

Sermon Notes: April 25, 2021 **Focus:** The Good Shepherd & Sheep dogging
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I want to look at the Good Shepherd, sheep and especially sheepdogs. Jesus says in the Gospel that he is the “Good Shepherd.” Aside from ‘good’ being a good thing, what does that actually mean? Let’s start with sheep to try to find an answer.

Sheep are everywhere in scripture and sometimes get overused by preachers. We can stretch a metaphor so far that it becomes benign but meaningless. *Short aside* – The family has been watching a series called *Debris*. We really liked it at first. But, as time goes the premise of an alien spaceship’s *debris* falling to the earth while possessing the power to resurrect people, create walking nightmares, teleport people, and turn people into chlorine breathers has all become less and less interesting. I think it is because the series tries to accomplish too much. My daughter summed it up well: “Is there anything debris can’t do?” When a concept or metaphor tries to be everything, it means little.

Dog and Sheepdog metaphor In an attempt to capture some meaning, I will look at sheep. Let’s create our own para-biblical metaphor: the sheepdog. This is a tall order considering what a dim view scripture takes of dogs.

Being a pitbull lover (now), one thing that disappoints me is that the Bible does not love dogs. Jesus was definitely *not* a dog apologist.

- *Matthew 7:6* “Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.
- *Philippians 3:2* Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.
- *Proverbs 26:11* Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly.
- *Revelation 22:15* Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.
- *Matthew 15:27* She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.”

But there is one, maybe only one reference about sheepdogs, Job 30. I’ll talk about that in a moment

The ancients did NOT think all dogs go to heaven, but I know they are wrong! Despite the bad press, I think the sheepdog metaphor is good one. It does not try to accomplish too much, and can shows us how to practice our faith.

Sheep the Bible does love sheep. So let me start with sheep before I leap to the sheepdog. Depending on how loosely define a sheep reference, biblical verses clock in somewhere between 380 to 500 verses. Sheep were a pillar in the economy of the Ancient Near East.

Ranching life was everyday life. Sheep were also props for symbolic and practical meaning when scripture writers got involved.

Sheep were:

- Currency in the marketplace and currency within the Temple sacrifice system.
- A metaphor for how (King) David the shepherd would lead the sheep (the people of Judah/Israel)
- King Solomon sacrificed football fields worth of sheep for the consecration of the Temple. They were signs of his incredible success AND the hubris of his excess.
- The lamb was sacrificed to prevent their firstborn in Egypt from dying.
- Peter was told to feed Jesus' sheep, to be a caretaker.
- Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (today's gospel)

It makes sense that Jesus would speak in sheep metaphors often, but Jesus does not make the metaphors easy. His is the shepherd, the sheepgate, his is a sacrificial sheep, etc. But for simplicity's sake today, the shepherd who knows and cares for his sheep.

Sheepdog There is only one biblical sheepdog reference that I am aware of:

Job 30:1 "But now they make sport of me, those who are younger than me, whose fathers I would have disdained to set with the sheepdogs."

Think how much harder life would be for the shepherd without a sheepdog. Sheepdogs move sheep in and out of pasture. This sheepdog video is a demonstration of a collie doing the herding work. The first three minutes get the point across. I think it's extremely cool to watch a well-trained dog work. It looks a lot like dancing <https://youtu.be/bpjP3mxv21s>

Sanctuary and green pastures.

God the Good Shepherd want to feed us (sheep) for greener pastures. God wants us to help everyone go in and out of pasture (sheepdog). We're sheepdogs who delight in learning the Shepherd's voice that calls out for green pasture and restful love.

I hope we all can be trained to hear the Good Shepherd's voice.

I hope we can delight in being trained to be sheepdog, turning left or right, going fast or slow, depending upon the Shepherd's voice.

I know that the Good Shepherd will send us out in joy.

I know that the Good Shepherd will call us back where, in returning and rest we shall be saved.

Todd