

The Good Shepherd

John 10:1-18 (ESV)

Key verse, “John 10:11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

Today we will hear the next two of Jesus’ “I am” declarations; I am the door, and I am the good shepherd. But before we jump in let me start with a word of prayer. So, I have some questions for you: Are you a sheep? On whose care do you depend on? Some of us may answer with a confident “Yes! I am a sheep”, and maybe you depend on your parents’ provision of nurture, advice and protection. Maybe you think you are a strong independent sheep that does not need a shepherd. Maybe you aren't so sure, honestly life is hard, we all need help, we need tender guidance, we need restoration, and we definitely need saving. We may find ourselves wondering what to do with our lives or we may wonder if we are under anyone's care and if we have someone to truly depend on. Today we will hear the voice of Jesus declaring himself as the door that leads into abundant life, and as the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. And in doing so Jesus reveals himself as the source of the very things we need, may God speak to us through his word today.

Part 1: Sheep

Are you familiar with sheep? They aren’t so common in this

of the modern world, but back in the old days they were a familiar livestock, so much so that the concept of shepherd and sheep became a common analogy weaved into the bible. In Psalm 23 David calls the Lord himself his shepherd, old leaders of Israel were also called shepherds because they were established to care for God's sheep, aka God’s people. You know, to live healthy and happy lives sheep need consistent management, they are not the brightest so they are prone to getting themselves in tight situations, they are also defenseless prey animals without claws, venom or fangs. They don't seem like an animal anyone would want to identify themselves with, but the reality is that we are spiritual sheep, alone we are just as defenseless and lost, and this is not meant to insult us, but it leads us to realize the necessity of a shepherd, it points us to Jesus, our good shepherd. Let’s try an exercise, go ahead and turn to your neighbor, and repeat after me.... Bahh :D Also and despite their weaknesses, sheep are particularly good at one thing: listening, so let us perk up our ears and listen.

Part 2: Voices

The author of John 10 doesn’t give us much detail on the location or audience, but we know this takes place after the healing of the blind man and the resulting conflict with the

Pharisees. The Pharisees had just received a rebuke because Jesus had healed the blind man, and rather than seeing the miraculous work of God, their legalism blinded them and they instead persecuted the healed man, in the end casting him out from his community. But Jesus finds him, and after some help the man finally confesses his faith as he says: "Lord, I believe." So now Jesus speaks.

Let's read verses 1 and 2: "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. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep." Jesus begins by saying truly truly, meaning that what he is about to say is very very important. He continues by using a figure of speech. You see, back in those days shepherds shared a communal overnight pen, so every night all the nearby shepherds would deposit their sheep into this big pen, and then they would return in the morning to collect them, think of it like a sheep motel. Jesus uses this analogy to highlight the differences between the shepherd and the thieves or robbers, let's break some of these differences down.

First, the thieves and robbers do not enter the sheepfold by the door, while the shepherd does. Jesus' words make it clear that there is a single legitimate way to enter the sheep pen and receive God's flock. And anyone that climbs in is a thief and a robber, they may have gained access to the sheep, but their intentions and hearts are vastly different. For example the Pharisees' lack of care for the blind man exposed them as thieves and robbers, they cared nothing for the man and were instead captivated by legalist customs and the upkeep of public image, all Jewish politics, which brought only destruction. But Jesus is different, with shepherd care he looked for the blind man and he healed him, restoring not just his physical sight but opening his spiritual eyes to see Jesus the Son of Man face to face. In fact Jesus is the fulfillment of all OT prophecy (Ezekiel 34), he is the one approved by God the gatekeeper to enter by the door and collect his precious sheep. In contrast to the Pharisees' callous legalism, Jesus is full of care and love for his sheep and is the true promised shepherd, so we have reason to trust and listen to him.

Second, the shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out, going before them. Let's look at verse 3b: "The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." Jesus describes another important quality of the shepherd; he has a relationship with his sheep. Calling his own sheep by name implies that he must know each of them well, he knows their likes and dislikes, he knows their weaknesses and their strengths. Jesus knows us, his needy sheep, he knows you, he knows the burdens you fight and the darkness you hide. He also knows the joys that you relish and even your daily victories. Jesus knows you and calls to you by name, do you hear him? Or are you tuned to something else? Honestly, who do you actually listen to? Our world is full of voices, and

there is so much variety that anyone can listen to what is most pleasing. Influencers, ChatGPT, our friends, even our own voices, it is all so loud, so how do we hear Jesus' voice? I have a recommendation; open your bible. We have the gift of God's word now more accessible than ever, paper or digital, English or Korean, Jesus is waiting. This doesn't mean to not listen to anyone ever, but Jesus is clear, we have a choice on who we truly listen to, and the two choices are thieves and robbers that steal our life, and the voice of the shepherd that leads to something truly fulfilling and eternal. This is another key difference, the shepherd also leads his sheep out from the pen, he doesn't just call them to release them into the wild, without a shepherd the sheep would just follow each other and wander. Jesus is the one capable of providing leadership and direction, we do not need to worry, we do not need to burden ourselves, we have the simple task of simply following the shepherd wherever he leads, even if we do not always understand and even if we are afraid.

Actually there is little reason to fear, why? Let's look at verse 4, it describes the shepherd as "going before" the sheep. Meaning that the shepherd walks ahead of the sheep, this is not just bossing his sheep around, it is true sacrificial leadership that puts the shepherd in front and ready to face it all. It is also the shepherd setting the example for us, Jesus' humble leadership is the blueprint for anyone who wants to grow as a shepherd. Verse 5 shows us how we ought to behave in response to the voice of thieves and robbers, let's read it. "A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." So what do the sheep do? They do not listen or follow, they flee for their lives. I pray that we can all flee from the voice of thieves and tune our ears to the caring voice of our true shepherd and follow his lead.

Part 3: The door

Let's read verses 7 to 10. "So Jesus again said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy, I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.'" This follows verse 6 which told us that the audience did not understand Jesus' figure of speech. So Jesus speaks again, this time using a similar but different analogy, he says; "I am the door." Jesus is referring to another type of pen, not the sheep motel from earlier but a private doorless pen that sheep entered for the great purpose of rest. And because this pen lacked a door, it was actually the shepherd himself who would lie across the entrance and become the door. With the shepherd on door duty the sheep were then free to enter through him and into the safety and rest from the dangers of the wild that instilled fear and brought death. So when Jesus says, "I am the door", he is proclaiming himself as the door into the pen where one is saved and finds abundant life.

You might ask; saved from what? From the power of sin and death. Romans 6:23a puts it simply, the wages of our sin is death. Ever since the fall of man we have been contaminated into a sinful nature, we have all sinned and earned ourselves the wage of death. Anyone who sins lives under the power of sin and death, and there is no amount of human performance that can bridge the gap between sinful man and God's holy presence, it is all like filthy rags before a holy God. (Isaiah 64:6). But Jesus declares, "I am the door, if anyone enters by me, he will be saved..." Jesus is the door that divides a life headed towards an eternal separation from God and one headed to eternal union with Him. In Jesus we have the gift of rest, there is no need to depend on our measly performance and we can instead confidently depend on Jesus who promises salvation. So, are you saved? Or are you still working for it? We have a tendency to create our own false doors, if only I prayed more, if only I sinned less, if only I had more sheep. Stop running, turn around and draw near to Jesus, and enter through the only door that leads into eternal life. Let's look at verses 9 and 10 again because there is another promise here, Jesus says that the sheep will go in and out and find pasture. This does not mean that we get to enter salvation and leave it like a drive thru, rather Jesus is revealing how free and abundant life is in Him, when we enter through the door we are not only recipients of salvation but also provision. Jesus promises to give abundant life, when we hear the word abundant what do we think of? Is Jesus promising a Mercedes? Or a life with no health problems? Or the perfect spouse? Might be sad to hear but no, he's not promising these, but what he does promise is greater. A life abundant is a life in fellowship with Jesus the shepherd, it is a life that brings joy in the midst of trials, a life full of purpose and direction, a life of healing and growth, ultimately it is a life of contentment and satisfaction in Jesus. Do you hear him? Jesus is calling, follow his voice and enter through him the door into abundant life.

Part 4: The good shepherd

Let's read verse 11; "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep." Jesus' declaration is an echo of the old testament and a fulfillment of scripture. In Ezekiel 34 the Lord God prophesies against the shepherds of Israel, who had neglected and abandoned the sheep. The Lord God promised that He himself would become the shepherd and search for His sheep and rescue them, and that He would feed them with good pasture, making them lie down, binding up the injured and strengthening the weak. (v11-16) So now Jesus stands before us, declaring himself as the promised good shepherd. And we can learn a few more things from his declaration.

First, in verse 11 Jesus says that the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The word "good" in Greek is kalos, which means better, fair, worthy, beautiful, appealing, and excellent. These qualities are confirmed by the life of our good shepherd Jesus, who

endured rejection, unimaginable pain, and abandonment, bearing our sins and giving up his life on the cross for us, his sheep. Jesus had all the power to abandon us yet he surrendered and humbly obeyed the will of the Father, in doing so opening the way for us to receive forgiveness and an eternal life. By his blood we were redeemed, in other words purchased, so we are no longer slaves to sin but belong to the good shepherd, in Christ there are no black sheep, only Jesus' sheep. This is also a reminder that we all belong to Jesus, yes even the difficult sheep, Jesus paid for them too.

Second, Jesus defends his sheep. Let's read verses 12-13: "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. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep."

Jesus uses the example of a hired hand to show how distinctively deep the love of the good shepherd is, at the same time he lays the template for all future shepherds. The hired hand who does not own nor cares for the sheep runs and leaves the sheep to the wolf. But the good shepherd does not abandon his sheep, his heart is not lukewarm towards them, instead his loving care for them leads him to lay down his life. This love is a model for all who shepherd after God's flock, sacrificial love is essential, we may not need to lay down our physical lives, but we can imitate his faithfulness in the sacrifice of small efforts like time and care. Finally, Jesus knows his sheep and his own know him.

Let's read verse 14. "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep" We had learned earlier that Jesus knows us by name, but here we see that he knows us much more intimately than we may be comfortable with. Jesus says that he knows his sheep just as well as he knows the Father, and how well does he know the Father? I'd say pretty well, actually Jesus later says; "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). So using the simple transitive property, we can conclude that Jesus knows us down to the very atom. We might feel the pressure and shame of knowing Jesus has seen us through it all, but remember that he does not reject us, he so loved you that he laid his life down so you could live and be free, isn't wonderful to be fully known yet still be loved? It is also an invitation for us to come to Him and know Him just as deeply. Anyone can come, verse 16 reveals that there is no distinction between sheep of different folds, whether gentile or jew, for there will be one flock and one shepherd.

I am among one of these gentile sheep. For a long time I lived as a wounded black sheep, strayed from any shepherd and prey to the power of sin. I did not believe in the existence of God and was one of those proud individualistic sheep. Yet God still cared, He sent his servant shepherds after me. And I experienced their patient loving care that led me to the

good shepherd Jesus, who I found waiting for me at the opening into a life I could have never imagined. Yet even with all the goodness I have experienced I have to confess that I am not the best of sheep, I still have the old individualistic habit of headbutting all my problems on my own and the awful tendency to close off my ears to the shepherd and instead listen to my own voice. And I can list many small potato examples of this, but let me share big potato stuff, like marriage. You see I have struggled for a long time with the idea of marriage, to clarify I think all of you should marry, but maybe not me. And the more I thought about why I was so against it, the more I realized that my reasons were rooted in unbelief. Honestly I worried about failure, on a relational level I worried about failing to build a relationship because I've always been alone, practically I worried about provision because I what if I lose the privilege of working, and personally I worried about my fight with depression, what if I one day I am just too tired to take care of my family. I think the problem is pretty evident; I am listening to my own voice. And man my voice is mean, my voice only reflects what my eyes see, I think I look at myself and see all the flaws and drive myself into despair. But you see that was my mistake, looking at myself instead of Jesus, listening to myself instead of listening to the voice of the good shepherd. So working on this message I was convicted yet more so encouraged, because I practiced turning my ears and tuning to the voice of the good shepherd. So when I caught myself straying to the sound of my own voice I stopped and turned my gaze unto Jesus, I saw him upon the cross and I heard his voice calling me into rest, lifting the self imposed burdens of fixing myself from the wounds and the ugly stains of sin, and helping me to see the sheep he so loved that that he laid his life for it, for me. So I know you probably can't see it but take my word for it, I am weirdly happy, even if I haven't quite figured everything out, I am at least feeling free to pray about a house church, maybe pray for me too. Ultimately my prayer is to be a humble sheep, that listens to the voice of my good shepherd and follows where he leads, even if it is to the places that I am most afraid of.

So, what about you? On whose care do you depend on? Who are you listening to? Who are you following? I hope that you are encouraged to turn to Jesus, to listen to his voice, enter through Him, the door into salvation and abundant life. It does not matter what kind of sheep you are nor what afflicts you, do you think you are too lustful, proud, unfaithful, ashamed, bitter, burdened, unforgiving, lost, doubting, empty? Jesus the good shepherd laid down his life for you, he knows you and is now inviting you to know him and experience the joy of life with Him.