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THE GOOD SHEPHERD

A local sheep farmer delivered a ram to another man who had previously purchased sheep from his flock. It was night and he wanted the new ram to get acquainted in his new home. So he called the sheep -- a high-pitched call they would recognize. And immediately about a hundred ewes came running from the field to the barn. Even though it had been two years since they had heard from their original shepherd.

That's a good illustration of what Jesus talked about in John 10: "***I am the Good Shepherd. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.***" In Jesus' day, all the sheep of a village were housed in a commons at night. The community sheep pen protected the sheep from predators and robbers. A doorkeeper stayed in the gate all night, to keep watch who went in and out.

Jesus was comparing Himself as a good shepherd to the religious leaders of the Israelites, who He had already rebuked as being "blind guides" of the people. Their spiritual blindness kept them from seeing Jesus for who He was, as sent from God to do His works and speak His words. They were not true pastors, but like imposters - who would lead the sheep astray or steal or scatter them.

Jesus said "***I am the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep.***" Imposters would run away when the wolves came. In Ezekiel 34 God rebukes the leaders of Israel as imposter shepherds who cared only for what they could get out of the sheep, not what they could give. They were like the religious leaders in John 9 who rejected the blind man who was healed and who believed in Jesus.

Jesus proved He is the Good Shepherd by giving His life for His sheep. He died on the cross to pay for the sins of all who believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Why? In John 10 Jesus said, "***I came that My sheep may have life and have it abundantly.***" The Good Shepherd provides health, life, truth. This abundant life is the new eternal spiritual life you receive when you trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior. How can you have this abundant life Jesus came to give to His sheep? Let's look at three truths:

1- JESUS KNOWS HIS SHEEP - The Bible says Jesus came into the world to seek and to save the lost sheep, both Jews and Gentiles. In John 6 Jesus said that His true sheep will follow Him, because the Father draws them to Jesus. The Good Shepherd knows His own sheep and He seeks them out.

2- HIS SHEEP HEAR HIS VOICE - Those who believe in Jesus are like the sheep who hear and follow their own Good Shepherd. Those who do not believe in Him are not of His flock, for they do not recognize His voice and follow Him. Yes, life is scary for sheep -- but their shepherd will never abandon them.

Today, scores of people claim to belong to Jesus. But they don't seem to hear His voice. They do not read God's Word, the Bible, which is the primary way He communicates to us. They do not listen. Someone said "people don't hear the voice of God because they've already decided not to obey Him." They are like the sheep in Psalm 95, who harden their hearts to the voice of the shepherd. So they stray.

3- HIS SHEEP FOLLOW HIM - How can you tell if those who claim to be of the flock of Jesus actually are His sheep? Only if they follow Him. It's one thing to say you hear Him, but if you don't follow Him, how can you be His sheep? Jesus said His sheep hear His voice AND they follow Him. Jesus will never lead you to self-centered pursuits. He will lead you to live out His abundant life through yours, to help others. Your works and your words will show whether you are following the words and works of the Good Shepherd.

Imposter sheep may claim to be Christians, but they are hardly ever in church with the flock of the Good Shepherd. And their lives look just like the sheep who stray or are scattered or who have listened to the voice of an imposter shepherd. They reject the Good Shepherd and choose harm, by straying away.

Jesus said, only if you trust and obey the Good Shepherd are you part of the flock of God. If He knows you, then you will hear His voice and you WILL follow Him. And Jesus promises you will be forever safe in His flock. He will never cast you out, and He will raise you up with Him on the last day. You will escape judgment for your sins, and you will be with the Good Shepherd in His paradise forever.

That's GOOD NEWS about the Good Shepherd -- share it with someone else today!