

# THE SHEPHERD AND THE SHEEP

by Ron Harvey

*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*  
John 10:27

## INTRODUCTION

In this wonderful passage of Scripture, Christians are compared to sheep.

It is not a flattering comparison.

Sheep are helpless

Sheep are not able to care for themselves

Sheep have a reputation for being not so smart

Sheep are very lowly and meek

Sheep are defenseless against the elements and against predators.

And, God compares us to sheep.

Our text this morning strips away our self-sufficiency and our boasting. Jesus calls us his “sheep.”

The church is made up of people from all stations in life. Some are doctors and some are ditch diggers. Some are highly paid and some are barely paid. Some are highly educated and some are uneducated.

Now, some think because they have some high worldly station that they also have a high station in the kingdom of God. But Jesus would have us know that in his kingdom, we are all sheep – little wandering, bleating, dependent sheep.

Now that’s a hard doctrine for the high and mighty in this world who think themselves to be something in God’s church, because, God’s Word says that all of his children are mere sheep. It doesn’t matter to God that you are a prominent businessman and it doesn’t matter to him that you have great worldly achievements. You are nothing more than a sheep in his church. Though you are accomplished in this world, you are as needy as a helpless lamb in the kingdom of God. Though you have money in the local bank, you have no more **spiritual** resources than anyone in this church building. Though you are prominent in the worldly community, you are no more prominent in God’s church than the weakest member.

There is no room for conceit and high-mindedness in the kingdom of God. There is one man that is good and one only – The Lord Jesus. All of the rest of us are sinners and if we have any positive attribute at all it is by the grace of God.

And so, Jesus refers to those in his church as his sheep.

And how helpless sheep are.

**Example: Have you ever noticed how helpless an infant child is -- absolutely unable to care for himself and dependent on his mother for everything?**

This passage paints this picture of those of us that belong to Jesus. We are helpless sheep.

**Example: The children’s song, “Jesus Loves Me” makes a very good point.**

**Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so,  
Little ones to him belong, they are weak, but He is strong.**

And that tells a very important truth.

We are very weak. We are not very wise. Our knowledge is very imperfect. We stumble around in our weakness most of the time. We are weak, but that’s only the first half of the equation. The second half of the equation is the comforting part – He is strong.

Let those that don’t know God boast of their strength, but let God’s children admit – we are weak!

We don’t know what each day may bring.  
We cannot control our circumstances.  
We make plans and they fall through.

But, we don’t despair, for our great comfort is – We have a Shepherd.

We don’t need to know what each day will bring – our Shepherd knows.  
We don’t need to control our circumstances – our Shepherd controls all things.  
We don’t need to worry about our plans – our Shepherd has planned every day of our life and every step of our way.

What a comfort to be a sheep in the Lord's fold!

His goodness is our constant companion and follows us wherever we go.

We can say just as David did, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."

But, do you know what else is comforting, though it doesn't seem comfortable at the moment,

His discipline is our constant companion. Yes, he watches over us with the rod of discipline and he keeps us safe thereby. That's why David said, "Thy rod and they staff, they comfort me."

**Example: When a sheep would stray, the shepherd would take his rod and tap the sheep back in the right direction. If the sheep fell into trouble, the Shepherd would use the crook on the end of the staff to snare the sheep and pull him to safety.**

We have such a Shepherd who watches over us day and night and occasionally he uses his rod of discipline to keep us safe. And how needful that is – because we are just sheep, mere sheep. And when we see the rod and the staff in his hand, we are greatly comforted because in his hand, they are instruments for good unto us.

One characteristic of sheep is that they are rather foolish. They wander away from safety and into danger.

David was a shepherd himself, and he knew what it was like to be a sheep.

**Example: One of David's prayers in the psalms was, "O God thou knowest my foolishness?" (Psalm 69:5)**

You see, David, though he was the King of Israel, knew he was a sheep in God's kingdom, a foolish sheep at that. And so are we all.

Ah, but we have a Shepherd who is greater than all. And aren't we glad to be His sheep.

How delighted we are to be the sheep of his pasture;

To be fed from his bounty

To be led by his rod and his staff

So what if we are weak, our Shepherd is strong.  
So what if we are defenseless, our Shepherd guards us.  
So what if we are foolish, our Shepherd is wise.

And so, our text teaches us that we are sheep and God is our Shepherd. And we are so comforted to be his sheep.

Now I want you to see first this afternoon, the owner of the Sheep, for Jesus says, *My Sheep*.

I. The Owner of the Sheep.

A. The Sheep are His because He chose them. (Eph. 1:4)

Before the world began, out of all the fullness of the number of mankind, God chose His sheep. God chose them based on nothing but his own prerogative. God said, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." And he chose his sheep. And he set his love upon his sheep. And he said, "These are mine."

And, the Father gave these sheep to Jesus as a gift.

*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, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.*

John 10:27-29

The sheep were given to Jesus by the Father. They were given as an inheritance. They are His portion.

And thus, the sheep are a token of the love of the Father for the Son. And as such, the sheep are most beloved and cherished.

**Example: Oftentimes a person who is dying will leave some token gift to a beloved child or grandchild. The gift itself may be of little monetary value, but the gift is valued for the donor's sake. And if the gift is given by someone who is dearly loved, then it is cherished and kept forever and it keeps alive sweet memories of that person.**

Likewise, the sheep are a treasured gift from the Father to the Son and the Son cherishes the gift as a token of the Father's love for Him.

Jesus does many great and wonderful things for the sheep, but in this passage, He does two things for the sheep:

He gives them eternal life

*“As many as thou hast given me, I give them eternal life.”* (John 10:28)

He keeps them safe.

*“No man shall pluck them out of my hand.”* (John 10:28)

The sheep are now the personal responsibility of Jesus Christ. It is the responsibility of Jesus Christ to save his sheep to the uttermost and to never lose one of his sheep. And Jesus takes on that responsibility personally. The sheep are a great priority to Jesus and he takes the utmost care of each little lamb.

The Bible is, in essence, the story of the redemption and the preservation of the sheep. Through many trials and tribulations, through hardships and sufferings, the sheep are saved by the Great Shepherd. This book (the Bible) is the great redemption story. It is the greatest love story ever told. It is a story of God's unfailing love for his sheep. It is a story in many ways of the weakness and the frailty and even the wandering away of the sheep. But there is always a happy ending for the sheep because of the determination of Jesus to save them to the uttermost.

How is it that Adam was not cast into the pit when he disobeyed God in the garden? Is it not that Adam was one of the sheep? And it is impossible that Jesus could turn his back on one of his beloved sheep, even if that sheep should fall into a pit of sin.

How is it that Moses was not cast away when he murdered an Egyptian in the field?

How is it that David could say, even after committing adultery and murder, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” It is because David was a little lamb of God and it is impossible that Jesus could turn away from one of his little lambs.

How is it that Peter could turn his back on Christ, yet, Christ could never turn his back on Peter? It is because Peter was one of the precious flock for whom Christ died.

How is it that the other disciples could flee and leave Jesus alone in the garden, and yet after his resurrection Jesus loved them and cooked them breakfast on the beach that morning.

How is it that Paul could belabor his sinful condition in Romans 7, but in Romans 8 say, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

How is it that you and I can fail so often? Rather, how can we **sin** so often against Jesus and perhaps even commit **gross** sins and **awful** sins and **shameful** sins at times against him? And yet, we have the sense that he still loves us. Isn't it because we are his sheep? We are the Father's gift to Jesus. And he will never turn his back on us. Let me say it even more personally. If you are God's sheep, though you have failed Him, he will never fail you.

I want you to remember the simple words spoken by Jesus in our text: “*My sheep.*”

And we have seen that they are his sheep first of all because he chose them. But now we will see also that,

B. The sheep are his because he bought them.

Ladies and gentlemen, Jesus went to the market place and bought himself a flock of sheep. He didn’t reach into his pocket and pay with coins. Rather, he stretched out his arms and paid with his suffering. And what he so dearly paid for, he values exceedingly. He will never give up one sheep for which he paid so dearly.

**Example: My son Tyler just bought his first car. Actually we helped him buy it, but he knows he is responsible for paying us back. And he paid several thousand dollars for this first car. And to him this is a beautiful car. It is a Pontiac Firebird – black and shiny. Now, as far as I can remember, Tyler has never washed my car. My car could corrode in the garage and he would pay it no attention. But you should have seen him wiping down every speck of dust off his car when he got it home. That car is valuable to him because he bought it. He owns it and it is his very special possession.**

And Jesus owns us and he cares for us just like Tyler cares for that new car.

You see, Jesus paid a huge price to buy us. And he cherishes us.

**Example: Some of David’s men were in battle with the Philistines and they perceived that their king David might be thirsty. And so, risking their own lives, they broke through the Philistine lines to bring their king a drink of water. And when they were come, David refused to drink it and poured it out as a sacrifice to the Lord, thinking the water too precious because the soldiers risked their own lives for it.**

But our Good Shepherd not only **risked** his life, but **laid it down** to purchase his sheep. And he esteems his sheep very highly because of the price that was paid. He owns the sheep because he bought them. The Bible says,

*Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price.*

I Corinthians 6:19, 20

Now, this is a great consolation for the sheep. For we know that if he bought us for such a price, he will never, under any circumstances, let us slip from his hand. That’s why our text for this morning says, we will never perish. (v.28) And, no foe will ever pluck us from his hand. (v.28) His hand will never allow us to slip.

To think that Christ died for me and bought me and yet, somehow, he will not save me to the end, is not conceivable. If he suffered so for me, then he will save me. If he took my guilt upon himself, then I will not be found guilty. If he loved me once such that he died for me, then he will always love me.

Now, we have seen that the sheep are his because he chose them and because he bought them. But also,

C. The sheep are his because he changes them by his own power.

The Bible says:

*“All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way.”*  
Isaiah 53:6

Now, here is the order of things. We went astray. Then, Jesus bought us. We had already turned to our own way. And he bought us.

That’s why the Bible says,

*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

Romans 5:8

Jesus reconciled us to God by his death when we were his enemies. He purchased us in that condition. You might say, we were a barrel of rotten apples when Jesus bought us. And after he bought us, he owned a barrel of rotten apples. But now, we were **His** rotten apples. And he determined to change us.

And we continued for some time as rotten apples, but rotten apples belonging to Him; still sinners, but **His** sinners; not goats, but the sheep of his pasture. And, he put his brand on us and we were marked as his own. Though we were yet sinners, his mercy followed us everywhere we went. And he superintended our way and his goodness and his grace chased us down like a greyhound chases a rabbit. We often ran hard from him, but his mercy was relentless. And he overtook us and he saved us. And here is the great thing, by his great power he changes us little by little from a rotten apple, to the apple of his eye.

Now, he doesn’t do this for the goats, but only for the sheep. And the sheep don’t even know they are being pursued.

When we were blind slaves of sin, little did we know:

That he had set his love on us.

It never entered our minds :

what his love had ordained for us.

We never dreamed:

That he chose us before the world ever was formed.

We never considered:  
That he died for us and bought us.

And we never knew that he was our Shepherd and that he followed us relentlessly and that he tracked our footsteps from day to day.

You see, at first, we had no idea that we were his sheep. In our youth, when we ran from folly to folly, we had no idea that his rod and his staff protected us.

We never imagined that his goodness and mercy was our constant companion.

But somehow, in the course of our life, his power worked around us and in us and we came to know these things. And by the power and strength of our Shepherd, here we sit today, listening to and rejoicing over the wonderful words of God.

Don't you love the work of efficacious grace! Though many who are self-righteous despise the thought of it, none of us would ever be saved without it!

Efficacious grace: It means effective grace. It means, by his power and his power alone, I am changed. It means his love chases me down and overcomes me. His power changes me. His power changes me progressively from what I was to what I shall be – all because **I AM HIS SHEEP**.

Before I move on, let's take a moment to reflect on the words of our text,

It says, "*My sheep.*"

This is how Christ describes his people. They are his own. They are a peculiar treasure. I hope you will always remember that you are his sheep. And, I think when he says, "My sheep," he says it with great tenderness and love.

**Example: Like when you say to someone, "This is my child." You say it with much pride and affection. This is my child. Others are not my children like this child.**

**And so, Jesus says, "My sheep."**

Now, we have admired the owner of the sheep. Next we consider:

## II. The special marks of the sheep.

Since there are many flocks of sheep, there should be marks to distinguish Christ's flock. These days there is a Muslim flock that follows Allah. There is perhaps a Buddhist flock that follows the philosophy of Buddha. There are many flocks that are not Christ's flock. But Jesus puts distinguishing marks on his sheep. In this passage, his sheep have two peculiar marks, whereby they are distinguished. If you notice our text very carefully, you will notice that one mark is on the ear and the other is on the foot.

We look first at,

### A. The mark on the ear.

*My sheep hear my voice.*

Do you see the mark on the ear in this verse? This is a mark that allows Christ's sheep to hear spiritually. Now, many heard Christ preach and teach when he walked the earth but they did not hear him with a spiritual ear. They heard him out of curiosity perhaps, but they would not believe him. They wouldn't come unto him for life. They did not have the mark on the ear.

But Christ's sheep have the mark on the ear. The Holy Spirit opens the ears of the sheep and this is the mark of God's sheep. Others have no such mark.

Jesus put it this way to the Pharisees:

*Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word.*

John 8:43

*He that is of God heareth God's words; ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.*

So, the Holy Spirit opens the ears of the sheep. And then, the Shepherd comes along and calls the sheep and they hear. The Shepherd's words are recognized by the sheep. And they are wonderful and comforting words indeed. The same words that ring hollow in the ears of other flocks, ring loud and joyfully in the ears of Christ's sheep.

*"My sheep hear my voice,"* says Jesus.

Jesus says, "Those that are not my sheep can't hear. But **my** sheep hear my voice."

How do the words of Jesus ring in your ears this morning? Are they merely curious words? Are they strange words? Are they meaningless words to you? Or do they ring in your ears like the very words of life? Are they wonderful words of life to you or are they foolishness? It all depends on whether or not you have the mark in the ear.

**Example:** If you are a football fan with a favorite team, you might go to the game and scream your head off with excitement because you have an interest in the game. But if you take a friend with you who doesn't know or care about either team, it is likely that he will not be so excited.

Likewise, if you've been marked in the ear as one of his sheep, you will hear the Word of God with great interest and excitement. If not, you will be dull of hearing.

**Example:** I've been told that the radio in my car makes a very annoying high pitched noise. It's very distracting and makes everyone in my car want to turn the radio off. But you know what? I can't hear it. I have hearing loss such that I can't hear high frequency sounds. So, I'm oblivious to the noise.

This is the way it is for those who don't have the mark of Christ in the ear. They can't hear his call. They have no desire to hear it and they can't hear it. The call of Christ is only for the ear of his sheep and only his sheep can hear.

That's why Jesus says, "*My sheep . . . hear my voice.*"

So the first mark of the sheep is the mark on the ear. But there is one other mark mentioned in our text. And that is,

B. The mark on the foot.

*My sheep hear my voice . . . and they follow me.*

I always wondered, when Jesus called his first disciples, how it was that they simply left everything and followed him. This is what Peter and Andrew did.

*And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.*

Matthew 4:18-20

Likewise, he told Matthew, "Follow me." And Matthew arose and followed him.

You see, this is the mark that is on the foot. All of His sheep have this mark. And they follow Christ.

They follow him wherever he goes. They cling to him as the Captain of their salvation and they follow none other. Their trust is in him and him alone and nothing can shake that trust. They are confident in Christ.

They also follow him as their teacher. The words of men are but wind whistling, but you can stake your life on the words of Jesus. His words are everything to his sheep. They are the only words that matter. His voice is the only voice to be heeded.

They follow him as their example. Though no one can be perfect like him, there is always the effort to be Christ-like – to have the spirit of gentleness and mercy and grace and truth and all the qualities that are embodied in the Great Shepherd.

And,

They follow him as their lawgiver. They know that His commands are not optional, they are mandatory. But, they are not hard commands. Jesus said, “My yoke is easy and my burden is light.” And the law of Christ is in fact, marrow to the bones. They are health to the body and the spirit. And his sheep follow his commands.

Do you remember what Mary told the servants at that wedding in Cana when she needed more wine for the feast? She pointed at Jesus and said,

*“Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.”*

Never did words so aptly describe the duty of the sheep -- and not just the duty of the sheep, but the heart’s desire of the sheep, because this is the mark upon the foot of every sheep.

You see, Jesus puts a mark on the feet of his sheep and the feet of the sheep rush to obey him.

This is why Jesus said to Peter and Andrew follow me and they simply left their nets and followed him. They had the mark in the foot. It is a mark of obedience.

You see, Jesus said,

*My sheep hear my voice and they follow me.*

**Example: I’ve got a watch on my wrist and if I took the batteries out, it would just sit there. The hands would not move. It would just be dead. But, when I put the batteries in, the hands begin to move and it keeps time.**

Christ’s sheep are empowered by the Holy Spirit of God and when Christ says follow me, the little lamb gets up and follows. Sheep of other folds have no enabling power and the commands of Christ are empty sayings to them, but not so for the sheep of his flock.

We have seen the Owner of the sheep and the marks of the sheep and now we hurry on to,

### III. The great privilege of the sheep

I can't tarry long on this point, but note our text,

*“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them.”*

I suspect that you could pass over these four words – **and I know them** – with little thought. But you would be missing the great blessing and the great privilege of the sheep.

This is the greatest of all statements that Jesus could make to you. “I know you.” You better hope he knows you, because this is the root of your salvation.

There will be some to whom Jesus will say, “Depart from me, I never knew you.” And what horrible words that will be. But he will never say such words to his sheep. This is the very characteristic of his sheep, they are known of him. You see, when Jesus says, “I know you,” this is more than just having an awareness of you. God knows everyone in that sense. But when he says, “I know you” he says, “I love you. You are a family member. You are special.”

Jesus says, *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them.”*

You are a sheep because he knows you. He accepts you. He set his love on you before the world began and he put you in Christ. And you are so safe there, because he knows you and cares for you.

You may say, why does he care for me? I'm a rotten scoundrel. I am not worthy of his love.

And I say, yes, you are a rotten scoundrel, but he chose rotten scoundrels just like you to love, and he says, “I know you.” Yes, he knows your rottenness, but, if you are his sheep, he knows you as his own possession and he will change you from your rottenness.

I would like to close this message by offering to you my simple concept of Christianity. And I think it sums up the message for today. I know there is much about the Bible and about religion that we don't understand and there is much wrangling over words and concepts. But, Christianity, in its simplest form, is a love affair between Jesus and his sheep. And if we can make it even more personal, it is a love affair between me and Jesus and it's a love affair between you and Jesus.

And that's all you have to know really. All the commandments can be wrapped up in one most important command, and that is, Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind.

Most religions are cold and fraught with all kinds of weird requirements. Jesus just asks that you love him.

**Example: “Do you love me, Peter?” And Peter said, “Yes, Lord. You know that I love thee.”**

Now I want you to listen very carefully. Do you have an ear that hears Him? Do you hear the Shepherd calling you? Listen! I think I hear Him calling, and He says,

*Come all ye that labor and are heavy laden.*

Come to me all you tired little lambs, and I will give you rest.

Come to me, he says, and I will feed you and you shall never be hungry.

Are you thirsty, little lamb, then he says,

*Come to me everyone who is thirsty, come ye to the waters.* (Isaiah 55:1)

Are you broken hearted little sheep? Then come to Jesus, for the Scriptures say,

*The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart.* (Ps. 34:18)

Is there anything that you need, little lamb, then Jesus says, come to me, and

*My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.* (Phil. 4:19)

Does everything in this world seem futile? Do you need a hope for the future, then Come unto me, he says.

*For I know the plans that I have for you . . . plans of peace and not of evil. And you shall call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you.*

Jeremiah 29:11, 12

Do you hear him calling you? If you do, then you have ears to hear.

And, if you have ears to hear, then you have feet to follow him.

Run, little feet, run as fast as you can and follow your Shepherd. Because this is your duty to Him and this is your comfort, to follow Him.

And that sums up the love story of the Shepherd and the sheep.

The Shepherd loves the sheep and lays down his life for them.

The sheep hear his voice and follow Him.