



HG193 *The I AM Sayings Of Jesus*  
**I AM The Good Shepherd**

John 10:1-21

Home Group Study Notes

9 February 2020 - Rachel Orford



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN  
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION  
**BEFORE THE MEETING!**

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group  
with you, along with any previous notes and other  
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



**Welcome** (10 mins)  
*Ice Breaker*

What are your memories of being in the school nativity play? What part did you hope for and why?



**Looking Upwards** (10 mins)  
*Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



## HG193 *The I AM Sayings Of Jesus* **I AM The Good Shepherd**

John 10:1-21

Home Group Sermon

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It doesn't take a great stretch of the imagination to picture Jesus as a shepherd does it? After all the picture of the shepherd is woven into the very language and imagery of the bible almost from the beginning.

As children one of our first experiences of being immersed in the story of the gospel is the school nativity play. I guess we all used to hope we would get one of what are considered the "good" parts - Mary and Joseph, the three wise men and possibly an angel, but then of course we have the shepherds, who were the first to be told the news of Jesus's birth. So, from an early age, the idea of shepherds as being important biblical characters is firmly in our minds.

### **Shepherds Everywhere**

And as we grow to know more of the story of the bible, we find shepherds everywhere. Moses was a shepherd; in Exodus 3 we find him tending the flock of his father in law Jethro immediately before he came upon the burning bush. And probably the most famous of all Old Testament shepherds is King David - before his famous defeat of Goliath, he looked after his father's sheep in Bethlehem

We also often find God himself likened to a shepherd. In Isaiah Ch 40 it is prophesied that the Sovereign Lord will come with power and that he "...tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart," and the psalms contain many references to God as a shepherd and the people as his sheep.

So I'm sure that Jesus's listeners would have been all too familiar with the life of a shepherd and all that it, particularly as Jesus had already used the shepherd and sheep elsewhere to illustrate his teaching. In Matthew Chapter 18 and Luke 15 he uses the Parable of the Lost Sheep to demonstrate that to God, just one sinner who repents brings him more joy than the entire rest of the flock who wander around without the need to repent.

And just in case you are thinking that shepherds are not a good analogy for us today - that being a modern shepherd would be a doddle with no need of the sacrifices described in our passage, let me tell you about Surin. Surin is a 25-year-old shepherd from the north-west of Romania who was recently interviewed by a Canadian internet news service and whose dedication and selflessness to his flock would I think definitely qualify him as a "good shepherd" by Jesus' standards. He says that he believes he was born with a special affection for sheep - that it is his vocation. He talks about the care he gives his flock, washing them and taking the thistles out of their fleeces, the lack of sleep due to the prowling of wolves, the bad weather, storms and frostbite he endures and huddling down with the sheep to keep warm during the winter. He even tells of how he rescued one of his sheep from the actual jaws of a wolf; "I live or die with my sheep," he says. So, the life of a shepherd in first century Palestine may have been hard, needing extreme dedication, but this kind of life is still going on today.

So here we are in chapter 10, with Jesus launching into a parable about shepherds, gatekeepers, thieves and robbers, strangers, sheep and sheep pens ....and being met with blank stares.

But you have to remember who Jesus is speaking to here - the Pharisees who don't have a great track record at getting what Jesus is talking about. It's very easy to be judgmental about them, because we know who Jesus is - the Messiah - and they did not. They were steeped in Mosaic Law, but this did not allow for their minds to be open to the possibility of Jesus being the one the scriptures foretold. In fact, any open claim on Jesus part that he was the Messiah would have given them the excuse they needed to haul him off to be tried for blasphemy.

Prior to our passage, the whole of the previous chapter had been about Jesus healing a blind man and whether this proved that he was the Messiah or not and Jesus is using his parable to explain that you can tell the true King in the same way that you can tell a true shepherd. Anyone accepting that Jesus was the Messiah would have understood these references, but the Pharisees didn't so Jesus had to explain the meaning further. "I am the gate for the sheep," he says, "I am the Good shepherd."

### **The Good Shepherd**

So just what is it that Jesus is telling us about himself? What does the good shepherd do that makes him.... good?

***He looks after his sheep.*** He sees them safely in and out of their pen and leads them to good pasture. In other words, he wants what is best for them. Jesus likens himself to the keeper of the gate to the sheep pen. He says "[the sheep] will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full."

We probably think of a gatekeeper today more along the lines of a doorman or bouncer to a club who prevents people from coming in if their faces don't fit or if they aren't dressed appropriately. If you want to go into that kind of club, there are all kinds of seemingly random rules, but Jesus' boundaries are very clear; we should love God, our neighbour and ourselves with all our hearts, souls and minds. If we do this and can accept his gift of forgiveness, then we will be observing his laws and can come and go freely, having good experiences and living life to the full. By minding the gate to the fold, he can care for us and guide us on our way, like God himself in Psalm 121 who watches over our going out and our coming in. This is his ambition for us, which we hear about in Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future".

***He protects his sheep.*** "The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep," says Jesus, foreshadowing the words he will say to his disciples later in chapter 15 when he tells them that "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." It seems incredible doesn't it that a shepherd really would sacrifice himself for his sheep, but Surin our 21<sup>st</sup> century shepherd tells in his interview of the lengths he had to go to protect the lambs in his care.

I am sure we can think of stories of amazing acts of self-sacrifice, but there is of course someone, Jesus, who made the ultimate sacrifice to save us and literally give his own life. And this wasn't something that just happened to him by chance. He wasn't just in the wrong place at the wrong time and 'took one for the team'. It was a command that he obeyed. He says "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.... This command I received from my Father." So, they were in it together. It was God's plan to save us, because he loved us. One of the most famous verses in scripture tells us this - John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. This meant that his son, our good shepherd, had to pay the most terrible price for this to happen.

***He Knows his Sheep.*** And this isn't just a passing acquaintance with humankind. "I know my sheep and my sheep know me," Jesus says. He knows us all individually - intimately. "Even the hairs on our head are all numbered" we are told in Luke 12:7.

And of course there are the wonderful words of Psalm 139 “You have searched me Lord and you know me..... You are familiar with all my ways”. It talks of us before we were born being knitted together by God in our mother’s wombs and being “Fearfully and wonderfully made”. Although it is comforting to know that there is someone who is that concerned with us, who knows everything about us, it is a bit frightening too isn’t it? There is nowhere we can hide.

Jesus likens our relationship with him to the one he has with Father - “just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.” We have that closest of relationships and the privilege to call God “Our Father”. And then he says rather mysteriously that he has “other sheep” that don’t live in his sheep pen. He knows them too and he must go and get them. This must have mystified his audience, even those who knew where he was going with this shepherd and sheep analogy. Who could these other sheep be? The original sheep are of course the people of Israel, but with the benefit of hindsight, we know that he wasn’t just interested in saving the people of Israel. He had come to save the whole world. Every nation was to be brought into the sheep pen. This was his vision, “one flock one shepherd.” And this of course means us too. Jesus wants to have this relationship with us, for us to get to know his voice.

### **The Unruly Sheep**

So, with all this going for us, with such a good shepherd inviting us to join his flock, why are we not all happily munching grass in green pastures and resting by quiet waters?

Well, I guess it is because we all have some rather unflattering similarities to unruly sheep. The shepherd has his work cut out. Sheep are probably not known for their quick wittedness although I expect Surin and his shepherd friends might take issue with this, but like sheep:

***We can be too trusting.*** Jesus says that his sheep will not follow a stranger if they do not recognise his voice. But what if the stranger sounds like the shepherd? What if he feeds them good things takes them to nice places? We can be easily fooled. The thieves and robbers that Jesus talked about were probably the local leaders who were either keen to involve Israel in more conflict or to throw their lot in with Rome to suit their own ends and increase their power and wealth. Ultimately there was no promise of safety in following them. Today we might think that we can spot a bad leader, but there are many other, less obvious “thieves” who deceive us with their promises of wealth, popularity, eternally youthful looks and so on, if only we would buy into what they are offering. They sound wonderful, but increasingly in the western world are coming to realise how unsatisfying this kind of materialism is and we are all looking for something or someone else - someone who doesn’t steal from us or deceive us. Someone who remains true

But we still have that inclination, don’t we, to ***follow the crowd***. I’m sure we have all seen a sheepdog trying to herd sheep. When one breaks away, a few others trot after him and then the rest all follow. No one wants to stand out on their own, to go their own way and appear different. There is nothing wrong with wanting to be part of something, but often following the crowd can turn into something ugly. Gang membership with all the intimidation that can entail; media frenzies against celebrities who have bucked a trend which can turn into vicious social media “trolling”, all because we need to be part of a tribe, a group, a crowd. We can end up thinking we are like them and mistakenly feeling that this means we are safe and loved. But really, do our new ‘friends’ want what’s best for us? Will they look after us and protect us? Do they really know us? The answer is of course No.

And ***we are stubborn***. Have you ever driven around the narrow lanes of a national park and found your road blocked by sheep? Not necessarily a whole flock of them - it could be just one. And no matter how much you hoot, it just stands and stares you down. Have you ever been that sheep? Have you ever secretly thought that maybe you are sticking steadfastly to a lost cause but don’t want to admit you are wrong? Even when it might lead to all kinds of trouble. Fortunately, God will protect us from ourselves and rescue us when we stray, the parable of the lost sheep illustrates this perfectly.

If just one of us has behaved so obstinately that we become lost, this shepherd will not write us off as a minor economic loss and leave us to our fate. He will leave the more obedient sheep safely grazing and come to find us and bring us home.

We can of course rely on our Good Shepherd for all of this - to save us from thieves and robbers, to protect us from being led astray and to rescue us when we get lost, but surely it would just be easier if we tried to be good sheep!

### **The Sheep Pen**

Because we all want to be safe in the sheep pen don't we? Our Church. There were two kinds of sheep pen in Jesus' time. In the villages and towns there were communal sheepfolds where all the local sheep sheltered when they returned home at night, usually in winter. These would have had a door to which there was a designated door keeper who was the only one who held the key. But when the sheep were out on the hills in warmer weather, they were collected into sheep pens on the hillside. These were just open spaces enclosed by a wall, with an opening through which the sheep came in and went out; but there was no door of any kind. At night the shepherd himself lay down across the opening and no sheep could get out or in except over his body. The shepherd literally was the door.

In the same way we have our communal sheep pen - the wider church - and our own local churches out on the hillsides, where our church families are hopefully safely inside in their pens. But just as the landscape of 1st century Judea could be inhospitable, we too can be affected by the elements - the trials, disappointment and difficulties of our lives, as communities and as individuals. And it is important to remember that Jesus is the only door through which we can safely go in and out. It is so important that we get to know his voice so that we are not led off course by stranger. Many times in the recent past we have reminded ourselves of the importance of understanding and taking to our hearts God's word and not being tempted to put our trust in anyone who encourages us to add to or take away anything from the gospel message, or to misinterpret scripture for their own interests.

### **Green Pasture**

And what of our final destination - our green pasture? Psalm 23 famously describes what we can expect if we accept the Lord as our shepherd. We will lack nothing; we will be taken to rest in green pastures and beside quiet waters. Our souls will be refreshed, and we will be guided along the right paths. In the end God's "goodness and love will follow me, all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

And Jesus really is the only gate to this life. Jesus tells Thomas in John 16:6 "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me". If we can accept that Jesus is our good shepherd - if we listen to his voice, trust in the plans he has for us, surrender ourselves to his protection and get to know him as he knows us then we can be certain that he will lead us to the most amazing pasture of all.

## **Emmanuel Church Text for 2020**

*"The Lord Your God is with you. He is mighty to save.  
He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with  
His love. He will rejoice over you with singing."*

**Zephaniah 3:17**



## **Looking Upwards** (40 mins)

### *Bible Study*

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

**1.** There are several account of characters being shepherds in the Old Testament. Which are you familiar with and what (if anything) was good about them?

**2.** Jesus says that his sheep would never follow a stranger. What things in our lives should we be wary of that we might be tempted to follow and that could lead us away from Christ?

**3.** Jesus tells us that he has come that his sheep might have life and live it to the full. What might a life lived to the full look like? What might prevent us from living it?

**4.** "I know my sheep and my sheep know me" says Jesus. How would you rate your relationship with Him? What steps could you take to strengthen it?

**5.** Jesus' vision is for there to be "one flock and one shepherd". How close or far away from this reality are we today? Why do you think that is?

**6.** Read Psalm 23 which gives us a powerful picture of the Lord as our shepherd. In what areas of your life do you think you particularly need "shepherding"?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



## **Looking Inwards** (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!')* for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



## **Looking Outwards** (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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