

THE FIRST 15

Thursday, June 13, 2024

Today is Thursday, June 13 and we are studying what the Bible says about shepherds and sheep.

OPENING PRAYER

In the morning, I come to this quiet place and listen for the voice of my Shepherd. I calm my scattered thoughts and slow my breath. I dwell in safety under the Shepherd's thoughtful eye and loving care. He watches over my comings and goings, guides me to places of peace in a busy day, and leads me to discover the joy of a Sabbath heart. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep." John 10:7-13

REFLECTION

In the Gospel of John, before Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd, he says he is the gate for the sheep. We can understand this "sheep gate" in two different ways - (1) the gate to the sheepfold out in the nighttime fields and (2) the Sheep Gate of the Temple in Jerusalem. At night when the sheep were to be kept out in the fields, the shepherd erected a temporary sheepfold to protect the sheep during the night. Such sheepfolds usually consisted of a circle of rocks with an opening at one end. The shepherd himself would serve as the gate to such sheepfolds by laying across the entrance to sleep. Whether a sheep tried to run off or a wolf tried to enter, they would have to do so by way of the shepherd himself. The shepherd himself was the door or the gate. This is who Jesus is for us.

In the ancient walls of Jerusalem, there are ten Temple Gates. The Sheep Gate was the first one to be constructed and is on the north side of the city. The Sheep Gate is the gate by which animals were brought in from the surrounding countryside for sacrifice in the Temple. The lambs were brought in and given a ritual cleansing in the Sheep Pool which later became known as the Pool of Bethesda where Jesus healed a paralyzed man. Once inside the city and within the Temple courts, there was only one door where the sheep went in, and no lamb ever came back out after entering the Temple. They traveled one by one. They entered in only one direction, and there they were sacrificed for the sins of human beings - men and women.

Jesus said, I am the gate for the sheep. When we enter the Kingdom we do so through Jesus. We do not have to pay the penalty for sin, because he has already done so. He is not only the gate for the sheep, he is not only the Good Shepherd, He is the Lamb. The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He is the Lamb whose blood was shed to cover my sin and the sins of all humanity who believe.

When Jesus walked the road to Golgotha, the place of the skull, carrying his own cross down the Via Dolorosa, to shed his blood for you and me, he would have entered through the Sheep Gate. The Sheep Gate is the beginning of the journey to the cross. He passed through the same entrance gate that sacrificial lambs had passed for centuries, going to their death. Jesus. One final Lamb going to be sacrificed - to shed his blood for the sins of the world!

Ask: How has Jesus been the Good Shepherd and the sheep gate for me? How do I understand Jesus as the Lamb of God who has taken away my sin?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy Lord Jesus, you are the Shepherd and Overseer of my soul. Thank you for willingly going to the cross to suffer and die for my sins. Thank you for laying down your life for me like a good shepherd who laid down over the opening to the sheep fold. Thank you for rescuing me from harm, caring for my life and leading me to the green pastures you have for me. I will follow you wherever you lead me to go. Amen.