

39. The True Shepherd and His sheep

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John 10 focuses on the image of sheep, sheepfolds, and shepherds. These images Jesus uses in chapter 10 of John may not click to the 21st Century American mind-sets right away, it sure did in the minds of the Jewish people at that time who wanted to know the truth. To understand the true meaning, we have to keep their culture in the back of our minds while we keep the whole texts in context.

Chapter 10 obviously follows chapter 9 in text. It also follows chapter 9 in terms of thought. There is no break between chapter 9 and chapter 10 in the original manuscripts. There's no change in circumstance. Jesus continues to speak to the very same people He was speaking to in chapter 9.

In chapter 9, the high and mighty Pharisees threw the man who was born blind but now he was healed by the Lord Jesus, out of their synagogue which pretty much ended his social and economic life, because he dared to stand against their pious selfish greedy hearts. Then, Jesus found him and revealed His true Messiah identity to this man. Some Pharisees jumped in the conversation between Jesus and this man just to get another blow in their pride.

Jesus spoke to the Pharisees about light and darkness, but now He changed the image to that of the shepherd and the sheep. Why? Because to the Jewish mind, a "shepherd" was a type of spiritual or political leader. People looked on the king and prophets as shepherds in the OT. Israel was privileged to be "the flock of the Lord" as it is mentioned in Psalm 100, Isaiah 56, Jeremiah 23 and 25, Ezekiel 34, and Zechariah 11.

This morning we are going to cover the first 10 verses of chapter 10. This portion divides into two sections: the first half from v1 through 6 and the second from v7 through 10. The first section is in the town setting and the second in the countryside setting. The first section is the shepherd gathering his flock and the second is the shepherd guarding his flock.

A. HE GATHERS HIS SHEEP

John 10:1-6 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." 6 Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.

This is a town sheepfold which is located in the middle of the town or near by it. Several shepherds would bring their flocks at the end of the day to keep them overnight in this community enclosure.

A shepherd would lineup his sheep to enter this sheepfold. His rod kept each sheep from entering and the shepherd would inspect each sheep after looking through its fur and making sure they were no scratches or no parasites that would infect the rest of the flock. He would lift his rod and the sheep would go under the rod and then he put it back down again to inspect the next one and next.

In the morning, it's time to take them out of the village and out to the countryside to feed them in pastures. The doorkeeper recognizes the shepherd and opens the door to the sheepfold.

Some would say that this sheepfold represents 'heaven' or 'church'. I have a serious problem with either interpretation. Did you notice what the Scripture said in v1?

John 10:1 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber."

No thief and robber will be able to climb into heaven. There is no evil in heaven and no man can make one's way to heaven whatsoever. Besides, God will not let anyone lead His people out of heaven or church.

"So what is it, preacher?" you may wonder. I am glad you asked. The sheepfold represents Judaism that has kept God's people safe until the Messiah could come. In case you may wonder how I got that, go down to v16, please.

John 10:16 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.

Note those two words, "other sheep"? It means the Gentiles, the church will be born in Jerusalem but spread out all over to Gentile world.

So who is this shepherd? Through many references from the OT, we can easily tell that it is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Good and True Shepherd for His sheep.

There are three things Jesus does as the Shepherd:

1) He comes to His sheep the right way.

While a thief and robber climbs up some other way, the Shepherd enters through the door. These legalistic Pharisees were the sheep thieves and robbers to steal, kill, and to destroy for their own selfish gain, but Jesus would not.

Ezekiel 34:2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?"

We still have spiritual thieves and robbers today. They often are on TV and radio programs with their ear-pleasing heresies for their own monetary gain.

Jesus came after over 300 Messianic prophecies in the OT – where He would be born, what He would do for Israel and mankind, etc. Apostle Paul echoes this in his epistle, the Book of Galatians:

Galatians 4:4-5 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

2) He calls His sheep the right way.

John 10:3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

Remember that this town sheepfold is a community property that contains many flocks of sheep. Shepherds cannot tell one sheep from another by looking at them unless he dyed his sheep wool coats in different color. So how does the shepherd separate his sheep from others? Each shepherd's voice has unique pitch that calls his flock. And his sheep know his voice.

Can you recognize your Shepherd Jesus' voice? The more you study this Word of God, the more familiar His voice is going to be. This Bible is His voice.

I just love what this verse says, "he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out". Did you get that? Our Maker Lord Jesus knows our names individually. Not only that, but He also knows every thought we have before we even have that very thought. Scary, huh?

All people love to be called by their names, because it is their own identity, even if someone might have the exact same name. But the majority of them have one common excuse when it comes to other people's names, "I am not very good at remembering names." Really? Would you remember a person's name if he is going to give you two million dollars in cash a year from today? You think? You will even remember his dog's name. So why do people not remember that person's name? Because that person's name is not very important to them. Let's be honest.

At the beginning of my pastoral ministry which started in 1992 as a lay pastor for a prison ministry in Arizona State Prison Wilmot Complex, the Lord spoke to me, "These are the inmates whom the society does not want to remember. But you remember them by name as I do."

I still do that with you all. If you've been coming to our church more than one time and you filled out the information card, I remember your name. This is not a bragging session, please. Don't take it wrong. But consider it as an example for you to follow as I follow the Lord Jesus. It is not because I have a tremendous memory capability. You have no idea how many times I forget things in a day. It is beyond pathetic.

3) He leads His sheep the right way.

John 10:4 And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

If you are familiar with ranch living in America, you know how to herd the cattle you have. You DRIVE them with whistles, shouts, and your horse. My extension of herding cattle stops at watching the TV series "Rawhide" when I was a kid.

But the Israel style is leading by the shepherd. He goes out first, the sheep follow. The shepherd makes sure that it is the right path. He leads them to the place of green pastures and still waters. Even though we may go through the valley of the shadow of death, we don't need to fear, because our Good Shepherd is with us. That is Jesus' style.

Some of you may have a reservation or two in following Jesus without knowing what is ahead. You cannot see the future, but He can. Trust the all knowing God for your unknown future. If Jesus Christ is indeed your Shepherd in leading your life, then trust Him; if He is leading you out of something, it is because He wants to lead you into something else.

Some of us don't want to be led by the Lord very well. We often dig our heels in and thinking that we can persuade the Lord into our way. There are other Greek words for that: FAT CHANCE!

Maybe Jesus is leading some of you out of a bad and sinful relationship, it's because He's leading you into His way. Maybe He's leading you out of false doctrines

because He's leading you into His way. Maybe He's leading you out of a bad business partnership or practice, it's because He's leading you into His way. Trust the direction and the lead of your Shepherd Jesus.

In v6 we find that these Pharisees still didn't get it, because they chose to be spiritually blind for their pride and carnal desires. Jesus' truth is revealed to the ones who seek it, but at the same time it is concealed if others choose not to seek it.

B. HE GUARDS HIS SHEEP

John 10:7-10 Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

Some of you might be confused by now. You are wondering, "Is Jesus changing His metaphors from 'Shepherd' to 'Door'?" No, actually it is the same metaphor. Please allow me to explain.

From v1 through 6, it was happening in the town setting. But during the summer time, the shepherds have to take their sheep to distant pastures to feed their sheep since they eat all the grass near by the town during the winter time. As they move from one location to another, it is not that simple to return to the town, so they have to settle down to an area where a shepherd can set up a temporary enclosure.

It is normally made out of mud or stacked rocks up to knee high with one opening. At night the shepherd would put all of his sheep inside of the enclosure and he lays across the opening to go to sleep. Yes, the shepherd literally becomes a door. Any sheep that wants to get out of the enclosure has to go over his body and he would know about it.

When we read v8, we should not think that Jesus was condemning all the prophets and servants of God before His earthly time. There have been many false prophets, false teachers, false messiahs, false shepherds, false doors like the Pharisees of Jesus' day who said, "We're the way; Come through us," but the true sheep didn't hear, they waited for the true Shepherd.

Jeremiah 23:32 Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams," says the Lord, "and tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies and by their recklessness. Yet I did not send them or command them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all," says the Lord.

True sheep of Jesus waited for the true Shepherd. Are you one of His sheep? You cannot be one of His by being baptized, or attending church services, or carrying a Bible, or doing something good once in a while, or putting money into the Agape Box. You become the sheep of Jesus by committing your life to Him – only through Him, only through His door, no other way.

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" in v10, a reference to satan. The thief wants to steal the sheep from the fold, slaughter them, and destroy them by the command of satan.

The end game of satan is to steal, kill, and destroy. He may come with an enticing temptation. He may come with something dazzling that might even have an element of enjoyment in it at the beginning. But his end game, his ultimate goal, is to steal, kill, and destroy.

But when we go through 'the Door' of Jesus, we receive life and we are saved. Because we receive life from Jesus and He gives it more abundantly.

C. A SHEPHERD STORY BY CLARENCE MACARTNEY

There is a story about a shepherd in Highlands of Scotland by Clarence Macartney who was a prominent conservative Presbyterian pastor in Philadelphia & Pittsburgh during the early part of the 20th Century. This is how it goes:

In one of the Highlands villages, there was a shepherd with a little daughter. He would take her out to the field with him to take care of his sheep. His daughter loved to hear her father's call to his sheep with his unique shepherd's call. The call went out down the hills and over the lazy slopes of the Highlands. The sheep heard him and came to him.

Time passed by, she became a beautiful young woman and went off to the big city. At first, her letters came every week regularly. Then the intervals grew longer and eventually stopped altogether. Through grapevines, the shepherd heard that his daughter had been seen with questionable people in not-so-good places. Some people from the village saw her in the city and tried to speak to her, but she ignored them and brushed them off.

So the loving father gathered a few belongings and left the village to look for his daughter in the city in his usual shepherd clothing with his shepherd staff.

Day after day, he looked for her in the big city, but he couldn't find her anywhere. At the near edge of the slum area of the city, he remembered how much his daughter used to love to hear his shepherd's call.

Sounding loud and free, he let out his shepherd's call as he walked along the slum area. The people on the streets and nearby houses saw this shepherd with astonishment who was making calls up and down the street.

In a house of the degraded portion in the area, his daughter was sitting with bad companions and heard her father's familiar shepherd's call. Even though it was a complete surprise, there was no doubt about it. Flinging a door wide open, she rushed out to the street to the open arms of her father. He carried her to their Highlands home and loved her back to decency.

Jesus wants you to be in His flock. Come to Him, NOW.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) **Do not resist the leadership of Jesus in your life. He knows our future and what is good for us. He is our Good Shepherd.**

2) **God's truth is the best protection against satan's lies.**