

Why Sheep?

Scriptures

Matthew Chapters 14,18, & 25

As a servant to the everlasting God thru a baptism into Jesus the Christ, we as followers of Jesus the Christ are well familiar with the examples of a Shepherd and Sheep relationship we have and are to have with Jesus and he has with us. For most of us, even if we are not from an agrarian background, understand the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep he tends within his flock. This relationship is well described by Jesus in the New Testament, especially in the book of Matthew. Jesus makes many references to the sacrifices that a shepherd will go to find his sheep and the celebration that ensues upon the success of the search. He indicates that he exemplifies all the characteristics of a good shepherd. In this society, shepherds are common part, viewed as people who will sacrifice for the animals that will follow them and they know that the sheep of their flocks know them and will follow them.

Much description is given the role of shepherds in the scriptures as Jesus sets to identify his role in the connection man should have with God. Why? Well I see Jesus coming into a society that is divided. Part of the society is, as stated earlier, agrarian. But part of the society was becoming less agrarian, removed from the understanding of the nature of a true shepherd, and therefore Jesus had to provide more explanation to help convey the understanding to people of his purpose and connection to that work which he was called to do by the Father.

But what is not provided a great explanation of is the reference to how his followers are to be like his sheep. Many times, the followers of Jesus, are referred to by sheep and not only they, their actions are described in terms of Sheep. During the time of the disciples, my guess is that people had an understanding of sheep and their characteristics, but as time has passed and society in general has become less connected to or even seeing sheep on a regular basis, that understanding has been lost.

Over the years I have heard many times from the pulpit and out, sheep described as unintelligent animals that will follow without reason. I have noted over the years in some conversations with non followers of Jesus that they felt that be referred to as sheep was a turn off and degrading. They felt they could have no part of a God, Whose son viewed his followers as non intelligent creatures, unable to survive without a leader to blindly follow. How did this come to pass? Well as in many cases, its not a misunderstanding, it is a lack of knowledge. As a result of this, I decided to research out characteristics of Sheep. Why not, after all, we are referred to as sheep by Jesus, and just maybe, a stereotpe could be broken and a clearer understanding could be achieved in order to bring a closer connection. Let's look at it like this, if Jesus spent so much time describing how he is the good shepherd and what expectations the good shepherd is held to by his sheep, as followers should we not learn what expectations to him we have as his sheep.

In the following section, I look at four criticisms of Sheep, that carry over to be used as descriptions of the Church and followers of Jesus. I then list the sheep Characteristic and from there the Christian quality i see that the characteristic translates into.

Criticism 1

Sheep will blindly follow a leader

Characteristic

"Sheep have a strong instinct to follow the sheep in front of them. When one sheep decides to go somewhere, the rest of the flock usually follows,..... If one sheep jumps over a cliff, the others are likely to follow. Even from birth, lambs are conditioned to follow the older members of the flock. This instinct is "hard-wired" into sheep. It's not something they "think" about."

Expectation

This is how we are supposed to trust and follow Jesus the Christ. Not Blindly, but unconditionally. Too often, we get caught on the stories of sheep following their leader into a bad circumstance. This should not concern us. If, as his sheep, we trust him as the good shepherd, we understand that the past pastures for grazing usually require passage through some of the toughest terrain, but as the Good Shepherd, Jesus is with us every step of the way and will not leave his sheep behind.

Criticism 2:

Sheep are needy and do not like to be left alone

Characteristics:

Safety in numbers

"Sheep are gregarious. They will usually stay together in a group while grazing. A sheep will become highly agitated if it is separated from the group. It is the banding together in large numbers which protects sheep from predators which will go after the outliers in the flock."

Social animals

"Sheep are a very social animal. Animal behaviorists note that sheep require the presence of at least 4 or 5 sheep which, when grazing together, maintain a visual link to each other".

Flocking together

"Flocking instinct exists in all sheep breeds, to some extent. It is the sheep's flocking instinct that allows sheep herders to look after and move large numbers of sheep and lambs."

Expectation:

We are to feed with those who are followers. We are not to be alone, that is when we become weak and vulnerable to doubt. Small groups work pretty good. Jesus said where 2 or more are gathered in my name, there I will be also. If we understand our connection, we understand that we most need to be like sheep in this manner, never alone, always feeding in smaller groups to maintain our connection.

Criticism 3:

When facing a threat, sheep scatter

Characteristic:

"Flee, not fight"

"Sheep are a prey animal. When they are faced with danger, their natural instinct is to flee not fight. Their strategy is to use avoidance and rapid flight to avoid being eaten.

Some primitive sheep breeds may be able to more effectively evade predators, as their natural instincts are stronger. Domesticated sheep have come to rely on man for protection from predators."

Safety in numbers

"After fleeing, sheep will reform their group and look at the predator. They use their natural herding instinct to band together, appearing as one large animal, for safety. A sheep that is by itself is vulnerable to attack."

Expectation:

Realize that individually we are weak and incapable of defense, but when we come together in worship and fellowship, we appear as one, larger and more powerful than the threat.

Criticism 4:

Christians to often vocalize their unfortunate situation

Characteristic:**“Pain**

Sheep have an amazing tolerance for pain. They do not show pain, because if they do, they will be more vulnerable to predators who look for those who are weak or injured.”

Expectation:

We are to be strong in the Jesus, the Good Shepherd. For Satan looks for the weak, as they are the easiest to lead to darkness.

Criticism 5

Church and Christians are not aware of the community around them.

Characteristic

Never walk a straight line

“Sheep tracks are never straight. The winding of trails allows sheep to observe their backside first with one eye, then the other. Sheep can spot dogs or other perceived forms of danger from 1,200 to 1,500 yards away.”

Expectation:

We often are accused of being narrow minded and blind to what is outside of the Church door. What if we, as the church, never walked in a straight line or sit in the same pew? We would see the threats before they got to us, but more importantly we would be able to see all the need that is around us.

When you consider this and look at the Church as Jesus called it to be, wow, it is amazing how much impact we would have if we acted like sheep and how much stronger we could be as well. I do not see that Jesus referred to us as sheep as a weakness, but for us to see an example of what our true lives should look like in relationship to him and the walk we would have with him.

The take away from this is simple, Sheep need very little discipline because it is in their nature to be disciplined. It is not until an outside force disrupts that discipline that the problem occurs, but even from there, sheep have an instinct to correct it by regrouping and facing down the threat.

My parting thought is, "if we as the Church and individuals, acted more like sheep, following the Good Shepherd as we are called instead of trying to cull and limit our flock, would not the love of God be more Clearly visible thru Jesus The Christ, because people could then see how we as followers of Jesus trust and depend on him and he provides for us, unconditionally."

All Sheep characteristic information is taken from and copyrighted 2014 by www.sheep101.info. Please visit this website to learn more interesting facts on sheep.
