

JOHN 10-11

Chap. 10 - JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

The imagery of God as Shepherd is well known in the Old Testament (Psalm 23, Ezekiel 34, etc). Also well-known is the indictment of Israel's leaders as false and self-serving shepherds (thieves and bandits).

Jesus is not only the good shepherd, he is also the gate through which the sheep enter into eternal life (which begins now as we will see when Jesus speaks to Martha in chapter 11). But throughout the gospel, the image of Jesus as life-giver has been a constant theme.

4 elements are emphasized in this section of passages.

- 1) Jesus' predicts his role to be one of giving up his life on behalf of the people.
- 2) The current leaders' interests are focussed on personal gain rather than the good of the people.
- 3) Jesus knows his own flock the way God knows Jesus. As God and Jesus are one, so Jesus and his own are one (in the process of becoming one).
- 4) Others outside of Israel will also be brought into the fold (an anticipation of Gentiles being converted).

Jesus' giving of his life to the world is also about Jesus giving up his own life. But his death is not an end. It is a transition to resurrection life already begun.

Jesus 'knowing' his own is much more than a kind of intellectual knowing. It is about an intimate communion. Anyone who knows Jesus has first been known by Jesus even as Jesus has been known by God. There is an order to the knowing, namely God to Jesus and Jesus to his own.

22-42. The feast of dedication (Hanukkah) is the occasion for another debate between Jesus and the Jewish authorities. By declaring himself to be one with God Jesus is making himself God. For the Jews this is blasphemy. For Jesus, his works (signs) offer ample testimony to the truth of his claim.

11: 1-44 - JESUS AND LAZARUS

Mary, Martha and Lazarus are good friends of Jesus (friendship is an important theme in this gospel). Upon being told of Lazarus imminent death, Jesus delays his visit in order to give further glory to God through the miracle (sign) to take place. As we saw with the healing of the blind man in chapter 9, sickness of any kind is an occasion for God's glory to be revealed through outer healing and inner transformation.

Jesus offers a wordplay on sleep and death to his disciples. They assume he is talking about normal sleep since he has said earlier that Lazarus' illness would not lead to death. But Jesus is talking about death. If he is the means to eternal life begun now,

then death can only be a kind of sleeping. The resurrection is an awakening from sleep.

Lazarus is in the tomb 4 days. This will make the sign that much more astonishing. Martha is upset at Jesus' delay. But she also believes Jesus can still do something. Jesus is the power of resurrection-life not only at the end of time but here and now. Martha believes Jesus is the Messiah. Does she believe he can resurrect the dead now?

Mary too is upset with Jesus' delay. Upon seeing her weep and the others with her, Jesus breaks down. The words used to describe Jesus' emotion are strong words. They convey a sense of inner anguish and torment in Jesus, the kind of torment that we experience when we lose our dearest loved ones. Jesus also weeps uncontrollably. This is why those present believe Jesus really loved Lazarus. We cry uncontrollably when we really feel the loss personally. Jesus prays to God although he knows God has already heard him, for he and God are in constant communion. Jesus' tears are his prayer already. He then calls Lazarus out of the grave. The wrapping around Lazarus' body further indicate that he was, indeed, dead.

45-57 The Pharisees and Chief Priests can no longer contain their desire to kill Jesus. Ironically, Caiaphas' declaration that Jesus should be killed works into God's purposes to save the world through Jesus' death (an occasion to glorify God. Jesus' death and resurrection will be the last and greatest sign). Caiaphas' idea is that if they kill Jesus, the people will settle down again and peace will be achieved. If they don't, there will be greater social unrest as Jesus is stirring up trouble.

But Jesus' death and his forgiveness embodies and expresses much more powerfully the forgiving love of God that is the only way the world can be saved. Defeating enemies by force will not save the world, and neither will keeping the people controlled by fear and threat of violence. That's the strategy of the religious and political authorities of Israel. While they want a military and political messiah, they believe such a messiah should support them and their vision. Jesus, on the other hand, undermines their power and control over the people and proclaims a freedom and wholeness (salvation) different than violence and force, one rooted in love for one another. This is diametrically opposite of anything the authorities understand or believe. And if the authorities can't control the people and the people rise up empowered by a different vision, Rome will come in and remove them from power, crushing the people's hopes and dreams themselves. So, Jesus is a threat to be eliminated, and this will demonstrate that the authorities are, indeed, in control.

So then, what are Jesus' options? Either forceful resistance, escape, or submission to his capture and death. Submission will serve God's larger plan to save the world, as painful and difficult as it will be to pass through it. Forgiving those responsible and culpable for his death while continuing to call out injustice and oppression, is the way a door to healing and reconciliation can open. It is also a way of confronting injustice without capitulating to revenge. This is the way Love must win. But will people believe?