichever analogy you use the New Testament is clear that Jesus is the person whom we need to listen to, to trust and above all obey. We belong to him and we are valuable to him. These are not popular ideas especially in a culture that prides itself on self-regulation and freedom.

John 10:1 *“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.*

10:2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

10:3 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

10:4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

10:5 A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”

10:6 This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

10:7 So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

10:8 All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.

The sheep in ancient times were not driven by the shepherd like New Zealander farmers drive sheep. Ancient sheep knew their shepherd and followed him. At night they would follow him into an enclosure like this, he would walk to the opposite wall, then he would then walk back through the herd inspecting them as he went for any injuries they may have picked up during the day then he would sleep across the entrance. He became the door nothing got in or out except through him. In the morning the shepherd would call the sheep out and they would follow him. Any sheep in the fold that did not belong to him simply would not follow him out as he left. Often shepherds shared a fold and two flocks could mingle but they remained loyal to their shepherd.

10:9 *I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.*

10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

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

10:12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

10:13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

Robbers

- The shepherd fought the lion the wolf and the bear
- David was the great shepherd of Israel and he cut his teeth killing the lion the wolf and the bear

The way a lion a wolf and a bear hunt are very different and I think we miss the depth of these analogies as they are referred to in other parts of the Bible.

The bear represents the full frontal direct shock attack that gets in your face and fights violently for the sheep. Goliath was like the bear to David, terrorism, controls over speech, Government seeking to control the church, perhaps even large bills we have to pay or sickness that threatens our life. What are the bears in your life?

Our country has just suffered something like a bear attack and we are as a nation dealing with that shock.

The wolf represents the crafty attack weaving in and out among the herd and trying to divide and separate off some sheep. The bible says false teachers are like wolves; false teaching, false doctrine, but also gossip and envy and pride. We must always be on guard against the wolf. We must not confuse a false teacher with a person who is seeking truth but has a few wrong ideas. A false teacher will often seek to avoid answering a question or will shut a conversation down or label it 'hate speech' if they disagree with you, but a real truth seeker will engage you with you. Ask people; what are you basing your argument upon? Then go away and think about their answer. Then ask them again or put forward your point of view.

From a working class man's point of view our whole world is divided up by groups of snobby intellectuals who won't talk to each other because they are afraid someone might show them a flaw in their research. Why can't we admit we might be wrong occasionally? Polarity solves nothing, find someone who thinks the opposite to you and don't let your emotions get the better of you. When arguments arise think foxes and wolves.

The lion is the hardest one of all to stop, because lions only attack when you cannot see them. Unless you have a very close flock and a strong fold they will sneak in over the wall like an invisible ghost and will eat in the fold or carry the sheep back out of the fold undetected. The devil himself is described as a lion. The lion is like secret sin or addiction or the struggle I just can't share with anyone. The lion is the thought that can lead to self-harm and suicide; thoughts that perhaps 10 or 15 years ago drove that quiet teenager from Australia to start looking into extremist websites; thoughts that might drive a young Muslim child who has suffered racist attacks and does not know how to process his feeling to start looking at extremist websites. The lion is the unchecked emotion that leads to family violence.

The Lion can be the sin of Pornography- I have told you in the past that I have struggled with pornography I could hide the fact out of shame or never mention it in the hope that you would forget it [but that is what the lion wants]. I want you to know how grateful I am to God that he is my shepherd protecting me from the Lion. I want to see men set free from this addiction. The shepherd can save you from the lion if you would just baa! See conquer series

True leaders

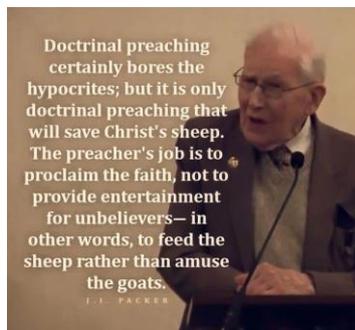
Now as pastors and elders are often seen as one of Gods hired hands, standing in for Jesus except not that reliable.

This is absolutely untrue. I am a sheep no better than any of you- my only authority. The only authority any human being can claim is that I am proclaiming the Word of God to you.

I sometimes get very upset at life and wish I was a full time pastor [that has been a dream of mine] and how sweet that dream appears when I have my arm in some rancid water with who knows what germs in it trying to fix a washing machine- but God reminds me “easy is not always good”- and I have been allowed to preach to you with conviction and I have been spared from the temptation of softening God’s word to protect my income. God knows my weaknesses- if you recall a visiting preacher recently was brave enough to say he had days when he was weak I was thinking “yes, I call those week days”. I know that I am not a human being who is fit or worthy of the high calling that is upon me- so I point you to Jesus not to James Watson. I have thoughts and ideas, but my firmest convictions are all from the word of God. And my mistakes are my deviations from it.

You know the ancient shepherds didn’t herd sheep with dogs; they took time to get to know each sheep like a pet. An older sheep [an elder] would follow the shepherd and the younger sheep would follow the older sheep until such time as they developed their own trust in the shepherd. So please do not put your faith in me, put your faith in the one I am pointing you toward.

All of this having been said let us not forget that the final words in Johns gospel that we read are a direction to Peter to feed Jesus Sheep, it is the Job of Christian leaders [including myself] to bring you before the word of God. The real proof that a Christian leader [new pastor] loves Jesus is that he or she will love you and bring the word of God before you.



10:14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,

10:15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

10:16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

Jesus is very exclusive in that some people are not in his flock as proven by their lack of desire to follow him- but Jesus is also very inclusive in that the boundaries of his flock extend beyond the nation of Israel- in fact they extend to every nation on earth.

Did you ever consider that today this means people outside the walls of the church? Maybe the other fold is your workplace, a hospital, the prison, another country, another culture or even another faith. Muslims are turning to Christ around the World and we have a wonderful opportunity to show our love and graciousness to Muslims in NZ while they struggle with the massacre of last week. The average New Zealander has seen a group of people who have been presented by the media as dealing with this crime and grief very well. But as a church we ought to be there after the

camera fades. The Islamic leaders have said lovely words – but they have only just started to grieve; in fact most of their people are still in shock and are being told exactly how to behave in public by their spiritual leaders. Sadly I do not believe that anyone has really been listening to how people affected by this atrocity are really feeling. As Followers of Jesus we ought to be able to show grace in a way that no-one else can. You will be surprised if you talk to a Muslim how much they already know about Jesus. Please make the effort – remember you never know who is part of Gods flock and a simple smile and conversation may prevent hatred from spreading and even bring some unlikely people to faith.

I also challenge you to show love and kindness to people who are racist – You may be surprised how effective love and forgiveness can be when it comes to changing a person’s attitude toward others. People who hate others may not have felt a lot of love themselves- often love has to be demonstrated for someone to learn it.... actually love always has to be demonstrated for other people to learn it.

John 10:17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

10:18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

10:19 There was again a division among the Jews because of these words.

10:20 Many of them said, “He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?”

10:21 Others said, “These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

10:22 At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter,

10:23 and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon.

10:24 So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”

10:25 Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me,

10:26 but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep.

10:27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

10:28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

10:29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.

10:30 I and the Father are one.”

As I said in the introduction to this series most scholars believe Johns writings were the last New Testament books written – John had developed his theology well and had seen the natural progression of Christianity from a Jewish sect to a new religion. The flock of sheep was thought to have been the children of Israel, but just being born an Israelite was not enough. It was clear that within Israel there had been a flock of sheep.

We now know that the flock was the defined as the ones who heard and obeyed the voice of God, nothing has changed except that now we can say just coming to church and reading the bible and singing and even praying does not make you a sheep, but hearing God’s voice and obeying is a sure sign that you are part of God’s flock.

The better news is; if you are part of God’s flock of sheep- nothing can take you from that. You may sin or wander off somewhere you should not go, but [if you are his] the Good shepherd will come to rescue you.

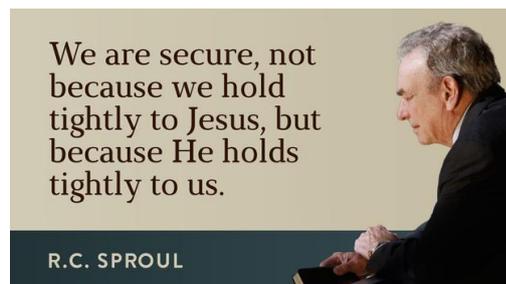
Presumably from before the beginning of time God the Father had set you aside for Jesus; God gave you to his son. Don't give me this rubbish about God knew who was going to choose him; get a bigger biblical picture of God.

GOD the Father gave His son [Jesus] a gift of a Flock of sheep; you were chosen [hand-picked] By God to be one of those sheep. This passage of Scripture was written before you were born. That is what it means to be called out people [the church]; set aside for God.

Salvation

If you recall I asked you what salvation looks like when I last spoke and I was trying to explain that according to John chapter 1 the biblical picture of salvation was entirely one sided there is no cooperation as if we are in some negotiation with God, But God the saves us like a rescue helicopter saves a person in peril at sea.

It should not surprise you that the picture of the Good shepherd saving the lost sheep is exactly the same. The Sheep chose not to listen to the shepherd and got into trouble and the shepherd saved the sheep. He did not give the sheep the choice to be saved but he saved him for one reason alone The sheep was precious to the shepherd He belonged to the shepherd.



Now I know some of you are still wrestling with the doctrine of election, some part of you still thinks salvation is all about you working with God. There are plenty of preachers to back up your argument. But the overwhelmingly repetitive teachings of the Bible are that God shows us his grace and we naturally react to it. If submission to his will appears to be a choice to you rather than a natural reaction to a supernatural revelation I'm not going to debate that with you. But what I am saying is that on virtually every page of scripture and certainly on every second page we hear of People who belong to God. And we see God going to extraordinary lengths for those people. What John is saying is those people who listen and believe are shown to be Gods people.

The people who consistently refuse to listen and never repent are simply not part of God's flock.

It amazes me how many people say to me after I preach – I'm not so sure about this predestination view of salvation you have [as if predestination was the word that I told Paul to use which caused all the New Testament writers to forget to emphasise our freewill]. I hope that this picture of a shepherd rescuing a sheep [whom he did not ask to cooperate] proves that I would call it a Biblical view of salvation.

The question is not: do you choose to believe in Jesus? And your answer will determine your fate But rather

Do you know the love of God like a sheep that has been saved from the slaughter? Your answer reveals your status before God?

Maybe today you are sitting here thinking – I want to know God’s Love like that or I’m not sure I know it yet. Maybe Christianity is a bit of ritual for you but you don’t know if you can trust this shepherd Jesus or this book about God.

Maybe you don’t think we are trust worthy people.

Admitting you are a sheep in Jesus flock may sound demeaning or even humiliating to some of you. Especially if you feel like you are part of a persecuted group in society who wants desperately to stand up for your rights, but it is so important that we come to realise that we are sinners saved by Grace our victories our that fact that Jesus our good shepherd shares his victories with us.

One of my favourite theologians of the 19th century [perhaps the greatest] was Gloria Gaither

*If you could see what I once was
If you could go with me
Back to where I started from
Then I know you would see
A miracle of love that took me in its sweet embrace
And made me what I am today
Just an old sinner saved by grace.*

*How could I boast of anything I've ever seen or done?
How could I dare to claim as mine the vict'ries God has won?
Where would I be had God not brought me gently to this place?
I'm here to say I'm nothing but a sinner saved by grace*

*I'm just a sinner saved by grace
When I stood condemned to death
He took my place
Now I live and breathe in freedom with each breath of life I take
Loved and forgiven
Back with the living
I'm just a sinner saved by grace*