

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## The seven "I Am's" - "I am the Good Shepherd"

The world in which we live in 1998 is a cold place. In every area of society, there is so little opportunity to get close to people. Everything is so impersonal. This should not be so among Christians. There ought to be a warmth and care for one another instead.

The subject for our talk today is the Shepherd. This should warm our hearts. There is scarcely another theme so frequently mentioned in the Bible than that of the shepherd and the need for shepherd care. In scripture very often men who became leaders among God's people were qualified because they had practical experience as shepherds. There is a personal relationship between the shepherd and the sheep.

One of the best known of all the Old Testament scriptures concerning the shepherd is Psalm 23. However, it is God who is the Shepherd there. David the Psalmist who wrote it really said, "Jehovah is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1). In the first three verses, it is what the Shepherd does, e.g. "He restoreth my soul", "He leadeth me" etc. In the following verses of the psalm, as David thinks of the many trials of life, he writes on a more personal level, "I will fear no evil for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me".

Let us look now at this great chapter, John 10. We will consider the subject under three headings:

1. The Shepherd of the Sheep (verse 2)
2. The Good Shepherd (verses 11 and 14)
3. The One Shepherd (verse 16)

### 1. The Shepherd of the Sheep (verse 2)

Our first heading, then, is The Shepherd of the Sheep. John 10:1-5 are a parable. It cannot be doubted that the Shepherd of the sheep points to the Lord Jesus Christ. The sheepfold into which He came was the nation of Israel. A fold with its walls and barriers was a very apt description of that nation. God had separated Israel from the nations in order to their becoming a witness for Himself. Sadly they had descended into a position of separatism, full of disdain for those outside.

The door by which He came into the sheepfold refers to the Old Testament scriptures which were fulfilled to the letter at the time of the Incarnation. In the early chapters of the Gospel of Matthew there are seven quotations from the Old Testament which were fulfilled. Seven is a complete number. The porter may represent the Holy Spirit by whom these Old Testament scriptures were written, we would not be dogmatic here. In verse 3, we read that the shepherd leads his sheep out. It has often been thought that chapter 10 is a commentary on the happenings of chapter 9. This chapter gives us the account of one of the notable signs of the gospel of John. It concerned a man who had been blind from his birth receiving his sight. This had never happened before (verse 32). This sign was a clear testimony to the Person of the Son. This led to the blind man being questioned by almost everyone, his parents, friends. The Pharisees were against him because the miracle had been done on the Sabbath day. Eventually, they cast him out. Their antagonism was really against the Lord Jesus Himself. The expression "cast him out" is almost parallel to the words "leadeth them out". The former is used from the point of view of the Pharisees, the latter from the point of view of Christ. Such were the dealings of the Lord with His sheep. Others were in the fold, but they recognised the Shepherd's voice and were led out to Him. The disciples were among them. What a wonderful example we have in Mary Magdalene at the sepulchre as one who knew His voice.

### 2. The Good Shepherd (verses 11 and 14)

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd." We see here something of the greatness of the shepherd. The words "I am" are a divine name. Further on in the chapter we read, "I and my Father are one" (verse 30). What a tremendous claim this is, yet true. It falls in line with many an Old Testament scripture as to the person of the Shepherd. Let us think of one in particular, "Behold the Lord God will come... He will feed his flock like a shepherd: He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young" (Isaiah 40:10-11). What a combination of compassion and power there is in Him. He is well fitted to care for all who are His sheep. Another passage from the

prophets may suffice to underline our thought, this time from the prophet Zechariah: "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, against the man that is my fellow (equal), saith the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 13:7). There couldn't be another scripture nearer to John 10:30 than this one in its teaching.

But it is in verse 11 that the Lord Jesus goes on to add, "The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the Sheep." If the sheep who had followed Him were to be His own on a righteous basis the cross was necessary. There was the foe to be faced (the wolf). Such was His love and compassion for the sheep that He faced the enemy and rescued the sheep from sin and danger. Now that He is risen from the dead, the sheep are His by ties that nothing can sever.

The Good Shepherd is put particularly in contrast with the hireling. A hireling fleeth when the wolf comes because he does not care for the sheep. There is no vital link of affection with the sheep; he is only concerned with his wages. In 1 John the apostle writes, "Hereby perceive we love, because He laid down His life for us" (1 John 3:16). This scripture shows the difference between the Shepherd and the hireling.

While dealing with this theme of the Shepherd's care and love, we will move down to verses 17 and 18. These verses continue the theme of the Lord's death. Let us listen to verse 17. "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again." These words lie outside our understanding. It might he said, surely the Father always loved the Son. He did indeed, as we have it from His own lips in the remarkable prayer in John 17:24, addressing His Father, "... for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." In whatever circumstances we view the Son, He is always the object of the Father's love without any cause. However in our verse there is a "because". It has often been said that the Son gave to the Father another reason for His Father to love Him. Going on to the next verse we learn that the reason was his obedience and devotion to the Father's will. "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." It is a staggering thought that the Son was under commandment. Three other times in the gospel of John the Lord Jesus is seen as being subject to commandments. They are well worth looking at. They are: John 12:49; 14:31; 15:10. These commandments were all the expression of the Will of God which He loved to do. We remember the words from Psalm 40:8, "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart."

Let us look a little further into John 10:18, and consider it well. He says "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself." When we think of the circumstances of His death, and the cruelty of men, it would seem that men did take His life. They thought they were in control, but this was far from the truth. Looking at the cross with a Spirit taught mind, it becomes obvious that He was in control. How we love to take account of this voluntary laying down of His life, but there is much more in it than this. It becomes evident that here is One who is altogether divine. None could speak like this but God Himself, although found in fashion as a Man. Certainly, none from the ranks of men could speak like this. We had forfeited our lives by sin, death is the wages of sin. He was sinless and laid His life down Himself.

But the story doesn't stop there, He goes on to say, "I have power to lay it down, I have power to take it again" (John 10:18). He gained absolute power over death; this was seen in His resurrection. Every foe was vanquished. What a wonderful Shepherd we have!

In verses 14 and 15 the theme of The Good Shepherd is developed further, "I am the Good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep."

The two verses quoted are separated in the Authorised Version. But to get their true meaning they should be read as one. The measure of the knowledge between the Shepherd and the sheep is said to be the same as that between the Father and the Son. We must concede that this truth is far from our finite minds to take in. However, we accept it with worshipping hearts. In sheep farming, a shepherd knows his sheep in a more thorough way than the sheep could ever know the shepherd. This is true of the knowledge between ourselves and our Shepherd. He knows us through and through! We should be thankful that it is so.

### **3. The One Shepherd (verse 16)**

In the beginning of our chapter, the sheep who were led out of the sheepfold were Jews who had been attracted to Christ. They found Him to be their centre and leader. They knew the shepherd's voice.

Thinking now of verse 16, we find other sheep that did not belong to the sheepfold. They were Gentiles who had no part in Israel. The national difference was very great indeed. The apostle Paul when writing on much the same subject, says of the Gentiles - interest here in this verse in John 10 because the word "other" means "other of the same kind". How can this be? We have already said the difference was considerable. The truth is God had worked in their hearts and they had been attracted to the Shepherd and they too knew His voice. What wonderful grace it is that there was always a place in God's heart for Gentiles like us.

Out of Jew and Gentile there is now "one flock", as verse 16 should read. There is a great difference between a fold and a flock. In the sheepfold there are walls and barriers keeping the sheep under strict supervision; there is no liberty of movement. The concept of the flock is entirely different. The sheep are not held together by walls, they are held by attraction to the Shepherd. There is affection shown to the sheep as well as ceaseless care. There is fellowship because each sheep is not only attached to the Shepherd but, as having a common centre, is attached to the rest.

As we consider this, we look onwards into the book of Acts and see how the work of the gospel went out toward the Gentiles with an ever increasing momentum. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus and his call to be the apostle to the Gentiles extended the work still further. We still live in this favoured day. Do we really appreciate our privileges?

There seems to be a tendency in the human heart to prefer the idea of a fold; it comes to us very easily. We feel the need for expedients of some kind instead of finding the Shepherd to be all sufficient. Bound up with all of this is the true joy that many know of being gathered to the Lord's name, owning no other centre but Christ.

John 10:27-30 are words very often referred to when Christians lack assurance of their eternal security. It is surprising how many Christians do have doubts about their eternal security. These verses are still in the context of the Shepherd and the sheep. The first verse in this passage returns to the happy thought of hearing the Shepherd's voice. There are many voices bidding for our attention in these days. Satan is always active to rob us of our assurance. It is characteristic of sheep to recognise the Shepherd's voice. Let us take heed to what our Shepherd says.

The most important thing is that the Shepherd is the Giver. He gives to His sheep "eternal life." Let us give heed to this, it is a gift. He goes on to say "and they shall never perish." What a promise this is! This is not all, but He continues, "no man is able to pluck them out of my hand". Can you possibly doubt His word? This eternal life is really a character of life that will bring us into the present joy of knowing the Father and the Son, lifting our hearts above this weary world.

It is, of course, a life that is eternal in its duration, and we can never lose it. Another assurance is given to us here; we have been given by the Father to the Shepherd. This is a subject often considered in John's gospel and spells out God's purpose and grace towards us. Also we are in the Father's hand and none can pluck us out of His hand. There is double security here. There is a oneness of purpose between the Father and the Son as the Lord Jesus says, "I and my Father are one".

As we draw our talk today to a close, there must be some impression of the greatness of the subject which has engaged us. John 10 in itself is a remarkable chapter. A prayerful reading of it will bring us great gain. However, a mere intellectual knowledge of the truth is not sufficient. What really counts is a personal acquaintance with the Shepherd on a day by day basis.

At the beginning of this broadcast reference was made to Psalm 23. The last verse of the psalm refers to "goodness and mercy" following us all the days of our lives. Many have likened these features to the sheep dogs. These dogs are very intelligent, and an asset to the shepherd. They keep the sheep together and prevent the lambs from straying. Finally, when the journey of life is over the Psalmist writes - "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (Psalm 23:6).

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