

“A JOURNEY THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF JOHN” SERIES

#18: “I Am the Good Shepherd”

SCRIPTURE: John 10:1-21

INTRO:

Here in chapter 10, in the events following His encounter with the Pharisees about healing the man born blind, Jesus teaches with two allegories: one about the door of the sheepfold and another about the good shepherd.

Paul Butler points out in his commentary on the gospel of John that *“The very evident purpose and message of these two allegories is a strong contrast between Jesus as the Door of security and peace and the Good Shepherd of compassionate trustworthiness with the false, insecure, unloving, untrustworthy Pharisees who claimed to be shepherds of the sheep. Such a contrast – between Jesus and those who claim to be shepherds – is very appropriate for our day.”*

In scripture, God’s people are likened to sheep – not cattle, not pigs, nor any animal of the wild – we are sheep and Jesus is the shepherd.

There’s a reason for this: sheep are relatively defenseless and must be led, not driven. The shepherd often has a “bell sheep.” A “bell sheep” is a sheep which has been disciplined for going astray (sometimes having one of its front legs broken and mended by the shepherd) and has had a bell hung from its neck. Once the leg heals, the sheep will tend to stay close to the shepherd, and the other sheep will hear the bell and stay close to it and follow it wherever the ‘bell sheep’ goes.

Here in chapter 10, Jesus uses the familiar relationship between a shepherd and his sheep to teach spiritual truth.

First of all, He says that...

...THE THIEF CLIMBS INTO THE SHEEPFOLD; THE SHEPHERD ENTERS BY THE DOOR.

In that day, sheepfolds were often “community edifices” that each shepherd of the community could use to shelter his sheep. These sheepfolds usually had walls of stone and a strong door with a lock to which the doorkeeper had the only key.

Many sheepfolds would house the sheep of several shepherds. Each shepherd knew his sheep, and his sheep, in turn, knew their shepherd’s voice.

He would enter the sheepfold by the door, but thieves would climb in some other way.

The point He makes here is that there is only one legitimate way to enter, and that is through the gate.

Later, in chapter 14, Jesus says essentially the same thing, only more directly: ***“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”*** (v. 6).

Next, He says...

...I AM THE DOOR TO THE SHEEPFOLD; ALL OTHERS ARE THIEVES AND ROBBERS.

Some “community” sheep pens would have a locked gate and a gate keeper. This gate keeper would recognize the shepherds who had sheep in the pen and would open the gate for them, but he wouldn’t open for anyone else. He would provide security for the sheep.

But some sheepfolds were constructed out in the fields. Their walls were just tall enough to contain the sheep, and there was no lock on the door. The shepherd would lie down across the entrance at night; he would, in essence, become the door.

In such cases, the shepherd would become security for the sheep. He would be ready to protect the sheep from wolves or other predators and to fend off any thieves who come to steal.

Jesus is our shepherd, our security. When it comes to wolves and thieves, about all we can do is run or hide behind the shepherd. Jesus is the “lion of Judah” who can protect us and fend off any wolves or thieves.

What’s more, He says, ***“I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved”*** (v.9). There is only one door to the sheep pen – one door to the kingdom – one door to heaven and eternal life – and that door is Jesus. We have a choice: door number one and door number two. Only one door leads to life abundant, and that door is Jesus.

Then He says...

...THE THIEF COMES TO STEAL AND KILL AND DESTROY; I CAME THAT THE SHEEP MIGHT HAVE ABUNDANT LIFE.

The thief He’s talking about is Satan and those who do his bidding. Notice that they don’t come to the sheepfold to only steal and kill but to *destroy*. The

original Greek here is APOLLUMI, which literally means “to destroy utterly.” In some cases, it means “ruin or loss of well-being.” It can also mean annihilate. Whatever the meaning, it is a step beyond “kill.”

On the other hand, Jesus came to make possible for us “abundant life.” Now, some have given this “abundant life” the meaning that a Christian is happier, more fulfilled, more content, and even more materially blessed than non-believers. Some even use this 10th verse for justification of a life of “Christian hedonism” – that “it pays to serve the Lord.”

For example, televangelist Kenneth Copeland is reported to be worth \$760 million and lives in a \$7 million home on which he pays only \$3,000 in taxes annually. He has said, “When people drive by my house, they will know that there is a God.” Copeland, who’s been married three times, teaches a “health and wealth gospel.” The eighty-five-year-old preacher would say that he is an example of the gospel he preaches and that he is simply enjoying the “abundant life” that Jesus promised.



Copeland's 36,000 sq. ft. home on a 37-acre estate

It's my belief that Jesus is referring to the life of victory over sin because of the abundance of God's grace. In ***"The Message,"*** a paraphrase by Eugene Peterson, this part of verse 10 is saying, "more and better life than they ever dreamed of."

Then, in verse 11 He says...

...THE GOOD SHEPHERD LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP.

He compares the good shepherd to the hired hand. The good shepherd is willing to risk his life to protect the sheep from thieves and wolves, while the hired hand, who owns none of the sheep, runs away to save his own skin.

Of course, Jesus is actually *more* than a good shepherd who gives his life for the sheep; Jesus would offer His life as a sacrifice to not only protect us from thieves and wolves but to redeem us, to bring forgiveness of sins and eternal life to us. While other shepherds might give their lives for the sheep, none of them could bring them what Jesus could bring them.

He says in verse 14:

I KNOW MY SHEEP AND MY SHEEP KNOW ME.

The key word here is ***“know.”*** The Greek for ***“know”*** is GINOSKO, which means “to have an intimate relationship with, built on experience.”

So, He says that He knows us intimately, and we who are His disciples know Him intimately. And this relationship is built through experience.

Throughout this allegorical teaching is a contrast between the *good* shepherd and the bad shepherds. We know that the *good* shepherd is Jesus, but who are the *bad* shepherds? The bad shepherds are the religious leaders in Israel, such as the Pharisees and Sadducees. The inference here is that they don't really *know* the sheep – they don't know who are or who are not true sheep. They're false shepherds.

Look at verse 16:

HE SAYS THAT HE HAS OTHER SHEEP THAT ARE NOT OF THIS FOLD.

Who are the sheep He's referring to? He's referring to us – to us Gentiles who will listen to His voice, believe in Him, and join the flock of God.

Now, this idea was repugnant, especially to the Jewish religious leaders, in spite of the fact that such was prophesied by Isaiah (56:8) and Ezekiel (34:23). The sheepfold of the New Covenant would include both Jews and Gentiles. There would be ***“one flock, one shepherd.”*** Oh, how I wish that were true today. Today's church is anything but ***“one flock, one shepherd.”***

IN CLOSING...

I'm sure Jesus still knows His sheep; He knows which of us are really His. Now, am I saying that some who claim to be sheep of His fold are really not of His fold? Yes, I am. Am I saying that some who are on church rolls are not really Christians? Yes, I am.

I hope that all of you are genuinely “Christian” sheep – truly “born again” believers.