

JOHN CHAPTER TEN

The Good Shepherd

John 10:1-11

Some years ago a “*Candid Camera*” TV program took place at an exclusive prep school where all of the students were well above average intelligence. The “*Candid Camera*” people posed as career consultants who were going to advise these brilliant young men concerning the careers that would be best suited to them, on the basis of “tests” and “interviews” that seemed (to the students) quite authentic.

One young man who was eagerly awaiting the “*counselor’s*” verdict, was pretty confident that the adviser would tell him to be a college president or a bank president, or perhaps even president of the United States. But, no, the “*counselor*” had something else in mind. You should have seen the look on the boy’s face when the “counselor” said: “*Son, after evaluating your tests and interview, I’ve decided that the best job for you is—a shepherd.*”

The student did not know whether to laugh or cry. After all, who in his right mind would want to be a shepherd? Why devote your life to taking care of a bunch of “*stupid sheep*” who do not seem to have sense enough to find their way home?

Perhaps he did not realize at the time that the most famous person in all of history had been a shepherd. Perhaps the “*counselor*” should have suggested the young man read John chapter 10. John 10 focuses on the image of sheep, sheepfolds, and shepherds. It is a rural and Eastern image, to be sure; but it is an image that can teach us a great deal, even in today’s urban industrialized world. Paul used this image when admonishing the spiritual leaders in the church at Ephesus (Acts 20:28ff). The truths that cluster around the image of the shepherd and the sheep are found throughout the Bible, and they are important to us today. They are symbols that Jesus used help us understand who He is and what He wants to do for us.¹

John 10:1-11 NAS

¹ *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber.*

² *"But he who enters by the door is a **shepherd** of the sheep.*

³ *"To him the **doorkeeper** opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep*

¹ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 10:1.

by name and leads them out.

⁴ "When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.

⁵ "A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers."

⁶ This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them.

⁷ So Jesus said to them again, "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 hear them.

⁹ "I am the door; if anyone enters through 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.

¹¹ "I am the **good shepherd**; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

Comparing people to a **shepherd** and his **sheep** was common in the Middle East. Kings and priests called themselves shepherds and their subjects sheep. The Bible makes frequent use of this comparison. Many of the leaders in the Old Testament were shepherds (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David). As national leaders, Moses and David were both "*shepherds*" over Israel. Some of the most quoted passages in the Bible emphasize this shepherd/sheep relationship: "*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*" (Psalm 23); "*All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him*" (Isaiah 53:6).

Let us talk about sheep for a few minutes. "They require, more than any other class of livestock, endless attention and meticulous care."² Sheep are helpless and defenseless animals that will wander about aimlessly unless they are led.³ They cannot find their own food and water and therefore depend on the shepherd for this. The shepherd would often fight off wild animals to protect his sheep and he would carry an injured sheep over his shoulders.⁴

Philip Keller also tells us that:

"The behavior of sheep and human beings is similar in many ways . . . Our mass mind (or mob instincts), our fears and timidity, our stubbornness and stupidity, our perverse habits are all parallels of profound importance. Yet despite these adverse characteristics Christ chooses us, buys us, calls us by

² Keller, Phillip, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, ©1970. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, p. 20-21.

³ Beers, V. Gilbert, *The Victor Handbook of Bible Knowledge*, ©1981. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, p. 440.

⁴ Ibid, pp 450-451.

name, makes us His own and delights in caring for us.”⁵

We can therefore see the importance of a good shepherd and we can also see that probably not every shepherd was so conscientious with looking out for his flock of sheep.

It is interesting to see how Jesus developed this comparison in chapter 10 between the **good Shepherd** and **false shepherds**. In the previous chapter (chapter 9), the Pharisees who were spiritually blind claimed that they were the ones who had all knowledge regarding spiritual things (John 9:41). They were therefore considered to be false shepherds by Jesus. As the good Shepherd, Jesus came to seek and to save the lost.

Christ’s ministry was for the salvation and overall benefit of the Jews. Those Jews who truly loved God would hear Jesus’ voice, recognize it to be that of the Messiah, and they would follow Him.

Let us now take a detailed look at what Jesus is teaching in this chapter:

John 10:1-6 NAS:

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² *"But he who enters by the door is a **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 *"When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.*

⁵ *"A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers."*

⁶ *This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them.*

The beginning of John 10 is certainly an outgrowth and continuation of John 9 where the healed blind beggar had been involved in a confrontation with the Jewish leaders, which resulted in his excommunication from the synagogue. You hopefully recall that Jesus had declared Himself to be the **light of the world** and that the Jewish leaders were living in darkness. “*Living in darkness*” means that they were ignorant and would not accept the truth even when it ran over them like a truck. They preferred their way to the right way. They preferred to continue struggling the way they had been for centuries rather than living in peace and joy.

And for the most part that continues to be the way people respond to Jesus today. Unless one opens himself or herself up to God’s Word in the Bible they will live in darkness. For those who do sincerely open themselves to the teaching of God’s Word in the Bible, they usually come to see the light and desire to bask in it.

⁵ Op cit., Keller, p. 21.

So after speaking to them about **light** and **darkness** Jesus gave them something else they could readily identify with, a **shepherd** and his **sheep**. As we mentioned earlier, the Jews considered a shepherd to be anyone in authority. People looked at kings and prophets as shepherds. Israel was privileged to be “*the flock of the Lord*” according to Psalm 100:3.⁶

3 Acknowledge that the Lord is God! He made us, and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Jesus opened His sermon here with a *familiar illustration* (John 10:1–6), one that every listener would understand. The sheepfold was usually an enclosure made of rocks, with an opening for the door to prevent thieves and beasts of prey from entering. The shepherd (or a porter) would guard the flock, or flocks, at night by lying across the opening. It was not unusual for several flocks to be sheltered together in the same fold. In the morning, the shepherds would come, call their sheep, and assemble their own flocks. Each sheep recognized his own master’s voice.

Do you always recognize the voice of Jesus? When we have a personal relationship with Christ and spend a lot of time reading and studying His Word, the Bible, His voice becomes very familiar to us. Then when we hear many voices calling to us, “*Do this,*” “*Try that,*” or “*Walk this way,*” we can recognize which voice is our Lord’s and we can ignore or turn away from those other voices.

Consider that only the shepherd has a right to enter the sheep pen. The true shepherd comes in through the door, and the watchman recognizes him. **The watchman (doorkeeper or porter) opens the gate (door),** and the shepherd comes in to call **his own sheep by name** out from the other flocks. Shepherds knew their sheep well and gave them names. As **sheep** hear the sound of their owner’s familiar **voice**, they go to him. He **leads them out** of the pen till his flock is formed. Then he goes **out** toward the fields with **the sheep** following **him**.

The thieves and robbers could never enter through the door, so they have to climb over the wall and enter the fold through deception. If a **stranger** enters the pen, the sheep **run away from him because his voice** is not familiar. Similarly, people come to God because He calls them.⁷ Their proper response to His call is to follow Him.⁸ But this spiritual lesson was missed by many who had heard Jesus, even though they certainly understood the local shepherd-sheep relationship. In their blindness, they could not see Jesus as the Lord who is the Shepherd.⁹

The setting for this lesson was the excommunication of the beggar from the synagogue

⁶ You might want to also read Isaiah 56:9-12; Jeremiah 23:1-4; 25:32-38; Ezekiel 34; and Zechariah 11.

⁷ John 10:16, 27; Rom. 8:28, 30.

⁸ John 1:43; 8:12; 12:26; 21:19, 22.

⁹ Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B.; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:309.

(John 9:34). The Jewish leaders, the false shepherds, did not care for this man; instead, they mistreated him and threw him out. But Jesus, the Good Shepherd, came to him and took him in (John 9:35–38).

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.¹⁰

God's sheep (the Jewish people) were taken advantage of by their own leaders and by the Romans and neither had any concern for the welfare of the people. Jesus came as Israel's rightful Messiah and came openly and honestly.

We might ask, who are the "strangers" who would try to lead Christians astray today? There are many including, but not restricted to, TV personalities, New Age philosophies and beliefs, the lyrics of much modern music, movies, even, unfortunately, certain trends in public schools or within the Church. The strange voices are so many and so loud that it is impossible to name them all. The worst tragedy is that so few people are familiar enough with the voice of Jesus that they don't recognize many voices as those of strangers. That is scary, just as in verse 6 where we read that the people did not understand what Jesus was saying to them.

John 10:7-11 NAS:

⁷ So Jesus said to them again, "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 hear them.

⁹ "I am the door; if anyone enters through 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.

¹¹ "I am the **good shepherd**; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

Jesus makes 3 statements about Himself in John 10. The first, "**I Am the Door**" (John 10:9), gives us another illustration of how Jesus sees Himself relating to the people as compared to the Jewish leaders.

Now Jesus condemns the leaders of Israel, saying, "All who ever came before Me were thieves and robbers. Such men care nothing for the sheep." Jesus, on the other hand, is the Good Shepherd. The Palestinian shepherd commonly slept in the single opening to the fold through which wild animals might attack. As "the door" Jesus protects His own, by placing His body between the sheep and their enemies. The Good Shepherd guides

¹⁰ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 10:1.

His sheep to pasture, concerned not only that they have life, but that they “*have it to the full.*” How deep is the commitment of the Good Shepherd to His sheep? “*The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.*”

In fact, at another time and in another place Christ told another parable to show how important one lost sheep is to the Shepherd. Let us look at it for a moment.

Luke 15:1-7 NAS:

¹ *Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him.*

² *Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."*

³ *So He told them this parable, saying,*

⁴ *"What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?*

⁵ *"When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.*

⁶ *"And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'*

⁷ *"I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.*

One lone, lost sheep is important to a shepherd. One lone, lost human soul was worth a great deal to The Good Shepherd. Christ came to earth to seek us out and to die for us that He might save us from the penalty for our sins. And we learn that when we respond to Christ and receive Him as our Savior, all heaven rejoices. So here in John 10 when Christ said to the Jewish leaders that He was the Good Shepherd who would lay down His life for His sheep, how clearly this must have spoken to the men and women of Israel. Their rulers, like religious leaders of many times and many faiths, were quick to demand respect and obedience. They were quick to lord it over others; quick to judge, advise, condemn. But no one in Israel would imagine for a moment that one of the authorities would lay down his life for one of the common people, although those leaders might lay down their lives for truth. More than once the men of Israel had refused to fight on the Sabbath, and had been killed easily by pagans. More than one Israelite had offered his body to Roman swords rather than permit a statue of Caesar to enter Jerusalem. To die for one's convictions was something they knew about and were willing to do. But to die for love of the sheep? Never! Truth was important to the authorities; people were not. But to Jesus, the sheep—sinners not worth the contempt of the righteous—were worth dying for!¹¹

The freedom of the believer, in contrast to their situation in Judaism, seems hinted at in

¹¹ Richards, Larry; Richards, Lawrence O.: *The Teacher's Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1987, S. 733.

the going **in and out**, and their new satisfaction (**shall find pasture**) was a welcome change from the boring teaching to which they had been subjected.¹²

Jesus Christ is the door, and as such He leads the sheep “*in and out*.” The blind man in chapter 9 was “*cast out*” (excommunicated) by the false shepherds because he trusted Jesus, but he was taken into the new fold by Christ. Theologian **Arthur Pink** points out that there are really three doors spoken of in this chapter, and we must distinguish them if we are to get the full meaning of this explanation:

(1) “*The door into the sheepfold*” (v. 1). The sheepfold here is not Heaven but the nation of Israel (see Psalm 100). Christ came to Israel through the way appointed in Scripture; the porter (John the Baptist) opened the door for Him.

(2) “*The door of the sheep*” (v. 7). This is the door that leads people out of their present fold, in this case, Judaism. Christ opened the way for multitudes to leave the old religious system and find new life.

(3) *The door of salvation* (v. 9). The sheep using this door go in and out, which speaks of liberty; they have eternal life; they enjoy the pastures of God’s Word. Satan, through his false teachers, thieves and robbers, wants to steal, kill, and destroy the sheep; but Christ gives abundant life and cares for the sheep.¹³

These interpretations given by Arthur Pink are all scripturally sound. And that shows us again the supernatural depth of the Word of God. A single Bible verse can have any number of meanings that can all be correct. No human author has ever been capable of producing such writing.

When Jesus said, “*All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers*,” Jesus was referring primarily to the religious leaders of that day (John 10:8). He referred to those leaders who had no concern for the spiritual good of the people but only for themselves.¹⁴

The statement “*are thieves and robbers*” (not “*were*”) makes it clear that He had the present religious leaders in mind. They were not true shepherds nor did they have the approval of God on their ministry. They did not love the sheep, but instead used and abused them. The blind beggar whom Jesus had healed was a good example of what the “*thieves and robbers*” could do to the *sheep*.

In verse 10 we read a phrase that gets quoted a lot, and which is often misunderstood. Jesus said that He had “*come that they may have life, and have it abundantly*.” What

¹² Pfeiffer, Charles F.; Harrison, Everett Falconer: *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1962, S. Jn 10:7.

¹³ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1997, c1992, S. 237.

¹⁴ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 10:1.

comes to your mind when you think of “*the abundant life*”? According to preachers of the prosperity gospel, it means you will have plenty of money, no problems, no illnesses, and that all will always go well for you. Yet that is not scriptural. Throughout the New Testament we see that persecution, affliction, and trials were common among faithful believers. Peter tells us that such afflictions polish up our faith so that it can be shiny gold (1 Peter 1:7). James tells us to rejoice when troubles come into our lives (James 1:2). Paul speaks often of trials and persecutions and how they actually minister in our lives. Peter, James, and Paul tell us how through such problems our faith is strengthened and we develop qualities such as patience, endurance, faith, love, and more.¹⁵ The abundant life that Christ wants to give us is a life filled with the fruit of the Spirit as described in Galatians 5:22-24. It is a life lived with the “*peace that surpasses human understanding*” (Philippians 4:7) because it is both peace with God and the peace of God. The abundant life is a life of deep-down inward joy, no matter how difficult the outward circumstances.

It is clear in the Gospel record that the religious rulers of Israel were interested only in providing for themselves and protecting themselves. The Pharisees were covetous (Luke 16:14) and even took advantage of the poor widows (Mark 12:40). They turned God’s temple into a den of thieves (Matthew 21:13), and they plotted to kill Jesus so that Rome would not take away their privileges (John 11:49–53).

The good Shepherd came to save the sheep, but the false shepherds take advantage of the sheep. Behind these false shepherds is “*the thief*” (John 10:10), probably a reference to **Satan**. The thief wants to steal the sheep from the fold, slaughter them, and destroy them. We shall see later that the sheep are safe in the hands of the Shepherd and the Father (John 10:27–29).

When you go through “*the Door*,” you receive life and you 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!*¹⁶

As we have seen, shepherds have full control over the lives of their sheep. They find the good pastures and clean water for their sheep. Shepherds protect sheep from predators, and provide medication for their wounds.

When Christ is our Good Shepherd, we should give Him full control of our lives: where we go, what we do, what we say. When we put our lives in the hands of the Good Shepherd we also enjoy His protection and provision; we can receive His comfort for our wounds. He brings us into His kingdom (sheepfold) and brings healing to our souls. I trust you have already made Jesus the Shepherd of your soul. But if not, we encourage you to enter into His sheepfold today.

The thief, that is, a false shepherd, cares only about feeding himself, not building up the flock. He steals sheep in order to kill them, thus destroying part of the flock. But Christ

¹⁵ See James 1:2-5; 1 Peter 1:6-9; 2:20; 5:10; 2 Peter 1:3-8; 2 Corinthians 4:6-11; 12:9.

¹⁶ Ibid.

has come to benefit the sheep. He gives life that is not constricted but overflowing. The thief takes life; Christ gives it to the full.¹⁷

¹⁷ Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B.; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:310.