

Explore: Feeling insecure?

November 1, 2013

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Nov. 17 focuses on John 10:1-42.*

John 10 is one of my all-time favorite passages of Scripture. We can see three roles of Jesus in this passage.

The Good Shepherd

A couple of situations in the Gospel of John show Jesus' superiority over the current set of religious leaders. Jesus self-description as the Good Shepherd is one of these moments. The other will come in John 15, when Jesus calls himself the True Vine. The role of a shepherd would have been familiar to Jesus' audience. Because of both the time and location, this would have been a common occupation.

The religious leaders were familiar with Old Testament teaching about shepherding used as an analogy. For instance, they would have known the 23rd Psalm: "The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing."

They also fully understood God desired to be a Shepherd for his people—leading them to places of abundance and safety. They also knew God had called the religious leaders to be a type of shepherd to his people as well.

Ezekiel 34:2 is an example of how God rejected the religious leaders because they had been poor shepherds and then announced he would become their Shepherd: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?'" Verse 11 adds, "For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'I myself will search for my sheep and look after

them.’”

Clearly, what Jesus is saying in John 10 is a fulfillment of that passage in Ezekiel. Jesus longed to be their Good Shepherd. By contrast, the “bad shepherds” were interested only in themselves, would not protect the flock and failed to bring them to a place of spiritual nourishment and sustenance. Jesus’ desire for those listening to him that day—as well as us today—is to let him lead our lives. He will bring us to places of peace and abundance. He is our Good Shepherd.

The Gate/The Door

Part of the way through this Scripture, Jesus appears to mix his metaphor. Suddenly, he stops talking about being the Shepherd and begins to talk about being the Gate. I have to admit, I do not know much about being a shepherd, but I did some research and found some interesting facts.

First, it would have been common for several shepherds to share the same area. There would have been a large pen with several parts sub-divided out for the different flocks. This helps us understand what Jesus meant when he said the sheep know the shepherd’s voice. They would not leave when another shepherd came to the gate and called his sheep; they knew their leader’s voice.

Another interesting fact: Sometimes these shepherds—the ones who really cared for their sheep—would sleep in the entryway of their portion of the pen. No one or nothing came in or out of that area without the shepherd’s knowledge. This helps us answer the question, “Is Jesus the Shepherd, or is he the Gate?” The answer is “yes.” He is both.

Why is this so important? It is significant because we are not talking about sheep that lived 2,000 years ago. The concept Jesus is talking about here has to do with people and eternal life. Jesus is the only way to have eternal life. He is the Gate through which we all must pass if we want to have our

sins forgiven and spend eternal life with God in heaven.

The Lamb

The final role Jesus talks about has to do with his death on behalf of his people. Again, Jesus couches this in terms of being a shepherd and laying down his life for his sheep. But we know what Jesus ultimately did was become a sheep. The words of John come to mind, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Jesus tells us no one can make him give up his life. He chose, because of his love for God and for us, to carry out the Father's plan of salvation: "... Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

The "joy set before" Jesus was and is that through his death many would come to know forgiveness and new life. Jesus was intentional in what he was doing here in this passage. He was stating that the religious leaders and their entire system were flawed and hopeless. Instead, Jesus himself was and is the only true Shepherd and the only true way to have the abundant life God wants us each to have. In doing this, Jesus is once again providing a choice for all who will listen.