

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
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8/14/2016

John 10:1-18 (read vv. 1-5, 9-18) “Jesus, the Good Shepherd”

Intro. In Chapter 10 Jesus gives a clear contrast between Himself and the religious leaders of Israel. Jesus was quite disturbed at what the religious leaders were doing. They were leading Israel astray. They had threatened excommunication to anyone who confessed faith in Him. In fact, the blind man He had healed was put out of the synagogue. So we are going to see the contrast between Jesus the Good Shepherd and the other so-called shepherds of Israel, who had rejected Jesus and even determined to kill Him!

There may¹ be an interesting historical background for this discourse of Jesus. We see in v.22 that it could have taken place during “the Feast of Dedication,” a winter festival. That is better known to us as Hanukkah. During its ceremonies Ezekiel 34, the powerful criticism of Israel’s “false shepherds,” was read as part of the Hanukkah liturgy. That was because the festival recalled the time when Israel rejected those leaders who led them to compromise their faith and adopt Greek culture and practices.² Hanukkah thus became a season that asked hard questions about failed leadership and false shepherds.

There is something else that is important to consider as we examine our text. Notice that Jesus compares people to sheep. That is nothing new of course. A number of times in the Old Testament God compares His people to sheep. For example, the Lord is compared to a shepherd in Psa. 23,³ and God’s people are compared to sheep. Why is this? Well first, sheep are entirely dependent upon the shepherd. They are helpless. The same thing is true of us, especially in the spiritual realm of life. You can try to live your life independently of God, but you will not live life successfully and you will certainly die in your sin. Jesus said in John 15, “Without me you can do nothing.” Secondly, like sheep we need protection. There are many spiritual wolves, many spiritual dangers. As we see here, a good shepherd protected his sheep with a sheepfold, his staff, and in other ways. Then like sheep, we need guidance. Sheep can easily go astray from the right way (Isa. 53:6). So like sheep, we need a shepherd to lead us by His truth and His Spirit. Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way that seems right unto man, but the end thereof is death.” As we said last week, by nature we are spiritually blind. You cannot figure out spiritual truth on your own. You can follow your own reasoning but you will end up in terrible condition. Because of this, Prov. 3:5-6 says, “Trust in the Lord, with all your heart, and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and he will direct thy paths.”

So like it or not, like sheep, we need a shepherd to guide us, especially in your spiritual life. That being the case, your next concern is this: Who should be my shepherd? Who should be my guide? Should you turn to your friends? Should you turn to worldly experts? Should you turn to the most popular TV preachers? Well let’s look into our text for answers. In the opening verses we see that:

¹ Yet v.21 links the timing of the discourse back to chapter 9. However, chapter 9 only took place 2-3 months prior to the winter festival, which is only mentioned here in the Bible

² In the 160s B.C. the Maccabean War erupted, pitting conservative Jewish fighters against Greeks and Hellenized Jews. Its first leader, Judas Maccabeus, captured Jerusalem's temple and in 165 B.C. rededicated it. Hanukkah is a Hebrew word meaning "dedication."

³ See also Gen. 49:24; Ps. 23; 78:52-53, 80:1; Isa. 40:10-11.

I. JESUS IS THE TRUE SHEPHERD

The first image that Jesus gives is not that of a shepherd in the field but a shepherd who has brought his sheep to the sheepfold. Notice in v.1 that Jesus speaks of a sheepfold. Just about every city and village in Israel would have one. It was a large open area with walls that were at least waist high, often topped with thorny branches. The sheepfold was built to protect the sheep from wild beasts. Each evening the shepherds of the community would bring their sheep in from pasture, and leave them inside with the keeper of the sheepfold. Then, the shepherds could retire for the evening to their own homes. At the door of the sheepfold, the porter would be on guard all night, ready to protect the sheep from any danger. He slept across the one and only doorway so that he himself was the door. In the morning the different shepherds would return. The doorkeeper would recognize them, and allow them into the sheepfold. When he gets in, his sheep are all mixed up with somebody else's sheep. How does he get the sheep that are his? He calls them by name. Then, he would lead them out to pasture for another day.

Then, Jesus gives a contrast in how He and others approached the sheepfold, and how the sheep respond to the true shepherd. Jesus clearly affirms that He is the true shepherd of Israel. So let's see the reasons why Jesus is the true shepherd of the sheep. First of all:

A. He Came to Israel Lawfully – In other words, He came with Divine authority. In v.2 Jesus said, “He who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.” The “door” to the sheepfold represents the lawful way of access to the sheep. Jesus demonstrated that He was the true Shepherd of Israel. No one else could have had the credentials that He had. He was sent by God, born of a virgin as prophecy predicted (see Isa. 7:14), of the seed of David (see Luke 1:32). He perfectly obeyed the law of God (Gal. 4:4). He completely fulfilled numerous prophecies concerning the coming Messiah, who would shepherd God's people Israel.

The contrast is given in v.1. There Jesus mentions those who try to enter the sheepfold, not by the door, but by climbing over the walls. If someone tries to enter your house through a window or the chimney, you would have a right to be suspicious. Well, the Pharisees were not sent by God to lead Israel. They were not called of God. They were self-appointed religious leaders. They were not anointed of God to lead the people. The Pharisees were thieves inasmuch as they seized positions which they had no right to occupy, exerted an authority which did not justly belong to them, and unlawfully demanded a submission to which they could establish no valid claim.⁴ Jesus makes this clear in v.8, “All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers....” The “all” surely refers to all the scribes and Pharisees, who were here being addressed by the Lord.⁵

V.3 tells us another reason Jesus is the one the Jews should have believed in and followed.

B. The Doorkeeper Gave Him Access to Israel - The doorkeeper (porter) recognizes the rightful shepherd, and gives the shepherd access to the sheepfold.

Who is this doorkeeper? Commentator Pink says there is “no doubt” that it was John the

⁴ Jer. 5:31 says, “The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so.”

⁵ “Before” (*pro*) creates a seeming difficulty if it be interpreted chronologically, for it would make all of Jesus' predecessors to be false teachers. In order to avoid this, some grammarians have translated it “instead of,” “in the room of,” “in the name of.” Dana and Mantey defend this translation of *pro* and allude to other examples of similar translation. This view is not supported by A. T. Robertson.

Baptist. He was sent of God to prepare the way of the Lord. He introduced Jesus, the Messiah, to Israel. He said in John 1:29, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" On the other hand McGee says, "The doorkeeper is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God came upon Jesus, and everything that He did, He did by the power of the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit was opening the ears of His sheep to hear His voice."⁶ The fact is both John the Baptist and the Holy Spirit authenticated Jesus as the true shepherd sent by God.

C. He Calls His Sheep by Name - Notice in v.3 that when the shepherd comes into the sheepfold, "he calls his own sheep by name." He knows His sheep and calls His sheep out from among the other sheep. For example, in chapter 1 we read that Jesus called out to Philip and invited him to follow Him (v.43). He responded to that call and soon declared to Nathaniel, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote..." (v.45). When Jesus encountered Nathaniel, it wasn't long before Nathaniel recognized who Jesus really was and declared, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (v.49). In Matt. 9:9 we read that Jesus saw a man sitting at the tax table, named Matthew. Jesus called out to him and said, "Follow Me." Matthew arose and followed Jesus and became one of His disciples. In Lk. 19:5 Jesus called out to Zacchaeus by name and asked to eat with him. Zacchaeus received Jesus gladly and later became a disciple of Jesus. In John 20 Jesus appeared unto Mary after His resurrection near the garden tomb. At first Mary did not recognize Him. But when was it that she recognized Jesus? It was when Jesus called out to her and said, "Mary." Then, she immediately recognized His voice! So we see that Jesus knows each of us personally. God is an intimate God. He knows our names.

Even as I speak, I believe that Jesus is still calling out to those who will be His followers. As the omniscient Son of God He knows your name. Is He calling out your name today? Many times the Bible speaks of the call of God. Romans 8:30 says, "...whom He called, these He also justified." 2 Thessalonians 2:14 says that "He called you by our gospel." Will you hear our Lord's call to salvation and respond? Will you recognize His still, small voice? Well, that leads to another truth from our text:

D. God's True People Recognized Him – Jesus says in v.4, "And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice." Just as sheep recognize the voice of their own shepherd, even so the true sheep of God recognized Jesus as the Messiah and Shepherd of God's people when He came. Twice in this text He says His sheep know Him (vv. 4, 14). Christ is known experientially; known personally.

A famous actor was once the guest of honor at a social gathering where he received many requests to recite favorite excerpts from various literary works. An elderly man who happened to be there asked the actor to recite the twenty-third Psalm. The actor agreed on the condition that the elder would also recite it. The actor's recitation was beautifully intoned with great dramatic emphasis for which he received lengthy applause. The elder's voice was rough and broken, and his diction was anything but polished. But when *he* finished there was not a dry eye in the room. When someone asked the actor what made the difference, he replied, "I know the psalm, but he knows the Shepherd."

But too many in Israel failed to recognize Jesus, and they rejected Him. We should not stumble over the fact that many did not recognize Jesus as the true Shepherd, led by the leaders.

⁶ However, B. F. Westcott says, "The figure is not to be explained exclusively of the Holy Spirit or of the Father, or of Moses or of John the Baptist, but of the Spirit acting through His appointed ministers in each case."

Jesus predicted that would be the case. Prophecy predicted that the leaders of Israel and others would reject the Messiah (Psa. 118:22; Isa. 53:3).

Have you recognized in your heart that Jesus is the true Shepherd, sent by God. Do you know Jesus? I did not ask if you know *about* Jesus. Do you have a personal relationship with Him? Are you following Jesus in your daily life? The true child of God has believed in Jesus, and follows Him.

Now in v.5 there is another contrast between the good shepherd, and the false religious leaders. Jesus says, "Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." They are likened unto strangers. The true sheep of God, the true people of God, will not follow a false prophet, or false religious leader. The Spirit of God within us will let us know that they are not speaking the Word of God, but heresy and false doctrine (cf. I John 2:20). We know a true pastor by the way his voice is consistent with the voice of Jesus in His teaching. The most important test is, "What do they believe about Jesus?" A true pastor is going to have his doctrine right, especially regarding Jesus! (1 Jn. __:__).

So Jesus gives some good reasons why He is the true shepherd of God's people. But we should follow Jesus, not only because He is the true shepherd, but also because:

II. JESUS IS THE *GOOD* SHEPHERD

He says in v.11, "I am the good shepherd." Likewise in v.14 He affirms, "I am the good shepherd." The expression here (*kalos*) is the one that means good in the sense of "lovely," "noble," or "pleasing," or "beautiful" in both character and service. It is significant that God Himself is likened unto Israel's shepherd (Psa. 23:1; 80:1). The fact that Jesus is the good shepherd is just a reflection of what God is like, for God is good! (Mark 10:18).

Now there are several reasons why Jesus is truly a good shepherd:

A. Because He Laid Down His Life for You – At least 4 times Jesus in this text Jesus says that He will lay down His life for His sheep (vv.11-13, 15, 17-18). This is the most important feature of Jesus' role as shepherd. When the wolves attack, the good shepherd does not grab a lamb and throw it to the wolves. Instead, he risks his own life to save the sheep. Here Jesus is predicting that He would not only risk His life for us, but actually lay down His life for His sheep! First of all, He gave His life:

1. As a Substitutionary Sacrifice – V.11 says, "The good shepherd gives His life for (*huper*) the sheep." Also in v.15 He says, "I lay down My life for the sheep." The word translated "for" (*huper*) here means not merely on the behalf of, but in the stead of, even to the point of sacrifice.⁷ The Savior "gave His life" not merely as a martyr for the truth, not so much as a moral example of self-sacrifice, but as a substitutionary sacrifice for a people. The Good Shepherd was willing to become a sacrificial lamb. *We* deserve to die, for the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), but He died in our place. Jesus said in Mt. 20:28 that He would give His life a ransom for many.

2. As a Voluntary Sacrifice - He makes it very clear that He gave His life willingly. He says in vv.17-18, "I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." See the very ones sent to arrest Him in the Garden, and soon they are prostrate on the ground before Him (John 18:6). He could have called twelve legions of angels to deliver Him from their hand (Mt. 26:53).

⁷ Throughout the Fourth Gospel *huper* is used almost exclusively in a sacrificial context (6:51; 10:11, 15; 11:50, 51, 52; 13:37, 38; 15:13; 17:19; 18:14).

Yet He voluntarily allowed them to arrest Him and the next day laid down His life as a sacrifice for our sin.

What would motivate Jesus to die voluntarily on a cross, and suffer so much? Surely, it was His love for His sheep. There is a song that says, “When He was on the cross, I was on His mind.”

Once again, Jesus contrasts himself with others. In vv.12-13 we see they are like a hireling, who should be distinguished from the thieves and robbers, since he entered the fold as an authorized agent rather than as a marauder. A hireling doesn’t care for the sheep. He only cares for what he can get out of the sheep, primarily an income. Not owning the sheep, when the wolves come they will look out for his own self-interest and flee.⁸ He will just leave the sheep to be ravaged by the wolves. Many of the religious leaders of Jesus’ day were nothing more than hirelings, and the same in true today. May God help me to be a true pastor who cares for the sheep, and not just a hireling!

Secondly, Jesus is the good shepherd:

B. Because of What He Will Do for You – Jesus says in v.9, “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.” Now in v.9, He likens Himself to the door of the sheepfold. I will talk more about that later. For now, I want to focus on what Jesus promises in the rest of the verse. This explains why He is truly a Good Shepherd.

1. He Gives Nourishment – Jesus says in the last of v.9 that we will “find pasture.” This reminds me of Psalm 23:1, “The Lord in my Shepherd, I shall not want.” When you trust in Jesus as your Savior, He promises to provide for your needs, including your spiritual nourishment. Wherever we find people who are eager for the Word of God, we know they are His sheep. In Jesus Christ Himself all the true needs of humanity are met and satisfied.

2. He Gives Abundant Life – Jesus says in the last of v.10, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” The thief steals from you, but Jesus gives, and gives abundantly! Jesus is such a good shepherd. Psa. 23:6 says, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life....”

So Jesus is indeed the good shepherd. And since He is such a good shepherd, we should love Him. We should faithfully follow Him. You will never go wrong following Jesus.

Now there is another main truth about Jesus that is revealed in this text of Scripture and it is this:

III. JESUS IS THE DOOR

Here the illustration changes. Whereas before Jesus compared Himself to the shepherd of the sheep, now He likens Himself to the door of the sheepfold. He says in the last of v.7, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.” In v.9 He says, “I am the door....” Actually, the porter or doorkeeper was the door. He would be on guard all night, ready to protect the sheep from any danger. He slept across the doorway so that he himself was the door.

So what does it mean since Jesus calls Himself “the door”?

A. He Is the *Only* Door of Salvation - In vv.7 & 9 He does not say “a door,” as one among

⁸ In the council that was held after the raising of Lazarus, they expressed their fear of Jesus’ success. “If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation” (.11:48). Their position meant more to them than their national life, and that they valued profit above the spiritual welfare of their charges (Tenney).

many doors, but *the* door into the spiritual fold of God.⁹ Sheepfolds only had one door. This fits in with the rest of Scripture. There was one door into the ark, and one door into the Tabernacle. Jesus said in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” He is the only way to heaven! (See also Acts 4:12).

B. *All Are Invited to Enter by Him* – In v.9 Jesus said, “if *any man* enter in, he shall be saved.” None are excluded. Furthermore, Jesus said that His “fold” includes other sheep than those among the Jews. He says in v.16, “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.”¹⁰ Thus He looked beyond the borders of Palestine to those whom He will redeem to God by His blood “out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Revelation 5:9). A very great truth is proclaimed here, namely, that the flock of Christ will no longer be mostly confined to believers from among the Jews. He would save people from all over the world!

Are we as interested in “other sheep” as Jesus is? What about the sheep of other ethnic groups? Let us have a heart for God’s other sheep, invite them to Christ and our gatherings, and let’s show that God’s flock is truly one!

C. *How Then Can One Be Saved?* – There are those who believe that salvation is attained through a lifetime of work and obedience. They imagine that it is difficult. It involves a long series of rituals.

But what picture does Jesus give of salvation? It is as easy as access through a door. A “door” speaks of easy ingress and is contrasted from the high walls in which it is set. There are no difficult walls that have to be scaled before the sinner can obtain access to God. All you have to do is come to Jesus, the Door. Then by faith just step through the door. Just one step, and those on the outside are now within. Jesus promises that if you enter by Him, you “will be saved.” Remember that a door is not to be looked at and admired, but to be used! Jesus promised in John 6:37, “... the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” You don’t have to worry that Jesus will not open the door to you because you’ve sinned too much, or because you are not a Jew. All can enter the family of God and eternal life through Him!

Conclusion: Jesus is the true Shepherd. You can believe in Him with confidence. He is the good shepherd. Since He is so good, you should love Him and follow Him faithfully. Finally, Jesus is the Door to eternal life and daily nourishment. Enter while the door is still open.

[Also make an appeal to join the church; I will be happy to become your spiritual shepherd, your pastor.]

Sources: Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955); Herschel H. Hobbs *John: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965); Steve Jones (notes from his sermon on this text); Alexander Maclaren (except sermon on v.16), *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1982); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975); Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948). Unless

⁹ The Greek does have the definite article in both verses.

¹⁰ Note Christ does not here say, “other sheep I shall have,” but “other sheep I have.” They were His even then; His, because given to Him by the Father from all eternity. A parallel passage is found in Acts 18. For I have much people in this city” (vv. 9, 10) [Pink].

otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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