

THE PRIVILEGE OF BEING HIS SHEEP

by Ron Harvey

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

John 10:27-29

INTRODUCTION

I want you to notice that in our text Jesus refers to his sheep. Now to be called sheep is not the most flattering analogy. If he had called us lions we might be proud. But he called his people sheep.

And if we are his, then that is our station in his kingdom. We are mere sheep. We are a flock of 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. There is only one who is high and mighty in God's kingdom and that is Jesus Christ himself. All the rest of us are his 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 kingdom. Though you are accomplished in this world, you are as needy as a helpless lamb in the kingdom of God. It doesn't matter that you have money in the local bank. It doesn't matter that you are prominent in the worldly community. In God's church you are a sheep and a needy sheep at that.

And so, Jesus refers to his called ones as his sheep.

Now the chief characteristic of sheep is their utter helplessness.

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, utterly dependent on him.

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

We don't know what each day may bring.
We can't control our circumstances.
We make plans and those plans 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 sovereign Shepherd controls our circumstances.

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!

So we see the helplessness of the sheep. But we also note that sheep are generally very foolish. They often 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 all of us.

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 trailed for a lifetime by his dogged mercy;
To be fed year by year from his bounty;
To be protected daily by his rod and his staff.

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

Now this morning there are three main divisions of the message. We will take special note of:

- I. The owner of the sheep
- II. The marks of the sheep, and
- III. The great privilege of the sheep.

And we see first from our text that it says,

My Sheep.

- I. The Owner of the Sheep is Jesus Christ

First,

- A. The Sheep are His because the Father gave them to Him.

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

Now, it is clear from our text that the Father gave the sheep to his Son. Now there were sheep of other folds who were not given. But the Father gave a certain flock of sheep to the Son. And the question is, "By what mechanism did the Father gather up sheep to give to the Son?" And the answer is, "By the mechanism of election."

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world . . .

Ephesians 1:4

Before the world began God the Father 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." (Romans 9:15) And he chose his

sheep. And he set his love upon his sheep. And he said, "These sheep are mine."

And, after the Father chose his sheep, he gave these sheep to his Son as a gift.

The verse clearly says that the sheep were given to Jesus by the Father. 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: One of my father's hobbies was coin collecting. And when he passed away a couple of years ago, he left me a token of his love for me. It is a \$20.00 gold coin. It is packaged and wrapped because it is uncirculated. The gift itself may be of little monetary value, but the gift is valued because of who gave it. And because the gift is given by someone who is dearly loved, then it is cherished and kept forever.

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.

And we have seen that they are his sheep first of all because he chose them. But now you should know that,

B. The sheep are his because he bought them.

Ladies and gentlemen, the sheep were owned by an evil master. But Jesus came into this world and became a man and he 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 life. And what he paid so dearly for, he values exceedingly. And He will never lose one sheep for which he paid so dearly.

(28) And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

(29) My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all: and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

Our Good Shepherd laid his life down to purchase *his* sheep. And because of the great price, he esteems his sheep very highly.

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 comfort and encouragement 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 hold us securely and he will never allow us to slip away.

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 surely save me. If he took my guilt upon himself, then I will not be found guilty. If he died for me because he loved me, then by his resurrection he will live to love me.

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

But let me take a moment and reflect on the words of our text,

It says, "*My sheep.*"

This is how Christ describes his people. They are his own. But he doesn't say "My sheep" with a cold sense of ownership. Rather, he says it with great tenderness and love.

Example: Like when a mother says to someone, "This is my child." She says it with much pride and affection. "This is my child," she says. The child next door is not mine. But this is my child.

And so, Jesus says with great pride and affection, "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. In the days of Jesus, there was a Jewish flock that purported to follow Moses. Down through the years there have been many flocks that have followed other religious figures. These days there is a Muslim flock that follows Allah. There is a Buddhist flock that follows the philosophy of Buddha. There is a flock that follows the lust of the flesh. There is a flock that follows the deceit of self-righteousness. There are many flocks that are not Christ's flock.

And so, in order to distinguish his flock, Jesus puts His own marks on his sheep to separate them from all others. 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 the voice of the Shepherd.

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 first mark of God's sheep. Other flocks 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.

John 8:47

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 meaningless words of nothingness? It all depends on whether or not you have the mark in the ear.

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. They picked up their feet, and followed Christ.

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. It is a mark of obedience. 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 follow him as their teacher. The sheep stake their very lives 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, the sheep always make the effort to be Christlike – to have the spirit of humility and gentleness and mercy and grace and truth and all the qualities that are embodied in the Great Shepherd.

And,

The sheep follow Christ as their lawgiver. They know that His commands are not optional, they are mandatory. The commands of

Christ are the way of life to the sheep.

And they are not hard commands. Jesus said, “My yoke is easy and my burden is light.” And the law of Christ is no hurtful thing at all. It is in fact, marrow to the bones. The law of Christ is health to the body and life to 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 – do whatever he says to you. And the Holy Spirit of God puts this mark on the feet of the sheep so that those feet walk after him.

This is how Jesus was able to say 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.

You say, How is it that Christ’s sheep can hear and Christ’s sheep can obey when those of other flocks cannot? And the answer is that Christ has empowered the ear and the foot of his sheep.

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.

And Christ’s sheep are empowered. They are empowered by the great and stupendous work of regeneration and by the Holy Spirit of God. And when Christ says follow me, the little lamb, so empowered, 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 pasture.

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.**"*

And I know them. I suspect that you could pass over these four words 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; if he were to say to you "I know you." You better hope he knows you, because this is the root of your salvation. Your salvation doesn't depend so much on you knowing Him. Rather, it is rooted in Him knowing you.

There will be some in that last day to whom Jesus will say, "Depart from me, I never knew you." And what devastating words that will be.

But let me assure you, 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. God is very aware of the wicked. But when he says, "I know you" he says, "I love you. I love you as a family member. I love you as a son or a daughter."

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.

Now if you are like most, you may say, "Why does he care for me? I'm a rotten apple. I am not worthy of his love."

And the Scriptures confirm, yes, you are a rotten apple. But he chose rotten apples just like you, to love. He chose sinners. He didn't choose the

righteous because there **were** none. But he chose rotten sinners.

And when he chose you, it was his way of saying, "I know you." Yes, the rottenness of sin had eaten you up. But if you are his sheep, he will take away the rotten parts and make you fresh and new. He will change you from bitter to sweet. He will change you from haughty to humble. He will change you from hellish to heavenly. He will change your condition from lost to found. He will change you from condemned to justified. This is what he does for those whom he knows.

So, the great privilege of the sheep is that they are known of God. And let me show you quickly what eternal benefits there are in being God's sheep.

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

1. He gives them eternal life

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

Men have searched high and low for the secret of eternal life. And here it is. It is found in that great fountain of life. It is in Christ. From him and from him alone flows life eternal and the sheep are led by the Shepherd to those life sustaining waters. And it says, "I give them eternal life." The sheep have the greatest gift ever known to man. They have abundant and joyful and thrilling eternal life. They shall forever be satisfied in a heavenly place prepared for them by their Shepherd.

But notice,

2. He gives them eternal security.

They shall never perish.

The wicked shall perish. The self-righteous shall perish. The unbelievers shall perish. Those of other flocks shall perish. But the sheep of Jesus Christ shall never perish.

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

This phrase tells us that the security of the sheep is the personal responsibility of Jesus Christ himself. He holds us in his hand. And he says, “No man shall pluck them out.”

I want you to see here that his sheep are kept secure by the power of God himself. Were it possible, the sheep might be plucked from his grasp. But it says in verse 29,

My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all: and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.

So, the great privilege of the sheep is that they are known of God. And they are given eternal life which is secure forever by the power of God.

CONCLUSION

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 absolute and unfailing determination of Jesus to save them to the uttermost.

Take the example of Adam. 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 all the more.

How is it that Paul confessed that he was a helpless sinner in Romans 7, but in Romans 8 he says, "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? How can we commit such shameful sins against him so often? 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. Not today, not tomorrow, not ever. Let me say it even more personally. If you are God's sheep, he will never fail you. Though you wander off from time to time, he will leave the ninety and nine and will come and get you for you are the sheep of his pasture.