

The Security of being in the Good Shepherd's flock

Main Scripture:

Jesus said to the Jews,

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand."

(John 10:27)

Main Point

Many people claim to believe in God, and believe they are God's children. Some even claim to be followers of Jesus. But, in speaking to the Jews, Jesus claimed there are specific characteristics and benefits of those who truly belong to Jesus' flock.

Intro |

Don't groan when I open my message with a little story about my beagle puppy.

If I was a man, I would probably regularly use sports illustrations. But, alas, God talks to us through analogies and metaphors which are familiar to us, usually arising from our everyday life. That's why most of my illustrations involve running, and today, how to train a beagle to walk on a loose leash.

We have come to the stage in our training where Toby, my cute, adorable beagle, needs to learn to how walk on a loose leash. That means, he needs to follow my lead, looking at me and listening to my voice, rather than looking at the ground and following every scent his nose leads him to.

When I first took him out, going 100 metres took 10 minutes, so many smells to investigate in every direction. I quickly learned how strong he was!

It was not me taking Toby for a walk. It was Toby pulling me along on a smelling expedition!

As I battled to go in the direction I wanted, I heard Jesus say "My followers often behave a lot like Toby! They, too, need to learn how to walk with me."

Today we come to a passage, where Jesus uses an analogy which is very familiar to most of us. I'm sure everyone of you has heard Jesus call himself the Good Shepherd and, understood themselves to be a sheep in his sheepfold or flock.

So, if I liken you to a sheep, none of you should be offended.

Now, sheep are not clever animals. They are stubborn and will wander anywhere in search for grass. They easily get themselves lost and in vulnerable places, because their eyes are set on grass, rather than what is going on around them.

That's why sheep need a shepherd. Without a shepherd, they are vulnerable and susceptible to attack by a host of wild animals.

Our passage today is in the middle of a long string of events at the climax of Jesus' ministry.

Prior to the section we read today, Jesus had withdrawn from the temple (8:59) and begun to gather around him a community distinct from official Judaism (chapter 9).

He had interpreted his activity as the divine shepherd gathering the flock of God (10:1-21). He concluded with a reference to the authority God had given him to lay down his life and take it back again (10:18 and 2:19-22).

Then we come to the saga caused by Jesus when he healed a blind man. Such a miracle, and the fact that he chose to perform it on the Sabbath, had thrown the religious leaders into a dispute.

"Many of them were saying, 'He has a demon and is out of his mind. Why listen to him?' Others were saying, 'These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?'" (10:19-21)

The question of 'who is this man and where does he get his authority?' drove the Jews to surround Jesus in the colonnade (v 24). The atmosphere was volatile to the extreme!

They were like wolves surrounding their prey, and they kept badgering him, *"How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."* (v 24)

Older translations translate their question, "How long will you keep us in doubt?" (KJV)

It is almost as though they were blaming Jesus for their unbelief. Saying, 'it is his fault we are confused!'

Yet, Jesus responds by returning to the analogy he had used earlier.

"I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep." (v25-26)

One of the dominant metaphors Jesus uses for his followers, is that of sheep and today's passage is all about who is a sheep in Jesus' fold and who is not!

The Jews because of their stubbornness in not believing in Jesus, were not his sheep.

But the way he showed them that they were not his sheep, was by explaining to them what made his sheep unique.

Now, I could just keep using the sheep analogy! And you'd all be completely comfortable acknowledging that you and I are just like stubborn, foolish animals like sheep.

But, today I'd like to bring the illustration into a setting of which we are more familiar – and liken you to a clever animal – like a well-trained beagle!

One who, because they have developed a relationship of trust and loyalty with their owner, has learnt how to walk through life, not just on a loose leash, but without the need for any leash – they are simply led by the voice of their owner.

Point 1 | Christ's followers are known personally and hear his voice

When the puppy school trainer told me how to teach Toby to walk on the lead she said, 'he should walk along, constantly looking at you, checking for your voice, all the time.'

At the time I said, 'is that even possible, knowing he is a beagle who is driven by his nose?'

She answered, "Absolutely! His nose will lead him into trouble. You are his master. He needs to always follow you."

What a powerful analogy for us, as we follow our master, Jesus!

The first characteristic Jesus identifies, is that His followers *know* him and are acutely attentive to His voice.

Jesus said, *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me."* (v27)

Notice, the emphasis is not on us having the ability to hear Jesus. Rather, *"My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all"*(v29)

We listen to our Master's voice because we are known by him.

Point 2 | Christ's followers obediently follow him.

Secondly, Jesus' followers obediently follow him.

This is where the 'lead training' analogy really becomes powerful.

It is not enough that Toby hears my voice and my command. He needs to have his ears attune to my voice, so that he listens to it and follows my voice. He needs to learn, as we do, never stray out of earshot. When I call 'Come' he needs to leave whatever he happens to be doing (or smelling) and returns to me.

So, it is not enough for Christ's followers to hear Jesus' voice. Nor is it enough that they hear His commands.

If we are Christ's followers, we will willingly listen and follow Him.

The goal of our Christian walk is that we walk side by side with our Master, chatting with our Saviour along the way, His voice prompting us of which direction we are to take.

If He turns in one direction, we'll happily turn to walk alongside Him. If He turns in another direction, we'll feel the tug of His yoke (Matthew 11:28-30) and turn with Him.

So, even if something looks really attractive, or we hear the voice of a stranger who speaks a different version of the truth, whether a lie from the enemy, or the squirrely theology of a false teacher, we know to turn our gaze back to Jesus, and listen to His living words, following Him wherever He goes.

So, there is no sense of a tug-of-war going on (unlike my walks at the moment with Toby)!

Christ's followers "fix their eyes on their Saviour" (Hebrews 12:2) and humbly submit to His guidance, knowing He knows what's best for us.

We don't pull against His yoke or harness, as though there is a battle of wills. Rather, Christ's followers walk in a relaxed, trusting way, knowing that their Master knows the way.

That's why David could say,

"He leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake." (v2-3)

There is refreshment and rest when we walk God's way, with our Saviour leading us.

Point 3 | Christ's followers reap the benefits of eternal security and protection from evil forces.

Lastly, because Christ's followers follow their Master's voice, they reap the benefit of His protection.

Jesus said,

"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."(v28-29)

We are vividly aware that we live on a battlefield. There is a war going on all around us. There are rulers in dark places and savage spiritual wolves who prowl around, seeking to attack and devour us.

So, how wonderfully reassuring to know, we are not being looked after by contractors or lazy employees. Afterall, they switch off at smoko!

No! We enjoy the privilege of having a Master, a Good Shepherd, who is so attentive to our welfare, that He not only encircles us within His fenced pen, but He is vigilant to kept us under His watchful eye and loving protective hand.

Notice ... where are Christ's followers?

They are in Christ's protective hand, and in the Father's all-powerful hand.

Because we are in His hand, we are secure and safe from the attack of wolves and those who wish to steal our lives.

That means we walk without fear.

That's why David sang, even if he was surrounded by enemies,

*"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil,
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."*(v 4)

There is a confidence and security that comes with knowing we are walking with our Master by our side.

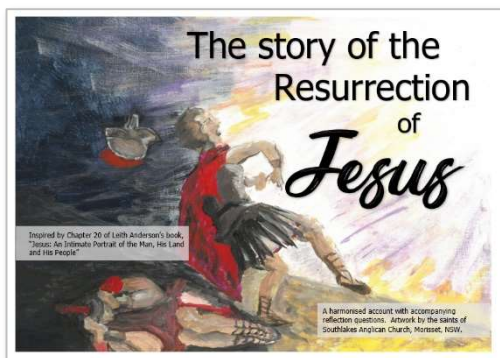
Our belonging to Jesus means that we are free to live the abundant life of which Jesus spoke earlier in the chapter: *"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly"*(John 10:10).

That's why David sings of the abundance he will enjoy for eternity,

*"Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."*(Psalm 23:6)

So, let's not pull against Christ's lead, let us walk in a relaxed way, trusting in our Saviour's direction and protection.

Easter to Pentecost Devotional



The story of the Resurrection will act as a devotional for the season of Easter to Pentecost Sunday. You may download a copy of the book from the Church's website or watch the story in video form at:

www.southlakes.org.au/wayofresurrection page.

To reduce the cost of printing, please ask the Church office if you would like a printed copy of this devotional.