

John's Gospel - the Good Shepherd

by John Vissers

In this sermon, John Vissers explores Jesus as the Good Shepherd, emphasizing His role in providing life, protection, and guidance to His followers.

Duration: 37:33

Scripture: John 10:1

Topics: "Good Shepherd"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the parable of the shepherd as told by Jesus in John 10. The main emphasis is on the voice of the shepherd and the importance of recognizing and following it. Jesus explains that the shepherd enters the sheep pen through the gate, symbolizing himself as the gate to eternal life and salvation. He contrasts this with thieves and robbers who try to deceive and destroy. The preacher encourages the audience to be discerning and not be swayed by false teachings or promises of fulfillment from self-help courses or other religious leaders.

Transcript

I tell you the truth. The man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate but climbs in some other way is a thief and a robber. The man who enters the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.

The watchman opens the gate for him and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

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 used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

Therefore, Jesus said again, I tell you the truth. I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.

I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out and find pasture.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away.

Then the wolf attacks and the flock scatters it. The man who runs away because he is a hired hand cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd.

I know my sheep and my sheep 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 the sheep pen.

I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my father loves me is that I lay down my life, only to 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 authority to take it up again. This command I received from my father.

At these words the Jews were again divided. Many of them said, He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him? But others said, These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon.

Can a demon open the eyes of the blind? Then came the feast of dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's colonnade. The Jews gathered around him saying, How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.

Jesus answered, I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice.

I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one can snatch them out of my hand.

My father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my father's hand. I and the father are one.

Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him. But Jesus said to them, I have shown you many great miracles from the father. For which of these do you stone me? We are not stoning you for any of these, replied the Jews, but for blasphemy because you, a mere man, claim to be God.

Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I have said you are gods? If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken, 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? Do not believe me unless I do what my father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles that you may learn and understand that the father is in me, and I in the father. Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.

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

And in that place, many believed in Jesus. Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O God, our strength and our Redeemer, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. There is a wonderful story about a rather large American evangelist who was invited to speak at an old parish church somewhere in England. The pulpit had been built in this church somewhere in the 16th century when people were a lot smaller than they are today.

It was quite high, and there was a small staircase that you had to make your way up in order to get into this pulpit. And after being introduced to the congregation that morning, this American guest speaker got up and he found that, in fact, the staircase leading into this pulpit was too small for him to navigate. No matter how he tried, he could not maneuver himself up through that narrow way in order to get into the pulpit.

Finally, in an effort to rescue him and to get the situation under control, the warden brought in a stepladder and had the guest get on the stepladder and climb up the front of the pulpit and get established and get himself settled, which he did. And once he got settled into the pulpit, he opened his Bible and he read the lesson for the day. John 10 at verse 1, I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate but climbs in by some other way is a thief and a robber.

Well, I don't know whether that story is true or not, but it's a wonderful turn of events to reflect upon. In John chapter 10, as we come to the opening of this chapter, we're still in the setting of the Feast of the Tabernacles. And Jesus here continues his teaching, and the teaching of John 10 really concludes the major teaching section which constitutes the whole center section of the Gospel of John.

Once we leave the 10th chapter, we go to the 11th chapter, where we read the account of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Then we come to John chapter 12, where Jesus is anointed at Bethany, and then he makes his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. And then in John chapter 13 to 17, we have the upper room discourse, where Jesus teaches his disciples in the upper room as they gather together, as they prepare for the reality not only of Passover, but that Jesus is going to leave them.

And then in John chapters 18 to 21, the last chapters of the Gospel, we come, of course, to the account of the arrest, the trial, the cross, the resurrection of our Lord. And so this really, chapter 10, is the final teaching section of this central part of the Gospel of John. Now, the passage, John chapter 10, that was read for us tonight, consists of two sections.

And in the first section, in verses 1 to 21, Jesus tells a parable. He tells a parable about a shepherd, about some sheep, and explains the meaning of the parable in terms of his own life, in terms of his own ministry. And this section, this opening section, concludes in verses 19 to 21 with the reaction of those who heard this parable and who heard the explanation that Jesus gave.

They're still not altogether sure who Jesus is. The people are divided. Some say he's demon-possessed and raving mad.

Others are not so sure. And then in the second section, in verses 22 to 42, which we're not going to spend much time in this evening, the setting has now changed. It's now the Feast of Dedication.

It's three months later. It's now winter. And Jesus again finds himself under attack by the religious leaders and some of this teaching from the earlier part of the chapter finds its way again into Jesus' teaching at this point on the fact that he is the good shepherd and the teaching goes on to make very clear that he is, in fact, the Son of God.

But the teaching of John 10 is really rooted in the opening five verses, which constitute really the parable which Jesus tells. And the imagery introduced in this parable is really very rich because the parable begins with the image of a sheepfold. It has one gate.

There's one way in and one way out of this sheepfold. And Jesus says the one who enters by the gate is the true shepherd. The sheep know the shepherd and the shepherd knows the sheep by name.

And then the parable introduces a negative possibility. There is the stranger whom the sheep will not follow because they do not recognize his voice. That's it.

That's the parable. Very short, to the point, and John, the gospel writer, then tells us that those who heard the parable did not understand its meaning. Now, at one level, the parable, of course, should have made abundant sense to those who heard it.

After all, the imagery used by Jesus was very familiar to first century people, very familiar in a society where sheep farming was the staple of the economy. The fold about which Jesus spoke was probably a large communal enclosure where several flocks would be gathered in the evening. They would be herded for safety at night.

And during the night, a guard, perhaps a watchman, hired by the shepherds, perhaps one of the shepherds themselves, they would become the door or the gate of that enclosure. The watchman or the shepherd himself would often lie across the opening of the sheepfold so that the shepherd himself became the gate. And the thief then who came to steal the sheep would have to scale the walls because it would be impossible to make his way through the shepherd, this gate at the sheepfold.

And in the morning, it would be the custom for each shepherd then to enter the pen, and by this time all the sheep would have been mixed with each other, the various flocks, and the shepherd would simply speak. And the sheep which belonged to that shepherd would know the shepherd's voice. And those sheep would then follow that shepherd out, and that shepherd would lead them into the fields of pasture for the day.

And then the next shepherd would go in. And likewise, he would speak. And again, the sheep would know his voice, the sheep of his flock.

They would make their way out, follow the shepherd into the pasture for the day. And so it would happen until all three or four flocks, however many there may have been in the sheepfold, have been led out into pasture for the day. So it should have made sense to the people, but it didn't.

And the parable also should have made sense to those who heard it because it also contains rich Old Testament imagery. In Ezekiel chapter 34 and verses 1 to 31, the prophet Ezekiel sets forth a lengthy indictment of false leaders of Israel who were the shepherds of God's people. And these leaders, Ezekiel says, have failed to provide for the sheep by not feeding them and by not caring for them.

They look after themselves. The shepherds of God's people look after themselves while the nation itself is being plundered. And in Ezekiel 34, the prophet, or God really through the prophet, makes two promises to His people.

In the first promise, God says that He Himself will come and be the shepherd of His people. That He will rescue and regather the flock and that He will pass judgment on the false shepherds. And then the second

promise is that He will appoint a new shepherd.

And the new shepherd will be in the line of His servant David. And so the meaning you see in John 10 is very stark and very real. And surely the religious leaders who heard these words would have begun to understand that Jesus was speaking about them and indeed against them.

That the religious leaders are the false shepherds and that Jesus is the new shepherd appointed by God. But the text says that those who heard this parable did not understand what He was telling them. And so the rest really of the passage, at least the first half of John 10, is Jesus' explanation.

It is Jesus spelling out the meaning of this parable very clearly. He tells the people, He tells the religious leaders exactly what this parable means, exactly how it ought to be interpreted with reference to His own life and to His own ministry. And particularly there are a few images that I want us to look at this evening.

I want us to focus on tonight as we approach the Lord's table, as we reflect on this parable. It's always dangerous, of course, to dissect the parable and to try to explain it in too great a detail. But here we follow the explanation that Jesus Himself offers, that Jesus Himself gives of this parable.

Now the first image, the first picture that I want to hold up for us to reflect on out of this parable is the image of the gate or the door. In the parable in verses 2-3, Jesus says that the man who enters the sheep pen by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him and only for him.

And then in verses 7-10, Jesus says, I tell you the truth, I am the gate of the sheep. Notice again the I am saying. The I am saying that we've been noticing again and again as we've been making our way through the Gospel of John.

I am the gate for the sheep. Whoever enters through Me will be saved. He will come in and out and find pasture.

I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. So the first image here is that Jesus is the gate. He is the door.

And it's a rich and a powerful image. He is the watchman hired to watch over the sheepfold at night. He is the one who guards the sheep and protects them from all harm.

He is the shepherd who lies across the opening to the sheepfold so that no one can come or go lest they pass through or over Him. He is the true shepherd, in the words of Ezekiel 34, appointed by God to protect His people. He is the shepherd through whom they will find life.

And so this image of the gate is an image of protection. It is an image of security. It is an image of provision.

It is an image of life. And that's really what Jesus here is saying, that He is the entrance into life. He is the one through whom we pass in order to find the riches of life that God offers to us.

He is the doorway to salvation, the way to fulfillment. Every truth must be tested by the truth of Jesus. Every teaching must be tested by His teaching.

And every true disciple who seeks to walk and who seeks to step inside the circle of discipleship must do so through Jesus Christ. There is no other way. There is no other way in other than through the life and

ministry and death and resurrection of Jesus.

And Jesus is very pointed here that every teaching and teacher that tries to enter by some other doorway is false. These words, of course, are echoed again by our Lord in John 14 and verse 6 when He's asked by one of the disciples, how shall we know the way? And Jesus says, I am the way. I am the truth and I am the life.

No one comes to the Father but through Me. And by contrast, Jesus here points to the religious leaders as thieves and robbers. And so this gate, this door, is the entranceway into life, into the riches of life, into the protection and into the security, into the salvation that the Lord offers.

The image, of course, makes us immediately think of Psalm 23. If we think of the gate as the shepherd lying across this entranceway, we remember the words of our Lord in Psalm 23. If the Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing.

He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul.

He prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. And what Jesus is really saying here is, I am the way into the riches of this life that even David was speaking about when he penned that great psalm, the 23rd Psalm.

And let's be clear what Jesus is talking about here. He is the one who gives life to its fullest. He gives the fullness of life.

And this is a reference, of course, to eternal life. But we usually think of eternal life only in terms of quantity, in terms of time. But the image and the wording that Jesus uses here speaks also about a quality of life, about an intensification of life.

The life that Jesus offers is eternal life. It is full life. It is rich life in His glorious presence.

And it begins not simply at death, but it begins as we allow Him to reside in our lives, as we open our lives, and as we enter into the life that He offers as the way, the truth, and the life. We live in a culture, of course, where there are all kinds of invitations to life. All kinds of invitations to find the fullness of life, the intensification of life, to really experience the fullness of life.

Advertisers promote their products this way. You will find the fullness of life, really experience life in its fullness and in its intensity if you buy our products. We live in a culture, an addicted culture, where people turn to substances of all kinds to find that kind of an experience of the fullness or intensification of life.

Self-help courses promise that if we register in their programs, we will be fulfilled. The New Age gurus promise that if we buy their books, we will be fulfilled. That even religious leaders sometimes can promote their teachings in this way that you'll find this kind of a life.

And Jesus says, these are the thieves who come in to steal and destroy the life that I want to offer to you, the fullness of life, eternal life, salvation, the intensification and fullness of the life that I bring to you. And so the gate points us in the direction of the richness of life that Jesus offers. The second image that I'd like you to think about for a minute with me is the image of the voice of the shepherd.

In this parable, the parable of the shepherd, the voice of the shepherd is prominent. In verses 3 to 5, Jesus says this, the watchman opens the gate for him and the sheep listen to his voice and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out and when he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never, I love this, they will never follow a stranger.

In fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice. And then in verse 27, Jesus makes the application very clear. He says, my sheep listen to my voice, I know them and they follow me.

Now as I said a few minutes ago, often a number of shepherds would put their flocks into the same enclosure, the same pen for the night. The shepherds didn't separate those flocks. They let those flocks mingle together.

They let those flocks kind of just mix in one with the other and as they did, of course, the flocks would become mixed together. And then in the next morning, the shepherd would go in and the shepherd would speak. And the shepherd would speak his voice and his sheep would follow him.

And Jesus says they would never follow a stranger. And the picture here that's being drawn is a picture of relationship and a picture of intimacy. I want you to reflect on that.

The picture that's being drawn here is a picture of relationship and a picture of intimacy. If you know someone's voice, if someone phones you and you know who it is, you pick up the phone without them even identifying themselves, you know who it is right away by the sound of their voice. You don't need to ask who it is.

If it's a member of your family, a husband, a wife, a son, or a daughter, a father, a mother, a close friend, you know their voice. You know the voice of those who are close to you. You know the voice of those who are intimate with you.

And Jesus says that's the voice of the shepherd for his sheep. And what He's saying is that if you know Me as the Good Shepherd, if you are one of My sheep, then you will know My voice. And you will be able to distinguish My voice from the voices of the strangers that clamor in your ears all about you in the world, the voices inside our heads that want our attention.

Jesus says we know if we belong to Jesus the voice of the Lord. We hear Him speak through His Word. We know what is an authentic Word.

We respond to that Word, and we resist then the voice of the stranger. We resist any voice which we know does not belong to our Lord Jesus. But notice there's more here.

Notice Jesus says that those who hear the voice of the shepherd, that is the voice of Jesus, includes those beyond the bounds of Israel. Verse 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 will be one flock and one shepherd. Now, I have to tell you, there have been many, many fanciful interpretations of this particular verse over the years, all kinds of interesting and different and diverse interpretations. But it seems to me the meaning is not particularly mysterious.

Jesus here is referring to the Gentiles. And Jesus knows that Israel's vocation was to be a light to the Gentiles. And as the true shepherd of Israel, Jesus fulfills that vocation of Israel.

He was born a Jew. He came to Israel. But the irony is, of course, that many of the religious leaders do not hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, while many outside of Israel do.

Oh, some of the religious leaders here, Nicodemus, for example, comes to Jesus at night in John 3. He wants to talk with Jesus. He wants to learn from Jesus. But there are others outside, beyond the pale, so to speak.

Think of John 4, the Samaritan woman. Think of the royal official and the royal official's son. Think of many others in the Gospels whom Jesus reaches out to who are beyond the pale, beyond the bounds of Israel.

And what Jesus is making clear here is the claim that the Apostle Paul later and others of the Apostles make very clear that the Gospel is in fact to include the Gentiles as well as the Jews. That Jesus came. That the sheep for whom He came are not confined to Israel alone, but to His people from every nation on the face of the earth.

And so the voice. The voice of the Shepherd is for His sheep. But it's not for a narrowly defined nationalistic group of people.

It is for those whom the Lord our God calls to Himself. His sheep know His voice. And the question is, do we recognize, do we hear the voice of the Good Shepherd? Do we have that kind of an intimate relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ so that when He speaks, we hear, we listen.

And then the third image and the final image that I want us to reflect on this evening is simply the image of the sacrifice of the Shepherd for the sheep. We have, yes, the voice. The Shepherd's voice.

Yes, the gate. The Shepherd as the door. But now, the sacrifice of the Good Shepherd.

Jesus says in v. 14, I am the Good Shepherd and I lay down my life for the sheep. And in v. 17-18, the reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again. And notice this, 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. Now we need to understand that in the New Testament, the cross of Jesus is portrayed using a number of different pictures.

A number of different images. For example, we often think of the cross of Jesus in terms of the sacrifice of the Lamb. We sang about that this evening.

Isaiah 53 speaks about and prophesies the death of our Lord on the cross as the sacrifice of a Lamb. We also think of the death of our Lord Jesus in terms of atonement by a priest. The atonement offering being laid upon the altar of sacrifice.

We think about it as the innocent dying for the guilty. The ransom of a slave. The payment of a debt that Jesus pays a debt that we owe so that we might be set free from the bondage of sin, from the curse of sin.

The New Testament also speaks about the cross of Jesus as victory over the powers of evil. It's described as a friend laying down his life for another friend. But one of the most beautiful and one of the most

powerful and one of the most real pictures describing the death of Jesus is the Good Shepherd laying down his life for his sheep.

It is the Shepherd's life given for his sheep. And in the first century, shepherds took their vocation, took their calling very seriously. We know that from other parables that Jesus told and other stories that Jesus told that this was so.

The sheep had to be protected from thieves. The sheep had to be protected from predators. And a shepherd would do whatever he could within his power to protect the sheep, to protect them from thieves, to keep them safe.

And if one sheep was lost, the shepherd would go and find the sheep that was lost. They gave their lives sometimes in order to protect the flock from a lion or a bear or a band of thieves. Do you remember David? David in his life as a shepherd when he's standing up against Goliath, he knows that God is with him because God has been with him in the past.

When he fought the lion, when he fought the bear protecting the sheep, he knew that God was with him so he could with courage face Goliath, face this giant as a young boy because he knew that the Lord was with him. That was David's experience as a shepherd, willing to give his life if necessary for his sheep. And here we have the son of David.

One greater than David who gives his life for the sheep. He has come to save his flock. He will save his people even though or precisely because it means going to a cross in order to protect them from the thieves and the robbers of their souls.

And notice that he does it lovingly. And notice that he does it willingly and voluntarily. No one takes my life from me.

I give it up voluntarily. I have the authority to lay my life down and to take it up again. He does it in accordance with his Father's will.

And he does it for you. And he does it for me. As we come to this table this evening, do you see Jesus as the gate, as the door to life? What voice is ringing in your head this evening as you come to this table? Is it the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ? And do you see the sacrifice that the shepherd makes for his sheep in order that we might celebrate the life which he offers? On May 29-31, in 1934, a group of Christians met in Barmen, Germany, to confess their faith in Jesus Christ.

And to confess their faith in Jesus Christ at a critical moment in the history of Europe and in the life of Germany. They confessed their faith in Jesus as Lord over against the Nazi regime and its attempt to co-opt the churches of Germany and the churches of Europe in their awful and horrific program. And the statement that they came up with, known as the Barmen Declaration, sets forth a number of evangelical truths.

And the first truth, the first statement of the Barmen Declaration is this statement. I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.

John 14.6 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. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved.

John 10.1 and 9. Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, they wrote, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and obey in life and in death. And we reject the false doctrine as though the church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths as God's revelation. They were making a very powerful statement.

Because as Christians living in the 1930's, they were saying there are thieves and there are robbers who would steal the faith of God's people. And they rejected the voice of Hitler and the Nazi regime as the voice of the stranger. And they heeded rather the voice of their Lord.

And so the question for us is will we hear the voice of Jesus as we come to this table this evening? I close with two texts. 1 Peter 2.25 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed, for you were like sheep going astray.

But now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls. And then from the book of Hebrews, may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great shepherd of the sheep, equip us with every good for doing his will. And may he work in us what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Lord, we bow before you and acknowledge that you are the good shepherd. Help us to hear your voice. Help us to receive the life that you offer.

Help us to realize the enormity of the great cost which was given in love in your sacrifice upon the cross. And as we come to this table, we pray that you would enable us to do so in faith and repentance through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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