

JESUS, THE GOOD SHEPHERD



Christ to the World Ministries

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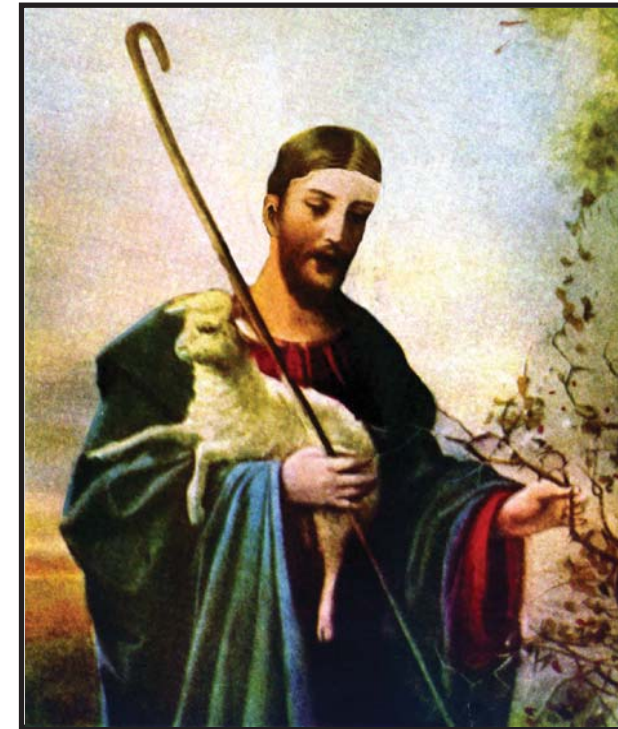
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CHRIST TO THE WORLD MINISTRIES

Jesus, the Good Shepherd

Read John 10:1-21, Psalm 23, and Isaiah 40:11 in your Bible.

One of the most beloved images in the Bible is Jesus as “The Good Shepherd.” We see it in art, hear it in sermons, and sing about it in hymns. Jesus used this expression about himself in an encounter with the Pharisees.

In John 9, Jesus gave sight to a blind man on the Sabbath. This miracle created a major controversy with the Pharisees. They expelled the healed man from the synagogue (John 9:22, 34). The once blind man could now see, but the Pharisees were spiritually blind.

Jesus responded to the actions of the Pharisees by using imagery from the life of a shepherd and his sheep. A common sight everywhere in Judea was the shepherd leading his flock. Jesus’ hearers knew the Old Testament was rich with teachings based upon the picture of a shepherd and sheep.

The Bible Presents Many Images of Shepherds and Sheep

Sheep are mentioned in the Bible about 750 times. The first occupation named in the Bible is that of shepherd: “*Now Abel kept flocks*” (Genesis 4:2). Some of the great personalities of the Old Testament were shepherds: Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and David.

God is often pictured in the Old Testament as the shepherd and the people as his flock (Psalm 23; 100:3; Isaiah 40:11; Ezekiel 34:11-16). False religious leaders were pictured as unfaithful shepherds (Jeremiah 10:21; 23:1-2; Ezekiel 34:1-10).

In the New Testament, angels announced the birth of the Messiah to shepherds (Luke 2:8-20). John the Baptist called Jesus “*the Lamb of God*” (John 1:36). Jesus told the unforgettable story of a shepherd who searched for his lost sheep until he found it (Luke 15:3-7).

So when Jesus told about a shepherd and his sheep, the common people had no problem understanding the imagery.

Jesus Is the Door

Caring for his sheep occupied all of a shepherd’s time. He led them to grass and water. He protected them from wild animals and dangerous places where a sheep might fall. He guarded against thieves. At night, the shepherd would bring his flock into a sheepfold, or sheep pen, an enclosure usually made of rough stones. Sometimes a communal sheepfold in a village would shelter several flocks. A watchman, or doorkeeper, would stand guard during the night and open the gate in the morning for the shepherd. The shepherd would call to his sheep and lead them out for the day.

Jesus referred to this communal sheep pen in John 10:1-5. The true shepherd entered by the gate that the watchman opened to him, but a thief would climb in some other way. The sheep followed their shepherd because they knew his voice. They would not follow a stranger.

Jesus contrasted his ministry with that of the Pharisees. He likened them to thieves and robbers who killed and destroyed, evidenced by their treatment of the healed blind man.

Blinded by their own prejudice and hatred, the Pharisees did not understand Jesus’ story. So Jesus continued. He changed the imagery from a communal sheepfold with a watchman to a sheepfold perhaps out on a hillside where a shepherd would bring his sheep at evening. Once the sheep gathered safely inside the enclosure, the shepherd would lie down across the opening to protect the sheep. No wild animal could get inside and no sheep could leave the fold without crossing over the shepherd’s body and awakening him. The shepherd served as the door to the sheepfold.

Jesus declared himself to be the door. “*I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved*” (John 10:9). He said on another occasion, “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6). Jesus is the way to God

Jesus Is the Good Shepherd

Several times in John’s gospel Jesus made great “I am” statements using metaphors. He declared, “*I am the bread of life*” (John 6:35); “*I am the light of the world*” (John 8:12); “*I am the gate*” (John 10:9). And Jesus announced, “*I am the good shepherd*” (John 10:11, 14).

Several important truths arise from Jesus’ identity as the good shepherd. He would lay down his life for the sheep, fulfilled by his death on the cross a few weeks later. He knows his sheep by name. He gives life to the fullest. He leads, guides and protects his sheep. He gives nourishment to those who follow him.

Conclusion

Jesus knows each one of us. He knows your name. He knows all about you and loves you with an eternal love. You are precious to him. He desires to be your shepherd. He will give you freedom from the guilt, the bondage, and the punishment of sin. He wants to lead and guide you through life. There is no trial or sorrow or hurt that you will ever experience that he does not go before you and will sustain you. He will meet the deepest needs and longings of your heart.

Pray this prayer: “*Dear God, I know that I’m a sinner. I believe that Jesus died for my sins and rose from the dead and is alive today. I now turn from my sins. I am placing my faith and trust in Jesus alone to be my Savior and to forgive me. I receive Jesus into my life as my Savior and Lord. From this day forward, I will follow Jesus. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for loving me and for coming into my life. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.*”

Welcome into God’s family!

Share with others that you have received Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. Ask for baptism in a local church as a public expression of your faith. If there is no church near you, start a church by gathering a group of persons in your home and worship together on a regular basis. Read your Bible and pray each day. Tell others what Christ has done for you and what he can do for them.