

JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

John 10:1-21

Key Verse: 10:11

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

In today’s passage Jesus declares, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” How precious these words are to us! What a wonderful image of Jesus they portray. So many pictures, murals, frescoes, drawings, paintings, even oriental rugs, depict the good shepherd Jesus—holding the lamb in his arms, or leading a flock of sheep to green pasture. When we think of our good shepherd Jesus, our souls find rest. Today, let’s accept Jesus as our good shepherd. Let’s learn how to be good sheep and good shepherds.

First, Jesus entered through the gate (1-2).

Look at verse 1. “I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.” Entering the sheep pen by the gate is the right way to enter. Spiritually speaking, it means to enter God’s service as a shepherd in God’s way. It is to receive God’s training and calling, and to have God’s approval. God chose Moses to deliver his people from bondage in Egypt. Before God used him, God trained him in humbleness for forty years. God chose David to be a shepherd of his people. David first received bone-crushing humbleness training for more than ten years. Then he could bear Jesus’ shepherd image and be useful to God.

The one who climbs in by some other way is the one who tries to be a shepherd without obeying God’s word or learning divine compassion for the needy. The Pharisees had positions of leadership in Israel. For this, they were willing to study night and day, and to practice rigorous religious rituals. But it was for their own glory. When God’s glory was clearly displayed, they suppressed it. When the Messiah was plainly revealed, they rejected him. They used the law to crush others. Jesus calls them thieves and robbers. They stole God’s glory for themselves and used God’s sheep for personal benefit.

Jesus entered by the gate. Jesus came in God’s way and followed God’s time schedule. Jesus was the most humble and obedient to God. Jesus came down from heaven to earth, emptying himself of all glory, honor and power to become a mere human being. Jesus always did what pleased God. Jesus obeyed the word of God to the point of death. Risking his life, Jesus revealed God’s glory through a man born blind. With great compassion, Jesus healed his life problem and gave him eternal life. In doing this, Jesus fulfilled messianic prophecy. It was clear evidence that Jesus came from God and Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus did not avoid God’s way of becoming the Messiah. Jesus went through the gate of obedience and suffering to be the Messiah. Praise Jesus.

Second, a good shepherd and his sheep (2-6).

In verses 2-6, Jesus describes the beautiful relationship of a good shepherd and his sheep. Let’s read verses 2-4. “The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and 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 them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.” The watchman has been interpreted in various ways. It may refer to John the Baptist who prepared the way for the Lord. John’s ministry as the forerunner was prophesied by God. John testified that Jesus was the promised Messiah and the Son of God.

Look at verse 3. “The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” Before the shepherd speaks, the sheep are already listening for his voice. They recognize his arrival instinctively, and they trust the watchman. Their ears are perked up and ready to hear the shepherd’s words. Then the shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. This has deep meaning.

In the first place the shepherd knows the sheep. To Hebrew people one’s name represented his entire being—his character, background, likes and dislikes, and his hidden greatness. Jesus knows all about those he calls by name. For example, the disciple Nathanael strongly desired to be a man of Biblical integrity. He found Bible verses to support whatever he thought or felt, though he often misunderstood them. No one else appreciated his sincere love for the truth; perhaps people were too sarcastic. But when Jesus saw him, Jesus said, “Here is a true Israelite in

whom there is nothing false.” Nathanael said, “How do you know me?” Nathanael felt that Jesus knew everything about him. From that time, Nathanael followed Jesus with a life commitment. The Samaritan woman said to her townspeople, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did.” After one short conversation, she was sure that Jesus knew everything about her. Still, Jesus accepted her. Jesus led her to the forgiveness of sins and to become a true worshiper of God. She became a really happy woman. Jesus understood the spirit of the man born blind. People condemned him as a sinner. But Jesus saw him from God’s point of view. Jesus saw God’s purpose for him. Jesus saw him with hope that he would be a warrior of faith who would glorify God in his own situation. And that was what he did.

Jesus knows us completely. He knows what we are thinking and what our desires are. He knows all our weaknesses and sins. Knowing this, he still loves us. Jesus sees us with hope. Jesus sees that we will become great men and women who display the glory of God. When he calls us by name, it is with great affection and deep understanding. David felt this keenly and said in Psalm 139:2,3, “You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.” We are blessed because we have a good shepherd Jesus who truly understands us. Sometimes we don’t understand each other, even among close family members. But Jesus understands each of us perfectly. Jesus is ready to give us wisdom and grace to help us in our time of need.

In the second place, the shepherd makes a personal relationship with each sheep. Though there are many sheep in the pen, Jesus does not say, “Okay, all you sheep, let’s go.” Instead he takes time to call each one by name. As Jesus calls them, Jesus claims them as his sheep. Isaiah 43:1 says, “But now, this is what the Lord says—he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.” Jesus was once passing through Jericho. He saw a short and chubby man perched in a sycamore-fig tree. Although Jesus was surrounded by people, he stopped and looked up, and said, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” Jesus called Zacchaeus by name and made a personal relationship with him. Jesus knew the heart of this man Zacchaeus. Outwardly he was a chief tax collector, a notorious public sinner. Yet Jesus knew he was ready to repent sincerely and begin a new life. Jesus saw him with great hope that he would be changed into a new creation and a blessing to others. When Jesus called Zacchaeus by name, his heart melted. He repented immediately. He became a child of God, a son of Abraham. When Jesus calls someone by name, it is the beginning of a personal relationship that leads to eternal life (Jn 17:3).

Look at verse 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.” The good shepherd leads his sheep by going on ahead of them. He does not push them from behind. He goes first. If there is danger ahead, he confronts it first. When the way is uncertain, he navigates through it until he can show them the way. Moreover, the shepherd leads sheep by example. Sheep are very interesting creatures. If they are pushed hard from behind, they become more stubborn than before. But when their shepherd goes on ahead of them, they follow very well. So Jesus always set the example for his disciples. At the Last Supper, Jesus washed his disciples’ feet. In this way, Jesus taught them how to bear with one another in their weaknesses (Jn 13:15). This remained in their minds and hearts. It became the basis on which they could unite in prayer. God used their united prayer to spread the gospel to the whole world. One concrete life example is more effective than thousands of words. There is a movie called, “To End All Wars.” It is based on the true story of British soldiers, who were Christians, in a Japanese prison camp during World War II. In that terrible situation, one prisoner gave his meager ration of food to a sick fellow prisoner day after day. In the course of time the sick prisoner recovered but his benefactor died of malnutrition. This concrete example of sacrificial Christian love inspired a radical change in the prison camp. Prisoners began to love and serve each other until it felt like the kingdom of God. One person who is willing to go on ahead and set an example can be used mightily in God’s work.

The essential element in the shepherd and sheep relationship is that the sheep recognize the shepherd’s voice and listen to him. When they hear their shepherd speak they feel loved. They know they are going in the right direction. They follow him with confidence. But when they hear a stranger’s voice, they run away. They know that the stranger does not care for them. Sheep are dumb animals in many ways. But they are experts in recognizing the shepherd’s voice. Jesus is our shepherd. We can hear Jesus’ voice through Bible study. We can help others to hear Jesus’ voice through Bible study. Many American young people need to meet Jesus. This is why we teach the word of God to students.

Jesus used the figure of speech with the religious leaders (6). He wanted to explain how they could be good shepherds in a way they could understand and accept. It is amazing that Jesus had hope for them. Jesus was so patient with them. But they could not understand what Jesus was talking about. It was because they did not know God and they did not have any idea about taking care of sheep. Still, Jesus did not give up on them. Jesus spoke to them once again.

Third, Jesus is the gate (7-10).

Look at verse 7. "Therefore, Jesus said again, 'I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep.'" Jesus changes the metaphor. Now he says he is the gate. When Jesus obeyed God's will and went through the gate, Jesus himself became the gate. Look at verse 9. "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture." Jesus is the gate because he is the way to our Father God. In the presence of our Father God we are saved. Our Father God protects us from all enemies. Our Father God provides for all of our needs. Our Father God gives us eternal life in his glorious kingdom. All the anxieties and burdens of life vanish and we have peace.

King David knew the happiness of dwelling in God's presence. So he said, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Ps 23:1-6). Through Jesus, the gate, we can dwell in the presence of God and have peace.

Fourth, Jesus is the good shepherd (11-21).

Look at verse 11. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Jesus is the good shepherd. It is because he lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is only interested in his paycheck. He cares nothing for the sheep. If he sees a wolf, he runs away quickly. Though the precious sheep are devoured by the wolf, he is indifferent; he can still sleep well that night. He does not care about the sheep. But Jesus is different. Jesus loves and values the sheep so much that he will lay down his life for the sheep. When the devil came to attack people and to take us to hell for eternal condemnation, Jesus did not run away. Jesus stayed and fought the battle for us. Jesus fought by shedding his holy blood on the cross for us. Jesus gave his life as a ransom sacrifice for our sins. Jesus gave his life so that we might live. Whoever believes in the death and resurrection of Jesus has eternal life and will not be condemned. Thank you Jesus.

When we follow Jesus we must learn the shepherd heart of Jesus. We must become shepherds like Jesus who can sacrifice for the salvation of others. One missionary has been fully dedicated to building a new Bible house at UIC. To do this, he turned his fellowship over to an American shepherd. But this missionary's compassion for his sheep did not stop burning. To help one person, he decided to give his heart, time, and even his life. There is an exemplary woman missionary. Her American boy sheep was struggling with a girlfriend problem. She prayed for him with tears and taught the Bible to him without ceasing, never failing to rebuke his sinsickness and to challenge him to repent. She bore much pain and misunderstanding. But finally her Bible student repented with many tears and has become a new creation in Christ Jesus. Likewise, we must all grow in the shepherd heart of Jesus. We must grow in the love of Christ until we can lay down our lives for others.

Look at verse 16. "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd." Here "other sheep" refer to the Gentiles. Jesus saw that the Gentiles would also come to God through him. It happens as they listen to his word. There are many different peoples and nations in the world. We all have different personalities. But as we listen to Jesus' word we become like him in spirit. We become one with him. And we can become one with each other. Yesterday we heard a beautiful vocal solo by Missionary Happy Maria Park from Bonn, Germany. It was rich in quality, befitting the musical tradition of Bonn. When she sang about Jesus, we could feel the same spirit with her. We have the same Savior and Lord Jesus Christ as she does. Someday there will not be any more barriers between people. We will all be one flock with one shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus has sheep in Muslim countries. They are waiting to hear his voice and join his flock. Jesus has sheep in North Korea who are waiting to hear his voice and join his flock. Jesus sees the vision of world salvation

through the proclamation of his word. We must earnestly pray and as God moves our hearts, go out to the nations of the world as Bible-teaching missionaries.

Jesus is our good shepherd. Jesus laid down his life for us. When we listen to his voice and follow him he leads us to salvation and eternal life. Let's be good sheep who listen to Jesus. Let's grow in his shepherd heart for others and his vision for one flock under one shepherd.