

JOHN 10

JESUS, THE GOOD SHEPHERD

The allegory of the Shepherd and the sheep, which opens the 10th chapter of this Gospel, is inseparably connected with the incident of the preceding chapter. It is, in fact, a continuation of the discourse which our Lord had begun in the presence of the Pharisees and the man who had been born blind. The purpose of this particular discourse was threefold: first, to rebuke the Pharisees for their treatment of the man to whom Jesus had given sight; second, to encourage that man in his faith and trust; and third, to describe the loving and saving ministry of our Lord. The allegory contains three related but distinct pictures. There are three scenes – in each of which, the imagery is slightly altered and the application is different. As one commentator has suggested, the first scene may be thought of as being in the early morning, when the sheep are being led out from the fold by the shepherd; the second may be understood as the noontide-scene, when the sheep are free to enter the fold for safety, or to go out into the pasture for the satisfaction of hunger; while the third scene is at nightfall, when the returning flocks may be in danger of wolves. The first of the three pictures contrasts the unlawful tyranny of the Pharisees with the Divine appointment of Christ, the second contrasts the injurious influences of their power with His gift of satisfying and abundant life, and the third contrasts their cruel or cowardly motives with His self-sacrificing love!

Scene 1 (verses 1-6). In excommunicating the man who had been born blind, the Pharisees had given an example of their exercise of self-assumed authority. They were unauthorized rulers, but Christ was the Messiah. The true people of God were dissatisfied with the Jewish leaders of their times; like the man born blind, they were ready to follow Jesus. All this, our Lord illustrated by this allegory. The Pharisees had not secured their power by entering “the door” of any Divinely-instituted office or function. They had climbed up “some other way.” Their despotic power had been secured by illegitimate means. They were like thieves in their deceit and hypocrisy, and they were like robbers in their violence and audacity. But Christ, on the other hand, had come on a Divine mission; for He had come in the appointed office of the Messiah. He was the true Shepherd! John the Baptizer, and others who had filled the prophetic office, were like the porter at the door of the sheepfold – opening that door so that He might have access to the flocks. And just as sheep recognize the voice of their shepherd, so also, those who truly love God would gladly accept Christ as the Messiah – like the man whom He had just healed of life-long blindness. Our Lord even hinted at the fact that to follow Him would involve a separation from

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ *Jesus speaks of Himself as the Good Shepherd – verses 1-21*
- ❖ *His conversation with the Jews during the Feast of Dedication – verses 22-30*
- ❖ *They attempt to stone Him, but He departs from Jerusalem – verses 31-42*

the Jewish synagogue and religious rulers, resulting in the sense of loneliness that was experienced by the healed man who was unwilling to submit to the Pharisees. But He also indicates that a new flock is being formed, which is composed of His followers; and even though they may be cut off from the society of those who are abusing their power, they shall enjoy the blessings of Christ's guidance and care.

Scene 2 (verses 7-10). In this second picture, Christ is not seen as the Shepherd, but rather, as "the door of the sheep." The way to Divine communion and fellowship with God is through Him, and Him alone. All others who have made such claims are nothing more than "thieves and robbers." The influence of such wicked persons is only to "steal, and kill, and destroy." But those who come to God, through Christ, will have life abundantly! They will have true liberty, satisfaction, and salvation.

Scene 3 (verses 11-18). Our Savior here describes Himself as the Good Shepherd; and as such, He declares that He is willing to lay down His life for the sheep. By way of contrast, He refers to others who show that they are not worthy of the name of shepherds – for their motive is only selfish gain; and in the face of peril, they show fear and cowardice. He calls them hirelings, and declares that they flee when they behold "the wolf coming." Just as the Lord had previously designated the Pharisees as "thieves and robbers," He also compares them here to the "hireling" and the "wolf." The latter of the two is an emblem of the cruel hate which animates His enemies. However, among the chief rulers, there were "many" who "believed on him; but ... they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue." These persons were like hirelings. Their real duty was to care for the sheep, but they were unwilling to make any sacrifice for them; and therefore, they failed to protect Christ's followers because they were afraid of personal loss. No matter how we may interpret the terms *wolf* and *hireling*, they both stand in clear contrast with the Good Shepherd, Whose purpose is unselfish and Whose motive is love!

But this is not all! The Good Shepherd has perfect knowledge of His sheep, and they know Him; and this mutual relationship is even compared with that union which exists between Christ and His Father. Moreover, Jesus' love and knowledge of His flock are not only for the disciples who are represented by the man born blind, for they are also extended toward a great multitude from among the Gentile nations who follow Him. Christ declares that all who believe in Him form one flock, although they may be in different sheepfolds. For all these sheep, He would lay down his life. He would be put to death through the murderous hate of His enemies, yet His life was to be a voluntary offering for sinful human beings. However, He would also rise from the dead! This was His ultimate purpose; for it is only as the risen, living, and present Shepherd that He can truly care for His sheep. Such power to live or die, He has received from the Father – to Whom His self-devotion is infinitely pleasing!

The allegory of the Shepherd and the sheep is followed by a brief historic note (verses 19-21); it describes the division among Christ's hearers which always results from His words. It is characteristic of this Gospel, which continually speaks of the development of faith and unbelief; and which repeatedly shows that as testimony is borne to Christ – either by word or deed



– people are passing judgment upon themselves by their response. In the allegory, this testimony has been stated in the claims of Jesus Himself. He has declared Himself to be the Messiah by presenting Himself as the true Shepherd of Israel, and the Divinely-appointed Savior. To these claims, faith responded; the sheep heard His voice. But also by these claims, the unbelievers were angered. “He hath a demon, and is mad,” they cried; “why hear ye him?” However, remember that in addition to testimony and belief, John’s Gospel is also continually presenting a third great idea – namely, that everlasting life which is a result of faith. And it is most beautifully set forth in this allegory! In the first picture, its blessedness centers in the Divine guidance that is granted by the true Shepherd; in the second, it consists in safety, liberty, and spiritual satisfaction; and in the third, it includes the love of Christ, a knowledge of Him, and fellowship of life with all believers – no matter their sheepfold or denomination – in His one great flock. Blessed indeed is he or she who can say from the heart, “The Lord is my shepherd!”

Two months have now elapsed since the healing of the blind man at about the time of the Feast of Tabernacles. We find Jesus in Jerusalem again (verses 22-38), attending another of the national festivals – namely, “the feast of the dedication.” This feast was in remembrance of the purification of the Temple by the Maccabees, after its desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century BC; and it is still known and celebrated by Jews today as Hannukah.

Jesus is walking in an eastern portico of the Temple, known as “Solomon’s porch” – very likely seeking shelter from the cold and rain of December. Here His enemies gather around Him in a circle and demand a straightforward answer to the question of whether or not He is the Messiah. However, they are not sincere in their request. They are well-acquainted with His claims, but they desire some occasion or excuse to destroy Him. Their question, moreover, is a difficult one – for He is not the kind of Messiah they are expecting, nor such a Messiah as they are ready to receive; but rather, He is the Messiah Who has been predicted by the prophets, and Whose work is to save those who trust in Him.

See how Jesus replies with matchless wisdom! He declares that His miracles, worked by Divine power, are sufficient proof of the truth of His claims. He assures His questioners that their unbelief is not due to a lack of evidence, but to the imperfection of their moral disposition. If they were truly in sympathy

with Him and His Father, they would believe in Him; and they would receive those supreme and eternal blessings which He alone can impart: "My sheep hear my voice ... and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish." The Savior further states that this safety of His followers is due to the relationship which exists between Him and the Father: "No one shall snatch them out of my hand ... and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one." This oneness means unity of will and of power, but it surely indicates even more – namely, unity of being.

The Jews understood exactly what Jesus was saying, and it made them very angry. They correctly interpreted His words as meaning that He was indeed God! And this was totally unacceptable to their minds. They would not believe this, and so they "took up stones again to stone him" – just as they had done on a previous occasion when Jesus had claimed essential unity with God. They might have accepted Jesus as the Messiah if He had not made such claims of Deity. But they did not expect a Divine Messiah; they were looking for a radical revolutionary who would lead them in a successful rebellion against the power of Rome, to whom they were in hateful subjection. It was because Christ asserted that He was more than a mere Man, and because He claimed to be united with God, that He was hated and rejected and crucified.

With indignant irony, Jesus asks the people surrounding Him with stones in their hands, "Many good works have I showed you from the Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?" They answer, "For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God." In replying to this, Jesus first frees Himself from their charge, and then He establishes the truth of His Divine claim (verses 34-38). By this defense, He does not renounce His claim to Deity. Rather, He is simply arguing that if the judges who represented Jehovah in their appointed office could be called "gods" in the Hebrew Scriptures (Ps. 82:1, 6), then surely it could not be blasphemy for Him – Who is the final and complete revelation of God – to call Himself "the Son of God!" He further declares that He was not only innocent of blasphemy; but even more importantly, that He has stated – in reference to His Person – only that which is true. His Divine works of mercy and love are proofs of His oneness with God. If the Jews would not believe His words, they should have at least been convinced by His "signs."

The attempt to stone Jesus is unsuccessful. He escapes from their hands and withdraws from the city to a safe retreat east of the Jordan River – the very place where John the Baptizer had ministered. In this spot, many persons became Jesus' disciples; and their faith formed a striking contrast to the unbelief which had been reaching its climax in Jerusalem.

Lord Jesus, we praise You as the Good Shepherd, the great "I AM," and the one and only way of entrance and access to God Himself. Thank You for the wonderful privileges that You bestow on all who come to the Father by You! Amen.