

The Gospel of John
Lesson 15 – John 11
Jesus the Life

Chapter 11 is a test case in which we will see if Jesus' claims to be the shepherd who knows his sheep by name and can give them life is true. This claim has been at the heart of all that Jesus has been saying, that he is the Son who completes the work of the father by giving life to those who believe. In addition, Jesus has claimed to be the shepherd who would lay down his life for the sheep. Without a test of this hypothesis, it would be difficult to trust in him.

The experiment is set (vs.1-16): The test of the hypothesis begins with Lazarus, a friend of Jesus ("the one you love"), sick and possibly dying. Lazarus is one of the sheep who has listened to the shepherd's voice and believed. If this is the case, then he ought to be in line for eternal life if he dies. Now Jesus could have easily walked to Bethany and healed Lazarus of his sickness. I would argue that he chooses not to in order to prove the hypothesis. It will prove the hypothesis in two ways. First by returning to Judea, where people wanted to stone him, Jesus shows he is willing to lay down his life for his sheep. Second it proves the hypothesis in that Jesus has the opportunity to raise Lazarus from the dead, thus showing that faith in Jesus brings eternal life. Once the disciples understand what is happening, they are willing to go and die with Jesus, which means that they are qualified to be shepherds...which bodes well for the nascent church.

Testing the hypothesis, do the sheep have faith and is Jesus the shepherd who cares for his sheep? (Vs.17-37): For the hypothesis to be judged to be true, there must be faith in Jesus, since eternal life/resurrection is dependent on that faith in the shepherd. We see several statements of faith. First, Martha says that Jesus could have healed her brother. Second, Martha makes it clear that God will do what Jesus asks, because they are Father and Son. Third, Martha believes in the general resurrection. This was a belief held by many Jews in the Second Temple period, that there would be a resurrection of all persons, then a judgment, then the righteous would live in God's kingdom on earth.

Jesus then asks her to change her belief and see that while there may be a general resurrection, that he, Jesus, is the one through whom resurrection comes. He is the resurrection and the life...which means Torah obedience is not what gives life. Jesus then asks her if she believes that. Her reply is perfect, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God who has come into the world. Thus, we discover that she is indeed a sheep who hears the voice of the shepherd. Martha also does the appropriate thing after profession; she invites her sister Mary to come and be with the shepherd. Mary acknowledges that she too is a sheep who hears the shepherds voice when she states that Jesus could have saved her brother. Jesus weeps because he sees the reality of death and the pain it causes. The Jews in this experiment are on the fence. They see that Jesus loved Lazarus and wonder if Jesus could have saved him. They are open to being sheep.

The hypothesis is proved true (vs.38-45): Jesus now raises Lazarus from the dead. We know Lazarus is dead because it had been four days, meaning that Lazarus' spirit had quit hanging around the body, and because Lazarus stank. Jesus then sets the stage by linking this resurrection to faith and to an act of God. Jesus commands, Lazarus walks out, and the people unwrap him.

The response of the thieves and robbers (vs.46-57): The response of the Jewish religious leaders is fear. They are afraid that if Jesus is allowed to continue then everyone will follow him and not the traditions of Judaism. The High Priest, without realizing what he is actually saying and prophesying, affirms the fact that Jesus will die for all the people...all the sheep. This leads to a plot on Jesus' life, which is what causes him to go into temporary hiding.

Questions:

1. How has Jesus proven to you that he is the shepherd who knows your name?
2. Have you ever invited anyone to come and "see Jesus"?
3. What is your view on resurrection?