

## ***One Flock, One Shepherd***

By Dr. Dave Neale

Today we have a behind the scenes look at Jesus' ministry. One in which this gospel writer brings a lot of "special" material (that is, it is found only in John) and gives us a unique interpretation of Jesus' life.

This different approach of John from the synoptics is called by one person, "...the unique, solitary grandeur" of John's Gospel.

The layout of what we are talking about today goes like this.

- Chapter 8 Jesus has a long soliloquy that begins with, ***I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.*** (8:12)
- Chapter 9 Jesus heals a man born ...***blind from birth***. His disciples ask, Rabbi who sinned, this man or his parents? And Jesus said, ***...we must work the works of him who sent me...As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*** A huge conflict breaks out because the "Pharisees" just didn't believe that he had been blind, etc.
- Today we have Chapter 10, which is a very powerful dialogue between Jesus and his opponents, who object, not to his healing of the blind man, but for his words:<sup>i</sup> ***"I am the good shepherd."*** (John 10:11; Hebrews 13:20)

Here, you will recall me saying a few times in the past, Jesus channels Ezekiel 34. There we find a tirade against the bad shepherds. Basically, God says there, I am the good shepherd:

***I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured and I will strengthen the weak...*** (Ezekiel 34:13, 16)

And how does Jesus show that he loves the sheep, that he is, in fact, the Good Shepherd?

Four times he repeats this phrase in his debate with his interlocutors:

- Vs 11, ***...the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...***
- Vs 15, ***...I lay down my life for the sheep...***
- Vs 17, ***...I lay down my life in order to take it up again...***
- Vs 18, ***...No one takes it from me, I lay down my life of my own accord***

You see, the hired hand doesn't own the sheep. The hired hand sees the wolf and flees. But the Good Shepherd stays. With the Good Shepherd we ***find pasture***. (John 10:9)

John calls all of this a "figure of speech" his hearers didn't understand.

There is the pure gospel for today. But here is the kicker... It is in how Jesus defines "the flock."

***And I have other sheep that do not belong to the fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.*** (John 10:16)

Isn't that fascinating? By the way, in Greek, "flock" and "shepherd" are a homonym, the same word with different meanings. Do you see the oneness of the shepherd and his flock?

And here we stand in Christendom with our countless denominations and petty divisions.

The browser window open in the background is that the Gospel is wrestling with who Jesus was in view of the political and religious context of the very late first century (90s) when the Gospel was published, probably by the “school of John.”

Here is the background. In 65-70 the Great Revolt of the Jewish nation against the Romans led to war and the destruction of the nation, including the beloved temple.

The Christians fled Jerusalem for Pella, and parts beyond to escape the war (read Acts to learn about the dispersion). Jewish nationalists not only thought Christians were traitors to the nation because they wouldn’t join the fight against the Romans, but that they held heretical views about their so-called Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

By the 70s, 80s, and 90s the church and the synagogue grew further and further apart. The Romans began to persecute the Christians because they wouldn’t bow the knee to the Roman Empire. Because they held that Jesus is Lord.

That is the browser window that is open in the background.

So, in this environment the evangelists of the church turned to the gentiles. The conflict between church and synagogue drove the missionary journey abroad. Paul of Tarsus was one of the earliest leaders of this movement (40s and 50s).

***And I have other sheep that do not belong to the fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.*** (John 10:16)

It is the mission to the gentiles, the mission to the godless pagans. It is the mission to the world beyond the smoking rubble of the temple sanctuary, and the utter desolation of the that religion of temple-based Jerusalem.

In this setting, the Jesus of John’s Gospel says: ***I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.*** (8:12)

Let’s apply.

What if we imagine, just for a moment, that the Lord were to say today, in our context: ***I have other sheep that do not belong to the fold. I must bring them also.*** What would it mean for us as a church? Here we talk about our mission.

We’ve been thinking about this in the context of the observation of the generational aging of the congregation, and the rise of the Millennials as the numerically dominant generation in Canada.

Now recently we’ve had the Gary iteration of our life as a faith community, now we’ve had the Pastor Dave iteration. In the next iteration of ministry, the obvious teaching for us here is the bringing in of the sheep that are not in the fold.

Can we see how exciting, how vivifying it is to think of the challenges and possibilities of growing our church into the new generational bulge?

Let me tell you about something I'm very bad at, and others seem to be good at. You know how when you come to the check-out you do an analysis of which line will move the quickest? In our consumer culture it is very important skill to be able to assess this. **Minutes of your life are at stake!**

I asked Christine, a skilled shopper, what she does and she picks lines with men or old ladies, because they are least likely to be problematic.

But I get it wrong every time. Their debit card doesn't work, or they have to call produce for the price of tomatillos!

If you want to get in the best check-out line just don't get in the one I'm in.

I don't know how to address the challenge and possibilities of growing the new generational bulge in our church (it's time to retire)! But somebody here will know how to do it – how to grow new modules of believers and so strengthen and diversify the church body.

We must embrace this! Great days are ahead. It's exciting to be part of a living, breathing community of faith – the one for whom the Good Shepherd lay down his very life. Don't be afraid of the future, church! Don't walk in fear. Trust in God. Be bold.

As to One Flock, One Shepherd, two passages of a vast biblical vision of inclusion come to mind.

- Matt 8:11, in speaking to the gentile centurion, a man with a faithful pagan heart, he says **...I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven...**
- Luke 8:23, 29, one asks Jesus, **'Lord, will only a few be saved?'**... **people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God.**

This will be the great ingathering of *one flock* under *one gracious shepherd*. **And I have other sheep that do not belong to the fold. I must bring them also...**

In Wesleyan theology we believe in the wideness of God's mercy. People are not foreordained. We choose by obedience to our conscience. For God looks on the heart, not on the exterior. It inspires us. It drives us. It compels us to generosity in the matter of salvation

Who will be there? I think we will all be surprised at the great banquet! How could our Christian hearts hope for anything more glorious, than to be wonderfully surprised by the wideness of God's mercy at the last day?

This raises the question, 'What about the countless souls who have not heard the gospel? Think of the billions of people from other places and religions and eras, what about them?'

Our faith does not require us to believe that those who, by accident of place or time of birth, or by insurmountable barriers of culture or religion, or because of the failures of our own competence, who were unable to respond to an accessible message of the glorious gospel, will become among the lost.

The Bible doesn't teach that. Our faith does not teach us that God is unjust, that he punishes the innocent. God is gracious **and** just, that's enough for me.

Here we turn to the Book of Romans. Paul, at the outset of his great exposition of the message of the gospel, deals first and foremost with this difficult problem of who will be saved. He knows he has to lay this out at the foundation of his argument. I think of Romans chapter 2 as the least read and understood passage in all of the Pauline corpus.

***When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law unto themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thought will accuse or perhaps excuse them on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all.*** (Romans 2:12-16)<sup>ii</sup>

A helpful way of thinking about this is that many will be saved by faith *in Christ*, but many will be saved (those who have never heard the gospel) by *the faith of Christ*. For he said, ***I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me!***

Can you see the importance of this foundational concept of Christian theology? The Good Shepherd is just, but gracious beyond all human imagination. Let us delight in the idea that heaven will be a vast ingathering of faithful souls.

***One flock, one shepherd.*** It's up to God, not up to you and me.

What is our role? To be grateful members of this fold. Those who go in by the gate of Jesus (John 11:9) ***find pasture***. To follow the Good Shepherd's example in self-giving. With hearts wide open, we care for those around us who are not of this fold, not with selfish motives, like the hired hands, but filled with the love and example of one who laid down his life for us all.

Thanks be to God.

Benediction

And now, may the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for his flock, fill you with love and a vision of hope for those not yet of this fold. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

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<sup>i</sup> Among the things his opponents object to are his words: ***"The Father and I are one."*** (John 10:30); ***"I am God's Son."*** (John 10:36), and Jesus' rejoinder quoting Psalm 82:6, ***I say, "You are gods, children of the Most High, all of your; nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, and fall like any prince."***

<sup>ii</sup> See also, When God's righteous judgment is revealed, ***...he will repay according to each one's deeds: to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury... For God shows no partiality [between Jew and Gentile].*** (Romans 2:6-11).