

The Good Shepherd and His Sheep

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John 10:1–15 (NKJV) “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.² But he who enters by the door is the 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 And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.⁵ Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”⁶ Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.⁷ Then Jesus said to them again, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.⁸ All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them.⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.¹⁰ The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.¹² But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them.¹³ The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.¹⁴ I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.¹⁵ As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.”

One of the key metaphors used to describe the relationship between God and His people is that of a shepherd and his sheep. In this passage Jesus revealed Himself to be the true Shepherd of the sheep. Jesus describes Himself as having a flock made up of many sheep which He is gathering into one fold. That fold is His Church. Not all individuals are His sheep and not all will be in His fold.

Jesus contrasted the difference between true shepherds and false shepherds. Shepherds are leaders among God’s people. True shepherds enter by the door into the sheepfold. The door represents legitimate access to the sheep. The Door into God’s sheepfold is none other than His Son, Jesus Christ Himself.¹ True God-ordained shepherds understand that the sheep belong to God and that they are simply under-shepherds and stewards of the flock.² The scribes and Pharisees claimed to be true shepherds but they would not enter through Christ. Thus they proved to be false shepherds.

Jesus described three categories of false or unfit shepherds: thieves, robbers, and hirelings. Thieves and robbers come to steal, kill, and to destroy (John 10:10) Thieves steal the sheep through deception. Robbers, on the other hand, steal the sheep through violence. They seek to use illegal means to gain ownership or control of God’s sheep. As false shepherds, the scribes and Pharisees had already claimed ownership of the sheep when the True Shepherd, Jesus Christ, appeared. Thieves and robbers will also seek to draw away disciples unto themselves.³ In the New Testament false shepherds refer to false apostles, false prophets, false pastors, false teachers, and other false ministers.

The third category of false shepherds is the hireling.⁴ Hirelings are paid to shepherd an owner’s sheep. Hirelings are in it for the paycheck. They care about themselves and not the sheep. They are not committed to the sheep’s welfare. When danger comes, the hireling will flee and leave the sheep to be devoured by wild animals or stolen by thieves and robbers.

Jesus presents Himself as the True Shepherd of the sheep. Unlike the false shepherds who come into the fold by illegal means, Jesus entered into His Father’s fold by legitimate calling.⁵ His Father knows Him and He knows the Father.⁶ Jesus is God’s True Shepherd.

¹ John 10:7

² 1 Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28

³ Acts 20:29-30

⁴ John 10:12-13

⁵ John 17:6

⁶ John 10:15

The True Shepherd has a personal relationship with His sheep. For Jesus shepherding is more than a role; it is a relationship. Jesus knows His sheep personally.⁷ He knows which sheep belong to Him and which ones do not. He knows each of His sheep personally and intimately just as a father or mother does their children. Each of His sheep has a spiritual birthday at salvation and their own DNA—Destiny, Name, Attributes. Each of His sheep are individually and intimately precious to Him.

For the True Shepherd, the sheep are not just a flock. He calls each of them by name.⁸ A name identifies specific sheep indicating relationship. In salvation, each of His sheep hear Him call their name to come to Him. His sheep are not just a number!

The True Shepherd leads His sheep.⁹ He does not drive His sheep. He is their Guide and they willingly follow. He leads His sheep because they are His own. He leads them out from this world. He leads them into a new life set toward His Father's house. He leads His sheep by His voice, His presence, His Word, and His example. His voice confirms His identity. His presence confirms His relationship with them. His Word confirms His will. His example confirms the right way to go. He goes before them.¹⁰ His sheep will never go to a place where He is not already there. Jesus is their Guide and prepares the way before them. He enables them to go in and out and find pasture.¹¹ He leads them in good places beside the still waters and in the paths of righteousness. He enables them to go in and out and find pasture. He will feed them in the green pastures of life and truth.

The True Shepherd is also the Good Shepherd.¹² He does what is good for the sheep. He defends and protects His sheep. He delivered His sheep from the hand and mouth of their enemy. Jesus came to earth to fight Satan and the wolf pack of false shepherds to bring His sheep back to the Father. Jesus redeemed His sheep from the enemy when He laid down His life for them on the Cross.¹³

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, gives His sheep eternal life.¹⁴ They will never perish. If eternal life can be received and lost then it is not eternal. Jesus will not lose any of His sheep.¹⁵ Not all who claim to be His sheep are indeed His sheep. No one will snatch the true sheep out of His hand. No one is able to snatch them out of His Father's hand. The eternity of the true sheep is secure in their Shepherd's hand. He is the Author and Finisher of their faith. He is both their Sacrifice for sin and High Priest. He ever lives to make intercession for His own. He not only leads them out of the world, He also leads them all the way home.

The Father is gathering His sheep into one flock under one Shepherd, His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus is the True Shepherd of the sheep who is seeking and saving the lost and bringing them into His fold. Jesus and the Father are one.¹⁶ To belong to the Son is to belong to the Father. To follow the Son is to follow the Father.

Who are the true sheep? The true sheep enter the sheepfold through the Door of Jesus Christ.¹⁷ The true sheep know Him.¹⁸ They don't simply know about Jesus. They have a genuine relationship with Him as their Savior, Lord, and Shepherd. As His sheep they hear His voice.¹⁹ As His sheep they know His voice. They carefully discern His voice in the crowd of voices calling out in this world. Because they know His voice, they will not follow the voice of a false shepherd.²⁰ They will not receive a different Jesus, another gospel, or another spirit.²¹ Because they know Him and discern His voice, they trust Him and lean not to their own understanding. They follow Him willingly and obediently.²²

Jesus is the True Shepherd of the sheep. He is the Good Shepherd. He gives them what they need. He gives His life for the sheep and gives them eternal life. He is the only Door into the Father's sheepfold. He will keep those

⁷ John 10:14, 27

⁸ John 10:3

⁹ John 10:3-4

¹⁰ John 10:4

¹¹ John 10:9

¹² John 10:11

¹³ John 10:11, 15, 17-18; Acts 20:28

¹⁴ John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; 10:10, 28

¹⁵ John 10:28-29; 17:12

¹⁶ John 10:30

¹⁷ John 10:9

¹⁸ John 10:14

¹⁹ John 10:3, 27

²⁰ John 10:4, 5, 16

²¹ 2 Corinthians 11:4

²² John 10:4, 27

who belong to Him and lead them home to heaven. David said, "The Lord is my Shepherd." Is the Lord your Shepherd? Have you heard His voice calling your name? Will you hear, receive, and follow Him today?

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