

Sermon Series Four: Believe and Live
(The Gospel of John: Signs of the Messiah - 1:1-12:50)
John 10:1-21
The Good Shepherd

Who would ever want to be a shepherd? Why devote your life to stupid sheep that do not seem to have enough sense to find their way home? If you know anyone who raises sheep, they will quickly tell you that sheep are one of the most helpless, defenseless, straying, and even dirtiest of animals. Consequently, they require constant oversight, protection, rescue and cleaning or they will die.

Today's passage focuses on the image of sheep, sheepfolds, and shepherds. Flocks of sheep were an everyday feature of Jewish life. God spoke of himself as Israel's Shepherd, her leaders as his undershepherds, and his people as the sheep of his pasture. In the New Testament this theme is continued with Jesus seen as the Good Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd, and the church as his flock. In John 10, we discover four distinctives of Christ's shepherding ministry over his church.

I. The True Shepherd's Ministry Is Marked by its Contrast to False Shepherds (10:1-10)

10 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. ² But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." ⁶ This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. ⁷ So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to 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 comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

1. The true Shepherd lovingly calls and leads his sheep.

Each sheepfold was surrounded by stone walls topped by briars with only one gate or door. Usually a sheepfold contained several flocks of sheep. The shepherds would graze their flocks in the surrounding countryside by day and then bring them back to this communal sheepfold where they would one by one allow the sheep into the fold after inspecting each one. Once in the fold, they were put under the care of a hired undershepherd (or doorkeeper) who would stand watch throughout the night. This watchman would only admit authorized individuals and would fight off or exclude thieves and robbers. Would be rustlers would have to climb over the walls since they could not come through the gate.

Jesus is the true Shepherd in contrast to the false shepherds, the religious leaders of Israel (or false teachers today). What distinguishes our shepherd? 1) **Our shepherd calls us by name.** We are individually very important to him just as shepherds who would often have special nicknames for their sheep. In that time each sheep was given a name. Each shepherd had a distinctive call or whistle that his sheep would recognize. We know our shepherd's voice, and listen to and believe his words. There was a day in our lives when we heard the Shepherd's call to salvation and we obeyed it and became members of his flock. What we later discovered was that our names were written in a very special book, The Lamb's Book of Life, before the world even began. It was way back then that God chose us and determined that he would call us. 2) **Jesus leads us and guides us all along the path to heaven constantly beckoning us with his voice.** The shepherd in Jesus' day went ahead of the flock, so that he might alert them to any potential dangers. He led them to green pastures that he had scouted out. This leading out by a shepherd was a very delicate task as he led them safely one by one through the gate and then across the fields where predators roamed ever ready to strike the flock. 3) **Jesus is the only door to the fold.** At times the shepherd himself would sleep at the gate of the fold. No one could enter or leave except through him. Jesus as our shepherd is the only way, the only gate or entrance by which we can become a part of the people of God. Once in the fold, we are forever delivered from the

power of sin over our lives for we have experienced God's forgiveness and salvation. Now we have daily access to God's blessing and protection and need never fear any harm or danger again. God feeds us daily through the Scriptures and we experience life and power through the indwelling Holy Spirit. **4) Jesus gives abundant life.** Jesus did not just come to bring spiritual life to people, but to bring the best quality of life possible. The eternal life that he gives is not just long in duration but is rich in quality. We flourish and grow and live enjoying every possible good thing there is to enjoy, beginning now and throughout all eternity.

2. False shepherds come only to steal and to kill and destroy.

While Jesus lovingly and faithfully cares for the sheep, false teachers do not. Their objective is only personal gain. **They bring great spiritual harm to God's flock by:** **1) introducing destructive heresies** that lead them away from God to follow the teachings or doctrines of demons (Second Peter 2:1). Such teachings include the worship of the false shepherd instead of the true Shepherd, denial of the deity of Christ, denial that Christ is the only way to heaven, and that salvation is by grace through faith. **2) introducing destructive lifestyles** such as promoting and declaring immoral activities and addictive habits to be acceptable. **3) driving, dividing, dominating, and scattering the sheep** instead of leading them. (See Jeremiah 23:1-2; Ezekiel 34:2-10) Jesus provides protection and security for his sheep whereas false teachers seek to exploit them.

*** Yet it is assuring to know that sheep refuse to follow a stranger because his voice is unfamiliar. In fact, if a stranger uses the shepherd's call or imitate his tone, the flock will instantly detect the difference and scatter in panic. So it is with those who have become the sheep of his pasture and members of his flock. They recognize the truth revealed by God and reject error because they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit who gives them insight, discernment and power to resist the devil's schemes.

II. The True Shepherd's Ministry Is Marked by His Unconditional Love for the Flock (10: 11-16).

¹¹ *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.* ¹² *He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own*

the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

1. He makes the ultimate sacrifice by dying for them.

Rather than killing the sheep spiritually like false shepherds do, so that he might live, he dies so that they might live. He voluntarily gives up his life sacrificing his total self for the sake of the sheep. And he came to earth with the full intention of doing so. The hired hand, representing the religious leaders of that day and false teachers of today, is concerned more for his own safety. He puts his own needs ahead of the needs of his flock. He flees at the slightest sign of danger. His ministry is done for the love of money or the love of position and power rather than for the love of souls. Without proper and courageous leadership, the sheep soon are scattered and made easy prey for their enemies.

2. He perfectly knows his flock.

Jesus knows his own in the same way that the Father knows him and he knows the Father. The word for “know” here is the word for the kind of intimate knowledge that a husband and wife have of each other. The picture here is one of an intimate, trusting loving relationship and a deep care for each other. What is astounding is that we increasingly come to know Christ as deeply as he knows us and as deeply as he knows the Father. In this way we come to know the Father’s will and have the wonderful opportunity to do it and to reap the benefits and blessings in doing so. Further, our relationship to Jesus is unique just as Jesus’ relationship is unique with his Father. Christ first took our nature that we might afterwards receive his. Yes, there is great mystery and wonder in all of this!

3. He unifies his flock.

The other sheep here are the Gentiles. Christ is saying that he will unite believing Jews with believing Gentiles in one people of God. The Old Testament congregation and the New Testament church will become one

in Christ. This would have been problematic to the Jewish leaders and most Jews who despised Gentiles. From a child up they were taught to fear and hate those who were considered to be no better than dogs. Christ is telling them that he is committed to including people from every tribe and tongue and nation in the community of the redeemed. Christ will allow no barriers, no room for hatred, because of his deep love for the whole world and for all his sheep. Together the nations will hear his voice and follow him. How much more than today should the body put aside petty arguments and the overemphasis of distinctions between evangelical denominations to work together in order to reach our communities and our world for Christ. We are and must be the one people of God. There is a richness in many of our biblical traditions, but there is a poverty of spirit demonstrated in our unwillingness to get along and work together.

III. The True Shepherd's Ministry Is Marked by Submission to God (10:17 -18)

¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may 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 I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

1. Christ's relationship with his Father was marked by love and obedience.

It is clearly implied here that you cannot have one without having the other. Love and obedience go together. The point here is not so much that Jesus gained the Father's approval by sacrificing his life, but that his sacrifice was in obedience to the Father's command. Jesus' total submission and obedience to the Father's will resulted in his receiving a *special love* for his perseverance in finishing God's work. God loves all believers unconditionally, but when we obey him, we enjoy an intimacy with him that only that obedience brings out. Although there are no conditions for God's love, there seem to be differing depths of God's love

2. Christ's submission is remarkable because it was completely voluntary.

He chose to do the Father's will. He voluntarily laid down his life. No Roman soldier could've crucified him if he had not allowed it. Jesus was in complete charge of the events surrounding his crucifixion. He had power over every step to the cross, every lash of the soldiers whip, every word from Pilate's mouth, every strike of the hammer against the nails, and further even in the raising of his own body from the dead. God had given Jesus the authority to offer himself as a sacrifice for mankind's sin and he faithfully fulfilled his Father's command. Consequently, Jesus' sacrifice was a voluntary sacrifice, a vicarious sacrifice, and a victorious sacrifice!

IV. The True Shepherd's Ministry Is Marked by Controversy and Contempt (10:19-21).

¹⁹ *There was again a division among the Jews because of these words.*

²⁰ *Many of them said, "He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?"* ²¹ *Others said, "These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"*

Once again we see Jesus' claims resulting in some believing and in some choosing to not believe. Once again many think that he is either demon possessed or raving mad. In ancient times it was common for insanity and demon possession to be linked. But others respond that only God can heal and so this cannot be the work of a demon. Jesus had just cured a man born blind. Further, what they just heard was not the sayings of one possessed, but words which were clear and powerful showing that Jesus was undeniably sanctioned and sent by God. It is, and always will be, that the clear proclamation of the gospel will cause some to mock and jeer in disbelief while others are humbled and place their full faith and trust in the good news of Christ's death and resurrection.

Conclusion

I want to conclude by stopping for a moment and thinking about us as sheep. Think of the characteristics of sheep. They are all *different*. In our time we are so used to mass-produced products and large herds of everything that the individual gets lost in the crowd. But Jesus knows your differences, what wonderfully distinguishes you from others. And he has a plan to use them for his glory. Not only are sheep different, but

they are also *helpless*. Did you know that a sheep can get stuck on its back like a turtle? It can die in that position within a few hours. Did you know that a sheep is un-discriminating in its choice of food so that it will eat anything even poisonous roots and weeds? Sheep are helpless in the face of a predator and will stand there not uttering a bleat while they are attacked and killed. But Jesus knows all of your weaknesses and he is there to protect you - to be your tower of strength. Sheep are *wayward*. You can put a lamb into a perfect pasture. But if there is a tiny opening in an otherwise secure fence, somehow the lamb will find the opening, wriggle through, and wander away to less ample fields and into the danger. Like the song says, “prone to wonder, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love.” All we like sheep have gone astray and Jesus is constantly on the alert to keep us from wandering and to seek us out when we succeed in separating ourselves from the flock. But finally, each sheep is *useful*. Under the proper management, it produces a valuable crop of wool. As a sheep of his flock we are useful. Christ uses us to help other helpless souls around us, to sing his praises, to build each other up, to touch a life which he has especially gifted us to touch. We are all under the careful care and watch of the good Shepherd. What incredible things he must have in store for you in the coming days, weeks, months and years!

A famous actor was once the guest of honor at a social gathering where he received many requests to recite favorite excerpts from various literary works. An old elder who happened to be there asked the actor to recite the twenty-third Psalm. The actor agreed on the condition that the elder would also recite it. The actor's recitation was beautifully intoned with great dramatic emphasis for which he received lengthy applause. The elder's voice was rough and broken, and his diction was anything but polished. But when he finished there was not a dry eye in the room. When someone asked the actor what made the difference, he replied 'I know the psalm, but he knows the Shepherd.'

There is no question at this point that Jesus is the good Shepherd. The only remaining question is, “Do you know the Shepherd?”

