

Bible Study July 12, 2023

JOHN 10 (NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION)

The Good Shepherd and His Sheep

¹ “Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.

At night, sheep were often gathered into a sheepfold to protect them from thieves, weather, and wild animals. The sheepfolds were caves, sheds, or open areas surrounded by walls made of stones or branches. The shepherd often slept across the doorway of the fold to protect the sheep. Just as a shepherd cares for his sheep, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, cares for his flock (those who follow him). The prophet Ezekiel, in predicting the coming of the Messiah, called him a shepherd (Ezekiel 34:23).

² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.”

Jesus’ sheep recognize his voice. A person’s voice conveys more than words; it conveys intent. Sometimes it speaks warmth, comfort, and encouragement. Sometimes it provides a warning. Ancient Middle Eastern shepherds were known for calling each of their sheep by name, and each sheep would respond to its own name. When we read Jesus’ words in the Gospels, we must listen for the caring Shepherd behind them. Jesus knows your name. Hear his call.

⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.

In the sheepfold, the shepherd functioned as a gate, letting the sheep in and protecting them. Jesus is the gate to God’s salvation for us. He offers access to safety and security. He protects us. Some people resent those who believe that Jesus is the gate, the only way of access to God. But Christians did not make the requirement to believe in Jesus alone—he did. Because Jesus created the world, he has the right to declare how we should come to him. Since Jesus is God’s Son, why should we seek any other way or want to customize a different approach to God? Jesus provides the entry point to God, and he is our caring master. Are you following his lead? (Also see the notes on 14:6.)

⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

In contrast to the thief who takes life, Jesus gives life. The life he gives to us is abundantly rich and satisfying. It is eternal, although it begins immediately when you turn to follow him. Life in Christ is more deeply meaningful than life without him because of his overflowing forgiveness, love, and guidance. Have you accepted Jesus' offer of life?

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it.

A hired hand tends the sheep for money, while the shepherd does it out of love. The shepherd owns the sheep and is completely devoted to them. Jesus is not merely doing a job or performing a duty; he loves us and has even laid down his life for us. False teachers and false prophets do not have this commitment.

13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—

Jesus refers to himself as the Good Shepherd. This would remind Jews of Ezekiel's scathing rebuke through which God had castigated the evil leaders of Israel (Ezekiel 34:1-6). Immediately after this, God had said he would take charge as the Good Shepherd (see Ezekiel 34:7-31). Jesus clearly identified himself with God by using this title.

15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

The "other sheep" were non-Jews. Jesus came to save Gentiles (people from all nations) as well as Jews. Here Jesus provides insight into his worldwide mission—to die for the sins of the world. People tend to want to keep God for themselves, limited to their own group, but Jesus wants us to love and help people beyond the fences we build.

17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to 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 authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

Jesus' death and resurrection, as part of God's plan for the salvation of the world, were under God's full control. No one could kill Jesus without his consent.

19 The Jews who heard these words were again divided. 20 Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?"

If Jesus was merely a man, his claims to be God would have proven him insane. But his miracles proved his words true—he really is God. The Jewish leaders could not see beyond their own preconceived ideas, and they looked at Jesus only from a human perspective—Jesus confined in a human box. But Jesus was not limited by their restricted vision.

21 But others said, “These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

Further Conflict Over Jesus’ Claims

22 Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, 23 and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon’s Colonnade.

Hanukkah commemorates the cleansing of the Temple under Judas Maccabeus in 164 BC after Antiochus Epiphanes had defiled it by sacrificing a pig on the altar of burnt offering. The festival is celebrated in the month of December.

Solomon’s Colonnade was a roofed walkway supported by large stone columns, just inside the walls of the Temple courtyard.

24 The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”

Many people who were asking for proof did so for the wrong reasons. Most of these questioners didn’t want to follow Jesus if it required them to submit to his leadership. They hoped that Jesus would declare himself to be the Messiah and then overthrow Rome and restore the prosperity of King David’s golden age. They, along with the disciples—and everyone else in the Jewish nation—would have been delighted to have him drive out the Romans. Many of them, however, wondered if he had the power to do that. These doubters hoped Jesus would identify himself so they could accuse him of making false claims to be God, as the Pharisees had done (8:13).

25 Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me, 26 but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. 27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.

In the same way that a shepherd protects his sheep from external threats, Jesus protects his people from eternal harm. While believers can expect to suffer on earth, Satan cannot harm their souls or take away their eternal life with God. You may face many fearful and dangerous trials here on earth because this is currently the devil’s domain and he controls the hearts and minds of many (1 Peter 5:8). But if you choose to follow Jesus, he will give you peace of mind now and everlasting safety.

30 I and the Father are one.” 31 Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him,

Here, Jesus gave the clearest and most dramatic statement of his divinity. Jesus and his Father are one in being and nature. Thus, Jesus was not merely a good teacher—he is God. His claim to be God was unmistakable. It made the religious leaders want to kill him because Moses’ law said that anyone claiming to be God should die. The Jewish leaders attempted to carry out the directive found in Leviticus 24:16 regarding those who blaspheme (claim to be God). Nothing could persuade them that Jesus’ claim was true. They intended to stone him.

32 but Jesus said to them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?”

33 “We are not stoning you for any good work,” they replied, “but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.”

34 Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I have said you are “gods””? 35 If he called them ‘gods,’ to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be set aside—

The Scriptures cannot be altered” clearly affirms the truth revealed in God’s Word. If we accept Jesus as Lord, we also must accept his confirmation of Scripture’s authority for our lives.

36 what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’?

Jesus referred to Psalm 82:6, where the Israelite rulers and judges are called gods (also see Exodus 4:16; 7:1). If God called the Israelite leaders gods because they were agents of his revelation and will, how could it be blasphemy for Jesus to call himself the Son of God? Jesus was rebuking the religious leaders because he is the Son of God in a unique, unparalleled relationship of oneness with the Father.

37 Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. 38 But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.” 39 Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.

40 Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days. There he stayed, 41 and many people came to him. They said, “Though John never performed a sign, all that John said about this man was true.” 42 And in that place many believed in Jesus.