
The Christian as a Sheep

John 10:1-20

Pastor Devon Berry

Introduction What if I told you, “You stink?” Your dirty! You’re not the most intelligent person I’ve ever met. You can’t stay with the group. You wander off all the time. You constantly need attention, to be told what to do, and someone to lead you by the nose to the things you need. In general, you are pretty close to incompetent! Probably even the humblest of us would be tempted to react indignantly. The rest of us, myself included, would be flat out offended. The fact is that most of us see ourselves as “able.” And when someone tells us we are not, it rubs us wrong.

We can see this from one end of the age spectrum to the other.

- My nephew Henry resisting...(exerting independence at changing table or touching things) (I’m competent!) or small children with the outright “No!”
- A member of the youth who announces to Mom in exasperation, “I don’t need you to tell me how to do this!” Or who closes up and becomes ever so private, not wanting the scrutinizing eye of a parent or grandparent because it would threaten their growing freedom and independence (I’m competent!)
- The spouse who has become so proud, prickly, and sensitive toward their mate that even the smallest of perceived slights is met with a maelstrom of fiery reaction (How dare you suggest I’m incompetent!) (at the dishwasher with my wife – I’ve got a PhD! etc.)(I’m competent!)
- The older person who is so confident that the experience of life long-lived has given them the answer to every question that they are absolutely unwilling or unable to hear when a son or daughter approaches in kindness and concern to gently confront on an issue of sin or foolishness (Grandparent, angry indignation; Parent, flat fogging)

We love to fashion ourselves as all that the American dream would tell us we are – able, agile, and astute. We can pioneer our own way, innovate, problem-solve, “just do it,” “get ‘er done,” (etc.). This self-concept collides with the imagery of sheep and shepherd. When the original hearers of the Bible were presented with images of shepherds and sheep, they had culturally conditioned images that immediately came to mind. Shepherds were those who cared deeply, intimately, competently for their flocks, albeit not highly regarded in society. Sheep were, as one author put it, “...totally dependent on shepherds for protection, grazing, watering, shelter and tending to injuries. In fact, sheep would not survive long without a shepherd. Sheep are not only dependent creatures; they are also singularly unintelligent, prone to wandering and unable to find their way to a sheepfold even when it is within sight.”¹

¹ Dictionary of Bible Imagery, see “sheep, shepherd”

There are very, very, few signals in our culture that would remind us of our incompetence, our weakness, our dependence. So when the Scriptures come to us or Pastor Chad brings us a sermon telling us we have Christ, who is our Shepherd, we may entirely miss the obvious implication – that we are sheep. Christ would certainly not describe himself as a shepherd if there were nothing like sheep in the equation ([illustrate, expand](#)). John 10, along with the whole of Scripture, repeatedly uses the imagery of sheep and/or flock to describe God’s people. The challenge is not so much in understanding what the imagery of shepherd and sheep is to imply, but rather believing that we are as dependent as Scripture tells us we are.

Do I See Myself as a Sheep?

So do we see ourselves as sheep? This is not the only image that is used to picture believers, nor is it necessarily a determinative image. That is, we tell ourselves, “Oh, God says I’m a stupid, dirty, wandering animal, so I might as well live up to that image!” If we say that to ourselves we can rest assured that we have already lived up to the image in full and we need go no further. The idea of believer as sheep is at least descriptive if not definitive – it tells us what we are like, what are tendencies, proclivities, and vulnerabilities are. Scripture also tells us we are overcomers, soldiers, servants, ambassadors, brides, stewards, children, etc. The point is that these images help us to understand the nature, substance, and characteristics of the truths that Scripture teaches and therefore, how we live intelligently as believers in a way that brings glory to God. God uses many images to help us understand his truths.

So the question is not whether these images are accurate or helpful (they are certainly both), the question is, will we believe them? Will we do the work of understanding them biblically? That is, will we value more greatly what the Scriptures tell us about ourselves than what the world around us or we ourselves tell us about ourselves? Can we see ourselves as sheep? Will we respond as sheep to our Chief Shepherd? The approach we will take tonight will correspond directly to Pastor Chad’s message from this morning. Chad helped us see this morning from John 10 what it means when Christ calls himself our shepherd, that is, he calls his sheep, leads his sheep, knows his sheep, gives his sheep life, protects his sheep, lays down his life for the sheep, unifies his sheep –these among the other qualities Chad mentioned. If Christ truly is the center of the gospel, then all that he is and has done corresponds to all that we need as sinners (John 10:10-11). Or put into the context of our current series, who Christ is as a shepherd corresponds to who we are and what we need, as sheep. In general, I believe that one of the main truths revealed to us in the imagery of shepherd and sheep across Scripture is that ***as sheep we are utterly dependent upon an all-sufficient shepherd.*** As such, we’ll reflect on this throughout the course of our time together.

Christ as Shepherd, Christians as Sheep

So tonight we'll progress in this way: This morning we saw that Christ as Shepherd

calls his sheep,	tonight	sheep are called by the Shepherd
leads his sheep,		sheep know and follow the Shepherd
knows his sheep,		sheep have a shepherd who will give his life in order that they might have life
gives his sheep life,		sheep take refuge in the Shepherd
lays down his life for the sheep,		sheep are unified
protects his sheep,		
unifies his sheep.		

The more you begin to consider each of these truths, the more you begin to recognize that each point is worthy of at least a sermon all by itself. We do not have time for that tonight, so we will consider only an aspect or two of each reality and move on – I cannot be exhaustive but I have been intentional in my selectivity hoping that these words will meet us where we are at as a church. [Let's pray]

Sheep are Called by the Shepherd

Let's begin by reading together Ephesians 2:1-9. This passage with great clarity reminds us that it is God who has called believers with a call that is effective. That is, the *work* of salvation, from beginning to end, is wholly his. Not only does he call, but by his grace he gives the gift of faith. This faith responds in obedience as evidenced by repentance. Grace then sustains that repentance over the course of our lives. Sheep are not elected into the flock because their wool is thick and white, because their legs are strong, or their minds agile. All sheep find themselves in the flock for one reason and one reason alone, the Shepherd has called them. There are a great many *in* Christendom who do not understand this. There are also many who understand it, such as many of us, but live as if they [have forgotten it](#).

Have you ever met a believer who has forgotten they are called? Would the older brother in the story of the prodigal son fit this description? Would we as a church fit this description? How do repentant yet struggling believers feel when they sit in our flocks, our Sunday services, our women's ministry events? Do we remember what we once were? Drunkards, drug addicts, pornographers, spouse abusers, liars, cheaters, tax evaders, gossips and slanderers, grudge-holders, mockers...and all the 100s of less visible but no less un-holy sins (1 Cor 6:9ff). And do we remember the struggles we *still* have? (James 3:2ff)

As sheep dependent upon an all-sufficient Shepherd we come to understand that by virtue of the Shepherd's call we have been brought, just as all other sheep, into the flock. We therefore humbly accept our position as recipients, not earners. Our status as the people of God must never become grounds for pride, superiority, or self-congratulation; either inside or outside the body. We are called – not congratulated.

Sheep Know and Follow the Shepherd

At several points in the NT Paul calls believers to follow Christ – and to follow himself and his colleagues – as they follow Christ. Following is inherent to the Christian experi-

ence [1 Cor 1:11, 2 Thess 3:7-9, Hebrew 13:7]. How much do you enjoy driving behind someone who follows all of the traffic laws exactly? How much do you chafe when you are required on the job to follow someone who does not understand the task as well as you think you do? We often struggle with following. Yet we are frequently called to submit, imitate, and follow in the New Testament. Sometimes this is in reference to Christ and at other times it is in reference to leaders in the church, parents, spouses, or authorities. Following is often not a forte of our character. Pride and foolishness often deter us [Proverbs 13:1].

And even if we are prepared to humbly follow, we lack knowledge of Him whom we are to follow. “I know little of the Shepherd and his ways, his words, his voice, therefore I am prone to wander, prone to follow other shepherds.” Most of you know that I am heavily involved in teaching and training nurses. Producing a good nurse is largely a matter of two things, getting students to comprehend the important information and placing them into a context where they can be guided and influenced by experts in the field. And no matter how passionately a professor makes the case for the importance of reading and comprehending the assigned material, it never fails that a student will come to you after failing an exam and after discussing their reading habits proclaim, “I didn’t know we were *really* supposed to read all of that!”

First, we must understand that the way we *know* and then *intelligently follow* the Shepherd is to understand his words. If you need convincing of how important these words are, start with Psalm 19 to get warmed up, then move to Psalm 119 to be fully convinced. Study the Word privately, attend doggedly to the public preaching of the Word, read books about the Word when possible (the bookstore is a great place to start). Secondly, you must be in the context created for you, that is, the church. We don’t train nurses among accountants and Christians will not come to know and follow their Shepherd from being in the world. It is in the church that you will be exposed to the Shepherd himself most fully, as well as to many other sheep.

As sheep dependent upon an all-sufficient Shepherd we learn to follow and know the Shepherd by comprehending his words and being among his people. We realize that we cannot grow (or even live) apart from the Shepherd, his words are life and his people are his body. While many other things could be said here, these two, at least, are fundamental.

Sheep Have a Shepherd who has given His Life in Order that they Might Have Life

In John 10 this morning we saw that the Shepherd both gives life to the believer (v.10) and lays down his life (v.11) for the believer. These two activities that Christ performs are inextricably connected. Christ laid down his life on the cross. This death was an acceptable sacrifice propitiating/satisfying God’s wrath. We must no longer die (or be eternally separated from God) for our sin. We have life beyond our earthly grave. There is also another sense, however, in which we have life. It is the practical outworking of Christ’s death – we are freed from our enslavement to sin. We now have the power to say no to sin and to please God. Romans 6 makes this picture clear for us. Listen as I read Romans 6:5-14 [Read]. The crucifixion and the resurrection are the best evidence

we have for the possibility of a life lived free from the dominion of sin. Consider the “abundance” that is made available to us as believers secondary to Christ’s death and resurrection: we are brought to light from darkness, to food from hunger, to drink from thirst, to truth from lies, to redemption from enslavement, to eternal life from eternal damnation, to the way from being lost...

The Shepherd laying down his life for his sheep... in our familiarity with the fact, it is easy for that to begin to sound theoretical, propositional, metaphorical, a good remedy to this danger is to think about and reflect on the everyday reality of our “new life” as a result of his laid down life. You grow in righteousness because **Christ has died**. **As sheep dependent upon an all-sufficient Shepherd** we are careful to intentionally reflect on the fact of his death and resurrection and the objective reality of our transformed justification) and transforming (sanctification) lives. Apart from the Shepherd there is no life and no hope.

Sheep take refuge in the Shepherd

A truly beautiful and comforting song about God’s protective care of his own can be found in 2 Samuel 22 and while we do not have time to read the song in its entirety now, I commend the chapter to you. While there are many messianic references in this passage, pointing us forward to Christ who would perfectly fulfill David’s role as king over God’s people, we also see the highly personal and experiential nature of David’s song. David is close to the end of his life at the time when he writes this song. His life has been a very mixed series of events. There are tremendous successes, failures, trials, and tribulations. Also keep in mind that David himself began as a shepherd. He has a real world idea of what it means to protect and deliver those who are unable to protect and deliver themselves. Hear just a few of David’s words, verses 1-4 read: **1And David spoke to the LORD the words of this song on the day when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. 2He said, "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, 3my[a] God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence. 4I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.**

David knew that protection from God meant not that life would be trouble free, absent of suffering, that his family would be godly, or that he himself would avoid life destroying sin, but rather that God would be faithful to his promises in a manner that ultimately brought his children good and himself glory. The very best display of this is found in the work of the Chief Shepherd who has hidden/protected us in himself from God’s wrath [Rom 8:31ff, Col 3:3]. This protection also extends over the reality of our lives – nothing occurs in our life that is outside of God’s providence [Acts 17:28] and even in the very worst of times we look to our Protector for our help, our peace, our ability to persevere, and our ability to please him. Sheep wander off and get lost. Sheep get attacked by wolves. Thieves try to break in and steal sheep. Sheep get caught in thorny thickets. Sheep develop diseases. This is the reality of the believer’s experience. The importance

and reality of these experiences cannot be understated, they are real. The writers of Scripture never ignore or downplay them. Yet these experiences are understood while standing in the shadow the Shepherd, with his rod and his staff – for defending and rescuing. The Shepherd knows how to do good to his sheep. He will protect and save us. **As sheep dependent upon an all-sufficient Shepherd**, we turn to the Shepherd when we are in danger or need and we believe and trust that he will protect and rescue us. Confidence and peace such as this come only through grace - it is [supernatural](#).

Sheep are Unified

Lastly, we will consider the unifying effect of the Shepherd upon the sheep in his flock. I believe that Scripture plainly teaches that one of the most striking characteristics of the church, particularly local bodies of believers is its unity (John 13, Eph 4, Titus 2). Christ tells us in John 10 that there is “one flock, one shepherd.” At Clearcreek, we may be tempted to pat ourselves on the back when it comes to this aspect of body life. It is true that we enjoy a body that is ever-maturing in its understanding and ability to care for each other in a manner that brings glory to God and makes him look large among us – glory to Him for this. However, let me both encourage and challenge us by simply saying that there is plenty of room for growth in this area for us as a church. And I speak not only to you, the sheep, but also to the undershepherds, those of us who are elders. **As sheep dependent upon an all-sufficient Shepherd**, we crowd around the Shepherd, eyes fixed on Him who calls, protects, feeds, gives life, and unifies.

Conclusion

Let’s wrap up by summarizing our observations and applications:

As sheep dependent upon an all-sufficient Shepherd...

1. Remember you have been called. Let us humble ourselves in a manner that reflects the truth of our predicament. Have you forgotten you are called? Need a mirror? Do your children disdain the dirty, the unlovely, the sick, the sinner...It may be they have learned by observation. Realization of our utter dependence unites us in the Shepherd.
2. To know and follow the Shepherd you must hear his words and be with his people. The church is not a perfect place – we have many problems. Yet as with many things, it is this weak and ill-formed tool that God has ordained to accomplish his work. To spite the church is to spite the Shepherd himself
3. Our Shepherd has given his life in order that we may have life. Preach this reality to yourself often, to your spouse, to your children, to your friends. When we live as if sin still has dominion over us we effectively deny the reality of the cross. The Shepherd’s death and resurrection HAS occurred – hence your freedom to obey God with abandon. Dwell on Romans 6.
4. Your Shepherd is your protector. Return with me to 2 Samuel 22, begin at verse 7. Is your life, oh sheep, characterized by anxiety? fear? worry? Perhaps you have not found the Shepherd all-sufficient...you want more (or less)...assuming that hardship

is an indication of your protectors absence. It is not. We have failed to understand his promises.

5. A unified flock is evidence of sheep obedient to their Shepherd. This is hard work, but it is worthwhile work. For many reasons but mostly because it is in our unity that world sees Christ. Families gathered around Christ...Elders gathered around Christ...Local fellowships of believers gathered around Christ. The church is never more beautiful than when it is unified.
6. Lastly, another warning about “bad” shepherds...