

"The True Shepherd"

It's been a disturbing week. We've seen how easily protest, which can be a valid expression of grievance, can turn into unjustified lawlessness and dangerous violence. We saw it in the riots last year and now again last week. Whether it comes from the right or the left, people who are espousing your causes or undermining them, it is wrong. In the Bible, riots and mobs are only and always bad. Nothing good comes from them. It is not my theme or focus today to talk about riots or their causes. But, the events of last week and of last year can together serve as a great backdrop as we listen to Jesus tell us that he is the True Shepherd that we all need. He and he alone is the one to whom we can and should fully give our trust and our hearts. The image of the Good Shepherd from **Psalm 23**, or the image of the Shepherd in **Luke 15** who seeks out the one lost sheep, lays it on his shoulders, and carries it home rejoicing, these are the images Jesus claims for himself in John 10, when he tells us he is the true Shepherd. In a broken world in which political and religious passions and personalities can let lead us astray, Jesus says he is the Shepherd we can trust.

We're in the last year of the life of Jesus, headed toward the cross and the resurrection. Last week we saw that Jesus spoke of the gift of the Holy Spirit at the feast of tabernacles, which was about six months before the end. Now, we've come to **John 10**. In **John 10:22-23**, we're given another time reference. John says Jesus was in Jerusalem, at the temple, during the Feast of Dedication. The Feast of Dedication is known to most people today as Hanukkah. It celebrated the rededication of the temple and its altar in Jerusalem after it had been desecrated during the persecution of the Jews under the ruler Antiochus Epiphanies ruler of the Seleucid empire, which emerged after Alexander the Great. The Feast of Dedication takes place in December. That means the events in **John 10** are about four months before an ugly mob incited by self-serving leaders calls for the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus knows what is coming. In this passage, he repeatedly talks about laying down his life for the sheep. The true shepherd is sacrificial. ***In this first part of the teaching, what Jesus so clearly wants us to understand is that he is the Shepherd, the who truly cares for us, and we can truly trust in him.*** If you are a Christian, you need to know this not only for your own heart but also for your mission in the world so you can share this with others and defend it when it is challenged.

The first thing we are taught in **John 10** is that...

I. JESUS CHRIST IS THE TRUE SHEPHERD FOR OUR SOULS

There are shepherds, so-called, who are not true shepherds. The leaders, among the people in those days whether religious or political were called the shepherds of Israel. In **John 9** Jesus healed a blind man. The leaders who see Jesus as a threat were so committed to their own agenda they saw the healing only as a problem. So they insult the poor blind man who has been healed and cast him. **John 10** is Jesus' response. He doesn't just condemn these leaders them as bullies. He exposes them as frauds. **John 10:1-3**: *"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. ² But he who enters by the door is the Shepherd of the sheep.*

In all of this what Jesus is doing gives us two evidences that he is the true Shepherd. *First, he says...*

A. The true Shepherd enters by the door, and the gatekeeper opens the door for him.

1. What does Jesus mean when he talks about the door? *The Old Testament Scripture and their promises and prophecies created a sort of narrow door. Anyone claiming to be the Savior and Messiah would have to pass through that door. Only the true savior could pass through that door. The Old Testament Scriptures had been completed hundreds of hundreds of years before Jesus was born. They contained multiple prophecies about the coming of Christ. The prophecies in Scripture are not just isolated predictions but the continually unfolding development of the one great promise of a Savior. Isaiah told the circumstances of His birth and the names he would be given. Micah said that he would be born in Bethlehem. He had to be from one nation, one tribe, born in one place. Other Scriptures foretold what he would be like and the miracles he would perform. All of this created a sort of narrow door or gate. Anyone claiming to be the true Shepherd and Savior would have to come God's way. Jesus and only Jesus did that. I'm thankful that We do not vote on whether Jesus is the true shepherd. He does not need the affirmation of any human authorities. He is the one and the only one sent by God to be the true shepherd of our souls. He alone deserves the full trust of our hearts.*

2. What of the gatekeeper? *In verse 3 Jesus says to him the gatekeeper opens. Well, the last of the prophets who preceded Christ, was sent by God to prepare the way for Christ, was John the Baptist.*

When Jesus came, John said, *“This is him. He’s the one who takes away the sins of the world.”*

Jesus fulfilled the prophecies and was announced by the gatekeeper. That’s the first evidence. The second evidence is that...

B. The sheep recognize the voice of the true Shepherd.

Verses 3-5: *The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.* The background in the culture is that shepherds sometimes brought their flocks together into one sheepfold in the evening. Several flocks were gathered and guarded by a watchman. In the morning, each Shepherd called out his own sheep. Although the flocks had been mingled, each flock knew its own Shepherd and his voice and would follow its Shepherd and no other.

I feel that I can say that this is what happened to me. I was restless. I was reading about Eastern religions and Western Philosophy, looking for some satisfying answers about life. One day I picked up a dusty Bible on a shelf in the garage. When I started reading it, I heard in the words of Jesus, the ring of deep truth. I knew His voice when I heard it, and I wanted to follow Him. We experience coming to Christ as if we are choosing him (and we do choose him). But one of the mysteries of God's sovereign grace that we do not *become* his sheep when we hear his voice and come to Him. We recognize his voice because we *are already* his sheep, and belong to Him. That's why even though we do not literally hear a voice, that is a metaphor, something very real and spiritual takes place. Something stirs in your soul, and you respond to Christ, and faith begins to take shape and take hold. Maybe you are here, or you are watching today online because he is calling you right now. He knows you. He invites you to come to him. If you have come to him – don't take that lightly. Let that move you to deep thanksgiving. You were lost, but you have been found by the true Shepherd. He is the true Shepherd. The sheep recognize his voice.

Jesus is the true Shepherd. That's the first point. Here's the second,

II. BECAUSE JESUS IS THE TRUE SHEPHERD HE IS THE ONE TRUE SAVIOR.

In **John 10:7-8** *So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and*

robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. In **verse 7**, Jesus says, *truly truly*. That is an emphatic way of saying, *I am telling you the truth*. When he talks about thieves and robbers he is saying there are many who abuse and distort the truth for their own ends. But while he warns us about the abuse of truth he says there is truth. He can tell it. You can know it. And he makes a strong claim. He says, *I am the door for the sheep*.

A. There is a unique blend of narrowness *and* openness in Jesus.

There is a narrowness in **verse 9** when Jesus says. *I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved*. Later, in **verse 16**, there is a blend of openness and narrowness. He says: *And 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*. He wants his sheep, with all their diversity to be one flock under him and him alone.

1. This claim that Jesus is the door for everyone is a problem for some people today. It seems narrow. That is undeniable. Jesus came to the Jewish people, but he says that he has other sheep scattered throughout all the nations and peoples of the world. And yet, far from saying that each of these other nations or people groups has its own door, or its own way, He says he is the one door or way for all people. How can Christianity claim to be true for everyone? Here's the reason. Jesus clearly taught this and we have to face the truth that he did.

2. The fable of the blind men and the elephant is often used to supposedly make the point that all truth is, at best, relative, and all religions equally valid. We should be able to respond to it so we can share our faith and serve the mission Jesus gave us. What we are often told is the illustration of the blind men and the elephant. The usual claim is that truth is like an elephant, and we are all like blind men who reach out and only touch a part of it. So one handles the trunk and says *an elephant is like a rope*. Another feels the side and says, *no, it is like a wall*. One touches the leg and says *it is like a tree*. Each blind man thinking his own perception of the elephant was the correct one, began to argue with the others. The king, awakened by the commotion, called out from the balcony. "The elephant is a big animal," he said. "Each of you is only touching one part." Enlightened by the king's revelation the blind men realized none of them had the whole truth. The point of this fable is to say that all of us and all religions are like the blind men describing the elephant. Since no one has the whole picture, no one can claim that they have the truth.

3. One problem with using that fable to make that point is that you have claim that you, unlike the rest of the world, are not blind. The problem becomes obvious if you ask the person using this illustration, "Where would you be in the story? Are you like one of the blind men, or are you like the king?" If you are like one of the blind men, you are just one more person not seeing the whole picture? On the other hand, if you claim to have the perspective of the king, how is it that you alone have escaped the limitations that blind all the rest of us?

There is another problem with the story when it is use to advocate relativism or that there are many paths and ways to God.

4. In the story, only the king, can explain the truth. The most ironic thing of all is that the parable of the blind men and the elephant, to a great degree, actually is an accurate picture of reality. It's just been widely misapplied. We are like blind men, fumbling around in the world searching for answers. We're often confused and mistaken. *How can we ever know the truth?* Well, there's only one way. We have to listen to the king. To be a Christian is to believe that the king has spoken and is speaking. In our passage, Jesus says: "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. The claim of Christianity is that we don't discover God by just groping in our blindness. God comes to us in Christ and reveals the truth. God is not is not passive and silent. If God speaks, this changes everything.

B. Jesus did not just claim to be another teacher. He said he was the door through which you must enter to be saved.

In **John 10:9**. He says: *I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.* One of the things we have to deal with when it comes to Jesus is the fact that he didn't just claim to be one more teacher with a few special insights. He claimed to be the door through which we enter and receive salvation.

It is common to hear people say: "No one should insist their view of God is better than anyone else's." But the idea that all views of God are equal only makes sense if there is no God or God is just our word for some impersonal force that doesn't care what your doctrinal beliefs about him are. So whenever someone says something like that, they are actually espousing their view of what God is like and pushing it as better than the rest! That is, at best, inconsistent and hypocritical since you are doing the very thing you are forbidding.

Years ago, there was a story about a fifteen-year-old boy, Shawn Hornbeck, who was found after having been kidnapped when he was

eleven. In some ways, the kidnapper acted like a father to him. A dysfunctional father but like a father of sorts. But can you imagine anyone saying, “*Look, there are all kinds of families in the world who is to say one is better than another? If this boy stayed with that man, for whatever reasons, why not leave well enough alone.*” That’s absurd. Why? There is a real father who loved that boy and wanted to be reunited with him. What if there is a real God who made all of mankind, and he wants us back? If God really exists and he made us to know him, to love him and be loved by him, it makes sense that he would want to reveal himself to us. He *has* revealed himself to us in Jesus. Jesus is the true Shepherd and the true Savior. He is the one who died and rose again to save us. We can trust in him. We can follow him.

III. WE CAN TRUST IN THE TRUE SHEPHERD, AND THE TRUE SAVIOR BECAUSE HIS CARE FOR US IS BEAUTIFUL.

Twice in **verse 11** and again in **verse 14**, Jesus says he is the *good Shepherd*. The Greeks had a word for goodness (*agathos*), which meant useful, correct, morally upright. But this word (*kalos*) included moral goodness but added to it an element of beauty, quality, and nobility. *Kalos* is the word from which we get kaleidoscope.

A. What Jesus came to give us is beautiful.

Verses 10-11, *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. 11 I am the good Shepherd. The good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.* Jesus doesn't just come to lay down the law. He came to give life. He doesn't just come to give us a longer life but to give us a richer life.

B. The way he commits to us is beautiful.

Verse 12-13 *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. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.* He doesn't love us as long as we are useful to Him, or it is easy for him. His people, his sheep, belong to him and he is committed to them.

C. The way he knows us is beautiful.

Verse 14-15 *I am the good Shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father, and I*

lay down my life for the sheep. There is a personal, individual, intimate knowledge and relationship that is being revealed here. Earlier in the same chapter, **John 10:3** says, *He calls his own sheep by name.* In the introduction to the book *When God Whispers Your Name*, by Max Lucado, he writes: *"When I see a flock of sheep I see exactly that, a flock. A rabble of wool. A herd of hooves. I don't see a sheep. I see sheep. All alike. None different. That's what I see. But not so with the [true] Shepherd. To him, every sheep is different. Every face is special. The Shepherd knows his sheep. He calls them by name."*

There is great beauty in all of this, but ultimately...

D. What he himself is for us is beautiful.

The prophet Isaiah described what the Savior would be like when he came. **Isaiah 40:11** says: *He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom and gently lead those that are with young.* This image was in total contrast to the religious and political leaders who were supposed to care for the people in the land. Jesus says, what you look for in vain from human shepherds I will give you I am the true Shepherd.

Conclusion

When Jesus calls himself the good shepherd and the true shepherd his words are designed to awaken a deep yearning. Maybe to awaken nothing less than the deepest yearning of all, the yearning of the soul for a relationship with someone or something that can make us feel cared for, watched over, provided for, guided and protected. That yearning is so deep it shapes a large part of our lives. Unless you come to Christ and let him truly be the true Shepherd *for* you - you will try to find what he is offering in someone or something else. You will try to find it in some person or achievement, or you will try to be it for yourself, and you will fail and get very cynical. Jesus is touching on a deep nerve here, and knowing that, Jesus does something typical of himself, but no one else. It's an astounding claim: Jesus says, *"I am what you want and what you need."* In saying this, he is calling you to so deeply, truly trust in him as *your* true Shepherd that you find him to be all that he is and can be for you. You find your security, satisfaction, life, love, identity, guidance, and eternal salvation in him.

Amen

Prayer of Response

O Lord, you are the true shepherd. Forgive our lack of trust in you, Forgive our willingness to follow others who are neither true nor good. Help us to hear your voice more clearly, to follow you more willingly, to thank you more deeply for knowing us and calling us and laying down your life for us. Help us to only and always give to our Lord Jesus Christ our highest allegiance and deepest devotion. Enable us to live in the trusting confidence that we are not on our own but in your arms and under your care. We ask in Jesus name, Amen.