

## The Theology of Sheep – John 10:27-28

### I. Introduction:

- A. The events of this chapter occurred in Jerusalem about three months before our Lord's crucifixion.
1. And **verse 22** tells us this was at the time of the feast of Dedication – winter.
  2. This particular feast is not to be found in the Old Testament.
  3. It was instituted by Judas Maccabeus only two hundred years earlier, to commemorate the purification of the former temple – after the desecrations of Antiochus Epiphanes.
- B. As Jesus was walking around in the area called *“Solomon's porch,”* He was talking and teaching.
1. But like all His parables, these lessons were to be understood only by His disciples – others rarely saw the point. And that remains true today.
  2. He said in **verses 1-5** – when it came to keeping sheep overnight, several flocks might be brought together in one pen – one sheepfold, or sheepcote.
  3. Then one of the shepherds would sit or lay down in the doorway of the pen, essentially becoming a door.
  4. Sometimes thieves would try to jump the low rock walls; they certainly wouldn't approach the door.
  5. In the morning when a shepherd was ready, he would come to the doorway and begin to speak.
  6. Those sheep which were his, would hear his voice, stand up, and separate themselves from the aggregated flock, following their own particular shepherd.
  7. Of course, the Lord was speaking of Himself and His people – His disciples.
  8. *“This parable spake Jesus unto (the crowd); but they understood not what they were which he spake unto them.”*
- C. In the next dozen verses, the Lord explained and expanded that theme.
1. He said that **HE was the shepherd**, and as such He was also the **doorway** to the sheepfold.
  2. *“I am the door, by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.”*
  3. Furthermore, *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd, giveth his life for the sheep.”*
  4. *“I know my sheep, and am known of mine.”*
  5. *“My Father, (to whom the sheep actually belong), loves me, because I lay down my life for the sheep.”*
  6. Clearly – from the Christian's post-Calvary perspective – Christ is talking about His death on the cross.
- D. At that point there was a division among the unbelievers in the crowd.
1. Some said that Jesus was speaking gibberish – *“He hath a devil, and is mad, why hear ye him?”*
  2. But others replied, *“The miracles which this man does prove he is not a madman. We will hear more.”*
  3. Then a mixed group of those Jews gathered around Him and demanded, *“How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.”*
- E. Jesus answered, *“I told you, and ye believed not.”*
1. Then He added, *“Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.”*
  2. The unbeliever will always be confused by the Lord's message – always.
  3. The things of the Lord are **spiritually** discerned, and that requires the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
  4. Following Jesus' last statement, His next few words have blessed the hearts of Christ's sheep for more than two millennia.
- F. I'd like us to consider **verses 27** and **28** under the title: *“The Theology of Sheep.”*
1. I know that the word *“theology”* often makes heads spin, and there is certainly that potential this morning.
  2. But if you are patient with me, I'd like to take a few theological words and bring them back down to the simple explanation which Jesus gives us.
  3. In these verses I see the doctrines of **election, submission, justification, sanctification & glorification**.
  4. Christ Jesus said, *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish.”*

## II. What did the Lord mean when He spoke of “MY sheep?”

- A. He had already pointed out that **the majority** of the people listening to him were **not** “His sheep.”
1. There is a difference between the sheep of Christ – the people of Christ – and the sheep of the world.
  2. The lost sheep **refused** to believe – and in fact could not – **believe** what Jesus was telling them, **because** they were not His sheep – **verse 26**.
    - a. Sheep and their shepherd speak one language, while dogs, goats and chickens speak another.
    - b. In that day, the sheep of one shepherd – the sheep of one flock – knew the language of **their** shepherd.
    - c. And Christians, people with regenerated hearts speak and hear a heavenly language, which the unregenerated, earth-bound people cannot hear.
  3. There were people present that day, who may have accepted and acknowledged Jesus’ miracles, but they refused to recognize the divine source which was in Him.
  4. And their religious leaders, some of whom were standing right there beside them, had climbed the wall into the sheepfold in order to steal sheep.
  5. They would never consider giving their lives for the sheep, as the Good Shepherd was doing.
  6. To them sheep were good for little more than wool and food.
- B. But out of a much larger bunch, some of those sheep were of the flock of Christ.
1. How did that come to be? How were they **His** sheep?
  2. Jesus tells us that they had been given to Him by God the Father. **“My Father... gave them me” – v. 29.**
  3. In the Lord’s Prayer of **John 17**, Christ speaks several times of this gift from the Father.
    - a. **“Thou hast given (me) power over all flesh, that (I) should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given (me).”**
    - b. **“I have manifest thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were. And thou gavest them me.”**
    - c. **“I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.”**
  4. The sheep which became Christ’s flock were the Father’s to begin with.
- C. But why and how were they the property of God the Father?
1. They were His by way of sovereign choice.
  2. Out of the millions of sheep in the world, these few were especially selected by God to become His.
  3. And these He gave to the Good Shepherd to save.
- D. You will search the scriptures in vain looking for good reasons for the sheep to identify with the Father.
1. These sheep didn’t choose to become God’s or Christ’s; they were chosen by God.
  2. Sheep are never invited into the market and asked to choose which shepherd they would prefer.
  3. Furthermore, sheep can’t perform great feats to impress potential shepherds.
    - a. They don’t juggle, win spelling bees, attend Sunday School for years, or offer other sheep as sacrifices.
  4. These sheep, now belonging to Christ, were simply chosen by God to be His.
  5. They had been elected according to the foreknowledge of God the Father – **I Peter 1:2.**
  6. They were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world – **Ephesians 1:2.**
- E. When Jesus used the word “my” to describe His sheep, He was **highlighting** the doctrine of **election**.

## III. And the word “HEAR” highlights the doctrine of SUBMISSION.

- A. **“My sheep HEAR my voice, and I know them, and they follow me...”**
1. When the Lord made this statement, He was speaking of a lot more than listening to **elevator music**.
  2. And it wasn’t like simply hearing a clap of **thunder**. It was hearing the **thunder** & then running for cover.
  3. The word is sometimes translated **“hearken,”** as we find it in **Acts 4:19** – Peter and John answered their Jewish judges, **“and said unto them, whether it be right in the sight of God to HEARKEN unto you more than to God, judge ye.”**

4. The meaning of the word is explained by the Lord Himself in **Mark 7:12** – *“When he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, **HEARKEN** unto me and every one of you, and **UNDERSTAND.**”*
5. Jesus’ sheep don’t simply recognize His voice as that of the Son of God; they **understand & respond** to it.
6. They actually **come** when He calls. They **believe** what He says. They **obey** when He commands.
7. The Devil’s sheep don’t hear Christ’s voice like that. They may hear the sound, but they don’t understand.

B. Perhaps a good illustration of this point might be **Lazarus** – one Christ’s chosen sheep.

1. You most likely know the story. Lazarus had been dead for several days.
2. Then the Good Shepherd came to his grave-site at a time when it was surrounded by mourners.
  - a. Later those people bare record that **Jesus “called” Lazarus** out of his grave.
  - b. He said, *“Lazarus, come forth.”*
3. And while the Lord’s ninety and nine sheep, along with some unbelieving goats, were watching, Lazarus, this single lamb, came out of his tomb in obedience to the voice of his Shepherd. He **heard** the Lord.
4. At the command of Christ there was nothing else to do but to **obey**. He **wanted** to obey.
5. In describing this event and this doctrine, a theologian might use the cold, hard doctrinal words, *“irresistible grace,”* but let’s avoid them right now.
6. Let’s just stick with what the Lord said to the non-theologians before him – *“My sheep **HEAR** my voice.”*

C. Through the years, there have been many people who have heard **my** voice and **my** invitation, but they have turned it down and turned away.

1. But then some time later, they **“heard”** the voice of the Saviour, and they couldn’t say **“No.”**
2. Jesus said, *“My sheep **respond** to my voice.”*
3. In explaining that response, it might be argued that they **finally learned** to **love** that voice, or they learned that other voices weren’t to be trusted. You might argue all sorts of things.
4. But the truth is, the voice of the Lord is by its wonderful divine nature, irresistible.

#### IV. When Jesus spoke of **“KNOWING THEM”** one lesson might be that of **JUSTIFICATION**.

A. **“Justification”** is another of those doctrinal terms which **excite** some people & **chill** others. I happen to love it.

1. But what does it mean? Most people don’t use that word in ordinary speech, but it does still hang around.
2. For example, when I am getting ready to publish a book, my computer asks me how I would like to **“justify”** the text.
  - a. It means: do I want all the lines to match up on the left side of the page, but to be ragged on the right?
  - b. Sometimes certain things, like titles or poems, are **center-justified** on the page.
  - c. But I prefer **full justification**, where both the beginning of the line and end of the line are even.
  - d. In **full justification**, a page of printing looks like a rectangular box full of words.
3. In this sense, to justify is **“to make things line up”** according to a specific pattern or plan.

B. And similarly, theological **“justification”** is the choice of God to declare something correct or righteous.

1. In **“justification”** souls line up the way God wants them to. They line up as righteous in His sight.
2. **Paul** says in **Romans 5** – *“Therefore being **JUSTIFIED** by **faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord **Jesus Christ.**”*
3. When God justifies, He looks at the people whom He saves, seeing them as holy – as **“saints.”**
4. And as such they **can** then be **at peace** with Him.
5. As **Paul** was preaching in **Acts 38**, he said, *“Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man (Jesus Christ) is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are **JUSTIFIED** from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.”*
6. He told the Christians in **Corinth**, You were sheep of the Devil’s flock – *“Such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are **JUSTIFIED** in the name of the Lord Jesus, & by the Spirit of God.”*

- C. How does the Lord know which of His sheep are justified?
1. It may sound silly, but He knows because He knows them, **and** it is He who justifies them.
  2. And He **"knows"** them in **a special way** much like the way in which His sheep especially **"hear"** His voice.
  3. They don't just listen to His voice; they love His voice and long to hear His voice so that they might obey and follow Him.
  4. Similarly the Lord knows His sheep in a way which is deeper and dearer than a mere acquaintance with their existence.
  5. The word **"to know"** is sometimes used in the most intimate way, as when **"Adam knew his wife."**
- D. Essentially when Jesus said, **"My sheep hear my voice, and I KNOW them"** He was speaking of His **love** for them.
1. He loves His sheep so much that, as the Good Shepherd, He gave His life for them, justifying them.
  2. And in that sacrifice, their sins and transgressions were all washed away.
  3. When they put their faith in Christ, they are proving that they had been justified in His sight.

#### V. The next thing Jesus said was – they **FOLLOW** me.

- A. **"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."**
1. This leads us into the doctrine of **sanctification** – the doctrine of **holiness**.
- B. And isn't it interesting that the Lord speaks of His people as **sheep** – but not as doves or pets or anything else.
1. Perhaps as this chapter began, everyone looked up when a group of Levites brought some sheep into the temple in preparation for their sacrifice.
  2. Perhaps Jesus saw those sheep as offerings unto God or to Himself, and it opened the door to further thoughts.
  3. Whether that was Christ's motivation or intention at the time, let me take you back to that idea.
  4. **Sheep** were perhaps the **most common sacrifices** that the children of Israel offered to the Lord.
  5. And as I hope you know **only the best** of the flock were acceptable.
- C. Consider that thought – only the best – as we continue with **John 10:27**.
1. As the Lord's sheep follow Him, where does He lead them?
    - a. He doesn't take them to the gin joint or the strip joint, the pot shop, or the gambling den.
    - b. The Lord doesn't lead His sheep into internet porn, TV reality shows, or sophisticated style magazines.
  2. The Good Shepherd leads His flock down a narrow road toward healthy pastures and still waters.
  3. And He speaks to them along the way, sharing with them the principles of righteousness and godliness.
  4. Christ's sheep follow Him, ruminating on His wonderful words of love and truth.
  5. And in the process **they grow** in ways which please Him. They grow in **holiness**; in **sanctification**.
- D. In contrast to them, there are the others – those who were chiding with the Saviour that day.
1. They probably all professed to be Jews, children of Abraham, servants of God. But were they? Really?
  2. Christ's sheep don't profess that they have put their trust in Jesus, but then run back to live among the goats – or worse – to live among the wolves, dressed up in sheep's clothing.
  3. Christ's sheep don't live like pigs, coating themselves in mud, eating garbage and refuse.
- E. Christ's sheep are different, they follow their Shepherd to the same degree that they **"hear"** Him & He **"knows"** them.
1. And they are **gregarious**, social creatures.
  2. They love to be with other sheep in the Lord's flock, not out in the wilderness away from the ninety-&-nine.
  3. **Joining** the Lord's flock, they look forward to that day when they are **immersed** in the sheep dip of baptism.
  4. They don't mind the Lord's **rod** and His **staff**, those things actually comfort them.
  5. And they **flourish**. They flourish in righteousness and their knowledge of the Shepherd.
  6. They actually look forward to being sacrificed for His purposes. They **"follow"** Him.
  7. The sheep which doesn't want to follow the Good Shepherd is most likely not really a sheep; it is certainly not one of the **Lord's** sheep.

**VI. Christ concluded His thought by saying: “and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish.”**

- A. That last phrase takes us to our last doctrine for this morning: “*glorification.*”
1. Jesus the Saviour/Shepherd says, “*and I give unto them **eternal life**; and they shall **NEVER** perish.*”
  2. The sheep which belong to Christ will live in His sheepfold for ever.
  3. In **contrast** to the **second death** there is the **Lord’s eternal life**. These two are obvious opposites.
  4. “*Death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.*”
  5. “*And whosoever was not found written in the (Shepherd’s) book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*”
- B. What did Christ pray in **John 17:2**, a verse we looked at earlier?
1. “*Father, glorify (me) thy son... as thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give **eternal life** to as many as thou hast given him.*”
  2. The Father has given His sheep to the Saviour, the Good Shepherd, that the Shepherd might give His life so that those sheep might live eternally.
    - a. “*This is the promise he hath promised us, eternal life*” – **I John 2:25**.
  3. Over and over again, the Lord has made and reiterated that promise.
    - a. “*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*”
    - b. “*He that believeth on the Son that everlasting life; (but) he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*” – **John 3:16** and **3:36**.
  4. Whoever hears the voice of this shepherd and follows him can not eternally perish, because to him or her the Shepherd has given eternal life – **John 3:15**.
  5. The Saviour will be glorified when those sheep of His are eternally glorified.
- C. Please, O please let Jesus’ words sink into your souls today.
1. “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish.*”
  2. Can you hear His voice this morning? Is the Lord saying to you, “*I know you, I love you?*”
  3. Then **follow** Him. Obey Him by putting **humble faith** in Him.
  4. **Love** Him. Be **loyal** to Him. **Follow** Him. Be **dipped** for Him.
  5. These are the only people to whom the Lord will say, “*I give unto **YOU** eternal life; **YOU** shall never perish.*”