**JESUS OUR GOOD SHEPHERD**

John 10:1-21 Key Verse 10:14

"I am the Good Shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know Me."

In today's passage we learn who Jesus is. Jesus is our Good Shepherd. Being in our ministry we have heard this countless times. But what does it mean that Jesus is our Good Shepherd? Who is Jesus to me? The answer to this question is so very important to us. May God bless us and comfort us and reveal to us who Jesus truly is to us that we may live lives properly as Jesus' sheep and coworkers. May God bless us this new upcoming year to better know who Jesus truly is.

Today's passage was instigated by what took place in the previous chapter. In chapter 9, Jesus healed a man born blind. This man never had the chance to see any color or shapes or beauty or anything. This mans world was only one thing. Pitch black, nothingness. He could hear sounds, he could touch objects, he could smell, but he could not see what made the sound or see what the object he felt looked like or what made such wonderful and delicious aroma. It was like living in the darkest cave with no light forever. He was probably like Golum in the movie Lord of the Rings. And in chapter 9 there is one constant theme throughout. No one understood this man. No one truly knew this man. No one truly understood his agony or suffering. The very first question brought up was, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" This came from Jesus' disciples. After being healed his neighbors couldn't even agree that he was the same man. Some said, "No, that's not him, he only looks like him." That's how well known he was by his own neighbors. And when he came before the religious leaders, they didn't listen to him, they did not believe he had been born blind and had received his sight, so they sent for his parents to start a formal investigation. You would think his parents cared for this man and understood him. But when they were under cross examination, when asked how their son could see, they did not answer, but said, "Ask him. He is of age." They did this because they were afraid of being booted out of the synagogue. In other words, they did not defend their son, they let him taker the full repercussions of his answer. As you read chapter 9, you realize that no one believed this man and no one knew this man, no one understood this man and no one cared for this man. The disciples didn't understand this man, his neighbors didn't truly know him, even his own parents did not care or lay down their lives for him. This man was truly like a sheep without a shepherd.

When we all came to Jesus, why did we do so? What truly brought us to Him? Why do we follow Him to this day? I think in our life in Christ, in our every day grind of everyday life and struggles of this life, we sometimes forget. I think in our ministry, where we have been taught to go and make disciples, we also lose sight of why we follow and obey Jesus. In our disappointments of serving others and of our own failings, we forget who Jesus is. We forget that Jesus is the One who at one time in our life came to us. He was the One who understood us, cared for us, who truly knew us, when no one else did, not even our friends or family, even though they may have tried. We were blamed for our condition, like they disciples did to this man. We were used by others for their own agenda or to puff themselves us, thinking they knew what was needed, but no one truly understood or cared for us, until we met Jesus. Jesus was the One who laid down His life for us. Jesus is truly our Good Shepherd. Let us look through today's passage remembering who Jesus is to us and look at several groups of people.

First, the Pharisees. The Pharisees were those who were to be the sheep who grew up and helped gather Jesus' flock under His care. In verses 1-2, Jesus said, "Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep." For a long time I did not really understand what Jesus meant in verse 7, "I am the gate for the sheep." What does it mean Jesus is the gate? I heard many people give many answers, but I am really beginning to think that the gate represents the love, mercy and grace of our God as revealed through our Lord Jesus. Jesus is the full display of God's love, mercy and grace to us. This is at the very heart of our Christmas celebration. God so loved us and showed mercy and faithfulness to us, that He gave us His One and Only Son just as He promised He would.

The Pharisees thought they could reach the sheep pen by remaining legalistic and not allowing any healing to take place on the Sabbath. They thought that they needed to be so absolute, so strict in keeping the law, because God said so. They had no mercy or grace or compassion. As they climbed the gate by some other means, they were transformed into thieves and robbers. They may have had good intentions at first. I don't think most became Pharisees because they at first had any intention to become robbers or thieves. It was because they tried to enter the sheep pen forgetting the mercy, grace and love God had for them, who opened the way for them to serve Him and to pray to Him and to enter into His sheep pen. They forgot that it was God Himself that made their offerings acceptable before Him and pleased Him. They were supposed to enter through the Gate, through Jesus Himself and not their own righteousness or merit.

Second, the Shepherd. The shepherd enters through the Gate. Shepherds reveal the love, grace and mercy of God as it was shown to each of us through Jesus Himself. Sheep listen to the voice of their shepherd. If a shepherd says, go this way, they go. But a sheep will not follow the directions of a shepherd who hasn't gone ahead of them. Shepherds lead from the front. They speak to the sheep and tell them to follow. They say, "Hey, come this way, the path is clear, there is no danger this way." The shepherd does not lead from behind, like many generals do. They lead from the front. In other words, sheep follow the example or lead of their shepherd, not just their direction. It is easy to give directions, but do we follow our own advice and direction truly? So many times I told my children, do what I say, not what I do. But that is not what a shepherd does. A shepherd also understands sheep's weakness. They are not going to ask a sheep who has a bad leg to climb a steep incline or a sheep who can't see well, he wont go too far ahead. The shepherd knows his sheep by name. He knows them personally and knows everything about them; he knows their strengths and weaknesses, their likes and dislikes. He knows everything about them.

Third, the sheep. We are the sheep in God's flock. Sheep also have their role to play. Sheep listen to the voice of their shepherd. Sheep need to be aware that the shepherd is leading them in and out of the sheep pen. Sheep also are not to treat their Good Shepherd like a hired hand. The Good Shepherd does not work for them. The Good Shepherd is not a butler who gives the sheep their every whim and fancy. In truth they belong to Him. The Good Shepherd serves them because He loves them, not because He has to.

Fourth, the Good Shepherd. There are shepherds and then there is the Good Shepherd. The truth of the matter is that Jesus is each and every persons Good Shepherd. We are His coworkers. We are called to feed and care for Jesus' flock, but ultimately Jesus is the Good Shepherd. We are to protect God's flock. We are to look after them. But ultimately it is Jesus who looks after His sheep. It is Jesus who laid down His life for the sheep, because they belong to Him. This is the great difference between us and Jesus. We belong to Him and He gave His life for us. Jesus truly gave His life for us. We as shepherds are trying to imitate Jesus. But all we are doing is what Jesus already did for us. We are only following His good example as best we can. But Jesus did it. He gave His life truly for us. He who descended from Heaven and stripped Himself of all His power, glory and majesty came to us. He then became obedient even to offering His own life of His own free will and authority for us. No one could take His life from Him. He gave it freely for us. This is our Good Shepherd. This is the One we follow. This is the One we imitate.

The Good Shepherd not only lays down His life for the sheep. He knows His sheep and they know Him. This is at the core of our faith. As sheep we are known by our Shepherd and we know Him. Jesus knows everything about us. He knows our agonies our struggles, our weaknesses and needs. Jesus knows us so intimately and perfectly. Isn't this one of our great desires? To be understood? Just recently I was having a talk with one woman coworker who I've known for a very long time. We were both single when we first knew each other. Now we both are married and have wonderful children. And we were having a talk and she said something to me that I did not forget. She said, "Don't you know me, even after all these years? Don't you trust me? Don't you know who I am?" When she said this I realized that we all have a great yearning and desire to be known and understood. Each and everyone of us here are Jesus' sheep. We all came because Jesus knows us and He revealed Himself to us as well. We know who He is. He is our Good Shepherd. The One who cares and understands us.

Pastor John chose this passage for our new year for this very reason. As followers of our Good Shepherd, who knows us. He wants us to know God's flock better. To understand what makes them tick. What motivates them. To have compassion on them. To show God's love and mercy and grace to them. To truly know those God has put under our care.

Today's passage taught me that the only way I can truly know the flock of God is to know my own Good Shepherd. To remember what He has done for me. I'm not a perfect person. Far, far from it. And yet, my Good Shepherd continues to pray for me, "Father, forgive Terry, he doesn't know what he is doing." He comforts me in my sorrows and disappointments and consoles me. He gives me the Words of life. He rebukes me and corrects me when I need it. He patiently bears my weakness. He waits patiently for me to come to Him. He does not demand from me. God says He desires mercy, not sacrifice. I testify that my Good Shepherd does all that for me and so much more. I am who I am by His grace and mercy and love alone. I need to remind myself again and again who Jesus is to me. Its only in this way that I can truly be a proper shepherd for others. Its only in this way that we all can be proper shepherds for others.

Personally, through this passage I received my key verse for this next year. Colossians 3:12 which reads, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." My prayer is to grow to the full measure of my Good Shepherd and serve His flock accordingly. May God help us to know our Good Shepherd and to know the flock God has placed for us to care for. May God help us to serve with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

One Word: Jesus is our Good Shepherd.