

Title Being the Good Shepherd's Shepherd
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It was a year ago tonight Laban Kauffman spoke of building a vibrant church, you remember that? My heart was overwhelmed as I repented. I wanted to be the first one up at the altar because Laban spoke about reaching out to those who are in sin and defiled. That evening I had the opportunity to weep and confess and repent for being a lousy bishop. God had brought into our midst, to us, people who are dirty, sick, and in my heart, I would have been happy had they gone somewhere else. Brother Elmer, Ken Miller, and a few others were able to put their arms around me and weep with me and allow God to change my heart. I thank God this morning for a wonderful team, a team of shepherds. God has since brought us more people, wandering sheep, dirty, bleating, needing healing. There is a balm in Gilead, a physician here. God brings healing, and He wants to use us as shepherds.

My topic this morning is "Being the Good Shepherd's shepherd," understanding the shepherd's role in Jewish culture. I want to look at five scenes this morning. First, I'd like to set the stage. This shepherd's culture is largely formed in the desert. Yes, it was a Judean desert. Many of the noted Jewish leaders were shepherds. While they engaged their flocks, they were cut off from the distractions from society, allowing inner reflection. The Torah says Jacob (and others) all herded sheep. Some of the earliest Jewish leaders were shepherds, though the surrounding culture scorned this occupation. It was not glamorous. One thing I do want us to understand from the onset is that in this spiritual sense of being a shepherd, it is a function, not a position. Ephesians 4:11 Anthony talked about last night. Some apostles, some prophets... We think of them often as positions. They're not. They're functions. The prophet needs to pastor. The evangelist needs to shepherd, teach. It's a function. In other words, shepherd is not a specific leader, but it's a kind of leader. We may be bishops and elders and deacons and not be shepherding. We may have people within the congregation who are not deacons and elders and bishops who do shepherding. Jesus referred to Himself as the Good Shepherd. Peter refers to him as the Chief Shepherd. He is the greatest shepherd of all time. When it comes to examples, he is the greatest example, but more. As I look at the history of Jewish culture, I think of other examples: Moses, David (my favorite). If you want to see a shepherd's heart, read through the Psalms. He understood the language, he understood the culture of shepherding. When Nathan came to him with the story of the lamb, he got it. He understood it, and it broke his heart, and he repented. In the Psalms he expresses the deepest of pain, of repentance, the highest expression of joy in the relationships he experienced; the most noted of the Psalms, we all read it last night. I was not assigned a text, so I want to read

it again. *Reads Psalm 23.*

I'd like to look at five scenes of the culture. I'm sorry, I can't project from a Power Point, so bear with me.

The sun is rising, casting the shadow on a shepherd, with his skin of water, and he moves across the desert. Sheep follow him. There is not a great distance between. The shepherd hums a familiar tune, putting them to ease. There is peace and confidence on his face. The sheep sense the same, and gladly follow him

Point 1: The Good Shepherd's shepherd leads.

John 10:4. *Reads verse.* Psalm 23:2. *Reads verse.* Why do the sheep follow? There is only one reason, because they trust Him. That's it. That's why they follow Him. They know his voice, they've been with him, proven them worthy of their trust; if the sheep don't follow, he's taking a walk through the desert. He has the ability to influence them because they trust him. Why? Because of his character, who he is. His character, impeccable. Second, because of what he does, he is not shotty, his workmanship is something he needn't be ashamed of. Third, how he is. The way he treats them, his humility. He doesn't know it all, but he knows the One who knows it all. The greatest need for shepherds is men of integrity, people who know the Chief Shepherd. He knows the dangers, the ravines. The Judean desert, it's not hard to fall over a crevice or into a ravine. With the sun shining, it can be difficult to see these, and he must know the desert to avoid these. The shepherd needs a vision. He needs to know where he is taking his sheep. He needs to know where the green pastures are, to see the future of the sheep. The shepherd doesn't always know what he will encounter when leading them, but he must be alert and prepared: difficult terrain, bad weather, the thief, the wolf. He must have a vision for the future. Curt Kauffman recently said, "If you don't have a vision, you can't lead people forward. You can only lead them against something." The shepherd needs a vision. He cannot sit cowering in the corner, afraid of the future, to venture out in fear of the unknown. If he sits cowering in the corner, the sheep will die. He cannot ensure a fence high enough that will protect the sheep. In the culture we are discussing they are not ranchers, they are shepherds. Only at night do they take sheep into the fold. At night, you know where his bedroom is, in the opening of that fold. It becomes the door.

Scene two. the shepherd has walked more through the desert and gets to an area that looks like rest, but there is a dew here. Small sprouts begin to spring up, and the sheep begin to graze as the shepherd looks to the next slopes, where a hue can be seen. The shepherd gently leads them to an oasis, where there is a pool of good water. The sheep drink deeply, and lie down and rest in the pasture.

Point 2: The Shepherd leads.

Psalm 23:2. *Reads verse.* He leadeth me beside the still waters. In the context of the Judean wilderness, this is not a lush British green pasture that perhaps King James' translators were thinking of, but this is the desert. This is the culture of the desert. This is not a place where you take your sheep or cattle and lead them on their own. If you do, they will die. It is the wilderness, in Hebrew, the "*midbar.*" The wilderness and desert are mostly referred to with the same word. Sometimes a different word is used. A shepherd needs to lead his sheep to the green pastures. He feeds them. This grass grows at night. There is little rain. It only rains 3 to 10 inches of rain each

year. They rely on the dew. God created it. It comes in over the night, falls upon the rocks, drips off to the side, and on the side of the rocks, some grass springs up. You can hardly see it, if you are not used to the desert. The shepherd knows where it is at and takes his sheep there. He gives of the fresh sprouts that come up at night. The pasture is known as the *bar*, the same root word as the word “God.” Pasture, that’s where we take them. They lie down, they get their fill, they get enough, what we consider the desert, these green sprouts come up in the barren desert. Brothers, there is a desert out there. We need to find the green pasture. If we leave the sheep alone, they will die. The image here is to bring them to a slope that has a green hue. Mostly rock, sand, but it has this little hue of green where this sprout comes up. The image of the sheep shows deep contentment and satisfaction. There is nothing that will bring the deep contentment to your flock as the green pasture of the Word of God. Being properly feed in the midst of the desert, our sheep will eat of the wrong thing if we don’t nourish them. The sheep need to be fed. Pastors, shepherds, preach nourishing sermons from the Word of God. A vibrant flock, a church is not a concentration of spiritually starved saints, but Bible fed. He leads them by the still waters. The desert is a desert setting. The oasis has extra grass around, and the shepherd leads them to the water. He knows where the water is, in a natural hole, not a man-made cistern that Jeremiah speaks of, broken, cracked, leaking, and contaminated. Fresh. Sheep need to drink once a day.

Scene three: Sheep are satisfied as the day wears on, and oblivious of other activity in the area. The shepherd is aware of other sheep, and as another shepherd makes his way there, the sheep intermingle, and the shepherds share with one another, the joys of tending to the flock.

Point 3: Shepherds communicate.

John 10:4. *Reads verse.* John 10:27. *Reads verse.* The shepherd speaks to his sheep. He communicates to them. A Hebrew shepherd is constantly speaking to them, and the sheep recognize the tone and pitch of his voice. Someone can dress like that shepherd, but will not follow him. They will only follow because of his voice. There are many voices out there today. Brothers, if you and I do not speak to our sheep, they will listen to voices, and begin to recognize those voices, and will follow them. Communicate! Communicate! It’s important what we speak. 1 Peter 4:11. *Reads verse.* It makes me a bit nervous. Brothers, let’s be sure we speak for God. Speak for God. The sheep are notoriously noted for going astray, wondering off. A shepherd will always call his sheep in a straight line. He will never call his sheep around something. If there is a water pool, go to the pool where the sheep are at. If there is a crevice there, ... If there is a ravine, make sure the sheep only go in a straight line. The shepherd needs constant communication with his flock. He even names them. He calleth his own sheep by name.

Lois [name], in her book “Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus,” tells a story like this. She was in the desert: She watched as three shepherds stood together speaking. Their three flocks mingled, and can see no difference between them. How would they get them separated? One shepherd called out, saying, follow me. Sure enough, there was a group scattered throughout that raised their heads and began to go towards the shepherd. Another shepherd stepped out for the group, went up the side of the mountain, and said, “Follow me.” Another group raised their heads and followed him. The other sheep that remained never raised their heads, totally oblivious of anything around them until their shepherd spoke. Then they raised their heads and followed him. They knew the voice. Brothers, if our sheep don’t know our voice, don’t be surprised if they don’t follow.

Scene four: the shepherd leads his sheep down into the ravine. With his staff, he checks the soil to ensure that it is safe; the sun is glaring, and he wants to make sure he can see into the deep canyon, and checks the mire around the pool. Appears contaminated, and he wants to make sure the sheep don't get stuck in the mire. He listens, in case it rained in Jerusalem last night, and it comes down suddenly, and catches his sheep stuck. He continues through the canyon. Darkness in the canyon. Out of the dark appeared a wolf, and with his rod, he strikes at it. The sheep follow the rod and the staff, and are comforted.

Point 4: The shepherd protects.

He has a rod and staff. These are viewed in Jewish culture as the same thing. I had to go to a lot of different places to get together with those, what about this, and that. Tell me about the Jewish culture, the sheep in the Jewish culture. I discovered many books are written from the American view that really don't know much about shepherding except for American ideas, and that's okay. I don't know much about it either. The rod and staff are comforting. They are a source of safety. In the glaring sunlight, the shepherd uses his staff, because it is so glaring, because when there is a crevice or ravine, it just looks black. So he uses his staff to make sure it is safe. He checks around for mire, places that are not safe. He uses his staff in defense, what David used to kill the bear and lion. The rod was never intended to punish. Anthony alluded to last night what many have read. In these books I've read, some shepherd has a stray lamb, and he wants to teach it a lesson, he strikes it, and then carries it and builds a relationship. Not in Jewish culture. No. These men I listened to, agreed that, studied Jewish culture— never. The rod and staff were not for that, it was a comfort for the flock. It was not a rod of discipline. It was a rod to protect the flock. The sheep were comforted, knowing. Another misconception is the rod has a crook at the top. It has a knob at the top. The Egyptians have two rods, the flail and the crook. You'll find it everywhere. But you cannot find it in Israeli culture, except in the tourist shops. This rod, crook, and flail were emblems of an Egyptian god symbol of divine authority. To discipline, punish, and rule. But it's Egyptian culture. Moses was educated in Egypt. Moses, after being 40 years educated, he knew about the crook and flail. One day he came out among his brothers. What did he do? He used his rod to kill the Egyptian, and then he fled. He went to the back side of the mountain where he tended his father-in-law's sheep for years, Mt. Horeb University. There, Moses encountered the burning bush. Brothers, everyone, every Shepherd needs to encounter his burning bush. His bush where he sees that this is a place without God, existence is impossible. Without God, I cannot do anything; I must totally depend on him. A place he can no longer run from, where he submits to the Almighty. Their rod becomes the Hebrew rod, and not our rod. It changes the perspective. Moses picks up the rod, and obediently follows the call of God. "I want you to lead the people out." Then they come back to Mt. Horeb. They need water. That's it! "Moses, take your rod and strike the rock, and water will come out." He did, and they drank, and were all satisfied. The people later chided against Moses and Aaron. They were upset, and all of a sudden, the training of 40 years of Egyptian came back to Moses heart. He was angry with the people of God. God said to Moses: "Take the rod, my rod, and go out to the rock, and speak to the rock." Moses, in his anger said, "Hear now you rebels, do I have to get water for you?" He was angry, and he smote the rock. Water came out. God said, "Moses, you didn't trust me." I don't know what all God said, but he said, "You were angry with my people; it's like being angry with me. You reverted to the Egyptian way. You can't come into the Promised Land. This one thing stands between you and the promise," because of his relationship with his flock. Ezekiel,

Anthony referred to last night, he said, “With force and cruelty you have ruled the flock, they are scattered, but I’m going to give them a good shepherd.” Jesus is the greatest of the Hebrew shepherds.

Scene 5: The day is drawing close to a close. They are headed back to the fold. The shepherd calls his sheep and they tightly surround them. He looks over each one. Some are dirty. He takes his hand to the wool and brushes it off with his hand. They had gotten in touch with the desert that day. He kneels beside one and removes the prickles and thorns hanging on his wool. He puts his arm and embraces the little lamb whose mother just died. He reaches out to the fringes of the flock and calls them by name, and says, “I love you. I’ve collected some grass and feed for you.” He feeds them, bringing them into a tight circle. He becomes aware then of a smell, the smell of sheep. It was a pleasant day, but not a pleasant smell. He finished the day. All of his sheep are in the fold, and he lays down in his bedroom. He comes to the door of the sheep fold. before he drifts to sleep, he still smells the sheep. No, no, it’s not the sheep he smells, he smells himself. He smells like sheep.

Point 5: Shepherds smell like sheep.

“I am the Good shepherd and know my sheep and am known of mine.” Brethren, if you can’t stand the smell of sheep, you shouldn’t be a helper or bishop, because you can’t be a shepherd and not smell like sheep. We must be intimate with the sheep. It’s called relationship. I know that they know me. I call them by name. I lay my life down for them. The sheep are attached to their shepherd, so that when a shepherd dies, the entire flock perishes. What did they do? They began to team shepherd. The second shepherd: if one dies, there is someone there, they know the voice. They are known of him. It’s a team. They know the sheep. The shepherd at times will weep for his sheep, the ones wondering from the flock. The shepherd has such an intimate relationship, that he smells like the sheep. Spending time with them. It is as important to go to the Memorial Picnic as it is to preach to them on Easter Sunday. Sorry! Sometimes the sheep do things that the shepherd is embarrassed with. May I suggest something in closing? Don’t be embarrassed of your sheep. Identify with their embarrassing actions. Embrace them in the place you find them. Don’t isolate. Let’s not isolate ourselves from them and drive them out. Ultimately, the goal of the shepherd is to serve the sheep, a servant-shepherd, just like Jesus. In closing, 1 Peter 5:2.

Reads verse.