

“THE HOLY LAND: A NEW TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE”

by Rom A. Pegram (6/10/18)

So, just to review from last week, what I’ve come to know as ‘The Fifth Gospel’ is really ... *the land and the people of Israel*... Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—yes! But then we must look into the context of those gospels...

Last week, we looked at this concept through the eyes of the Old Testament—Psalm 23 in particular. And we saw how ‘The Fifth Gospel’ could help inform us of what was really going on in a particular scripture—to help inform us of the *actual* context (as opposed to the one that’s been formed in our minds over the years) and how that context gives clarity to the truth of the scripture itself...

Today, we’re going to look at the same phenomena, except we’re going to be looking through the eyes of the New Testament and what God did for us through his son, Jesus and his three-year ministry on this earth...

Just as last week we saw God as ‘The LORD is my shepherd’ (Psalm 23), this week we move to Jesus as ‘the Good Shepherd’ (John 10). And just as we last week we saw God’s goal for us was to bring us ‘into his house forever’, this week through the Good Shepherd, we begin to see how that would take place. God made a way for us to into eternity through his son, Jesus, THE GOOD SHEPHERD. That’s where we pick up this week.

John picks up in Chapter 10 of his gospel with Jesus going back to a ‘shepherd/sheep’ analogy. Jesus begins by talking about the sheepfold, where the sheep are kept safe. Those who come over the wall of the sheepfold are not supposed to; they are bad people who would harm the sheep. Jesus, however, is the sheep gate ... and it’s only through him that anyone is allowed into the sheepfold (speaking of eternity). Jesus speaks of the Enemy’s purpose for the sheep and then his purpose for the sheep. Let’s pick up there now (John 10:10-16, NLT)...

The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life. ¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. ¹² A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don’t belong to him and he isn’t their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because he’s working only for the money and doesn’t really care about the sheep. ¹⁴ “I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, ¹⁵ just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd. – John 10:10-16 (NLT2)

So, how does ‘The Fifth Gospel’ inform us in the New Testament? Let’s take a look, as we get into our scripture for today: Jesus is the GOOD SHEPHERD for these reasons...

JESUS WILL GIVE HIS OWN LIFE FOR HIS SHEEP! In Verse 11 Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep.” You know the story of Jesus; you know the Easter story; this is why Jesus came ... and now he cares

for all of us—his sheep—daily, watching, feeding, and protecting us! Jesus, the Good Shepherd will give his own life—voluntarily—for his sheep; he will give his life in this last struggle with the Enemy and he will overcome...

So, what is a Shepherd? An Episcopal priest in Scotland (*Gordon McCulloch, Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, April 22, 2018*) describes it this way. He says, "...we are here in Ayr ... and Ayr is a market town close to a countryside full of sheep ... looked after by shepherds ... and if I was to ask you, what does a typical shepherd look like? ... I am sure you would say that they are pretty normal human beings like us, wearing the same cloths as we would wear, if we worked in fields all day, in all weathers.

This is a strange question with an obvious answer, but this was not the case back in the day, because at the time of Jesus, shepherds were very poor, and dare I say, pitiful creatures. The shepherds were treated as outcasts, the scum of the earth; ... and so was anyone associated with them...

They were in fact nobodies, nobody wanted them, they smelled, and they certainly were not welcome in any church; ... yet, it is amazing that God the Father chose lowly shepherds to be the first to witness the birth of Jesus. ... So not only was Jesus birth humble in a manger, but the witnesses to his birth were lowly Shepherds who lived in the fields, and not the higher echelons of society. ...

And the good shepherd gives his life for his sheep. And this humility brings us to our Gospel reading this morning wherein verse 11 Jesus says, but "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep," ... and you know, after what I have just said, Jesus is now comparing or relating himself to these poor unclean outcasts ... recognizing the good work they do for the sheep, and saying, "I am the shepherd of mankind". ... When Jesus recruited Peter, he said, "I will make you fishers of men" ... but here, Jesus is going a massive stage further by implying that "he will even lay down his life for them".

And did you notice also, that Jesus said it three times in this short passage ... in verses 11, 15 and 17 ... that he will lay down His life for us. ... Jesus wants us to hear that because he really does loves us ... and that he also wants us to know that His death will not be a victory for His enemies; ... his death will be, or was, a voluntary sacrifice to save us from ourselves, and restore our relationship with God."

Folks, what that Scottish pastor just described was that unrelenting love of God that will pursue us—and did pursue us, all the way to the death of God's son, Jesus ... so we could be good with God. Jesus is The Good Shepherd because ... he will give his own life for his sheep... He's also the Good Shepherd because...

JESUS HAS A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS SHEEP! In Verse 14, Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me...." Jesus is also the Good Shepherd because he's willing to invest himself in a personal relationship with us; he knows his sheep and they know him! The Good Shepherd knows ... the weak and the strong ... the stubborn and the submissive ones ... the hurts and the needs of every sheep... AND, the sheep know and trust their Shepherd—every inflection in his voice, the way he leads them out to pasture, his courage in the face of danger... He is their shepherd—the GOOD SHEPHERD...

Let me share with you the story of ‘The Good Shepherd’ that only comes from the context—from the 5th Gospel, the people and the land of Israel. In Luke 15:3-7, Jesus tells the story of a lost lamb (then the lost coin, then the lost son). Let me share with you, first, from the Gospel of Luke; here’s the story Jesus told (Luke 15:3-7, NLT)...

So Jesus told them this story: ⁴“If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. ⁶ When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’ ⁷ In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven’t strayed away!

Now, folks, here’s the ultimate example of ‘The Fifth Gospel’—something about this parable Jesus told that you could only learn from the people and land of Israel. You know the story: the shepherd leaves the 99 and goes out to find the one that has lost his way; he puts it on his shoulders ... and then returns to the rest of the flock. What nobody ever explained to me was this: How in the world could that shepherd put the lamb (a rebellious one) on his shoulders and carry it home so easily? Here’s the scoop...

The first time I went to Israel—back in 1996, we went to a place called ‘Caesarea by the Sea.’ In that archeological city—built by King Herod the Great, many statues and other works of art were uncovered ... and were now lined up and displayed for all to see upon entry. And one looked like this... [*Show statue of ‘The Good Shepherd.’*] This is where I first heard ‘the real story’ of the GOOD SHEPHERD. As it was explained to me, we have this cute story from Luke, Chapter 15, about ‘the lost sheep,’ the shepherd going to look for it, carrying it back on it’s shoulders, etc., but no one gets into the nitty gritty of why that shepherd was carrying that lamb on it’s shoulders. Apparently, if one sheep lost his way ... or ran off, it was usually a stubborn, unruly sheep. So, when the shepherd found that sheep, they would discipline them so that the act of ‘running away’ wouldn’t happen again. They would actually break its legs ... which is why they *had to* carry it back home. Then, in the time it took for the lamb’s legs to heal, that lamb and the shepherd—who spent a great deal of time with the lamb during the healing process, had a brand-new relationship. That lamb would then *know* just how much the shepherd loved him by the way they took care of them during this time. And, folks, it’s only as you dig into the context of the parable Jesus told that you can learn how this really happened...

And, Jesus loves us so much that he is willing to do ‘whatever it takes’ to make sure we know—without a doubt—just how much he loves us! And he did that by giving his life for us. That’s why God/Jesus came into this world. They had to ... to let us know. That’s the ‘unrelenting’ or ‘pursuing’ love of God; ‘and your love will pursue me all the days of my life’... Do you remember that in Psalm 23? And God’s not kidding. If you’ve lost your way, count on God to come after you; count on God to love you enough to discipline you—if necessary ... to make sure you’re brought back home to him ... forever!

The truth is ... JESUS LOVES US MORE THAN A SHEPHERD LOVES HIS FLOCK OF SHEEP. It was a great love in Jesus' day—a shepherd for his sheep; context tells us that. They depended on their flock for their life—for their livelihood; the flock meant everything...

- The shepherd would do just about anything to protect his sheep...
- The shepherd had a personal relationship with his sheep, so they knew his voice; they knew the difference between his voice ... and false voices that would try and lead them astray (I wonder if we know the difference!)

Then, Verse 16 concludes in this way: "...and there will be one flock with one shepherd." Unlike society today who seems to demand inclusivity for everyone, regardless, following Jesus is a very exclusive deal. "...and there will be one flock with one shepherd"—a Shepherd who wants to protect us, a Shepherd who wants to love us like no other ... for eternity! That's who I want to follow; how 'bout you?