

JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

John 10:1-21

Key Verse: 10b-11

“... I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

King David was called the shepherd king. He knew the Good Shepherd. And he wrote about the Good Shepherd in Psalm 23: **“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake. Yea, 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 runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”**

The Lord, who was David’s shepherd, is also our shepherd. He was the shepherd of a man born blind in John 9. He led this man into a life-giving relationship with God. He wanted to be a good shepherd even to the Pharisees who sought to kill him. As we study this chapter, may we grow in our relationship with Jesus, the Good Shepherd. May we hear his voice and follow him into an abundant life.

Part one, a parable about the shepherd and his sheep (1-5).

Look at 10:1-5. **“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. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 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. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.”**

Sheep may seem dumb, but one thing they know - they know the shepherd’s voice. During the Palestinian uprising in the late 1980s the Israel army decided to punish a village near Bethlehem for not paying its taxes. The officer in command rounded up all of the village sheep and placed them in a large barbed-wire pen -

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the size of a football field. Later in the week an old woman came. She begged him to let her have her 25 sheep back. Her husband was dead and her sheep was her only source of livelihood. The officer pointed to the pen containing more than a thousand sheep and laughed. "You must be joking." How can you find your 25 sheep in this football field full of sheep? I can't give you back your sheep because I can't find them." She asked that if she could identify and separate them herself, would he be willing to let her take them? He agreed. A soldier opened the gate and the woman's little son went in and walked through the flock. He pulled out a reed flute and began to play a quiet little song. He played the simple tune again and again, and soon sheep heads began popping up all over the pen. The young boy continued his music and walked home, followed by his flock of twenty-five sheep.

Sheep need a shepherd. They are near-sighted; as they graze, they don't pay attention to where they are going. Sometimes they stray away from the flock; sometimes they fall in a crevice. And the shepherd looks for the lost one and pulls it to safety. They are very fearful so they stay together. They are afraid of flowing streams and won't go near turbulent water. Because they can't see so well they listen attentively for the shepherd's voice.

In John 9 Jesus showed himself to be the Good Shepherd for one sorrowful man born blind. He healed this man's blind eyes on the Sabbath day. The Pharisees, who were the shepherds of Israel, were not thankful. The work of God was displayed in a man's life; The Pharisees refused to see the work of God. They tried to discredit and even kill Jesus saying, "He broke the Sabbath Law." They tried to push this sorrowful beggar back into his fatalistic box by saying, **"You were steeped in sin at birth. How dare you teach us!"** The Pharisees were like the false shepherds described in Ezekiel 34: **"Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves!...You do not take care of the flock..."**

The Good Shepherd risked his life to help this man. The man born blind recognized the voice of the shepherd and followed Jesus. He stood on the side of truth and was cast out of the synagogue. When he was lonely and sorrowful, the Good Shepherd found him, opened his spiritual eyes and gave him new life. Verse 6 says: **"Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them."** Jesus wanted to heal the Pharisees from their spiritual blindness. He wanted even the Pharisees to know him and find life (1 Ti 2:4). So he addressed this parable to "You Pharisees." He rebuked in love.

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Part two, “I am the good shepherd” (7-13).

Jesus is the Good Shepherd because of who he is and what he did. Who is Jesus? John’s Gospel contains seven “**I AM**” claims of Jesus which point to his deity and to his unique character as the Messiah. This passage contains two of them: “**I am the Good Shepherd**” and “**I am the Gate.**” The “**I AM**” has its roots in Exodus 3, when God identified himself to Moses as the “**I AM,**” YHWH, translated, “The Lord.” Jesus is the Lord God. He is the Messiah, Son of man, Son of God, descendant of King David, and the Good Shepherd.

(1) The Good Shepherd comes in by the gate.

There were two kinds of sheep pens. The first kind was a communal sheep pen. When the weather was cold, several shepherds brought their sheep in from grazing in the open fields to the town to find shelter for the night. Several flocks of sheep slept together in one huge sheep pen. A watchman would guard the gate. When morning came, the shepherd comes. The watchman opens the door. The shepherd knows his sheep. He calls them out and goes before them and they follow him.

Shepherd Jesus came in through the gate which was opened by the gate keeper. God himself prepared the way. The prophets point to Jesus the Messiah. His Messianic work confirms it. He is the one who would heal the sick, make the lame walk, and open the eyes of the blind (Isa 35). Ezekiel (34) looks forward to the time when God himself would come to shepherd his people. He wrote, “**This is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘I, myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down., I will search for the lost and bring back the strays....I will place over them one Shepherd, my servant David; he will tend them and be their Shepherd. I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be Prince among them.’**” Jesus fulfilled this prophecy. He is the Shepherd of God’s flock. God sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for his coming. When John baptized Jesus, the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus and God the Father announced, “**This is my Son, whom I love.**” John was used by God to preach repentance and open the gates of peoples’ hearts to Jesus who forgives our sins.

The one who does not enter by the gate, but by some other way is either a rustler or a predator. He does not enter to take care of the sheep. The rustler wants to steal the sheep. The Pharisees wanted money or power or leadership or recognition. They wanted something for themselves. A bear or wolf or hungry

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predator comes to kill and steal and destroy. The one who comes with selfish motives belongs to the Evil One, who was a liar and murderer from the beginning (Jn 8:44).

(2) Jesus the Good Shepherd is the Gate (7-10a).

Jesus came in by the gate and he is the Gate. Look at verses 7-17. **“Therefore Jesus said again, ‘Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.’”**

In 1977, a young optometrist went to Afghanistan to do what he could to give sight to the blind eyes of the poorest of the poor. At that time the country was peaceful and its borders were open. Then Russia invaded and there was a war followed by Russian occupation; then a take-over by the Taliban. Dr. Little stayed through it all. He ministered to the blind and near-blind. In August 2010, he and his team were massacred by the Taliban. President Obama awarded him the 2010 Medal of Freedom.

The president said: “An optometrist from New York, Tom Little could have pursued a lucrative career. Instead, he guided - he was guided by his faith and he set out to heal the poorest of the poor in Afghanistan. For 30 years, amid invasion and civil war, the terror of the Taliban, the spread of insurgency, he...helped bring to Afghans, literally, the miracle of sight. Last summer, Tom and his team of doctors and nurses were ambushed and senselessly murdered. Today, we remember and honor Dr. Tom Little - a humanitarian in the truest sense of the word; a man who not only dedicated his life to others, but who lived that lesson of Scripture: **‘Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.’**” Dr. Little laid down his life for the blind sheep.

The shepherd is the gate. In Jesus’ day, there was another kind of sheep pen. It was used in the countryside. It was a rough circle of rocks piled up to be a wall, with a small opening. The shepherd would bring his sheep there at night. Since there was no door or gate, the shepherd would sleep in the opening, literally becoming the door to keep sheep in and predators out. Jesus the Good Shepherd

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said, **“I am the Gate.”** The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. By his death on the cross and resurrection Jesus became the Gate to eternal life, forgiveness of sins, and the kingdom of heaven for all who put their trust in him. He is the only way. He said, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me.”** Acts 4:12 says: **“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”**

The hired hand is another kind of shepherd. He doesn't seem so bad. He is not a thief or a robber. He takes the sheep to pasture and to streams of cool water. He looks like a shepherd and acts like a shepherd. But he is basically selfish. He cannot lay down his life for the sheep. Look at verses 12-13. **“The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”** He is okay in ordinary times, but when the time of crisis comes, he runs away.

One lady spoke about her life of living mission in a country controlled by fanatic Muslims, a country at war. Bombs and rockets were falling. An invasion was imminent. She prepared to leave with her children; her husband, if he survived, would come later. But her daughter asked, “What about Daddy?” She said, “The angels will take care of Daddy.” She said, “I want to stay with Daddy and the angels.” So they all stayed. They became “the people who stayed.” Many hearts were opened to the message of the gospel. Only by grace and with the help of God can anyone be a shepherd and not a hired hand who runs away, Jesus will never leave or forsake me. No matter what happens, he is there.

(3) Jesus is the Good Shepherd (10b-13).

Look at verses 10b-11. **“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”** The Good Shepherd gives abundant life, life to the full. It is union with Christ, a vine and branch relationship with Jesus. He promised, **“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him”** (Jn 14:23). The abundant life Jesus promises is a life of freedom, satisfaction and security. Jesus says: **“I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture.”** Here, there is peace that the world cannot offer (Jn 14:27); there is joy

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that the world cannot take away; there is love that the world cannot know. Jesus wants us to have such life, not just survival, but life abundant, full and overflowing life.

How does Jesus give us such life? He died for us. He rose from the dead. He is alive and he dwells in my heart. My sins are forgiven. He leads us and guides us through his voice. We hear his voice through personal Bible study, prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Sheep know the voice of the Shepherd. The man born blind recognized Jesus' voice. He did not listen to the Pharisees. He listened to Jesus' voice. It was the voice of love and hope and deep understanding. It was the voice of healing. He held on to the truth until he knew Jesus and had life eternal. He knew him and worshiped him. To "know" implies an intimate personal relationship. It is different than to "know about." Jesus said in John 17 that eternal life is to know the Father and to know Jesus the Son.

The Good Shepherd knows the sheep. He knows their needs and their wounds and their hearts. Jesus knew that the man born blind was bound with the chains of fatalism. Everyone, including the blind man himself, thought that he was blind because of some sin for which he was being punished. No way out. But Jesus told him that it was not because someone sinned, God wants to display his own work, his love and power and mercy in your life. So hope and vision was born in his heart. The Good Shepherd knows the sheep by name. Each one is different. The Good Shepherd knows the character and needs, the weaknesses and strengths, the sins and failures and victories of each one. He loves them. He knows them because he created them. There is a relationship of love that binds the sheep and Shepherd together. This union with Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit. He knows my name - everything about me and loves me anyway. The Good Shepherd knows your name too. He loves you and he died for you. He invites all of us to hear his voice, come into his sheep pen and have abundant life. Are you listening to his voice?

Part three, the Shepherd, the sheep and the Father (14-18).

(1)The Good Shepherd has a life-giving relationship with the Father and with his sheep. Read John 10:14-15,17-18. **"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me - just as the Father knows me and I know the Father - and I lay down my life for the sheep....The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life - only to take it up again. No one takes it from me,**

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but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.” Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross was by his own decision. God did not make him do it. It was done in love for God. And God raised him from the dead. Jesus loved God. He trusted God, and his sacrifice was for God. The Father’s command could be obeyed or disobeyed. God loved and trusted Jesus. God had no plan “B.” Jesus loved God and did his will. And we inherit eternal life. I am Jesus’ sheep - not because I have done anything to deserve being Jesus’ sheep but because he died on the cross for me.

(2) Other sheep not of this sheep pen (16). The Good Shepherd said, **“I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd”** (Jn 10:16). Jesus spoke of other sheep. Perhaps he is thinking of the Gentile world. Perhaps he is thinking of the whole world where people are waiting to hear the news that God loves them. David Livingston, the man God used to open Africa to Christ is buried in Westminster Abbey in London. On his tomb is written: “Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; Them also I must bring.” And he did. All these other sheep, if they are Jesus’ sheep, are my brothers and sisters. We follow the same Good Shepherd and listen to the same voice, so we are one flock with one Shepherd. Jesus prayed that all of his disciples might be one as the Father and Son are one. He commanded us to love one another. He is ready to come and dwell in our heads so that we can do so. His indwelling presence in our hearts is the abundant life, life to the full which he promised.

In verses 19-21 peoples’ responses to the Good Shepherd were divided. **Many said, “He’s demon possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?” Others said, “These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”** C.S. Lewis said that Jesus is not just a good man and a great moral teacher. He is either a liar or a lunatic or he is telling the truth. He is God. The man born blind said it: **“If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”** He said to Jesus, **“Lord, I believe,”** and he worshiped him.

By grace alone I am Jesus’ sheep and he is my Shepherd. I am his sheep for whom he died. So my salvation is sure. My loving Shepherd is Jesus who said, **“Follow me.”** He wants me to grow in his image by listening to his voice. He wants to lead me to live a full and abundant life, the life that is life indeed. The Good Shepherd says, **“I am the Good Shepherd. I have come that [you] may have life and have it to the full”** (10b-11).