**THE GOOD SHEPHERD LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP**

John 10:1-13 (Key verse 11)

*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

In today’s passage we are going to learn from the word of God concerning our 2nd prayer topic for the year which is to have a sacrificial shepherd heart and life for Jesus. We are going to learn firstly why we need to have a sacrificial shepherd heart for God’s sheep, what it means to have a shepherd heart and lastly how we can have a shepherd heart. From the key verse Jesus declares: “*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”* Jesus declared this, for he wants us to come to him, believe in him, and have life to the fullest in him. Furthermore, he said this implying that only those who follow him can be shepherds for his flock, and should learn from him. Therefore, through this passage we are also going learn how sinners like us can follow in Jesus’ footsteps, lay down our lives for his sheep. May God have mercy on us today to receive one word, have a clear direction on how to have sacrificial shepherd heart and life for Jesus.

The passage begins after a great conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees concerning as man who was born blind and who Jesus healed. The Pharisees did not want to acknowledge the power and authority of Jesus who healed the blind man, they did this because of selfish political reasons. They could not stand Jesus who attracted a lot of following from the crowd, and so they abused the man who was born blind. The Pharisees’ political ambitions hindered them from having a shepherd heart, instead they abused the man who was born blind. They political ambition hindered them from seeing Jesus’s shepherd in healing the man. And so, to help them Jesus started today’s passage with great emphasis in **verse 1-5** saying:

*“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2 The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.”*

Here Jesus used the words “Very truly I tell you…” to emphasize the importance of the words that follow. Furthermore, he used a figure of speech related to everyday things, the sheep, the sheep pen, the gate, thief and robber, the gatekeeper, shepherd, a stranger etc. Furthermore, Jesus used this figure of speech because it perfectly described of the people that God had called the Pharisees to take care of and what the role of the Pharisees should be. The sheep in the figure of speech described the people, it describes us, it describes campus students. The people are compared to sheep, for without a shepherd the people are lost, sheep need to have a shepherd to take care of them, to protect them from danger, to care for them and lead them. Without a shepherd, sheep are vulnerable, they cannot find their way back to the sheep pen, they can easily fall into danger such as the falling into pits with no ability to rescue themselves. So, they need a shepherd to help them with this things. Many souls like the man born blind need shepherds, to lead them and guide them.

However, a Shepherd is not just anyone, a true Shepherd needs to enter the sheep pen by the gate, the gatekeeper opens for him, the sheep listen to his voice, he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of his sheep, and his sheep follow him for they know his voice and they will never follow a stranger, but run away from him because they do not recognize his voice. Jesus emphasized this figure of speech to help the Pharisees understand what their role is in society, to help them to repent from their political ambitions and be used a shepherd for God’s flock. Even though Jesus emphasized this and used very common things in their daily lives, the Pharisees still did not understand what Jesus was telling them.

What did Jesus do when the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them? Did he give up on them for they had hardened their hearts? No, Jesus did not give up on them, similarly Jesus will not give up on us today as well. We all know that the UBF ministry is founded on raising Shepherds to serve sheep on campus. In the past years we might have failed to take care of sheep like the Pharisees, even though we knew our calling as Shepherds for God’s flock. Just like the Pharisees, Jesus has not given up on us, instead Jesus is willing to teach us and help us, and restore us as his shepherds for his flock. And so, he when the Pharisees did not understand what he was talking about, he went further to explain to them with emphasis.

Let us look at **verse *7-10****: “Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. 9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”*

Jesus explained to the Pharisees the figure of speech, first he revealed to them that he is the gate of the sheep pen. In order for the Shepherd to access the sheep pen, they need to go through him. In order for us to access the sheep on campus and to serve them according to the will of God we need to go through Jesus. What does this mean? This means we need to have a relationship with Jesus, we need to know Jesus first and be united with him first in the Holy Spirit through personal repentance and faith. Only then we can be able to help sheep genuinely, when we enter through Jesus, we will be able to help sheep to turn to Jesus as opposed to turning to ourselves. The Pharisees wanted the people to respect them and to honor them, instead of turning to Jesus. As Shepherds of God’s flock our mission is to help sheep to believe in the name of Jesus and come to him. If we are truly come to God’s sheep through Jesus and prayerfully lead the sheep to Jesus, the sheep will sense it and by God’s grace they will trust us and follow Jesus. But if we do not come through Jesus, the sheep will sense it and will not listen to us. I pray that God may help us this year to come through Jesus Christ first so that we can be effective shepherds and lead our sheep to Jesus.

Furthermore, Jessus explained and emphasized the figure of speech saying: “*I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture.*” Here Jesus explained that he is the gate to salvation, the only way to be saved is through Jesus Christ. In **John 14:6** Jesus also said*: I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the father except through me*. In order to truly be shepherds of God’s flock we need the assurance of salvation, otherwise we cannot lead God’s sheep to Jesus, salvation needs to be real to us and if we come to Jesus, we will experience salvation, and our sheep will see it and trust us and come to Jesus too. Jesus also added saying, “*… They will come in and go out, and find pleasure.*” Meaning he is the gate his sheep uses regularly, the sheep come in and go out through him, this also means though we are Shepherds for God’s flock, we are also Jesus’ sheep and need to go in and out through him. We need to regularly come to Jesus, before doing anything we need to come to Jesus, in the morning and in the evening, we need to come in through Jesus. Through regular prayer and study of his word, we need to come to Jesus, and his word promises that when we do this we will find pleasure. Our souls will find satisfaction, security and rest if we come to him. Spending time in prayer and Bible study should not be to impress my wife, but to truly spend time with God. We need to spend time with Jesus every time we get, when we do so we will grow and be able to help our sheep to go in and out the gate, come to Jesus in the morning and in the evening and experience his pasture.

Furthermore, Jesus explained to the Pharisees the figure of speech saying: “*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.”* Here Jesus contrasted himself to bad leaders, who come to steal, kill and destroy. Which leaders are those who come to steal, kill and destroy? In **Ezekiel 34:1-4** it says: *“‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? 3You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. 4You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally.*” The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were called to take care of God’s sheep, but because of their selfish ambition, only wanting to take care of themselves they not only could not take care of God’s sheep, but they drove them away, they oppressed them with legalistic approaches, ruled them harshly and brutally and left the people spiritually broken, wondering around and helpless.

The Pharisees came to steel from the people, they did not lead the people to God but enforced their ways on them, they stole their peace, killed them emotionally and spiritually and destroyed their sense of peace. But glory to God, through his mercy, love and compassion he sent his one and only Son Jesus Christ. Who declares today saying: “*I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.”* Are you broken? Do you feel something was taken out of you? Is this affecting you in serving God’s ministry, causing a sense of discouragement when you serve your sheep, making you feel you are not worthy to serve in God’s ministry? Are you living life just because? Do you have a sense of joy in your heart? Jesus says I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. What does it mean to have life to the full? This means life full of hope, joy, peace, love. A life with real conviction and direction to serve God’s sheep on campus for the glory of Jesus, serving God’s sheep with joy and peace. When we have a real relationship with Jesus, when enter through him, in and out, in the morning and in the evening, Jesus promises that we will have this life, life to the full. As shepherds of God’s sheep we should strive to come to Jesus always, our goal should be to bring our sheep to Jesus. We should not just be happy to gather sheep and entertain them with activities, but rather we should pray to God, have a relationship with him, bring his sheep to him so that they too can have a life to the fullest.

After Jesus had finished explaining the figure of speech, a clear illustration of what it means to be a shepherd of God’s flock, he went and shared with the Pharisees a life changing fact about him on our key verse. Let us look at the key **verse 11**: *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”* Jesus died on the cross, he was punished and crucified for the sins of the world for me and you, Jesus did not come to take from us, to control us but he came down, left his glory and heaven as the Son of God, to live among us sinners, a world filled with rebellion, hostility and stubborn unbelief. And he willingly gave his life for us, with full knowledge of our sinful nature. Why did he do this? He did this because he a good Shepherd, who lays down his life for his sheep. He did this because he is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Jesus held nothing back, even though we are rebellious, hostile and have stubborn unbelief he gave his life on the cross that we may be saved. When Jesus was captured, the very same crowd that he served and loved, shouted crucify him, crucify him and still he decided to die for them. I also lived my young life until university graduation without Jesus, rejected him and saw him as interference to the success in my studies, yet Jesus did not hold back. He laid down his life for me, not because I was good or did something to earn it, but because he is the good shepherd. Today as well, as Shepherds of God flock, we will also encounter rebellious sheep, hostile and stubborn. Jesus wants us to learn from him, follow in his footsteps and lay down our lives for them. How can we do this? We can do it when we remember and experience this greatest love of Jesus, who gave his life for my and your life. Let us pray that God may fill us with his holy spirit, to really experience the love of Jesus, who laid down his life for me and you. When we realize and remember that Jesus went through the horrible death and humiliation for us, we will not help but break down all our pride, self-righteousness, anger, selfishness and indifference. If we taste this great love, we cannot but want to follow his example and love sheep like he did, love sinful people without carrying any burdens and anger. May God have mercy on you and me to always remember Jesus our good shepherd, who laid down his life for us. This is the most crucial step on how we can truly be transformed and have a sacrificial shepherd heart for our sheep this year.

Looking back at last year, I was very challenged to realize how I fell short in serving God’s sheep and my family because of my busy schedule at work, I fell short because of fear of my managers and did not want to disappoint them, I fell short because of fear of offending my sheep. When we had the fast, I was praying that God may help me to serve his sheep fully this year according to his grace, I prayed against feeling a sense of burden and fear of people, but to be filled with joy and energy to give glory to God through serving sheep. When I prayed, the Lord answered me and gave me a year key verse for 2025 from **Galatians 1:10** which reads: “*Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.”* From this key I learnt that I need to overcome pleasing people, I need to seek Jesus and do what pleases him by obeying his commands and following him. I have learnt that when I do this, I can be used by God to serve his sheep. I pray that God may help me to hold on to this key verse, overcome the spirit of wanting to please people but choose Jesus always.

I pray that the Lord may have mercy on us all this year, to have shepherd heart for God’s sheep. We have learnt that in order for us to have a shepherd heart we need to enter through the gate, we need to come through Jesus Christ, by having a relationship with, repenting of our sins. When we come to Jesus in repentance, Jesus will bless us with the holy spirit to overcome any self-centeredness, and enable to lead his sheep to him, enable our sheep to hear our voice and trust us. Furthermore, we have learnt that as Jesus shepherds we need to always come to Jesus, in the morning and in the evening. Jesus also promised that when we come to him always, we will be saved, we will find pleasure, we will find satisfaction, and sense of security. When we come to Jesus in repentance, Jesus will grant life to the full. Meaning we will be filled with love, hope, joy, the days of being burdened by serving sheep will go away. And our sheep will see this, and will be drawn to Jesus, when we call on them, they will hear our voice and come to Jesus. Finally, we have learnt that Jesus is the good shepherd, our perfect example who has laid down his life for me and you. Jesus did not lay down his life just for the good ones, but for everyone, the rebellious, hostile and stubborn sinners like you and me. As we serve God’s sheep on campus, let us remember this, for there is power in what Jesus has done for us on the cross, on own we cannot serve campus students as shepherds, but when we remember and taste Jesus’ sacrificial and great love, we cannot but want to follow his example and love sinful people as he does to us.