

Bible study notes for John 10:11-21 – I am the good shepherd

Introduction

It is necessary to understand this chapter 10, in the light of the Old Testament understanding concept of who the shepherd is. The shepherd symbolises a 'royal caretaker' of God's people. Some Old testament references where God is called the shepherd of Israel are to be found in: Psalm 23:1, Psalm 80:1, Isaiah 40:10-11, and Ezekiel 34:11-16. And it can be seen also that God gave great responsibility to the leaders of his people as his shepherds of his flock but unfortunately they failed to live up to his expectations. God denounced these 'false shepherds' the hired hands in this parable (at least this is as close to a parable that we will see in John's Gospel), (Isaiah 56:9-12, Ezekiel 34), and he promised to provide the true shepherd for his people, (Eze 34). This prophesy he fulfilled through Jesus his son. *(It would be useful to look at Ezekiel 34:1-16)* In the New Testament we see Jesus attack the failure of the leaders in Matt 15:1-9; Mark 7:13 - both quote Is 29:13.

In chapter 10 we see how John links the ancient prophecy of Ezekiel 34 and the idea of David being the true shepherd. David is symbolic for the Messiah. In 1 Sam 17:34-36 there is a picture of David being willing to risk his life for his flock. In the OT there is the emergence of a belief that a descendant of David would arise to redeem his people and introduce a period of harmony in creation. (Is 11),. This is based upon a covenant made between God and David in 2 Sam:7:12-16. We see, later in John 10:30, that Jesus fits it all together by saying 'I and the Father are one' i.e. God is the shepherd; the King is the shepherd and it only makes sense through Jesus. The word John uses for the 'good' shepherd' sounds a bit clinical here. In fact the word John uses can also mean beautiful. It doesn't describe Jesus' appearance but rather the beauty of what Jesus was about to do. The 'good' shepherd tells us of the compelling power of his love.

Application: *Who does the hired hand represent? How does John show in these verses that the leaders of Israel in Jesus' time have let God down as Ezekiel said they would? (12-13)(19) Matt 3:7-12. How do our traditions as a church get in the way of the Gospel message?*

A definition of a true shepherd is that he isn't in it for his own gain. The test comes when he is faced with a choice; save himself or his flock. And the development of the parable of the good shepherd in 11-21 introduces a dark note that soon comes to dominate the rest of John. Throughout the last few chapters John has been showing how Jesus has faced threats to his life, e.g. John 8, 58-59. Now he introduces the truth that a violent death is not just a possibility; it is a future reality, (17-18). The good shepherd is to lay down his life for his flock. We see that the love and the plans of the Father are involved in Christ's actions and that Jesus had his Father's authority. He chose to die; no one else could have forced his death without his permission.

Application: *On whose authority does Jesus act in verse 17-18? What do these verses tell us of the relationship between the Father and the Son? What links the role of the shepherd with the role of the Messiah?*

John also introduces in these verses the truth that Jesus, (16) is to be shepherd over one huge flock. He is going to enlarge the flock by bringing in a whole load of different sheep. Here is a glimpse of the future worldwide scope of the church. All God's people will have the same shepherd (John 17:20-23). All future believers are included in the prayer from this passage in chapter 17. This is a theme that John continues to expand through the coming chapters. Pontius Pilate was not a Jew, he was a Roman, and he was challenged by a vision of God's Kingdom in John 18:33-38. This vision of a worldwide church is the reason our church has Matt 28:19 as our mission statement.

Application: *Who and what is John talking about when he talks about 'other sheep'? Who are the original flock? How do you think this vision of gentiles and Jews together as a flock would have been received by those present, and how are non Christians received in our churches today? How can we improve this?*

Witness: *How and why does this passage influence our decision to witness to other people?*