

The Gospel of John

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Chapter Ten

The Good Shepherd

This chapter has similarities with the Good Shepherd parables in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 18:12-14; Luke 15:3-7). All three Gospels (Matthew, Luke, John) demonstrate the careful concern of the shepherd for His sheep. This gospel utilizes a wider presentation regarding the shepherd for the sake of His sheep. John was obviously very touched concerning the relationship of Christ to His followers.

John 10:1-4

"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 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.

Using the double words truly, truly is a way to state that what follows is very important for the readers to understand. The parable needs to be read using Ezekiel 34 as a background where God speaks as the chief shepherd who appoints under-shepherds but they (like the worthless shepherd of Zech 11:17) are more concerned about their own needs than the needs of the sheep. God removes these under-shepherds and seeks His scattered sheep to gather them and commit them to one worthy of their trust (Ezek 34:23). Jesus is thus making the claim to be the Davidic shepherd promised by God. The Jews would certainly have been familiar with this portion of Scripture.

The sheep pen was an enclosure of some kind to protect the sheep at night. Sometimes the shepherd used a cave and sometimes a fenced enclosure and the pen was not always fitted with a cover. Sometimes a row of briars was placed over the fencing to stop people from entering over the fence. There was only one entrance for bringing the sheep in for their protection and anyone taking care of the sheep would also enter by that door. The word translated "thief" implies someone using subtlety and trickery whereas the word translated "robber" has the meaning of violence and plundering, a word sometimes used for bandits. The purpose of both was exploitation rather than the welfare of the sheep. The lawful method of entrance is through the door but Jesus was warning the people about false messiahs who would seek to gain control of the people through false promises much as people do today in giving them the words that they want to hear rather than the words that they need to hear much as Paul warned about: *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires;"* (2 Tim 4:3) Only the one who properly enters the pen is the true shepherd of the sheep.

The doorkeeper is sometimes translated "watchman" and is the only one who is legitimately in control of the sheep. The Oriental shepherd would usually name his sheep and would summon

them by calling them by name. There would often be more than one fold of sheep in a given pen so each shepherd would call his sheep that would then follow him out of the pen as he would lead them to the best place for them to take care of their needs and be kept safe. The shepherd of this time period would not have had a sheepdog to help in leading the sheep.

John 10:5-7

"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.

The Greek word translated "figure of speech" is sometimes translated "parable" but the Greek is not *parabole* as required for parable but it is *paroimia* that means a proverb or a cryptic saying as better translated "figure of speech". If someone other than the real shepherd came into the pen and even if he used the same call made by the real shepherd the sheep would recognize the difference and not only would they not follow the stranger they would even go away in a panic. The metaphor about sheep should have been very familiar to those to whom Jesus was speaking but they could not understand His true message because of being spiritually dead (1Cor 2:14 NAS77 *But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.*). They considered themselves to be children of Abraham (8:39) and would not be in need of such a shepherd as described by Jesus. Nor would they understand that they were the strangers about whom Jesus was speaking. Jesus then proclaimed that He was the door of the sheep. The shepherd would stand at the entrance and carefully examine each sheep as they entered. If any were damaged in any way he would anoint it with oil to help in the healing process and, if they were thirsty, he would give them water. After all his sheep entered the pen he would then lie down in front of the entrance to guard it from entrance by someone or something he did not approve. Thus the shepherd would literally become the door of the sheep. John not only reveals the good shepherd to be the servant of the Lord but the King of Israel fulfilling the first part of His commission: Isa 49:5 NAS77 *"And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, in order that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, And My God is My strength),"*. This last statement parallels a later statement: *"Jesus *said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me."* (John 14:6).

When Jesus is referring to Himself as the door or way to salvation is indicated by the second-century Palestinian writer Hegesippus in his story of the martyrdom of Jesus' brother James. James was challenged by the question "What is the door of Jesus?" and he was put to death because he would not deny that Jesus was the way to salvation.

John 10:8-10

"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.

Jesus cannot mean the prophets for they are characterized as being evil. They then must be the false messiahs and other false messengers who appeared to the people after the Exile and especially in the century before the appearance of Jesus. Many factions existed during the time period after the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC and those people tried to rid the nation of the Roman rule. Some theologians also think that Jesus was referring to the current religious leaders who were trying to control the people. He might also be referring to false Messiahs who gathered people around them and led them into disaster such as Theudas and Judas the Galilean (Acts 5:36, 37). The purpose of Jesus was not in the political realm but in their spiritual life and service to God. Jesus clearly states again that He is the door and all who enter through His path will not only be saved but will also be able to find complete fullness of life. It seems that John gives a short parable inserted into the longer parable. Those false teachers and messiahs are only looking after their own self-interests and not the needs of the sheep. Jesus says that not only did He come that they may have [spiritual] life but that they would have it abundantly.

John 10:11-13

"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 is not the owner of 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 is not concerned about the sheep.

This concept of a good shepherd goes back to the OT and specifically with Psalm 23. Jeremiah and Ezekiel also prophesied regarding the need for a good shepherd (Jer 23:1-3, Ezek 34, 12, 15). Sheep herding was a major occupation in Palestine during this time and it involved both a protective and a sacrificial attitude. The phrase "lays down His life" means a voluntary sacrificial death (10:11, 17, 18; 13:37-38; 15:13; 1 John 3:16). The Greek word (psyche) translated "life" means more than the physical life and is often translated "soul". In verse 12 Jesus is drawing a distinction between Himself and the religious leaders of His day. The hired hand is more concerned about himself than the life of his sheep and he will flee to protect himself when any danger appears. He is not malicious as the thief or robber but is still mainly concerned with receiving his wages than in being a caring shepherd. Without a self-sacrificial attitude of the keeper of the sheep the sheep will be easily made victims of their enemies. The main motive of the hired hand is their pay and Peter also writes regarding this attitude: "*shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.*" (1Peter 5:2-3)

John 10:14-17

"I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, (15) even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. (16) "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. (17) "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again.

Jesus affirms that He is the good shepherd with even more of the characteristics of the good shepherd as described above. Saying that He "knows" His sheep does not just mean knowledge of facts but an intimate relationship of trust and intimacy that exists between Him and His sheep.

Our knowledge of Him grows over the time of our being related to Him but His knowledge is complete and instant since He paid for all of the sins of His people. This relationship is as complete as the relationship between Jesus and the Father. He loves them collectively and individually and lays down His life for them. His sheep who are not of this fold are probably the Gentiles who will come to a saving relationship with Him and to whom Jesus sent His disciples (Matt 28:19). He is probably referring to the time when there will be neither Jew nor Greek (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). We will read of this unity between the folds later (John 17:20). Disunity occurs when the followers of Christ depart from an understanding that their existence as Christians depends upon their being in Christ. They may build walls that are so comprehensive as to include wolves along with sheep or so exclusive as to exclude some sheep from their number. We see this occurring in the USA today with some churches including some obvious wolves as homosexuals and other practitioners of sin or excluding true Christians because of a theology that is too restrictive. Jesus has repeated this vow of laying down His life for His sheep three times (10: 11, 15, 17), which indicates the importance of this aspect of His fulfilling His Father's mission on earth. John will repeat this statement regarding Jesus laying down His life for us: "*We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*" (1John 3:16). The laying down of His life for His sheep will be the last act of His mission and then He will take back His life (John 12:23).

John 10:18-21

"No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father." (19) A division occurred again among the Jews because of these words. (20) Many of them were saying, "He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?" (21) Others were saying, "These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?"

John informs us of two aspects of the death of Jesus. The first is that it was entirely voluntary but that it was not some type of suicide such as "death by cop". Nobody could have harmed Him if He had not allowed such to happen. The only time that Jesus would allow His death to occur was when the "hour had come" (John 12:23). The second aspect of His death is that not only would it only occur when the time of such was in the timing of the Father, but that He had the authority to lay it down and to take it up again. Anyone can lay down his life but only the Son of God could also take it up again. His life, death, and resurrection are the result of His receiving all the commands from His Father. Saying that He had this authority means that such was not at the whim of some worldly decisions but totally within His means of timing it properly. Jesus is stated elsewhere in the New Testament as being raised from the dead by God (Acts 2:32; Rom 6:4; Heb 13:20; 1 Peter 1:21) The Jews became divided on their reaction to this extreme statement by Jesus. By human standards His comments are certainly worthy of being committed to an insane asylum. Some thought Him insane and some decided that He was demon possessed. The charge of demon possession had previously been raised (John 7:20; 8:48) but it is not the work of a demon to do an act of mercy. But some of them were still thinking about the healing of the man born blind that John discussed in the previous "chapter". That miracle certainly made an impression on some of the Jews. The crowd was then in a quandary for they knew that no demon would open the eyes of someone born blind but His statements certainly seemed to be those of an insane person or someone demon possessed.

John 10:22-23

At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; (23) it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon.

The Feast of the Dedication is now known as Hanukkah, which was established in memory of the purification and rededication of the temple by Judas Maccabeus on December 25, 165 BC. It had been profaned for three years by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the king of Syria after he had captured Jerusalem, plundered the temple treasury, and sacrificed a sow to Jupiter on the temple altar. This attempt to Hellenize Judea led to the Maccabean revolt, which resulted in the defeat of the Syrian armies and liberation of the Jewish people after a three-year war. It is celebrated as the Feast of Lights because of the lighting of lamps or candles in Jewish homes to honor the time. The portico of Solomon was a long covered walkway supported on pillars on the east side of the temple overlooking the Kidron Valley. The porch was a shelter for people from the heat of the summer and from the cold rains of the winter and was often used by Jesus to teach and preach since there would almost always be some people there. It is also the place where Peter spoke to the crowds that arrived to see the man who had been cured of his lifelong lameness (Acts 3:11; 5:12).

John 10:24-28

The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." (25) Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. (26) "But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. (27) "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; (28) and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.

The Jews encircled Jesus so that He could not easily escape them for they wanted Him to clearly declare Himself to be the Messiah. They were hoping that He was the Messiah who had come to complete the work of the Maccabees, especially since this time was in remembrance of their attempt at liberation. Jesus had not used the term Messiah of Himself but saying that He was the good shepherd was close. However the Jews had a political and military implication in their use of Messiah. John never writes that Jesus made any messianic claims even at His trial. He is quoted as stating that He is the Christ in Mark 14:62. If He was not the Christ then they could look elsewhere, but His miracles and authoritative teachings seemed to indicate that He was the Messiah. His actions and words certainly offered sufficient proof to those whose hearts were not hardened that He was the Son of God acting in the power of the Father. Jesus replied that He had answered their question concerning His origin and mission but they did not believe. John reported these actions in 5:16-47, 6:32-59, and 7:14-30. He stated that He did the works in the name of His Father but they did not believe because they were not of His flock. If they had been His sheep they would have believed Him, He would have known them, and they would have followed Him. Their faith in Him would have made them members of the family of God and children of the second birth (John 1:11-13). He further stated that those who did believe and follow Him would be given eternal life, they would never die, and nobody would snatch them out of His hand. He thus promised them that He would fulfill the work of the Good Shepherd in all of its actions.

John 10:29-31

"My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. (30) "I and the Father are one." (31) The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him.

Jesus then said that His Father gave Him the sheep and since He is greater than anyone else there is no power that can take them out of His control. He then stated that He and the Father are one where 'one' is neuter indicating oneness in nature or equality. We are told that Jesus is one in mind, purpose, and action with the Father. The keeping of believers is then pledged by the Son and the Father so the "perseverance of the saints" is guaranteed by the rulers of the universe! Jesus has already been quoted as saying that He will raise up all that the Father has given Him on the last day (John 6:39). The verb translated "picked up" actually means "to carry". It is not likely that there were a lot of loose stones on this porch but the building of the temple nearby would have been a good source of stones. They were preparing to stone Him to death in accordance with the act of blasphemy (Lev24:16).

John 10:32-36

Jesus answered them, "I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?" (33) The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God." (34) Jesus answered them, "Has it not been written in your Law, 'I SAID, YOU ARE GODS'? (35) "If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?"

The Jews had previously tried to stone Him when Jesus made the declaration, "Before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:58, 59). The statement that He and the Father are one is similar and so an attempt at stoning was anticipated. The Jews thought that His "works" of asking the cripple person to pick up his pallet and to knead the clay with spittle on the Sabbath were bad enough but His words were even more blasphemous. Jesus answered by pointing them back to the many good works that He had done and that those works were from the Father. They could not pick out any of His works as requiring stoning but they accused Him of blasphemy by claiming to be God. They stated that He made Himself out to be God but actually Jesus was in word and deed showing them that He was truly the Son sent by the Father to bring light into the world (John 1).

Jesus then referred them to Psa 82:6 in which God had addressed a group of people as "gods" [*elohim*] and "sons of the Most High". They were called gods because God's word came from them so they could not stone Him because the Father had sanctified and sent Him to the world to accomplish His tasks. The beings addresses in the Psalm were unjust judges who had divinely been sentenced to death: Psalm 82:6-7 *I said, "You are gods, And all of you are sons of the Most High. (7) "Nevertheless you will die like men, And fall like any one of the princes."* However Jesus is the One Whom the Father sanctified [set apart for His special mission to the world] and sent so there is no valid reason to stone Him. Jesus had a very high view of the scriptures as did the Jews who wanted to stone Him. However Scripture cannot be annulled or made void (Mark 7:13) just because it may be inconvenient. Today people want to void some parts of the Bible because "times have changed" but the written Word of God is permanent and never invalid.

John 10:37-42

"If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; (38) but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father." (39) Therefore they were seeking again to seize Him, and He eluded their grasp. (40) And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was first baptizing, and He was staying there. (41) Many came to Him and were saying, "While John performed no sign, yet everything John said about this man was true." (42) Many believed in Him there.

Again we read that Jesus refers to His works. He stated that His works demonstrated divine compassion and showed that He exercised divine authority over the world and thus showed that the Father was in Him and He was in the Father. However they refused to believe the power behind the works was from the Father so they again tried to seize Him. The mutual indwelling explains how the knowledge of the shepherd for His sheep is complete and that the works demonstrate the knowledge. For the people in the upper room this teaching was a tremendous blessing but for those Jews hearing it at the time it was given the statement was anathema. Such statements only confirmed their thinking that Jesus was a blasphemer so they tried to arrest Him as they did at the feast of the Tabernacle (John 7:30). Again they failed because the Father's time for the arrest was not yet complete.

Jesus then retreated to Perea on the east side of the Jordan where He found a better reception. This was a region under the authority of Herod Antipas and the Jews had no authority there. He would not return to Jerusalem until Palm Sunday, which would be in three to four more months. The witness of John the Baptist for Jesus continued to help His cause even though he is not recorded as ever doing any mighty works. What a great epitaph for John in that everything he said about Jesus was true. The truths that John stated about Jesus were determined to be true because of the works and statements of Jesus. John had long been killed but his words lived on. Now, about 2000 years later, this truth about Jesus is still leading many to believe in Him.