



Potomac Hills

Presbyterian Church, PCA



By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

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John 10:1-21

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English Standard Version

“Christ — The Good Shepherd”

This is the 34th sermon in the series on the New Testament book of John entitled,
“The Gospel of Christ.”

John 10:1-21

"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. 3 To him the gatekeeper opens. 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." 6 This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. 7 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. 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 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. 12 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. 14 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. 16 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. 17 For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may 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 I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from My Father." 19 There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. 20 Many of them said, "He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?" 21 Others said, "These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?""

INTRODUCTION: *Trying to Steal Sheep*¹

It was during World War I when some Turkish soldiers tried to steal a flock of sheep from a hillside near Jerusalem. The shepherd, who had been sleeping, suddenly woke up to see his sheep being driven off of the other side of the ravine. He couldn't hope to recapture his flock by force single-handedly, but suddenly he had an idea. Standing up on his side of the ravine, he put his hands to his mouth and gave his own peculiar call, which he used every day to gather his sheep to him. The sheep heard the familiar sound. For a moment, they stopped and listened, and then, upon hearing it again, they turned and rushed down one side of the ravine and back up the other side toward their shepherd. It was impossible for the soldiers to stop the animals. The shepherd was away with them to a place of safety before the soldiers could make up their minds to pursue them — and all because the sheep knew the sound of their shepherds' voice.

There is no better loved picture of Jesus in the Scriptures than the picture of Him as the Good Shepherd. The picture of the shepherd is deeply woven into the fabric of the Bible. The language and imagery of sheep and shepherds are found repeatedly in both the Old and New Testaments. The main part of Judea is a plateau, about 15 miles wide by 35 miles long, and for the most part, it consists of rocky and stony ground. The primary way to make a living was by tending animals, either cattle, goats, or sheep. The most familiar figure of the Judean countryside was the shepherd.

But what is a shepherd ... exactly?

And why did Jesus use this image to **teach us about Himself**?

Let's start by first asking ...

WHAT DOES THE SHEPHERD HAVE?²

We're going to look at this passage a little differently than normal. Rather than going verse-by-verse, I'm going to use a series of questions and answers to try and get at the meaning of what we find here in the text. There is so much here in this passage that I could have easily taken three or four weeks to deal with it, but sometimes when we do that we lose the big picture, the main point, of what Jesus is teaching us. And in John 10, **Jesus** is teaching us about Himself.

So the 1st question is ... What does a shepherd have?

And the first thing we see here in answer to that question is that ...

- **The Shepherd has a Fold**

Jesus starts off in verse 1 by saying, *"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."* A fold is an open sheep pen; it has four walls but no roof. It's open to the wind; it's open to the eyes of the shepherd. It's a place of protection.

Jesus begins this parable by asserting that anyone who forces his way into the sheep fold other than by the proper entrance is a thief and a robber. In other words, He's saying that your life is a sheep fold to which He alone, as the Good Shepherd, is the rightful owner.

You may have erected high walls of self-defense around your life. You may even completely enclose yourself behind the walls of fear, cutting yourself off from other people; afraid to let anyone get too close to you for fear that you'll get hurt. You seek total security

1 The Introduction is taken from *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* by Michael Green, ed., page 420.

2 The Exposition of the text is adapted from my sermon *"What is a Shepherd,"* 8/9/92; the sermon *"The Lord's My Shepherd"* by Derek Thomas, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS, 2/3/03; *Reflections on the Gospel of John, Vol. 2* by Leon Morris, pages 368-383; *The Gospel According to John* by D.A. Carson, pages 379-390; *A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23* and *A Shepherd looks at the Good Shepherd* both by W. Philip Keller.

because of your insecurity. But here Christ is letting you know that's impossible. Because over and around your high walls, your life is surrounded and enfolded by the encircling care and provision of a providential God. Your life cannot be closed off from His concern. It's wide open to the wind — the wind of His gracious Holy Spirit. There is no way, as a Christian, that the Spirit can be kept out, any more than the wind blowing across the countryside can be kept out of an open sheep fold.

That's the first thing we see, that the shepherd has a fold.

Second, we see that ...

- **The Shepherd has a Door**³

Go to verse 2, which tells us that *"But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep."* And again in verses 7-9 we read, *"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. 9 **I am the door.** If anyone enters **by Me**, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture."*

It's difficult to think of these verses without considering the huge body of Old Testament passage that talk about shepherds. One of the most important of these we read as our responsive reading this morning ... from Ezekiel 34.

There God denounces the false shepherds of Israel, and repeatedly says that a day is coming when He Himself will be the shepherd of His people, feeding them, leading them, disciplining them. Jesus' insistence that, so far as shepherds go, those who came before Him *"are thieves and robbers"* would call Ezekiel 34 to mind. Then, toward the end of that Old Testament chapter, God says He will place one shepherd over His flock— His servant David.

Now the Good Shepherd is here, one with God, yet from David's line.

When Jesus was born, we read in **Matthew 2:6**, *"And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler **who will shepherd my people Israel.**"*

Then Jesus says, *"**I am the door.**"* In the most literal sense the shepherd was the door; there was no access to the sheep fold except through him. You see, there's only one way to enter the sheep fold ... and that is by the door.

These hillside sheep folds were just open spaces enclosed by a wall. And somewhere in the wall there was an opening by which the sheep came in and went out; but there was no actual gate of any kind. What happened was that at night the shepherd himself laid down across the opening and therefore no sheep could get out or in except over his body.

If the sheep fold is where the sheep are, where God's people are, and the only way to enter the sheep fold, the Kingdom of God, is through the door, and Jesus is the Door (not a door, but **The** Door) — then it's clear that one can only enter the Kingdom of God through Jesus Christ. He is the **only** way to salvation.

Which is exactly what we read Him saying in **John 14:6**, *"Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father **except through Me.**"* And we read in Acts 4:12 that *"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is **no other name** under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."* Salvation is found only in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And Jesus is saying here, very clearly, that "You must pass through Me to be a part of God's flock." And when you do that, then Peter's words in **1 Peter 2:25** become true in your life. For there the Apostle writes, *"For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."*

³ Part of this section is adapted from *For The Love of God* by D. A. Carson.

Which leads us to the third thing we see here that the shepherd has ...

- **The Shepherd has a Flock**

Jesus says in verse 16 that *“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.”*

Now you have to stop thinking here about lamb chops. If you raise sheep for mutton or for meat, you don’t do the ‘bonding’ thing. You don’t name an animal that is destined for the kitchen table. You don’t give that animal a name. In the ancient near east, sheep were raised, on the whole, for their wool rather than their mutton; and the value, of course, could be substantial. So you could bond with them. A true shepherd knew his sheep and often kept them for a long time.

And that’s what we’re reading about here.

Jesus knows His sheep. He knows them by name. You remember how He called Nathaniel and said, **John 1:47-48**, *“Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael said to Him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.””*

Do you remember Luke 19 and the story of Zacchaeus up the tree trying to get a look at Jesus as He was passing through? And He calls him by name. As far as we know, they had never met.

I’m usually pretty good with names ... in context. If I see someone I know from baseball at the baseball field, I’ll usually remember who they are. But if I run into them at Costco or at school ... absolutely clueless. They’ll say “hi, Mr. Silvernail” and I’ll say “Hey, how you doing.” [I grew up in Jersey] But in my head, I’m thinking, “I know this person but I can’t remember who they are.” And it drives me nuts ... because names are important. I know how offensive it is when somebody ought to know your name and they don’t know your name.

Jesus never forgets your name. He knows who you are.

In fact, He knows you better than you know yourself.

Jesus brings all believers together — all who have received Christ as Lord and Savior; Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, men and women. Jesus knows them all, He knows them by name, and they all respond to His voice.

Salvation is available to all who will put their trust in Christ. Any man or woman who does this belongs to Him, is a member of His flock, and a sheep of His pasture. And there shall be one flock. This last part of verse 16 is a play on words in the Greek, which can probably best be understood as saying, *“and there shall be one sheep-herd and one shepherd.”*

And that brings us to the next question ...

WHAT DOES THE SHEPHERD DO?

To really ask the question of “What does the shepherd do?” We must first ask “Where would the sheep be without the shepherd?” You see, sheep are weak, they’re slow, they’re dumb, and they’re defenseless. Sheep are easily injured and readily get sick. Sheep overeat! Sheep usually panic when they’re threatened. Sheep follow each other blindly, and they drown quickly. It’s amazing that there are any sheep at all. Sheep are here only because sheep have shepherds!

According to the American Heritage Dictionary the definition of a shepherd is “one who herds, guards, tends, and guides sheep.” Simple enough, but lets look a little closer. We start by noting that ...

- **The Shepherd herds the sheep**

The shepherd brings them together into one flock and he keeps them together. He finds

the lost sheep and brings him in. He allows them to, verse 9, *“go in and out and find pasture.”*

When we allow the Good Shepherd to herd the sheep, we’re allowing Christ to bring us together as Christians and to give us direction as a church. The focus of our attention is shifted away from ourselves and given instead to the Shepherd.

The second thing the shepherd does is ...

- **The Shepherd guards the sheep**

The shepherd is the sheep’s defense. He protects them from thieves and robbers; He protects them from those who don’t care about them; He protects them from wild animals. John 10 speaks a great deal of God’s protection for us. Verse 5 says, *“A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”*

What happens when you’re confronted by ungodly influences? Because it’s clearly not coming from the Shepherd, do you run? Or do you listen to it, just to see what it says? In this day and age we’re surrounded by false and misleading influences which pretend to have our best interests at heart. We’re flooded with misleading concepts and false ideologies which pour forth from our newspapers and magazines and, most of all, from the television sets in our living rooms.

Two of the most prominent and most devious worldly influences are Humanism and Materialism. The first, Humanism, says that Man is the master of his own destiny. There’s no need to believe in or follow God. *“Have it your way — you only go around once, go for the gusto — you deserve it — be selfish — lie if you have to.”* The second, Materialism, says that the Chief End of Man is the accumulation of possessions. *“He who dies with the most toys wins.”*

We’re getting caught up in a worldly way of existence and we’re being robbed blind. These false religions are leaving us with broken lives, broken hearts, broken minds, broken homes, broken bodies, and a broken society. They’re modern day idols and we need to flee from them. We simply cannot afford to follow these strangers if we’re to survive as Christians who are tuned in to the call of the Shepherd. Jesus says in verse 10, *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”*

Our Chief End, as the Westminster Shorter Catechism says, is to glorify God (not ourselves) and to enjoy Him forever (not our things).

Third, since we don’t always do that, thankfully we see that ...

- **The Shepherd tends the sheep**

The shepherd takes care of the sheep. He feeds them. He mends their wounds. He provides them with shelter. He spends a great deal of time with the sheep. When the shepherd calls his sheep out of the fold to lead them to a new pasture, he stands at the door. And as each animal passes him he calls it by name, examines it with his knowing eye, searches it with his knowing hand, to see if all is well.

It’s a moving time at the beginning of each new day; a time of close and intimate contact between the shepherd and his flock. The shepherd gets the sheep out early in the morning so they will benefit from the dew that lies on the grass. As the area around Jerusalem is so dry, often this is the only moisture available for the flock. All the moisture the flock must get comes from the dew-drenched pasture. It can only be gotten early, before the sun beats down and it dries up.

Turning to our lives, we find that much of the same principles hold true. It’s worth noting that most of the great men and women of God through the centuries are those who have met with Him early in the day. It’s significant that so many of His most intimate “saints” have been those who literally allowed themselves to be put out into fresh fields of intimate association

with Christ at the break of day. It's in these still hours that the quiet dew and refreshing presence of God's Spirit descend upon us. It is then that our frantic worlds are still, the clamor and conflict of our complex lives are quiet. It is then that our lives are calm enough to listen to what God's Word has to say to us. It is here that the Shepherd comes to feed, tend, mend, and teach. It is here that we give Him the time to take care of us.

We have such a contrast here between Jesus and the Pharisees. Just one chapter ago, in John 9, we met a man born blind. Here is someone the Pharisees should have cared for but they didn't. Then Jesus came along and healed the man. And instead of rejoicing with him as he could now see, they interrogated him to find out if Jesus actually dared heal on the Sabbath. And when they didn't like his answers, they cast him out. **Cast him out.** But Jesus went and found him and brought him in to His fold, tended to him, and that man responded with great faith.

And if we give Him that time, we will discover, and come to know, that ...

- **The Shepherd guides the sheep**

The shepherd leads them to pasture. He directs their ways. He takes them on the safest and surest routes. The shepherd is up early at the break of day to lead his sheep out into fresh pastures. He doesn't allow his flock to linger without food, but is continually providing for them.

Likewise, God, by His gracious Spirit, is calling you to follow Him. He wants to lead you out from your cramped day-to-day routine. He has new paths for you to follow, so there is no need for your life to stay in a rut. He doesn't want you to linger without being fed from His Word, but He daily invites you moves into the rich pastures of Scripture.

Verses 3 and 4 teach us that *"To him the gatekeeper opens. 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."* One thing about the shepherd, he only takes the sheep to places where he has been before. He knows where the sheep are and where they are to go. Wherever He chooses to put you is for Him ... familiar ground.

If you're setting out under His guidance, then your confidence is in His faithfulness to find the right place for you to be, the place where He and others will benefit the most from your presence. But it means that you have to be able to trust the Shepherd. And as people, we tend to trust only those whom we know the best, which brings us to the next question ...

WHAT DOES THE SHEPHERD WANT?

It's not just a one-way street. While the shepherd does an amazing amount of things for the sheep, there are some things He expects of the sheep. First, and one of the most important, is that ...

- **The sheep are to know the Shepherd**

Verse 14 says, and this verse is critical, *"I am the good shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me..."* There's a special relationship of trust between the shepherd and the sheep. A relationship based upon knowing each other. Knowing Christ is one of the great themes that runs through the Gospel of John.

We are to know the love of God.

We are to know that we have eternal life.

We are to know that He hears us when we talk with Him.

We are to know that we belong to Him.

The only way you really get to know someone is by spending time with that person, listening to what they have to say, to what they think, to what they feel. It's the same with the Shepherd. The only way you really get to know the Shepherd is by spending time with Him,

listening to what He has to say. It's through the Bible that we learn who the Shepherd is and how much He actually loves us. It's through the Bible that we're able to know the Shepherd.

The second thing the Shepherd expects from us is that ...

- **The sheep are to hear the Shepherd**

Verses 3 and 4 tell us that *"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."*

Why do the sheep listen to the Shepherd's voice?

Because they've spent so much time listening to it — it's become familiar to them. This is simply because over a period of time the sheep come to associate the sound of the shepherd's voice with special benefits. When the shepherd calls to them it's for a specific purpose that has their best interests in mind. Hearing the shepherd's voice gives the sheep assurance that his presence is among them and that he's caring for them. The instant sheep hear and recognize their shepherd's voice, they lift their head, turn in the direction from which the sound came, and cock their ears to catch every sound. Whether resting, feeding, or fighting, everything else is forgotten for the moment because they've heard their shepherd's voice. It commands their full and undivided attention.

Likewise, we're to recognize the Shepherd's voice. We must learn to distinguish it from the many other voices crying out to us in our confused world. In order to be able to recognize His voice, we must spend time listening to it — it needs to become familiar to us.

Secondly, we must respond to the Shepherd's voice. He chooses to communicate with us in order to impress upon us His desires and His will. He has good intentions towards us. They are in our best interests and we must act accordingly. God's truth becomes truth to me, and spiritual life becomes life to me only when I actually do those things I hear Christ telling me to do ... only when I respond to His Word and follow His directions.

Finally, the Shepherd expects that ...

- **The sheep are to follow the Shepherd**

Verse 4 says, *"When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice."*

There's a major cultural east/west difference in this verse that we don't think about. In the west, sheep are driven, probably because most are going to get eaten. But in the east, sheep are led. Over a period of time the sheep come to recognize and respond to the shepherd's voice. This is simply because, to the sheep, the voice and the shepherd are one. The voice indicates his presence ... that he is there in person. The voice represents his power and his authority, his ability to protect and provide for them.

I read about one man who only had two sheep ... so he named them Goodness and Mercy and said they will follow me all the days of my life.

It's doesn't matter where Christ leads you. He never leads you into sin. He may ask you to wade in deep water, to climb rocky heights, or to walk in the valley of the shadow of death. But He'll never ask you to go anywhere without going there first Himself. Because He's leading you through ... and you're following Him there. When we hear His voice, we should want to follow Him.

Because only the person who **wants** to follow Christ will ever do so.

All the rest become strays.

The word "follow" implies more than just blindly tagging along, but rather, it means deliberately deciding to comply with specific instructions. We know to hear God's voice that we must go to God's Word. We also know that His clear instructions for our conduct and character

have also been laid out for us in His Word.

Philip Keller's books, *A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23* and *A Shepherd looks at the Good Shepherd*, have been wonderfully refreshing for me as I prepared this message. In fact, I was enjoying them so much I got way behind in writing this. Just one quote from his books ... he writes "It is no mere whim on God's part to call us sheep. Our behavior patterns and life habits are so much like sheep it is well nigh embarrassing."

In conclusion, I want to tell another story about another shepherd.

CONCLUSION: *A Young Pilot is Lost*⁴

It was during World War II when a young British fighter pilot was returning from his mission over Europe. It was a cloudy overcast night and his plane was badly shot up. He had lost all his navigational systems. And as he neared England he realized that because of the heavy cloud cover, he couldn't see the airfield well enough to land. So he began flying in a triangle. He remembered that this was the distress signal and that the folks on the ground would recognize it and send up another plane ... a shepherd. And the shepherd would bring him in.

Sure enough, soon he heard the engine and saw the lights of the other plane. As the plane pulled up alongside, he was surprised. It was an old World War I biplane, pilot complete with goggles and flowing white scarf. He followed alongside the old plane and shortly was brought in for a safe landing. He decided to go look for this brave pilot in order to thank him for saving his life and bringing him in.

He went into the pilot's room and asked for this man, describing him to the older pilots sitting in the room. Silently, they pointed to a picture of a pilot in a World War I biplane that was hanging over the fireplace.

"Yes, that's him," the young pilot said, looking at the old picture.

"Where can I find him?"

And they told him that he was a World War I flying ace who went out as a shepherd one cloudy night to bring in a crippled plane. The other plane made it, but the shepherd was never seen again. And the oldest pilot said, "Oh, he's still out there ... he's still bringing people in, still saving lives, but it's been many years now and we're still waiting for his return."

The situation hasn't changed much today.

Who is the shepherd? Christ said, "*I am the Good Shepherd.*"

Christ knows His sheep and His sheep know Him. He counts them one by one and calls them by name. He is the Shepherd. He herds His sheep together into one flock, guarding them well, tending them with care and compassion, guiding their steps, and loving them faithfully. And Christ laid down His life for His sheep. And who are His sheep? The psalmist tells us in **Psalms 100:3**, "*Know that the Lord, He is God! It is He who made us, and we are His; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture.*"

Yes, Christ is the Good Shepherd.

He's still out there ... still bringing lost people in ... still saving lives ... still calling His sheep into His flock. But it's been many years now and we're still waiting for His return.

Perhaps He's looking for you.

Think about that.

We need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

⁴ The conclusion is a greatly abbreviated version of my favorite short story ever, *The Shepherd* by Frederick Forsyth.

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Hebrews 13:20-21

*"Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, **the great shepherd of the sheep**, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."*