

THE SHEPHERD OF LIFE

There is much said today about peer pressure and the desire to be like everybody else. This situation has been around for a long time. It was what caused the nation of Israel to want a king over themselves. Today, fashion trends rely upon this tendency of people to respond to peer pressure. Among animals the herding tendency is great. It is probably most evident among sheep. Those who raise turkeys have noted this tendency, also. If that area in the Middle East had turkey farmers rather than sheep herders, then instead of saying that people act like a bunch of sheep, we might be saying they act like a bunch of turkeys. (That may be appropriate.)

Throughout the Old Testament there are many references to the people of God being as sheep. This reference was appropriate not only because of the basic nature of people to be peer sensitive, but also because of the needs people have to survive in this world. Sheep tend to be somewhat defenseless and so are we if do not have a shepherd. Many of the Old Testament writers referred to the leaders of the people as shepherds. Ezekiel referred to those leaders of his day as evil shepherds because they were more interested in their desires than they were in taking care of the needs of the sheep. We should not be surprised to find that same sort of self interest prevailing in leaders today. The name of the game (whether it is in the national government, business organizations, or almost anywhere we look) is not “what is the best thing for the country or organization” but “how can I get myself re-elected or hold on to my job.” These evil shepherds had their contrast in the likes of David who had defended his sheep against bears and lions. David also recognized the goodness of God as being like that of a shepherd who really cared about his sheep. (Psalm 23)

By the time Jesus came, raising sheep was still common place; however, it was only the common people who were involved with it. Jesus had a practice of using the common place to illustrate the principles of the Kingdom of God.

JOHN 10:1-6 This passage is an introductory statement for the points Jesus wanted to get across to the people. In winter, many flocks were gathered together in one place for protection. The place had an attendant so that just anybody could not come in and steal or kill the sheep. Those who would try to get to the sheep other than by the proper route would obviously be a robber. Jesus made an interesting observation. The sheep will not willingly follow a false shepherd; however, the legitimate shepherd only needs to call. The common people of that day did not follow the religious leaders of their day. As in the case of the blind man Jesus healed, the leaders did not care for the man at all. In fact, they excommunicated him. This passage, coming directly after the incident of his being cast out of the temple, could have been referring somewhat to that incident in addition to setting the stage for His teaching on the theme He is the Good Shepherd.

JOHN 10:7-9 The way into the Kingdom is through Jesus. Jesus presented a picture that is representative of the summer sheepfolds that were used for protection at night. The enclosures had an entry way but no door that could be closed. After the sheep were in the enclosure the shepherd would lie down across the entry way so that nothing could come in or go out without his knowing it. The shepherd literally became the door to the corral.

Jesus alluded to the fact that through the ages there have been many philosophies of life that had attracted people. There are still many people trying to get others to follow them. Some of these we recognize as false religions and cults or just plain paganism. There are many voices today encouraging man to be his own god. Jesus called these thieves and robbers. That is, they have no

legitimate claim on people.

Some may wonder what harm it does to be involved with false religions and cults? They claim these provide good fellowship and do good service. However, Jesus said that all others have a different agenda than His purpose. Just because an organization does good works we must not be deceived into thinking there is any salvation in it.

JOHN 10:10 Anything that is not of God has as its ultimate goal to do us harm! Sometimes we have trouble seeing the truth of that statement. Many times we cannot see the dangers that are in a particular situation and before we know it, we find ourselves involved in something we can't get out of. There is deliverance from any situation provided we put our trust in God and step out in faith.

At this point in the interaction Jesus was have with various groups of people, He had set the stage for another of the seven I AM proclamations recorded by John.

JOHN 10:11-16 Jesus said I AM the Good Shepherd. In the teaching of contrasts between good and bad shepherds, we see foundation truths of the gospel. He told us He came that we might have life and have it abundantly. How He would do that is to substitute His life for ours. The Good Shepherd would give His life for His sheep. He paid the penalty of the Law of Sin and Death that we might have life in Him and live according to the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus.

The contrast Jesus presents between a hire hand and the owner of the sheep showed the radical difference of love and care for people that Jesus had (and has) as compared to the religious leaders of that day. The once blind man who had been excommunicated from the temple was a good example of how little they really cared.

Jesus' reference to other sheep looks ahead to the time when the Gospel would be taken to the Gentiles and they too would come into the Kingdom of God. The sheep of God's pasture are those who have the faith of Abraham -- those who believe God.