

## A SHEPHERD TO LEAD US

Leadership. We all want good leadership. Good shepherds to lead us in and out of green pasture. We vote hoping to elect it, we apply for jobs hoping to work for it, and we go to school hoping to be educated by it. But we do not always find it. The trust we place in our leaders can be broken. So what are we to do? John 10 holds the answer.

Look at the picture Jesus gives us here in John 10: this wonderful portrait of a shepherd caring for his sheep. The shepherd would lead his sheep out to distant areas and stay there for days. Being a good shepherd he created a temporary corral, a pen to keep the sheep in when they weren't grazing. Using the crude stones of the field a shepherd could quickly put together such a structure and at night he would lay his body down in the opening of this corral making himself the door. No sheep could wander away at night unless it stepped over the sleeping shepherd and no wolf could come in to do harm without waking up the shepherd. He is the gate.

Do you see what is happening here? More than any other duty the goal of the shepherd is to protect the sheep. This is how you know a good shepherd from a bad shepherd. Does the shepherd... does the leader have the best interest of his people at heart? How do you know that he or she is a good shepherd? You know by looking at the sheep. Looking at Jesus' teaching here in John 10 we need to ask a few questions and see what the answers might be.

The first question is: what are the needs of a sheep? The first and obvious answer to that is: protection. Jesus says that there are predators always trying to get into the sheep pen, trying to devour the sheep. They will try every trick in the book to get to the sheep. Their intent is to steal and rob.

Not only do sheep need protection from predators, they need protection from themselves. You have no doubt heard that sheep are some of the dumbest animals in all the animal kingdom. They are creatures of habit: they will graze the same hills until they become desert wastes. To their own destruction they will not move on. They are creatures of bad hygiene: they will pollute their own ground until it is run over with disease and parasites. To their own ill health they will live in their own filth. They are creatures with heavy coats: their fleece can grow very long and become weighed down with mud, manure, burrs and debris. And when they lie down they can roll over. Once on their backs they cannot right themselves unless a shepherd comes and puts them back on their feet. To their own destruction they become burdened with things.

Protection is the first task of the shepherd because sheep by nature are followers. That's the second thing I want us to see in our text. A story is told of a young woman who wanted to go to college, but her heart sank when she read the question on the application blank that asked, "Are you a leader?" being both honest and

conscientious, she wrote, “No,” and returned the application, expecting the worst. To her surprise, she received this letter from the college: “Dear applicant: a study of the application forms reveals that this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you because we feel it is imperative that they have at least one follower.”

Most of us do not like to think of ourselves as followers. We style ourselves as leaders but truth be told the vast majority of us are not. Outside of parenthood we rarely are placed into positions of ultimate care over others. But Jesus recognizes that we are by nature followers, that we need those over us to care for us. Sheep are followers.

The next question is this: who will be given the responsibility to care for these creatures? Will it be a good shepherd or a bad shepherd? Someone will step into this void and the health of any given flock of sheep depends on the type of person who is over them. If the shepherd is gentle, kind, intelligent, brave and selfless in his devotion to his flock the sheep will thrive. If the shepherd is cruel, inattentive, haphazard, and selfish the sheep will struggle, suffer and starve. Their hardship will know no end.

As we read in verses 11 and 12 Jesus contrasts the good shepherd with a temporary shepherd who is a hired hand. Jesus says that these shepherds are not fully committed to their cause because they do not own the sheep. Have you ever been fully committed to some cause? Have you had full ownership of some project or program? If you have then you know what our Lord is talking about. Who puts in the most hours? Who works the hardest? Worries the most and cares the deepest? It is the owner. Not the hired hand. Jesus says when they see the wolves coming they leave the sheep and run away.

So let me ask the last question: What are the traits of an effective shepherd? Many traits could be listed. I like what Dwight D. Eisenhower said, “In order to be a leader a man must have followers. And to have followers, a man must have their confidence. Hence the supreme quality of a leader is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, no matter whether it is on a section gang, on a football field, in an army, or in an office. If a man’s associates find him guilty of phoniness, if they find that he lacks forthright integrity, he will fail. His teachings and actions must square with each other. The first great need, therefore, is integrity and high purpose.”

Looking through several books and quotes about effective leadership I came up with a list of traits. These five were present in most of the lists:

1. Courage- Leaders expressed ideas to help others improve, in spite of personal risk or opposition.
2. Non-conformity- Simply swimming with the tide leaves you nowhere.
3. Foresight- The ability to look ahead and see what’s coming.
4. Steadiness- Having patience and persistence despite failures and obstacles.

5. Righteousness- The willingness to do the right thing and speak the truth.

These are all marks of a true leader but none seemed willing to go as far as Jesus did. He always had a way of summing up the meaning of a thing. He took the Ten Commandments and said, "Love God and love your neighbor" and you will fulfill the law. When the disciples said how do we pray he said, "When you pray, say: Our Father, hallowed be thy name."

So he looks out at the people and he sees that they have had bad shepherds. That the nation has been put in danger because of these leaders and he says, "The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep." You can't argue with that. That is true leadership. We all need to spend our lives trying to be imitators of Christ whether we are leaders or followers.

We all want a leader. A shepherd to lead us. Someone we can trust. Someone who has our best interests at heart. Someone who will not disappoint. I offer you Christ. He is the Good Shepherd.

May god bless the sheep in the church and also those who shepherd. Amen.