

John: sermon #11
The Good Shepherd and his sheep
(John chapter 10)

Introduction

John 9 ends with chilling words from Jesus directed toward the Pharisees who excommunicated the formerly blind beggar from the synagogue: “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind” (verse 39). The Pharisees objected: “What? Are we blind too?” Jesus answered with another warning: “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.”

Jesus’ dialogue with the Pharisees in chapter 10 turns into a monologue—a sermon where Jesus uses the analogy of leaders as shepherds. He contrasts his good leadership with the corrupt leadership of the Pharisees and other leaders of the Jewish religion. In doing so Jesus makes three declarations concerning his own identity and his relationship with his followers. Using the shepherding metaphor, he declares himself to be “*the gate*” and “*the good shepherd*”; and then he also declares himself to be “*the Son of God*.”

1. “I am the gate” (10:1–10)

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. ² The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. 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. 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. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."

6 Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. 7 Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

In first century Jewish thinking any leader, spiritual or political, was thought of as a *shepherd*. They looked on the kings and the prophets of Israel as shepherds of God's 'flock' (Psa. 100:3). And so Jesus makes his point about good leadership and bad leadership using the imagery of sheep and shepherds. He mentions first a sheep pen which in those days was usually an enclosure made of rocks, with an opening called a "gate." The watchman would guard the flock penned within the enclosure at night by lying across the opening (and thus creating a closed 'gate'). **It was not unusual for several flocks to be penned in together. In the morning, the shepherds of each flock would come, call their sheep, and assemble their own flocks. Each sheep recognized his own master's voice.**

The true shepherd comes in through the gate, and the watchman recognizes him. The thieves and robbers could never enter through the gate, so they have to climb over the wall and enter the pen through deception. But even if they did get in, they would never get the sheep to follow them, for the sheep follow only the voice of their own shepherd. The false shepherds can never *lead* the sheep, so they must *steal* them away.

The occasion for this monologue from Jesus was the excommunication of the beggar from the synagogue (9:34). The false shepherds of Israel (the corrupt religious leaders) did not care for this man; instead, they mistreated him and threw him out. But Jesus, the true Shepherd, came to him and took him in (9:35–38). In Jesus' sermon the sheep pen represents the nation of Israel (10:16) and the Gentiles are the "other sheep" not of the sheep pen of Israel.

When Jesus came to the nation of Israel, he came the appointed way, just as the Scriptures promised. Every true shepherd must be

called of God and sent by God. If he truly speaks God's word, the sheep will "hear his voice" and not be afraid to follow him. The true shepherd will love the sheep and care for them.

Since the people did not understand his symbolic language, Jesus followed the illustration with an *application* (10:7–10). Twice he said, "I am the gate." He is the gate of the sheep pen and makes it possible for the sheep to *leave* the pen (the religion of Judaism) and to *enter* his flock. The Pharisees *threw* the beggar out of the synagogue, but Jesus *led* him out of Judaism and into the flock of God.

But the shepherd does not stop with leading the sheep out; he also leads them *in*. They become a part of the "one flock" which is his church. He is the gate of salvation (10:9). Those who trust him enter into the Lord's flock and fold, and they have the wonderful privilege of going "in and out" and finding pasture. When you keep in mind that the shepherd actually was the "gate" of the fold, this image becomes very real.

As the gate, Jesus delivers sinners from bondage and leads them into freedom. They have salvation. This word "saved" means "delivered safe and sound." The word was commonly used to say that a person had recovered from severe illness, come through a bad storm, survived a war, or was acquitted at court.

The "thieves and robbers" Jesus is referring to here are the religious leaders of his day. They were not true shepherds nor did they have the approval of God on their ministry. **They did not love the sheep**, but instead exploited them and abused them. The blind beggar was a good example of what the "thieves and robbers" could do.

Jesus, the true shepherd came to save the sheep, but the false shepherds take advantage of the sheep and exploit them. Behind these false shepherds is "the thief" (10:10), probably a reference to Satan. The thief wants to steal the sheep from the fold, slaughter them, and destroy them. We will see later that the sheep are safe in the hands of the true shepherd and the Father (10:27–29).

When you go through "the gate," you receive life and are saved. As you go "in and out," you enjoy *abundant* life in the rich pastures of the Lord. His sheep enjoy fullness and freedom.

Jesus not only gave his life *for* us, but he gives his life *to* us right now.

The emphasis in this first section is on “*the gate.*” Our Lord then shifted the emphasis to “*the shepherd*” and made a second declaration.

2. “I am the good shepherd” (10:11–21)

¹¹ "I am the good shepherd..."

This is the fourth of our Lord’s I AM statements in John’s Gospel (6:35; 8:12; 10:9). **Certainly in making this statement, he is contrasting himself to the false shepherds who were in charge of the Jewish religion of that day. The word translated “good” means “intrinsically good, beautiful, and fair.” It describes that which is the ideal, the model that others may safely imitate. Our Lord’s goodness was inherent in his nature. To call him “good” is the same as calling him “God” (Mark 10:17–18).**

Jesus then goes on to point out **four special ministries that he performs as the Good Shepherd**, contrasting himself with the false shepherds who were accusing him and abusing God’s people:

1. *Jesus dies for his sheep (vv. 11–13)*

¹¹ "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns 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. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd dies for the sheep! Five times in this sermon, Jesus clearly affirmed the sacrificial nature of his death (10:11, 15, 17–18). He did not die as a martyr, killed by men; he died as a substitute, willingly laying down his life for his followers (and note that other scripture, such as John 6:51, tells us that he laid it down for the whole world).

Jesus contrasted himself to the ‘hired hand’ who watches over the sheep only because he is paid to do so. But when there is danger, the hired hand runs away, while the true shepherd stays and cares for the flock. The key phrase is “the hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep.” **The Good Shepherd *purchases the sheep* and they are his because he died for them. They belong to him, and he cares for them. By nature, sheep are prone to get into danger; and they need a shepherd to care for them.**

Throughout the Bible, God’s people are compared to sheep; and the comparison is a good one. Sheep are defenseless and need the care of the shepherd (Ps. 23). They are, to use Wesley’s phrase, “prone to wander,” and must often be searched for and brought back to the fold (Luke 15:3–7). Sheep are peaceful animals, useful to the shepherd. In these and other ways, they picture those who have trusted Jesus Christ and are a part of God’s flock. The Pharisees, in contrast to the Good Shepherds, had no loving concern for the beggar, so they put him out of the synagogue. Jesus found him and cared for him.

2. Jesus knows his sheep (vv. 14–15)

14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father— and I lay down my life for the sheep.

In the Gospel of John, the word *know* means much more than intellectual awareness. It speaks of an intimate relationship between God and his people (John 17:3). The Shepherd knows his sheep personally by *name* and therefore knows best how to minister to them.

Our Lord knows our ***names*** (John 10:3). He knew Simon (1:42) and even gave him a new name. He called Zaccheus by name (Luke 19:5); and when He spoke Mary’s name in the garden, she recognized her Shepherd (John 20:16). **How comforting it is to know that the Good Shepherd knows each of his sheep by name.**

He also knows our *natures*. While all sheep are alike in their essential nature, each sheep has its own distinctive characteristics; and the loving shepherd recognizes these traits.

One sheep may be afraid of high places, another of dark shadows. A faithful shepherd will consider these special needs as he tends the flock.

Because He knows our natures, he also knows our needs. Often, we do not even know our own needs! Psalm 23 is a beautiful poetic description of how the Good Shepherd cares for his sheep. In the pastures, by the waters, and even through the valleys, the sheep need not fear, because the shepherd is caring for them and meeting their needs.

As the shepherd cares for the sheep, the sheep get to know their shepherd better. The Good Shepherd knows his sheep and his sheep know him. **They get to know him better by listening to his voice (the Word) and experiencing his daily care. As the sheep follow the Shepherd, they learn to love and to trust him. He loves “his own”** (John 13:1) and shows that love in the way he cares for them.

3. Jesus brings other sheep into his flock (v. 16)

16 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.

The “sheep pen” here is Judaism (John 10:1), but there is another pen—that of the Gentiles (Eph. 2:11ff). In our Lord’s early ministry, he concentrated on the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5–6; 15:24–27). The people converted at Pentecost were Jews and Jewish proselytes (Acts 2:5, 14), but the church was not to remain a “Jewish flock.” Peter took the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10–11) and Paul carried the message to the Gentiles in the far reaches of the Roman Empire (Acts 13:1ff).

Jewish and Gentile Christians constitute the ‘one flock’—the one people of God who belong to the one Good Shepherd. God has these people all over this world (Acts 18:1–11), and calls them together to be one people. The missionary message is clear, because “God so loved the world” (3:16), we are to follow Jesus and work against any exclusivist approach like that of the Jewish religious leaders. Jesus died for a lost world, and his desire is that his people reach out to a lost world across all boundaries with the message of eternal life.

4. Jesus takes up His life again (vv. 17–21)

17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, 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."

19 At these words the Jews were again divided. 20 Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?" 21 But others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

Jesus' voluntary death was followed by his victorious resurrection. From the human point of view, it appeared that Jesus was executed; but from the divine point of view, he laid down his life willingly. **When Jesus cried on the cross, "It is finished!" he then voluntarily yielded up his spirit to the Father (19:30). Three days later, he voluntarily took up his life again and arose from the dead. The Father gave him this authority in love.**

Sometimes the Scriptures teach that it was the Father who raised the Son (Acts 2:32; Rom. 6:4; Heb. 13:20). Here, the Son stated that he had authority to take up his life again. Both are true, for the Father and the Son worked together in perfect harmony (5:17, 19). In a previous sermon, Jesus had hinted that he had power to raise himself from the dead (5:26). Of course, this was a claim that the Jews would protest; because it was tantamount to saying "I am God!"

How did the listeners respond to this message? There was a division among them" (10:19). The old accusation that Jesus was a demoniac was hurled at him again. People will do almost anything to avoid facing the truth!

Since Jesus is "the gate," we would expect a division, because a gate lets some in and keeps others out. He is the Good Shepherd, and the shepherd must separate the sheep from the goats. It is impossible to be neutral about Jesus Christ; for, what we believe about him is a matter of life or death (8:24).

Next Jesus gives a third declaration—the most startling of all.

3. "I am God's Son" (10:22–42)

22 Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter...

Here John clues us in as to the passage of time. The events in this section occurred some two and a half months after those described in verses 1–21, but Jesus continues to use the sheep-shepherd analogy in his teaching. The occasion here was the Feast of the Dedication (Hanukkah or the Feast of Lights). It occurs in December and commemorates the rededication of the temple by Judas Maccabeus in 164 BC after it had been desecrated by the Romans. This historical fact may bear a relationship to the words of Jesus in verse 36, for he had been set apart (dedicated) by the Father and sent into the world. The Jewish leaders were celebrating a great event in history yet passing by a great opportunity right in their own temple.

1. The encounter (vv. 23–24)

23 and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. 24 The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

The leaders surrounded Jesus in the temple so that he had to stop and listen to them. They had decided that **it was time for a “showdown”** and they did not want him to evade the issue any longer. “How long will you keep us in suspense?” they kept saying to him. “Tell us plainly—are you the Messiah?”

2. The explanation (vv. 25–42)

25 Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, 26 but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. 27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."

31 Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, 32 but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the

Father. For which of these do you stone me?" 33 "We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God."

34 Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'? 35 If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be broken—36 what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'? 37 Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. 38 But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father."

39 Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp. 40 Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days. Here he stayed 41 and many people came to him. They said, "Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true." 42 And in that place many believed in Jesus.

Jesus reminded them of what he had already taught them, emphasizing the witness of his *words* (“I told you”) and of his *works* (“the miracles I do”). But now Jesus went deeper in his explanation, revealing *why* these leaders did not understand his words or works: they were not his sheep.

From the human standpoint, we become Jesus’ sheep by believing; but from the divine standpoint, we believe because we are his sheep. There is a mystery here concerning God’s sovereignty in election and human decision/response; but the point is clear: God’s sheep are safe and secure in his care: “They shall never perish—no one can snatch them out of my hand” is Jesus’ promise (verse 28, also 3:16; 6:39; 17:12; 18:9). Jesus’ followers are secure in their salvation—not because of the perfection of their works, but because of the sovereign election of God and the Good Shepherd’s perfect love and care.

Here we note Jesus’ threefold relationship to his sheep:

1. He has a *loving* relationship with them because he died for them
2. He has a *living* relationship with them because he cares for them
3. He has a *lasting* relationship with them for he keeps them safe and not one is lost

Our Lord made a statement that he knew would startle his enemies and give them more reason to oppose him (10:30). It was the “plain answer” that the religious leaders had asked for. “I and the Father are one.” This is an unambiguous claim to deity. This was even stronger than his statement that he had come down from heaven (John 6) or that he existed before Abraham ever lived (John 8:58).

The Jewish leaders understood what Jesus was claiming. And such a claim was, to them, utter blasphemy, which according to Jewish law was punishable by death (Lev. 24:16; Num. 15:30ff; Deut. 21:22). Jesus cleverly used Psalm 82:6 to momentarily refute their accusation. The picture in Psalm 82 is of a court where God assembles the judges of the earth to warn them that they too will one day be judged. The Hebrew word translated ‘gods’ in that verse is *elohim* which can also be translated “god” (little ‘g’) or “judges.” It is also one of the Old Testament names for God. Jesus’ point was that if God called human judges “gods,” why should they stone him for applying the same title to himself? It was not yet time for Jesus to die and so once again, Jesus slips their tightening noose.

John 10:36 is crucial because it gives a double affirmation of the deity of Jesus. First, the Father sanctified (set apart) the Son and sent him into the world, and second, as Jesus stated boldly, “I am God’s Son” (see also John 5:25). He gave them the “plain answer” they asked for, but they would not believe it.

Could these religious leaders have believed Jesus’ assertion? **Jesus invited them, even urged them to believe, if only on the basis of his miracles (10:37–38). If they would believe the miracles, then they would know the Father, and that would open the way for them to know the Son and believe in him. It was simply a matter**

of examining the evidence honestly and being willing to accept the truth. But they would have none of it. Once again, they tried to arrest him (7:44; 8:59), but he escaped and left the area completely. He did not return again to Jerusalem until Palm Sunday when he presented himself as Israel's king.

Jesus went to where John the Baptist had ministered on the other side of the Jordan River, perhaps eighteen to twenty miles from Jerusalem. Why there? For one thing, it was a safe retreat; the Jewish religious leaders were not likely to follow him there. Also, it was a good place to prepare for his final week of public ministry when he would lay down his life for the sheep. As he remembered his own baptism by John in that vicinity, and all that he had experienced at that particular time as his public ministry began (Matt. 3:13–17; John 1:20–34), it must have fortified him for the suffering that he knew lay ahead.

The common people continued to seek Jesus, and he continued to minister to them. It is worth noting that John the Baptist's witness was still bearing fruit long after he was dead. His witness to Jesus Christ led many to trust the Savior.

Conclusion

Let's know through a personal study and self examination that we have responded to our Lord's three great declarations recorded in John chapter 10.

Let each one of us know that Jesus is the *gate*, and by personal prayer and study know we have "entered in" by faith into Jesus' flock and are saved.

Let each one of us know that Jesus is the *good shepherd*. We have heard his voice through personal Bible study and trust him. We now follow him. We know that we are safe and secure in his hands.

Let each one of us know that Jesus is *God's Son*. He is our *living savior* and we have given ourselves to him as to God and received his gift of eternal life.

Sermon Series is provided by Ted Johnston via the Senior Pastor Team of Tom and Alberta Ecker to assist ... Bible studies in series covering a book of the Bible.

This issue continues a series in the gospel of John with material from *The Bible Expository Commentary* by Warren Wiersbe, *The New Bible Commentary*, *The Parable of Joy* by Michael Card, and *The Gospel of John* by F.F. Bruce.

Note: Bold script above covered in Worship Services.