

The Good Shepherd

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I've been asked to say just a few words. Before I say anything else, I just want to share a providence of God that you might appreciate. After Brother Jesse's sermon last night, I was thinking about meditation. And this morning, I got up about five, and I reached over and grabbed my Bible, and I thought to myself, well, I might as well put some of this to use. So, I decided to read, and I said, I'm going to ponder, I'm going to meditate and chew on what I read. I've been in the same book of the Bible for about two months now, and so I just turned to the passage I'm working through. And it was a passage I'm familiar with. It was actually a few verses I heard preached about fifteen years ago; the Lord used in a mighty way about fifteen years ago. I've been sort of chewing on this here and there ever since. And I wrote a few verses down on this sheet of paper from the hotel and I put it in my pocket and I said maybe I'll use that. And I almost fell over in my seat when I heard Mack's sermon. "How blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee. In whose heart are the highways to Zion. Passing through the Valley of Baca. They make it a spring. The early rain also covers it with blessings. They go from strength to strength. Every one of them appears before God in Zion." Psalm 84:5-7.

I've been asked to say a few words about the church I pastor. I'm going to make it brief, because I really want to get to the Bible. I'm the pastor of Harvest Bible Church. I grew up in Gilmanton Ironworks, New Hampshire. And my family always traveled for church. We just never had a good Bible church in our area. So when the Lord called me to ministry, I thought it fitting to go back to my hometown and plant a church there. And so, I led a team in 2013 that's coming up on five years and it's just been a joy to preach Christ to them and to see them grow and to see other people drawn to the fellowship. And it's just been a real joy. So I would ask you to pray for Harvest Bible Church. We don't want to just plant and stay put. We're actually looking already at another church plant. We want to be active. So, we're just coming off of our final year of missionary support, so we're looking at spinning around and trying to plant another church hopefully in the northern part of New Hampshire. So just pray for the work in New Hampshire, that God would continue to use His Word and His Gospel expediently.

Well, for my session today, I want to explore with you a beloved passage of Scripture. John 10: The Good Shepherd. I'm used to having a desk, and so I don't know what to do with these podiums. But John 10. Last year at my church, I was able to preach through this text, and we spent a few weeks in this one passage. If you'd turn to John 10 with me. Today, we're going to look at a larger portion of this, and hopefully I'll be able to bring some things to mind.

I would just like to preach Christ to you today. After an encounter with the religious leaders of Israel, Jesus has the opportunity here to teach in the public square. And He's seizing on, perhaps, one of the most visible occurrences in ancient Palestine: the tending of sheep. Using this imagery of shepherding, the Lord begins to teach. Look with me at John 10. "Jesus says, '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. To him, the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. When he has brought out all of his own, he goes before them,

and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow. But they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.' This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what He was saying to them. So Jesus said again to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who come 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 go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy. I come that they might have life, and have it abundantly. I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. 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. 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. 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. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it up again. 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.'

Often times, in Jesus' ministry, He used common themes and common imagery as tools to teach about complex and weighty truths. And if you read the Gospels, you see these are prevalent. We see Him using things like light and darkness, water and birth, marriage, fishing, husbandry, and shepherding. Very common illustrations for divine truth. And the occurrence of shepherding was probably the easiest and most identifiable occurrence for his audience to grasp. Everyone understood shepherding. But even though the most basic of illustrations is being used, verse 6 tells us that his audience did not understand what He was saying. And so for us, this morning, I would invite you, for those who have ears to hear, let them hear.

The teaching of the Good Shepherd is built on an allegory. D.A. Carson calls this a narrative parable. But Jesus uses these common elements in the shepherding world as illustrations laced with deeper meaning. In looking at these 18 verses, we notice that He changes His metaphor twice. First, He presents the allegory in v. 1, and you can see that in your text. Then He changes it again in v. 7. And He changes it again in v. 11. And then He circles back around at the end. But let's work through this. In ancient Israel, and in many places in the East today, shepherds tend their flocks in the open field. And then, they bed their sheep at night. And sometimes they'll use a sheep pen or a sheepfold. And in this context, it was oftentimes a brick and mud structure. Sometimes they used a cave. But he would build a wall around the entrance, and he would sort of close them in. And he would secure them in the sheepfold. In the front of that sheepfold was the entrance, and that would be the gate or the door. At night, when all the sheep were in, the door would be shut until the morning. And everyone in the audience would have known this. This would have been common understanding. Very simple. And so Jesus says in v. 1, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in another way, that man is a thief and a robber." Truly, truly = Amen, amen is the language. This is Jesus' way of signifying to the listeners that what He's about to say is of supreme importance. Pay attention! Listen up is what he's saying. And immediately He describes this phenomenon of thieves and robbers attempting to climb over the walls, breaking

into the sheepfold. And He uses these two words: kleptes and lestes: thief and robber. The thief is the one that connotes subtlety and trickery in the Greek. And the robber - the one who is violent, seeking to plunder. These men have no honor, no morality, no scruples. They only desire to sneak in and pilfer the sheepfold. The shepherd, on the other hand, enters by the door. He is authorized. He is allowed. Why? Well, because he's the shepherd. He's the shepherd.

And v. 3 says that when the gatekeeper sees him coming, he opens the door for him because he recognizes that he is the rightful shepherd of the sheep. And then Jesus notes a remarkable phenomenon. The shepherd enters the fold and the sheep hear his voice. And he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. See, sheep inherently know and respond to the shepherd's voice. So much so, that even if another person were to try to imitate the tone and the verbiage and the loudness and the timbre of his voice; even if someone else tries to imitate the voice of the shepherd, sheep know the voice. They will not listen to someone even imitating the voice of the shepherd.

Did you know that? The sheep inherently can know and discern an imposter. Many times, if there were many flocks that were together, that were mingling, and many shepherds that would come to a watering hole or something like that, and it was time to go, the shepherd would simply use his voice and he would call to his sheep and he'd start walking, and his sheep would separate from that group and they would follow. They know the voice of the shepherd. V. 4, "When he's brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow, for they know his voice." In the West, shepherds drive their flocks from behind. But in the East, the shepherd goes out in front and leads, and the sheep follow. V. 5, "A stranger they will not follow, and they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." Again, simple truth, that anyone in this audience would have understood.

Yet, they're confused. After all, Jesus had been teaching in Israel for about two years at this point. And they were expecting to hear spiritual teaching. After all, He was the rabbi, He was the teacher. So they were expecting teaching, but they weren't expecting a story about sheep. V. 6, "They did not understand what He was saying." Now immediately, one theme becomes very clear. And that is the inherent authority of the shepherd. He has the right to enter the sheepfold. He maintains ownership. At least, guardianship in this context, over the sheep. He calls. They respond. He leads. They follow. Very clear. He commands total authority, and that is crystal clear.

But then, Jesus explains it further. Look at v. 7. 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. And the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. Anyone who enters by Me, he will be saved, and go in and out and find pasture. The thief only comes to steal, and kill, and destroy. I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly." So now Jesus is inserting Himself into the allegory. And He makes very bold claims here. He says, "I am the door." The door was the only authorized entrance. The only way in. And at this point, He tells us, this is all about one thing. Look at v. 9. He says, "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved. He will go in and out and find pasture." He's talking about salvation. In v. 10, He's talking about life. He qualifies it: abundant life.

Now at this point, we must acknowledge that there is some mystery surrounding the meaning of the sheepfold. Some Bible teachers have said that it represents the realm of

salvation, the Kingdom of Heaven, and that very well may be. However, Jesus makes note of the thieves and the robbers who are breaking into the sheepfold. And we know that nobody has the ability to break into Heaven, into the realm of salvation. That's not true. In v. 16, Jesus says He has other sheep that are not of this fold. And certainly, there are not two heavens. There are not two salvations. After all, just a few words later, He says there is one flock, one Shepherd. Crystal clear. Scholars have unanimously agreed as far as I can tell, that the reference to the other sheepfold has to do with the event of the Gospel going out to the Gentiles and breaking out and others coming into the Kingdom.

If that's so, then it's plausible to believe that the sheepfold here in v. 1-15 is Israel, but more specifically, the religious system of Judaism. That God had set up to keep the believers at the time. Through the line of Abraham, God had created for Himself a people and given them a land. And to David had given a promise for the Messiah. God had given everything to Israel. Paul notes at the beginning of Romans 9 that the Israelites were the recipients of the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the worship, and the promises. They were to be God's heralds, announcing the coming of the King of creation. They had everything. All of it. If anyone should have recognized the coming of the Messiah, it should have been Israel. John tells us in chapter 1 that Jesus came to His own, the Israelites at the time - His own people did not receive Him. In fact, in John 8, they opposed Him. And they said to Him, "We have Abraham as our father." In other words, we have religion. We have the Bible. We have the temple. We have the liturgy. We don't need You. But Jesus opposes them, and He says, "Before Abraham was born, I AM." He invokes the name of Yahweh to them. And immediately, their response is to try to stone Him for blasphemy. Because He's claiming none other than the name of God. I can raise up stones to be children of Abraham. But John 10, He is making the claim of authority and exclusivity. The only way anyone is getting in or out of this covenant is through Me. He said, "I am the door." He notes that there are other false Christs, and other false shepherds, and other false teachers. They had tried to come in and claim the right of the sheep. He says in v. 8, "All who come before Me..." Again, false messiahs, false shepherds, false Christs. "All who come before Me are thieves and robbers." But the sheep don't listen to them. There's no salvation through them. There's no hope in personalities. We have lots of personality cults. There's no hope there. There's no safety in religion. The only way to be saved, the only way to find pasture, the only way to have life is to go through the Door. And the Door is only wide as the shoulders of Jesus Christ. He's it. There's no other way. He says in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father, except through Me." He is the door to eternal life. This is exclusive.

There are myths today: many ways to heaven. And we hear this all the time in popular culture. All roads lead to eternal life. Just be a good person. Someone told me on a plane once, "I just have to do one good deed worthy of greatness, and God will accept me." I've heard this, "It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you just believe." Wrong. Wrong, wrong, wrong. Jesus said, "I am the way." "I am the door." False teachers and hucksters, they're only there to steal and kill and destroy. But Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life."

And then starting in v. 11, He shifts His metaphor. He changes His direction a little bit. Up to this point, He's demonstrating the exclusivity of salvation, claiming to be the door of the sheep. And then He goes a little bit beyond and says how about this? "I am the Good

Shepherd." I'm now the Shepherd of the sheep. Good in the Greek is kalos, it's "good" or "beautiful" but it also is referring to something that is noble or honorable or of worthiness. That seems to be the use here. Because there is more to this than simply a casual use of the word "good."

We don't really know what good means today. At all. And judging from Scripture, no one else seems to know either. In fact, Jesus chides the rich, young ruler for calling Him "good teacher." Without realizing the magnanimity of the word. And He says, "Why do you call Me good?" Like you know what good is. "Why do you call Me good?" And he says, "There is none good except God alone." And that statement becomes even more earth-shattering in light of the fact that Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd. Use propositional logic here. If no one is good except God alone, and Jesus is the Good Shepherd, then Jesus is God. More than this, He is the Shepherd of infinite value. Of supreme worth. Of the highest nobility. He is the Shepherd of Psalm 23, Who makes us lie down in green pastures. Who leads us beside still waters. Who restores our souls. Who leads us in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. However, He's also the Shepherd of Ezekiel 34 Who seeks out His flock - those who've scattered - to rescue them from the places where they have wandered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. See, the Good Shepherd beds the flock, grabs His staff, and ventures out into the night searching for lost sheep. And He will not stop until He's found them. That is our Shepherd.

To what ends does He go? What's He willing to do? Look at v. 11. "He says, 'I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.'" Sacrificially. Substitutionally. There were times when a wolf would attack, and the shepherd would throw himself in front of the sheep to save it. Now generally speaking, it's to no advantage for a shepherd to lay down his life for the sheep because then the sheep are without a shepherd. But here, the Good Shepherd must die for His sheep. He must. V. 14-15 "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." This word "for" is substitution. Anytime you see "for" in this context: substitution. He dies for His sheep. In their place. We know this is penal substitutionary atonement where the Son of God gives Himself as a ransom to the Father, dying in the place of sinners, to satisfy the wrath of God and earn forgiveness and justification.

And some people say, well, I don't like that doctrine. That sounds a lot like divine child abuse. Well, let me tell you, it's the only way that we are forgiven, we can be justified, our sins can be removed, the Father's wrath satisfied, reconciliation restored, and the peace of God can be declared. That's it. Friends, there's no other way. The only way we truly know the love of God is through the sacrifice of the Son. Let me prove it to you. 1 John 3:16 "By this, we know love, that He laid down His for us." Isaiah 53:6 tells us that all of us like sheep have gone astray. We have turned to our own way. But the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Isaiah quotes God and he says, "It was the will of the Lord to crush Him." Why? Because God is merciless? No. Because God is merciful towards sinners. Because He demonstrates His mercy through the work of the Son.

Look at v. 18. He says, "No one takes it from Me. I lay it down of My own accord." He says, "I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I received from My Father." He wants to do it. He was called to do it. He came to do it. He said I did not come to be served, but to serve and to give My life as a ransom for many. That is our

Christ. He came to save us. To give His life. He says, "nobody takes it from Me." Goodness... Jesus knowing and willingly gave His life for His sheep.

And more than this, we're called not just His sheep, but according to John 15, we're called His friends. And more than this, according to Ephesians 5, we're called His bride. The bride He loves. The bride He sanctifies. The bride He cleanses. The bride He presents as unblemished. The bride for whom He gives His life. He gave up His own sinless, spotless life, and He died on the cross at Calvary, was buried, rose again the third day to bring life to all who would repent and believe. That is our Good Shepherd. That is Whom we serve. That is Whom we love.

Juxtapose - look at 12 and 13. We see now the hired hand, the bad shepherds. Look at v. 12. "He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming, leaves the sheep, flees, the wolf snatches them and scatters them." And He says, "he flees because he's a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep." These are professional cowards. These are those who only care about drawing a paycheck. And when things get tough, they bail. Sadly, there are many flocks who have hirelings for pastors. New England seems to be a hireling haven. I shudder to think of how many faithful believers have given their money generationally to their churches through endowment, that are now paying the salaries and retirement of pastors who are starving the church to death. Wolves that have fleeced the flocks of New England. They care nothing for the sheep. I hear this all the time. Pastors who refuse to minister the Word to their people.

And when trouble comes, they flee. And their churches are stranded and they're helpless. We've suffered the storms of liberalism and Unitarianism and Roman Catholicism. The New England church has been starved and beaten to the brink of extinction. Our light is flickering and one more gust and it could go out. And we oftentimes as believers, we feel like Elijah, we say Lord, they've driven out every faithful pastor they've ever had. There's no more believers. I alone am left. And they're seeking my life to destroy it. Believers, let me encourage you. There is one flock. One Shepherd. One body. One Spirit. One hope. One Lord. One faith. One baptism. One God and Father of us all. And if you are in Christ, the Good Shepherd is your Shepherd.

There are no second class churches. There are no second class believers. And even though we're limping along up here, this is still the bride of Christ. He loves this church. As long as there is a church in New England, Jesus Christ is the Head. That should encourage you to know. And when we come together and enjoy this rich fellowship in the Spirit, a fellowship that exists first between the Father and the Son. He tells us that's the basis of our fellowship with each other and with Him. We are still blood-bought sinners saved by grace. There are lost sheep scattered all over the Northeast. But take heart, believers. The Shepherd is coming for them.

Let's pray. Father God, Lord, I weep, when I think about the heritage that we've had here. So many faithful, who loved You, served You, gave up everything for You, sent out missionaries and trained up pastors and loved in a way that is uncommon among men. Saints of whom the world was not worthy that were here. And so many of them have passed on and we are weakened. But Father, I look to You, and I trust You, and the church here believes in You, that You are still our Shepherd, and You still care for the sheep, and You still have given Your

Son for the sheep. And I pray Father that You would help us to be faithful to You. To listen to Your voice. To know You intimately. To love Your Word. To love Your precepts. And to follow hard after You. Not to give up hope up here. Not just to wither and fade, God. But that You would ignite our hearts to burn for You. That You would restore the work here again. Not because of anything in us. Not because of our heritage. But because Your name is worthy to be praised. That the name of God our Father would be heralded in New England again. That You would glorify Yourself through this body of believers. And Father, if it's Your will, and we die serving You and that does not come to the way that we are satisfied, we know that our ways are different than Yours and Yours are higher. And so we trust in Your sovereign will. We trust in Your providential hand. That You will work and You will save. And the gates of even the hardest hell up here will not prevail against Your church. You alone are worthy of our praise. We pray this in the name of Your Son Jesus, Amen.