

Dogs and Sheep

Shepherds of the Flock

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I want to begin laying a foundation for this sermon in John 10. At Ambassador College it was recommended that we learn the chapters, or at least some of the most famous chapters, and give them a little title. There was one minister, Dean Blackwell I believe, who had written up basically the entire Bible by chapter. He had given each chapter a name or title. Many of the Bibles do that now by putting a heading up there.

This one—John 10—is "the Good Shepherd" chapter, Christ being the Good Shepherd, and we being the sheep.

John 10:11, 14 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep?" I am the good shepherd; and I know My *sheep*, and am known by My own.

So, anybody with a little Bible knowledge is aware of this metaphor that Christ is the Good Shepherd, and those who make up His Church are His sheep.

Now at the time, tending sheep was very common in Palestine. The natural geography of the land made sheep herding very easy and it was something that had been done there for generations. Those hilly pasturelands in the Judean Hills and the Hills of Ephraim were very good for that sort of thing.

So, raising sheep was a prime industry.

Now, the people who were listening to Jesus, here in John 10, may not have understood Jesus' spiritual intent to what he was saying, but they certainly knew his description of the shepherding life to be true. And had they thought about these things to any great extent they would begin to understand the things that He was bringing out. With the Holy Spirit these things become really vivid metaphors of Christ and the church.

Now, even outside of religion the sheep metaphor has become almost a cliché in our society. "People are like sheep." People tend to follow the crowd. They unthinkingly, like a sheep, do what everybody else is doing. People become downcast, which is a sheep term. I do not know how many of you are aware of that. But, shepherds call that being "cast down"—when people become downcast—dejected or depressed. They do not feel like doing anything.

Well, when something is wrong with sheep or with their environment—maybe they are not getting the right kind of water, or feed; or maybe they are diseased in some way—they become cast down. They will lie down and cannot or will not get up! And they will die unless the shepherd comes by, picks them up, figures out what the problem is, and corrects it.

There are other sheep metaphors that we all know:

"Wolves in sheep's clothing."

"Being sheepish." (Sheep are among the most shy of creatures, and they just skitter away when something untoward or unknown comes by them.)

"The black sheep of the family."

"Gentle as a lamb." (Everybody likes ugly little lambs.)

"Two shakes of a sheep's tail." (Did you ever hear that one? That is something that happens really fast, rather quickly, because those sheep can wag that tail real fast. That probably came out of the Midwest somewhere among the sheep farms.)

"March comes in like a lamb (lion) and goes out like a lion (lamb)."
(Here in Charlotte this year, it came in like a very wet lamb!)

In most of the world, though, unlike in the Bible, shepherds are not alone in their tending of the sheep. In most of the world, shepherds use dogs to assist them in their herding of sheep. In fact, if you will remember my Dad's offertory a year or two ago at the Feast, you know that the Bible takes a very dim view of dogs. Dogs are rather contemptible in the Bible.

If someone called you a dog in Bible times, you were either a pervert, or you were the lowest of the low. Dogs were considered scavengers, skulky, sly, and contemptible in every regard. They were good only for the scraps and scavenging the bones. In fact in the story of Jezebel, dogs ate her flesh and bones and dogs licked Ahab's chariot out; they licked out the blood. It is the Bible's way of showing great contempt for something like Jezebel and Ahab.

However, believe it or not (I found this yesterday—I did not think I could, but I actually did find it), there is one mention of dogs tending sheep in the Bible. I did not know this until last night. I was going to say that the Bible does not mention them at all, but I found one in Job 30. Job mentions it in just an offhand way. He is not even talking about sheep or dogs at all, but he uses it as a put down to those people who were mocking him:

Job 30:1 "But now they mock at me, *men* younger than I [the first bit of contempt; younger than him, so they did not have as much experience and wisdom], Whose fathers I disdained to put with the dogs of my flock.

This tells us more than just the fact that Job was having a superiority complex right here at this time. Dogs, in Job's time, were used to tend sheep, or at least to guard them. But, they are still considered contemptible. That was a job that even the lowest people would be out doing with the dogs—tending the sheep.

But, it is a biblical reference to sheep dogs. And that is what I thought was important. So, it was not unknown in biblical times. You could understand that because just about everywhere in the

world where sheep are raised, there are dogs as part of the herding of the flock.

Now the reason that I bring this up is because just over a month ago, my family had the pleasure of attending the sheep dog trials here just north of Charlotte, North Carolina. We had never seen one of these events and only in an offhand way knew that they even existed.

If you have seen the movie, "Babe," at the end there is a sheep dog trial that takes place down in Australia, and of course the star of the show is a pig, not a dog. But, here at Lake Norman, they were all dogs, actually Border Collies.

They would take five sheep and run them through a course. They would have to go through this course in about 10 minutes. Then the judges would grade them, taking away points from a start of 100 for their mistakes.

We went on Friday morning, actually it was a home-school learning experience that we took our kids to. I enjoyed it so much, that I wanted to come back on Sunday. I ended up taking some other people with me. It was quite an enjoyable time! Well, I thought so. I really get a kick out of watching that. It was fascinating to me to watch the handlers, with their dogs, and the dogs with the sheep, and even the handlers with the sheep.

It not only entertained me, but I received a whole new appreciation for sheep dogs.

And so this sermon today is going to be different for me, I think. I hope to convey appreciation for the sheep dog. But, more than that, more importantly, I would like to draw some spiritual analogies that to me are fascinating in their application to the church. Even though the Bible does not contemplate sheep dogs, as part of the analogies of the metaphors that it does use, I think that we could actually draw some just from the way that a shepherd handles the sheep through a sheep dog.

Before I go any further I should mention a book by a man named Philip Keller. Many of you might recognize the name. Philip Keller was the one who wrote, "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23." I think that the other book that he is famous for is "A Layman Looks at the Good Shepherd." But, he also had a book published posthumously in 2002 called, "Lessons from a Sheep Dog." I would recommend it. It is just a little book that you could read in a sitting or two. It includes his experiences with a particular sheep dog that he had when he was a young man. He draws a few spiritual analogies.

I will not be using his material to any great extent, but I will here, and there. I mention this in case you might be interested.

Now, we can look at the sheep dog analogy of Christ and the church in two ways.

The first sees the sheep dog generally, just as anyone who commits himself to serving Christ. That is, anyone who wants to join in the work of salvation, we would say. As Philip Keller would say, this is anyone who would participate in the harvest of souls. (He tends to get a bit syrupy and protestant in his way of describing things.)

So, this would be anyone who becomes *a servant of God*.

We will read III John 5-8. We do not go to III John all that often. This is the letter to Gaius. Not much is know about Gaius. Not even where he lived. Some think that he was a very rich or at

least prominent lay-member in a city or town not far from Ephesus. He had a reputation for being quite hospitable. And so, this is what John writes to him:

III John 5-8 Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. *If* you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.

John commends Gaius here for his service to those, both brethren, and strangers, who he extended hospitality toward. He says here that for this service which was an act of witnessing of the character and kindness of a Christian, John called him a *fellow-worker*. Or, as we have said in the past, applying it slightly differently, a *co-worker*. In the past we have used co-worker in terms of those who supported the church monetarily, but who were not baptized members of the church. But, this was not the case here in this passage. Gaius was a baptized member of the church. Some have thought he may be an elder. But, that is not really known.

So, at the very least, he was a lay-member who was well known for his hospitality toward others. John considers that service that he did a mark of a co-worker with him.

So, we can look at the sheep dog as *anyone who does service for God*.

However, more often, a fellow-worker in the Bible, or a co-worker as described by Paul, and other Apostles is an elder, or an evangelist, or an Apostle, a person who has been ordained as a servant of God.

This therefore is the second way to understand the metaphor of the sheep dog—the sheep dog is *representative of God's ministry*.

You can say that the ministry has gone to the dogs.

But, I hope that after this sermon you will see that if we look at it this way, a dog does not come out to be quite so contemptible.

It is interesting to look at it this way because the way that a shepherd works with the dog to tend the flock has great and deep spiritual meaning. Maybe I can bring this out in a few examples.

Fellow workers are people who are actively involved in the preaching of the Gospel, and the feeding of the flock as their vocation. It is something that they devote their lives to, not just eight hours a day, but they are always on the job. Philip Keller mentioned—I will probably bring him up more than I thought I would—his dog, named of all things, "Lass," or "Lassie," lived outside in a kennel when he was not outside with the flock. If there was any problem with the flock, or on the property at all, that dog was up and at them any time of the day, 365 days a year. That dog was not on a clock in any way. He rose with the sun and did his work all day right at the side of his master. Pretty much all day, except when he was out doing his job, he was at the master's side. That gives you an interesting illustration right off the bat.

That is how a minister of God has to be. Always at the beck and call of God to go fetch a sheep, or whatever it may happen to be. That is a dog's life, you might say.

These co-workers or fellow workers with Christ are usually ones who have been called by God to do His work. As we will see later, true sheep dogs like the Border Collies, and Australian Sheep dogs have been bred and trained to do their job that way. It is almost instinctive to them. That is very much like God's calling to the ministry.

If you will go to I Corinthians 3 we will see one of these fellow worker verses. I am going to go through a series of verses. I am going to start off with I Corinthians 3, verses 5 through 9, and we will see how Paul shows that it is the primarily the ministry that he is talking about here.

I Corinthians 3:5-9 Who then is Paul, and who *is* Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers?

Paul is very clear here that he and his fellow worker Apollos were especially appointed, and gifted to evangelize and teach the gospel. Paul was the one who evangelized them and Apollos was the one who had taught them. Paul planted (different metaphor, but the same thing), and Apollos watered.

But notice! In a way, you can say that he follows the dog analogy in saying that he and Apollos were nothing. They were low. They were not worthy to be compared in any way to God who is the one who gave the increase. They were just there to do a job. They were not above the people, and he says that they were equal, one was not the boss of the other, necessarily. He says that each one will receive his own reward according to his labor. But, the one who gets all the glory is the Shepherd—the One who gives the increase, the one who gives the commands; and that is Christ.

So, the ministers are servants. They are to work. They have a specific job to do. And, God is in everything making sure that it all comes out for the best.

I will just read these verses in II Corinthians 6; I will not make very much comment. He had just finished telling the Corinthians that we are Ambassadors for Christ, and he was speaking primarily of himself and the other ministers.

II Corinthians 6:1-4 We then, *as* workers together *with Him* also plead with *you* not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation. We give no offense in anything that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all *things* we commend ourselves as ministers of God:

So, here again, he allows some of those same ideas through, that we are workers together with Christ; and that they try not to give offense, that they do all things to commend themselves as ministers and servants of God.

So again, he puts the ministry in a position of service and humility and gentleness as well.

Here he is talking specifically about Titus:

II Corinthians 8:23 If *anyone inquires* about Titus, *he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you?*

Here was another minister. This is Epaphroditus:

Philippians 2:25 Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier?

So, not only does he call him a fellow worker, he is also a fellow soldier; down in the trenches with him, fighting the good fight, but also a brother in arms, or in any other way.

Philippians 4:3 And I urge you also, true companion [he is speaking to the elder here in Philippi], help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names *are* in the Book of Life.

Here he mentions several others:

Colossians 4:10-11 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him), and Jesus who is called Justus. These *are my* only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me.

All of these were Jews that were working with Paul. And then he goes on to others, but he calls them fellow workers, they were all elders, helping Paul out in his ministry.

So, this is most of them, maybe all but one or two of the verses in the Bible that talks about fellow workers; six out of the eight that have to do with ministers, rather than with lay-members.

Finally, we will read I Peter 5:1-4. Peter uses a slightly different term, but it is one I think that you will be familiar with. I am sure that this was on Peter's mind a lot, because it was one of the last things that Jesus said to him before He ascended up to heaven. And He hit him in a time when it really stung, because he has just about left and gone off to do something else (referencing John 21) when Jesus reminded him that he had a different job, which was to tend

His sheep, feed His sheep, feed His lambs.

And so, here it is, at the end of his life, and he writes this:

I Peter 5:1-4 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion [constraint] but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

So Peter here admonishes the church's ministers to act as tenders of the flock. This in effect is what a sheep dog does.

He is like an under-shepherd to the sheep. Yet, even as an overseer of the flock, he is completely subject to the Shepherd. He must be. And if he is not, he becomes like Paul said in Acts 20: 29, "a savage wolf which does not spare the flock."

Maybe we should actually go to that verse to see exactly what he did say, because he is obviously speaking of ministers here. He is speaking to the Ephesian elders here. It was the last time that he would see them, on his way back to Jerusalem. Paul tells them:

Acts 20:29-30 "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

Now, this could go either way, as wolves from outside, or dogs that go astray, and become violent, and become wolves (just like the movie, "Babe" where the sheep said that all dogs are wolves.)

So, what I am trying to do here is show from the way a sheep dog works with sheep how ministers act within the church, and why they act the way that they do.

Now the world's primary sheep dog, is the Border Collie. The Border Collie was developed and bred in Scotland for hundreds of years. And the sole purpose of a Border Collie is to herd sheep. They have instinctive herding skills, and are extremely intelligent dogs.

You will get into an argument from different owners of breeds but, there are some who say that the Border Collie is the most intelligent of all dogs. Others say the Poodle, some would give you other breeds of dogs as the most intelligent; but they are up there in the top tier of intelligent dogs, at least.

They can be taught fairly quickly to obey both voice and hand signals from their handler, or shepherd (I will be using those terms interchangeably.).

They are also known to be very loyal to their owners. Philip Keller said about his Border Collie, Lass, that she was kind of special in this regard; she had been abused as a young pup. Once she began to trust Philip Keller, she would not be watered, or fed by anyone but him. If he went away while his wife stayed behind to put out food and water, Lass would not eat it. She would go on a fast until he came back, and set the food down and the water down. She would not be fed by any hand but his which is another interesting spiritual analogy.

The Border Collie can be quite devoted to their masters, putting themselves at risk for the shepherd. They will plunge into briar-patches after a sheep. They will plunge into water of any kind to get to a sheep, maybe on the other side, or one who has gone in. They will go down rocky slopes, or in stony places to fetch a sheep who has gone out of the way for a tender morsel that just happens to be just right over there.

They will also face down mountain lions, wolves, and other predators that happen to come upon the flock. If the master so desires it (another spiritual analogy), they will give up their lives for the sheep to protect the flock.

Of course, these qualities make a good minister in the church. They are very much the same. Ministers should at least be somewhat smart, at least as smart as a Border Collie. They should have skills in bringing people together, which is a prime herding quality. As well as, motivating them in the same direction—making them all go in one way.

It is kind of interesting though (just as a point to contemplate) that while Jesus says in John 10, that the sheep follow him, most often sheep dogs drive sheep. The sheep are naturally afraid of the dog. And so, they will not follow a dog. They will not follow the sheep dog. But, if the dog faces them, and begins to move toward them, they will turn around and move, and go the direction that he sends them.

Oftentimes, that is what a minister has to do. It is not driving them like a whip's lash, but trying to move them (the congregation) in a direction that he feels God wants them to go.

This is the direction, of course, that the shepherd is already going. And, the sheep dog is doing nothing more than making sure that the sheep go in the shepherd's direction.

He is not driving them for his own purposes; he is driving them because the shepherd has instructed him that this is the direction for them to go. And so the sheep dog is a motivator to try and get the sheep to go in a direction that they need to go.

Like a sheep dog, a minister must be obedient to his Master's voice. And not only that? in an analogy with the hand signs, a minister should be aware enough to see the signs of the times and the things that are going on around him. He should be aware of the indications of the way that things are going, and be able to direct the flock in that manner.

Ministers should be loyal, and devoted to the shepherd, to the Master and like Him, be willing to lay down their lives for the brethren.

Very few ministers meet all of those qualifications. But, hopefully there is enough there to make them at least reasonably good at the job God has assigned to them.

Let us look at some of these qualities in the Bible.

Titus 1:5-9 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God [which is a servant], not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

Now, there are several of these qualities that particularly fit sheep dogs.

For instance, Paul mentions here, "not self-willed," meaning that his will is subsumed under God's will. And that is exactly the way that a sheep dog must be. If he desires to do something of his own, the sheep will not be tended. He must be always willing, always ready to do exactly what the shepherd says, and to do it immediately, and not to wait until he gets this done, or that done. But, as soon as the shepherd says, "Bring them to me," he is off, and doing exactly what he has been told to do.

Paul also says here, "not quick tempered," and "not violent." These also apply to sheep dogs. A sheep dog that is quick tempered and violent will instill fear into the sheep, and even cause them harm. And if you remember in the movie, "Babe," when one of the sheep gets killed, the dog who was responsible (or in this case, they thought it was the pig that attacked the sheep) was immediately put down. They do not want a dog that is going to go against the whole reason for having sheep. The dog is not supposed to attack the sheep, the dog is to tend the sheep, and put them where the shepherd wants them.

And so any dog that attacks the sheep will be immediately killed. You do not want that aggressive streak in the strain of the breed.

Self-control is another of the qualities.

(Just put in the back of your mind, we will be going away from all of this, but I want you to just mark in your mind here that in verse 9, he talks about holding fast to the faithful word.)

Self-control is a vital quality in both ministers and in sheep dogs. Sheep are naturally skittish, as mentioned before, and they are the most timid of creatures, and the smallest thing will make them afraid and run off.

If the sheep dog is not precise and controlled in his movements, the sheep will scatter.

When we went to the trials north of Charlotte on Friday, the young dogs were out in the morning—the ones just learning the tricks of the trade. They had to go through their trial or course.

I must explain before going on what the sheep dog trial field looks like.

It is about a hundred yards or so deep from front to back, but it is very wide, maybe three or

four times that. In the middle of the front of the field is a flat space. There was a pen on the left side, there were a couple of chutes on the right side, and as you moved out toward the rear, it slowly sloped upward.

There were several gates as you went straight back, and then about a hundred yards away there were the sheep just standing there. There was a handler and his dog holding them where they were.

Now, right in the front of the course, in the middle, was a pole. That is where the dog who was going to be sent out on his course would start from. The handler stood there also.

There was one young dog there on Friday morning. We saw this dog before he went out. He seemed like a very happy and playful dog. As a matter of fact, I think that this was the one who got in trouble for peering over the fence. They had some of these construction fences that go around with the black plastic so the dust will not go out into the street. But, this dog had got up on its hind legs and was watching what was going on, on the field. Which was a no-no, because they did not want the dogs to get excited, start barking, or whatever, and cause the dog presently on the course to get distracted, or to make the sheep afraid because here was another "wolf."

But this dog seemed like a really nice little dog—young and extremely happy and playful.

Well, this dog when it got its turn was all over the place. He would run right. He would run left. And he would run at the sheep. These sheep were just terrified of this dog.

I am sure that this dog was not doing anything mean, but this dog was just hyper. If you know anything about sheep, sheep need peace and quiet. If they are agitated in any way, they just go berserk. They do not want to do anything. They do not want to eat, or drink, they do not want to lie down; it is like they are on something.

Well, they are on fear—adrenaline, probably. And, this dog just ran them ragged. They ended up all over the field. They were tired and scared. They were shaking. You could see palpable, visible fear on them. This dog had run them all over the field.

Their joy was amazing to watch as their pen was opened up, and they were allowed to get off the field. And then, it was not a dog or two later another young, very well trained dog had his turn.

He took the command, "Away, to me!" which I should explain is a command that they use in this particular trial to make a wide sweeping counter-clockwise movement. It is also a double command because "away" is used in this counter-clockwise motion, and "to me" means to bring them forward. So, this was a kind of double command, "away" and "bring them to me."

This dog was off! Like he was shot out of a bow. This dog ran, and ran, and ran?to the right. He was just going to the right. Remember I told you that his place was a couple hundred yards wide. So, there was a lot of land out there. And this dog kept going right, and right, and right?we wondered if this dog understood. He just kept going away, and away.

But, this dog had a plan, or had been trained that way. He went out farther than any other dog to the right until he came to the road along the tree line of the course. And he walked along

this road, out of sight of the sheep, because the sheep were facing the opposite direction. And maybe that was why the handler himself sent this dog "away." There is another command for going clockwise. But, he saw that the sheep were facing to the left, so he sent the dog off to the right.

The dog kept going along this road. He was shielded by the lay of the land, as well as, he blended in with the trees behind him—I do not know if you know Border Collies, but they are almost all black with a bit of white on them, some have a bit of brown on them too. And so as he was going, you could hardly tell where this dog was.

After a moment, maybe a minute, everybody lost sight of this dog. We were all looking and wondering what was going on. The handler was just standing there so calmly! Just waiting.

Pretty soon, you saw the dog's ears come up over the ridge, then its head. And as soon as he got over the crest behind the sheep, he stopped, and lay down. And that is all he did, but then he crept forward a few steps, and stopped again. Crept forward a few steps, and stopped again. Crept forward, and stopped?crept forward, and stopped.

He was five yards away from the sheep before they noticed him. And then they looked up, and there was this dog. But, they did not run they stayed. So, the dog got up on all four feet, and looked at them, and walked forward.

The sheep saw the dog coming, so they turned and started walking toward the handler, just exactly like in the movie. That is what they are supposed to do, like David said, "Baa, ram you, baa, ram you," in the story Babe.

The dog, just by his presence there, made the sheep move. They did not move in a rush. The best they got with this dog was in a trot, not even a brisk trot, just a normal trot. They stayed in a tightly controlled group as they went through those couple of gates in the middle of the field. They came up very placidly right there to the handler.

Now, the next step, they were to go around the pole in a clockwise manner. So, the handler whistled, and the sheep trotted around the pole because he was right behind them telling them where to go. Once in a while he would step to the right to make them go left, and then step left to make them go right. But, these sheep just trotted around the pole. And then they had to go through another gate that was off to the left. So, they placidly trotted out there.

This dog was just walking behind them—a step here, a step there—and got them through that gate, brought them around—had to make a U-turn—and then the hardest part of the whole course was now in front of them. He had to bring the sheep totally across the field again to the right hand side, and take them through a V-chute. A chute shaped like a "V," with the bottom quarter or third chopped off. So it was like two diagonal chutes offset to one another that he had to send them through.

He had to send them through the top of one chute and out the bottom, and then turn them very quickly to make them go up the other arm of the chute so that they came out the top of that chute.

So, obviously this task was to display the dog's ability to make the sheep change direction as a

group in good order.

Now, remember the playful dog who made the sheep go everywhere?

Well, this dog hated this part. He was just as frustrated as the sheep were trying to get through this particular V-chute.

He (the playful dog) brought the sheep up to the first diagonal at a brisk trot. If they were not running, they were just about to break into it. It was almost like a canter. They came up so fast, he had them aimed pretty well toward this chute, but he only got four out of five sheep into the chute. One went off to the side.

It was not good enough to have four out of five; you had to get all five into and through the chute.

His task, now, as hyper as he was, was to get this one sheep that had gone astray back under his control, and into the chute without getting the other four out.

Now, these chutes were just a type of split-rail fence. And so these sheep who were inside the chute could tell what was going on outside the chute. And they were acting as though there was no sheep there at all. And so, when the dog would go to get the wayward sheep, if the dog went too fast, the four sheep would turn tail and run out.

And then he had to come back and get these four to make sure that they would stay at the right place, right there at the opening of the chute, and then run and get this one, and try to bring it back, and he was going back and forth. This dog was running hard to get these sheep to do what he wanted them to do. But, they were split into two groups, and he could not control both groups.

So, the little sheep ended up all over the front portion of that field. There was a group of two here, a group of two there, and the one who would not go into the chute at all off to the side. And, he just could not do it. He did finally get them all grouped together, and through the first leg of the chute, but he could not make that turn—not the way that he was going. He was running them too fast. They shot out the end of that chute and had to make a turn within about ten feet to go into the next chute, but they were running. So, when they made the turn, they missed the next chute by about 15 feet. And, guess what was right there? The gate to the pen where they rested after their time on the field.

And they saw that gate, and went directly for it—"Let us go in. We want to get away from this wolf!" And so they all ended up over by the gate, and they still had to go through this other half of the V-chute.

So, they got there, and the dog had to round them up again, and herd them back to the second chute. But, by this time they had been run all over the field for nine minutes or so (each trial runs 10 minutes). This dog had been dogging them all this time, at their heels, running them hard—their wits were just scrambled. Four of the sheep, once this dog came up to herd them all together, just ran. They were out of there. And the last one started trotting behind them, and I guess she was the most tired of all because she just turned around, put her head down, and faced that sheep dog.

She was not going to run. She had had it. So, she was going to defy that sheep dog.

At this point, the handler had had enough too. As we all watched this encounter taking place, it had looked like the other sheep who had run off were coming back actually to watch what was going on. Maybe they were coming back to protect the poor old sheep that had had enough and was about to square off with this dog. But, everything started to converge on this encounter between the dog and the sheep.

And so the handler rushes up—she was going to grab the dog's collar—and get her out of the way. But just before she gets there, the dog snaps at the leg of this sheep. You should have heard the crowd gasp.

This never happens at a sheep dog trial. But, she was a pup; she was not that old. And so, they forgave her. But, the judges did not. She got very, very poor marks. I think out of a hundred points, she got like 17 or so.

You do not really want to run the sheep, because that just destroys all the fat, and makes for very lean, and tough sheep. The whole idea is to make them ready for market. And so that was a no-no.

We rarely think of John the Baptist as a shepherd. But, this V-chute made me think of him. That and my Dad's sermon made me think of this example of a shepherd who knew how to make changes—knew how to go with the flow of the change in God's work.

You know John had quite a number of disciples. It says all of Judea went after him. And many of them were not just baptized, but followed him around, and listened to what he said. And, as my Dad pointed out, years later, in at least Jesus' ministry, and in the book of Acts we actually have some of his (John's) disciples asking about being baptized. He made quite an impression on a lot of people.

And so we have this right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. These are John's disciples:

John 3:26-27 And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified----behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!" John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.

John immediately says that he was called to do what he did—that God had given it to him—and that he was one under authority.

John 3:28-29 "You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, `I am not the Christ,' but, `I have been sent before Him.'" "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.

He says that I am just like that friend. I am very happy that Jesus has come upon the scene and

He is about to prepare his bride.

John 3:30-31 "He must increase, but I *must* decrease. "He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth?"

Now this is the sheep dog speaking, remember—I do not mean to be crude about this, but if you think of it in this way, this is the way that a sheep dog thinks about his Master.

John 3:31-36 "He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth?He who comes from heaven is above all. "And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. "He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. "For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

So, from this we see that John was content—at least at this point—to hand everything over into the Chief Shepherd's hand, because that is what he had been called to do. He had prepared the way for Christ, he had done his job, and now Christ was going to do His job. And that is what a sheep dog does.

In this case, if the work seems to change, well, it is the minister's job to make sure that the sheep go in the direction that the Master—the Chief Shepherd—commands.

So, here John says nothing startling and disruptive to his disciples, but he kindly and humbly points his disciples to Jesus as their True Shepherd. And he gives them all kinds of reasons why they should follow Jesus and not him anymore. He is the One from above. He speaks on higher things than I do. He is the One that the Father loves and the One who has the Words of God and the Spirit without measure. He is the One you have to follow.

John realized that his work was done. And this is the hallmark of one of God's servants—they understand when God is beginning to do something different and then they conform to it.

Now Philip Keller writes that his dog, Lass, had one major problem. She had trouble with the "stay!" command, which is kind of interesting. This can be a problem with ministers also. In fact, I think most of us have problems with this command. I think that most Americans especially have problems with this command.

"Stay! Just be content. Stay on your job. This is where I want you. This is what you need to do, now do it. Stay!"

The Collies, at the trials, had this proclivity to rise, and to move, when their handlers told them to stay.

Now, what happens when they did this, is that they moved, so the sheep moved. And usually the handler would say, "Stay!" because he wanted the sheep to settle down. Usually what would happen is when the sheep dog listened and did as the handler said, the sheep would move only a step or two, and they would stop, and start grazing again. They would stay there. The dog could be only five feet away, but if he was still the sheep would stay. But, if that dog got up—whoops!—they were watching that dog, "what does that dog want us to do?" If he moved right or left, they moved left or right. If he moved toward them, they moved away from him.

And so, "stay" was a very necessary command. It all had to do with sheep control. Remember what I said about sheep: They like stillness, quiet, and peace.

And if a minister (going back to the analogy here) is always on them, or pushing them and never giving them a minute to rest, then they start getting the jitters. And, they are likely to scatter.

There is a certain pace, and stillness, and contentment that is necessary. Now, this does not mean that there is not a time for rapid movement, because there is sometimes. But, the best pace is a trot.

Mr. Leroy Neff used to say, "It is the plodders who will make it to the Kingdom."

Bit by bit, step by step. It is not the ones who rush, and use up all their energy in a flash, but it is the marathon runners, not the sprinters. And, this is the way that sheep should be driven by a sheep dog, slowly, resolutely, and given periods of rest. That is why it would take a shepherd days, or weeks to go from one pasture to another. He could not just drive them all up there in one day. He had to take them at their pace, and stop and rest, and give them water, and make sure that they had sources of food along the way.

A sheep dog, then, would have to conform to this pace, even though most sheep dogs just love to run and move, and go.

But, going back to Philip Keller, he said that he would tell Lass to stay in a certain place keeping several sheep, or lambs, or rams (or maybe it was just a small group of sheep he wanted to check over), to inspect them for trouble. But she sometimes would become distracted, and wander off—usually to chase birds.

Where he lived, he said there was a rookery of crows on an island not far from where he tended sheep, and these birds would come and dive-bomb the dog.

She was supposed to be staying there holding these sheep in place, but this dive-bombing was just too much fun, and she wanted to play with those birds, and chase them back.

And so she would forget all about the sheep, and start chasing and snapping at these crows. And the sheep, with no one there to guard them, would wander off. And then the master's work would have to be done over again. Because the sheep were no longer in that stay position that he had originally put them in with the dog.

We humans do not like holding patterns of any stripe. We feel like we are wasting time just doing the same thing over and over again. We feel like we are being unproductive, nothing is getting done, we are not moving forward, there is no progress, we are not producing a thing.

We chomp at the bit. We get impatient. And in frustration, we just go do something else.

Now, sometimes this something else is a huge distraction. We play.

I have a tendency to follow NASCAR. And, I could be—this is one of the temptations of the Internet—working on an article or sermon during racing season and I will think of something. "Oh yeah! I wanted to look that up on NASCAR.com." And the Internet is only a click away. "Whoops. There it is! NASCAR.com!" And I will end up searching for something and five minutes will go by and I get distracted.

Now, that is just a small example. But, people have taken such things really far in that direction. Now, if I was really a NASCAR aficionado, I would have a car out in the garage that I was working on to race Saturday night! Now, that could be a real distraction. I could be the Racing Preacher!

But, I will not do that. You have my word. But, that is something that could happen.

In years gone by, I know that there were some ministers who got really distracted by hunting. I am not saying that hunting is bad, but to a minister it could take an awful lot of his time.

Some ministers got pilot's licenses, and they ended up flying away their ministry, rather than putting their nose to the grindstone and being helps to their churches.

Others did other things. But, a sheep dog's loyalty is to the flock, and to the Master. And he does what the Master—the Shepherd—says. And he does not get distracted with silly little things like playing.

If he does, then the Master has to come down on him hard, and put his nose back into His Work. A lot of times, we just chase our interests. We get enamored with something that is exciting, or we go off on some new thing because the holding pattern—the stay—is not exciting enough.

Sometimes we just simply lose focus like Lass the dog, and forget that we were even commanded to stay, and we just wander off.

So, Keller calls this, "losing faith." Losing faith with the One who gave us the command. It is a serious problem which sheep dogs, because those dogs are there not only to hold the sheep, but to guard them too. And if the dog is not there to give them some kind of protection, those sheep are vulnerable.

And so a sheep dog that is at least present and active in the flock is a great comfort.

We are going to hop and skip through II Timothy to just pick up a few verses. In a way you could say that this is Paul's command to Timothy to stay. Notice:

II Timothy 2:1, 4 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus? No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of *this* life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

A minister called to this job must stick to his job and not become entangled in the affairs that

are going on around him. It is easy to do. There are things that you feel that you need to do, but the calling that has been given to a minister is higher than any of the affairs of this life.

And so a minister needs to find the right approach.

Yes, he needs to take care of his family. Yes, he needs to make sure that he trains his children well. Those things are allowable. But, things like getting involved in the community are probably distractions that he should not get involved in. His community is the church, not his neighborhood. Though he may do what he can to help, if he gets involved too deeply they are going to take time away from his ministry.

There are a lot of things like that that a minister has to evaluate. He cannot get involved in being a baseball coach. He has to pick and choose where he uses his time.

II Timothy 3:14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*,

They have to continue on. They have to stay, and they have to remain stayed, as it were.

II Timothy 4:1-2 I charge *you* therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season?

A minister has to be prepared all the time for whatever may come up.

II Timothy 4:2-3 ?Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;

Sheep are noted for having ideas and just going and doing their own thing. All of them, or there might be one who wants to wiggle up to the fence and see if she can loosen it and get out. And if the one gets out, all the rest follow!

And so, like a sheep dog, a minister has to be aware of those things, and make them stay.

II Timothy 4:4 and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

This is analogous to "the grass is always greener?."

A minister has to be aware of the things that people are ingesting, and make sure that they hear the truth instead.

II Timothy 4:5 But you be watchful in all things [There is the guarding aspect.] endure afflictions [He says, meaning "be willing to lay down your life?"] do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Stick to it! Take it all the way to the end. Fill it to the full. Finish it.

Then, he says in the next few verses that he has done just exactly that.

II Timothy 4:9-10 Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia.

Now, Timothy had examples of those who had not fulfilled their ministry, and Paul brings one up here, this Demas. He had loved this present world. He had allowed himself to get entangled into the affairs of this life. And, He had forsaken his ministry. This is like the dog who was told to stay, but goes chasing after birds.

But, he also had good examples (like those mentioned in verses 11, Luke and Mark) who had been faithful in their ministries and had always helped Paul.

And of course, there is the example of Paul himself who had fulfilled his ministry to the nth degree.

We have not read I Timothy 6:20-21 in a little while. We live in a time similar to the later first century church when guarding the truth and holding our position is paramount, and this is what Paul tells Timothy:

I Timothy 6:20-21 O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane *and* idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith.

Does not that sound like a sheep dog that has forgotten his command to stay?

We have to be faithful and loyal, and obedient to the command. Stay on course. Hold the line. Keep the faith like it says here, until the Chief Shepherd gives us a new command to follow. Stay! It is hard to do, but it is one that we have been given to do. It is important that we keep on keeping on.

I am going to pull this slightly out of context, but I will not be twisting it here. I do not need the preparatory information. I just want the thought that Paul expresses here. He is speaking of the ministry here:

II Corinthians 1:24 Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.

Here is that final fellow worker's verse that I mentioned earlier.

In the movie, "Babe," (which you might want to watch sometime—it is kind of interesting after seeing the sheep dog trials) the sheep tell the pig, "All dogs are wolves."

And, it is not too long later that Babe is told by the dogs, "All sheep are stupid." This is the natural adversarial relationship that exists between real sheep and dogs. It is the predator/prey instinct. It is natural. But, it should not be so in the church of God.

The ministry has authority as shepherds under Christ. He is the Good Shepherd. And, we should be good sheep dogs. That authority that is given should not be used to rule, and to force the brethren towards salvation.

As Paul says here, "not that we have dominion over your faith" ?because your faith is in Jesus Christ and we have no authority to rule your faith in any way. We can only motivate. We can only help.

And, our goal, as Paul says here, is to work with you for your ultimate joy, through gentle persuasion, and even motivation through Godly fear if it is necessary.

But, our bark is only what you should get, not our bite. If there is biting, that is bad. It is not part of the job.

As the King James Version says, "The ministry is helpers of your joy." God appoints ministers to guide the sheep to real ever lasting joy in His Kingdom.

And the faithful minister, like a faithful sheep dog, tends the sheep for their ultimate good to please the Shepherd.

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