

Coach House Church

BEACONS

WHY SHEEP?

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When we read through the bible we find lots of places where people are compared to, and referred to, as sheep. Have you ever wondered why?

Last week after church, with a small group of people, we were discussing this subject. To me the reason why we are sometimes compared to sheep was evident but someone in the group was confused about the analogy and someone else had to explain: It's because most of the time we do what everyone else is doing. It takes one person in a group to panic, and it extends to the whole group. In a group of children, it takes one kid to start crying and before long they all cry. Sometimes at the school where I work I have to discipline pupils and when I ask why did you do it? - whatever it was that got them in trouble - often they will answer: because he/she told me to. To this answer I always ask: ok, so if he/she would have told you to jump out the window from the top floor, would you have done it?

Herd mentality - that's why we are compared to sheep. We don't like to be left out or to be the odd one out. We have to be part of whatever is going on. And we love to follow whoever we think is in trend at that point in time

However, when it comes to sheep it's not all bad. They have good characteristics too. Sheep are humble and timid, they are not fierce predators - on the contrary, they do not have teeth and claws, they are totally defenceless when it comes to predators and dependant on the human care. Sheep are raised for their fleece, milk and meat so they are extremely useful to people.

In the bible, we find sheep and shepherds from the very beginning. Abel, Adam and Eve's son, was a shepherd. God himself uses the imagery of sheep regarding people; sometime in a positive way and sometimes with a negative connotation. The prophet Ezekiel in his book in the 34th chapter, is given a word from God in which he has to tell the human leaders that God is angry with them as they do a

bad job in looking after the people God give them to look after. Here the leaders are presented as bad shepherds and the people are the sheep.

When we read the chapter we see that at the beginning God speaks against the bad shepherds who are taking advantage of the sheep; then tells them what He will do to them and then in verse 11 He says this :

" 'For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness."

God is saying here clearly that He himself will look after his people when human leadership fails.

Further on in verse 17, God addresses the people who here are represented by sheep and tells them what they do wrong when they live without consideration for others. Verse 20-24 tells us the following :

'Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another. I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken."

Here the Lord is telling his people how he intends to look after his people and also gives the prophet a confirmation of the coming Messiah who at this point in time hadn't arrived yet.

In the New Testament, we find Jesus using the same imagery. In John's gospel 10:3-5 , Jesus talks about a relationship between the shepherd and the flock.it says this :

"... He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."

And further down he explains who the Shepard Is:

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it."

John,10: 11-12

What could we learn from this passage and the Shepherd-Sheep imagery? What practical advice could we take from it ?

Let's be encouraged that the Lord himself is going to be our Shepherd ; a Shepherd who give his life for his flock and wants a relationship with his it- with each of his sheep.

And when we have a choice, we would always choose to follow and listen to the Good Shepard and not the hired one. Lets decide to be the docile sheep who willingly follow the shepherd without rebelling and thinking we know better. King David so himself as a sheep when he wrote psalm 23. Let me read it to you : "The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Psalms 23:1-6 NIV



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