

18. John 10:1-21

Andrew Judd

Jesus declares himself to be the good shepherd, rebuking Israel's leaders for their spiritual blindness. Jesus is both the gate (the only way to be saved) and the good shepherd (the one who lays his life down for the sheep). Obedience to Jesus is life to the full.

This passage is really part of one section which starts with the blind man in chapter 9:1 and goes till the end of chapter 10 (hence the reference back to the blind man in 10:21).

Getting started

Who was your favourite teacher at school? What set them apart from the other teachers?

Observation and interpretation

Read Ezekiel 34:1-24. What are some of the promises that God makes in this chapter regarding (1) the leaders of Israel and (2) his scattered people?

God's will deal with the bad shepherds (the spiritual leaders of Israel) who have exploited his people and led them to disaster. He will shepherd his people himself. Then he will appoint one shepherd over them, David.

Read verses 1-6. Jesus is using a figure of speech that his audience doesn't understand.

- Who might the thieves and robbers be referring to?
- Who is Jesus' audience, and why can't they understand Jesus' figure of speech?

>> Draw a diagram of a shepherd on a big piece of paper. As you read through, use post-it notes to add descriptions to the good shepherd (Jesus).

Read verses 7-13.

- What might this second image of the 'gate' suggest about Jesus?
- What dangers does Jesus 'save' his flock from?
- What might 'life to the full' mean?

The use of different sheep related images here can be a little confusing if we try to nail them down too tidily. In this parable, Jesus uses 'several images somewhat interchangeably' (Bible Speaks Today: John, 145).

"Jesus' imagery would have been familiar in a society where sheep-farming was a staple of the economy. The 'fold' or pen was probably a large, communal enclosure where several flocks were herded for safety at

night. The calling of the sheep in the morning (3) would be crucial as each shepherd assembled his own flock from the larger herd in the fold. During the night a guard would be hired (3, the watchman). He would remain at the only door to the enclosure. Robbers could enter only by scaling the enclosure. The guard would admit only the true shepherds by the door when they arrived in the morning.” (BST 145)

Read verses 14-16. What makes someone a member of the flock? Who are these ‘other sheep’ that Jesus is referring to?

Implications

Read verses 17-18. Jesus says that he lays down his life willingly. How would Christianity be different if Jesus had been sacrificed unwillingly?

- What is the link between the knowledge (v15) and love of the Father for the Son, and his laying down his life for us (v17)? Would the Father have still loved the Son even if he had not laid down his life?

In verses 19-21 people are divided over Jesus – is he mad, demon possessed, or is he from God. Are there any other options? What are some of the pieces of evidence that we could use to help us decide for ourselves where we stand?

How do we know if we are part of Jesus’ flock or not?

Jesus promises safety and security for his sheep. Yet Christians live in danger all over the world. How do these two things fit together?

Prayer suggestions

Give thanks for Jesus’ intimate knowledge of us and care for us.