

The Lamb and the Shepherd

Lambs and sheep are rather helpless creatures.

Matthew 9:36 [NIV] *“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”*

Jesus took pity on those who followed Him because they were like lost sheep without a shepherd.

God has great compassion for humans as a good shepherd does for his sheep.

Luke 15:3-7 [NIV] *“Then Jesus told them this parable: “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”*

Note the compassion of the shepherd, Jesus depicting His own compassion for lost people. The lost sheep when found was not beaten or shouted at, it didn't even have to walk back to the sheepfold and its return to the fold was a reason for rejoicing.

We as the readers are invited to relate to this lost sheep.

Jesus is telling us that we belonged to Him as the shepherd even before I became a lost sheep and no matter what we do we will always be loved by Him.

If we stay in the sheepfold all is well, but when, and we all do at some time, stray from the sheepfold, Christ's love for us compels Him to seek us out and bring us back to the love and safety of the sheepfold.

In ordinary life there is no way that a lamb can ever become a shepherd.

Yet Jesus clearly invites those who follow Him like sheep to a shepherd should become shepherds themselves.

John 21:15-17 [NIV] *“When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “**Feed my lambs.**” Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “**Take care of my sheep.**” The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “**Feed my sheep.**”*

Peter as a disciple of Jesus Christ, a sheep following the shepherd, was invited to become a shepherd and feed future sheep of God.

Once we have experienced being forgiven by God our Shepherd, in spite of the perverse way we went astray, then we begin to know what shepherding is all about.

Remember that Peter had denied even knowing Christ but was not condemned by Christ but experienced His love and compassion.

When we experience this love of God as our Shepherd we can then be trusted to become assistant shepherds to Jesus.

Peter thought he knew all about shepherding having spent over three years with Christ until he learnt of his own desperate weakness by denying Jesus.

It was only after Peter went badly astray and was forgiven so easily and with such love and compassion that he became a lamb fit to become the assistant shepherd that Jesus had called him to become.

The original shepherd is God the Father and this image was well established in the Old Testament.

Abraham must have experienced his own relationship with God similar to the way he in his nomadic life looked after his sheep.

King David started his life as a shepherd boy working for his father.

Time and again the prophets used the image of sheep and shepherds, and often the shepherds were corrected by God for not loving His sheep.

John 1:29, 35-37 [NIV] *“The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” ... “The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!” When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.”*

Jesus comes as the Lamb of God, chosen by God, precious to God, eventually to lead as a Shepherd but first to demonstrate what it is to be a Lamb of God.

Luke 3:21-22 [NIV] *“When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”*

Only when Jesus had been listening to God the Father and heard these words confirming that He was the Son whom God the Father loved, did He begin His ministry as the Shepherd who would in the end lay down His life for His sheep.

Only after this confirmation as the Lamb of God did Jesus begin as the Shepherd to select His assistant shepherds, His disciples.

Only then did Christ start to take the crowds of lost sheep away from the unloving shepherds they already had, to feed them Himself of the true food that had like manna [bread] in the Old Testament, come down from Heaven.

John 6:35, 38-39 [NIV] *“Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” ... “For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.”*

Here Christ as the Good Shepherd sent by the Father, promises to feed His sheep and go after those who go astray.

How does Christ the Good Shepherd feed His sheep?

Matthew 26:26-28 [NIV] *“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”*

Jesus Christ laid down His life for His sheep.

We have to accept the sacrifice of the Lamb of God for the forgiveness of our sins.

This is how Jesus as the Lamb of God could feed His sheep as the Shepherd of God.

Jesus Christ for us was both Lamb of God and The Great Loving Shepherd of His sheep.

Unlike Peter, Jesus got His order of priority right the first time. He first listened to His Father, became the Lamb of God then became by invitation of the Father to be the Shepherd of God's sheep.

John 10:7-14 [NIV] *“Therefore Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He 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. “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns 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. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.”*

Jesus insists that each of us become one of His sheep or lambs, this is compulsory.

As to becoming an assistant shepherd, this is by invitation and voluntary.

The first is free, the second will involve great cost on our part.

In order to be saved by Jesus, we need no qualifications other than to recognise ourselves as lost sheep and to bleat loudly to be rescued.

As Christians once we know well our status as lambs we are invited by Christ to help in the shepherding of His sheep.

God will always be the owner of the sheep as Creator of all life.

Jesus will always be the Chief Shepherd, so if my contribution to shepherding is not very successful, the responsibility for eventual success will not be mine but that of the Chief Shepherd.

God designed us and desires us to be His voice, hands and feet here on earth but He is not limited to or by our talents.

The Chief Shepherd has many other and more direct ways into the heart of the lost sheep.

This is the Spirit of Christ the Holy Spirit for this is His work on earth for Jesus Christ and the Father.

John 16:7-11 [NIV] *“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.”*

Convicting and teaching this world of lost sheep is the job of the Holy Spirit.

We are to be just instruments He may choose to use in His work.

We have to choose if we will submit to the Holy Spirit and become by invitation assistant shepherds of Jesus the Great Shepherd, God loves, I trust, God invites, I follow.