

“I Am the Good Shepherd” - Jesus the Good Shepherd

Introduction: (Read John 10:1-21/31) – The language of John 10:1-2 makes clear that Jesus is continuing His interaction with the Pharisees from the previous paragraph (cf. 10:1 and 9:13-38, 39-41). There is the assumption in the structure of the opening verses of John 10 that the narrative doesn’t break thematically at the chapter division.

In addition, it appears that Jesus’ teaching in these verses is prompted by the sign miracle He just performed in healing the man who was blind from birth (cf. 9:1-38). This miracle led to significant opposition to Jesus among the Pharisees which resulted in the Pharisees kicking the formerly blind man out of the synagogue. When the Pharisees ejected the healed man from the synagogue Jesus found him and “opened the eyes of his heart” so that he was able to see who Jesus really is (unveiled Himself to the man as the Son of Man). The man responded in faith and worshipped Jesus. In contrast, the Pharisees – who presumed to have the right to exclude this man from the “covenant people” – remained blind to both themselves and to Jesus and remained in the guilt of their sin. I believe N.T. scholar Craig Keener is correct in saying that in this section, “Jesus is still addressing the Pharisees in the presence of the man born blind.”¹ It seems that commentators/scholars agree that this passage is best understood in light of the words of Ezekiel 34 in which the Lord indicts the shepherds of His people Israel (cf. Ezekiel 34:1-10, also 34:11f where the Lord Himself shepherds His people). The Pharisees and Jewish religious leaders are clearly seen as the failed shepherds and fit the figure of “thieves and robbers” in the parable of John 10.

The key practical issue in John 9, which is carried over to John 10, is seen in the difference between the reaction of the Jewish leaders to Jesus and the reaction of the man whom Jesus healed. It comes down to either rejection of Jesus or belief in Jesus leading to worship (cf. 9:35-41). This narrative is not about Jesus healing the man born blind – Jesus tells His disciples that at the beginning of John 9. This narrative is primarily a revelation of Jesus. It is about Jesus and not us and it is not primarily about us. We are told about Him so that we would believe and worship Him alone!!

By the time we arrive at the end of this Gospel’s record of Jesus’ life we understand that its purpose is that the readers come to believe Jesus’ claims for Himself – as to who He is and the reason He came. In believing – it is understood that they will have entered into worship and will have life in Him. It is equally clear by this place in the Gospel’s narrative that the option to worship is rejection, and ultimately to “seek to kill Him.” There really is no “middle” ground in one’s response to Jesus. For the believer there is no real possibility of passive or unmoved belief (cf. 12:42-43; 13:36-38; 15:18-25; 16:1-4; 21:15-24).

Jesus Introduced the Proverb of the Shepherd, His Sheep, and the “Sheepfold” – 10:1-6 – Jesus uses the parable of the Shepherd and the sheep to teach His relationship with those who

¹ Craig Keener, “The Gospel of John – Volume 1,” page 797

believe in Him (and worship Him). He progresses through the chapter emphasizing three elements of this initial/introductory statement of the proverb – **First**, Jesus as the gate or door by which the sheep enter the sheepfold (10:7-10); **Second**, Jesus as the Good Shepherd of the sheep (10:11-18); **Third**, the response of those who truly are His “sheep” to Jesus who is the Good Shepherd and the contrasting rejection of Jesus by those who are not His sheep (10:22-29, 30).

There are several key components to this parable as it is here introduced, components which Jesus takes up in the verses to follow.

- The “sheepfold” or sheep pen – This could be either part of a family courtyard or an independent structure where several families keep their sheep. It would be a structure which is enclosed on three sides with a single door or gate through which the sheep could go in and out to pasture and water. In the case of a multi-flock shelter there would be a “door-keeper” who was stationed at the opening to protect against predators and “thieves or robbers” entering the sheep pen. He would only open for a shepherd whom he recognized. In the case of a sheep pen providing for a single flock the shepherd – it is said – would often place himself in the door to protect the sheep and when the time was right he would lead them out to pasture.

- The shepherd is the one commissioned to provide and protect life for the sheep. This will be applied by Jesus to Himself. There are three points of affirmation of the shepherd; **1.** The gatekeeper recognizes him and opens the gate for him. There are sheep pens where more than one flock are kept and those that house only a single flock. Those that house more than one flock often had a gatekeeper manning the gate to assure that only the shepherds of one of the flocks keep within the sheepfold was allowed in. **2.** The shepherd, when he entered the sheepfold called to his sheep and they knew his voice – they *would follow* him out. **3.** The shepherd knew each sheep by name and he called them out using the name he had given them – This pictures individual care and relational intimacy (cf. 10:3-4).

- The sheep are the people of God, the elect of God – those who belong to the shepherd. As the parable continues, the sheep are believers in Jesus, the elect of God – those who are His. Jesus is calling out from the world the people of God – you and me.

- The thief or robber – posing as the shepherd whose voice is foreign to the sheep and who scatter when they hear the voice of the false shepherd. This is applied to the Pharisees and other corrupt religious leaders but it has many applications throughout the ages (cf. 10:5).

Jesus Borrows from the Symbolism of the Proverb In Order to Identify the Sheep and Picture His Relationship to the Sheep, As the Gate to the “Sheepfold” – cf. 10:7-10 - In this application of the parable Jesus borrows the image of the gate and declares “*I Am* gate for the sheep” (cf. 10:7, 9). He presents Himself as the gate through which the sheep – His sheep – enter the sheepfold. **This has strong and patently gospel applications!!**

- This is the 3rd of the 7 “*I Am*” statements with predicate. “I Am (as God) the gate” for the sheep. There are 3 key elements about the “gate” which Jesus highlights here;

1. **Jesus is the only gate or way into the sheep pen.** The key to this “I Am” declaration is that **Jesus is the only way** for passage of the sheep into the safety of the “sheepfold” of God – the salvation and life. He is not saying that He is one among many or other ways. He is not even saying, I am the way par excellence – the best by far of the various ways – the quintessential way. What that means is that Jesus is saying “As God Incarnate (**I Am**), I alone am the ‘gate’ or the ‘way’ into the ‘fold’ of God” (cf. 10:9; 14:1-6). Those “who came before Him” were “thieves and robbers.” They were pretenders who served themselves at the expense of the sheep. This depicting both their self-serving motives and the sheep destroying” outcomes of their deception (cf. 10:10a). They did not, because they could not, offer life/salvation or safety. **The true sheep do not listen to them or follow them.**

2. As the gate for the sheep, He provides access ***both into the safety of the sheep pen – and into the life and love of the Triune God which it represents.*** The shepherd protect the sheep from the attack of those who would enter the sheep pen – both predators and thieves or robbers.

However, He provided “safe passage” out of the sheep pen. He led them out safely (the metaphor shifts here) and provided them access to the rich pasture and abundant life which is the essence of life in Jesus and by the Spirit. This means salvation (safety, protection), rich provision and abundant life (10:9-10; 14:15-23, 25-27; 15:8-11; Psalm 23).

- Jesus contrasts this with the purpose of the “thieves and robbers” and – in application – the purposes and outcomes of the vast number of other “gods” and their offerings and promises of life, meaning, and fullness. The contrast is powerful in so many ways and is seen in the very essence of who Jesus is – His heart for the sheep is the heart of God (Father, Son and Spirit) and redemptive gospel mission of rescue and life which is driven by a mutual love relationship with His Father – Intra-Trinitarian love (cf. 10:10). This is the message is the next application of the parable where Jesus declares “*I Am the Good Shepherd.*”

Jesus Borrows from the Symbolism of the Proverb In Order to Distinguish Himself from the “Thieves and Robbers,” as the Good Shepherd of the Sheep – cf. 10:11-18² – The metaphor shifts from Jesus as the gate to the sheep pen to Jesus as the good shepherd of the sheep. However, as you have seen, there is necessary overlap in Jesus teaching as He shifts, from imagery to gospel. As we look at this section I want you to ask the question that everyone hearing this parable is likely to ask (I know this because Jesus is taking the time to answer the question with the case He makes), “Why should I trust Jesus’ claims – His promises to me?” “What makes Him different from every other ‘god’ who demands your trust and worship –

² Some of the elements to follow have been highlighted in John Piper’s sermon preached on this text, August 6, 2011 and in Torrance’s book “Atonement,” as well as various commentaries on John’s gospel – such as Keener, Carson, Kostenberger, Ridderbos

Buddha, Allah, the gods of Hinduism or government, political leaders or parties, social/political movements, science, medicine, nutrition (health and beauty), psychology, philosophy, economic policies etc?”

- This is again one of the “*I Am*” statements with predicate. It is the 4th of 7 such statements recorded in John’s Gospel, which carry critical truths of Christology into the content of the gospel declarations. “I Am the Good Shepherd.” ***Jesus alone*** is the Good Shepherd of the sheep – not simply the shepherd *par excellence* or the best among many - He alone is “The Good Shepherd.

- The Good Shepherd gives His life for His sheep (cf. 10:11-13).

1. At the level of the parable, the level which the hearers would understand, the shepherd who owns the sheep is placed in contrast to the “hired hand” who simply works for the shepherd. The “hired hand” would run in the face of the threat from a wolf. He would abandon the sheep to the wolf in order to assure his own safety. The sheep really don’t matter to him (cf. 10:12-13). The shepherd cares for the sheep and faces the threat – sets aside concerns for his own life in order to protect the sheep – The sheep are safe with the shepherd!

2. At the level of gospel truth the application is clear. Jesus alone is qualified to be our “Good Shepherd” because He alone has given His life for the sheep – for you and me (cf. Colossians 2:1-12; Ephesians 4:17ff)!! ***Every other “promise” of hope, no matter who makes the offer, leads to the “shepherd” living off of the sheep – exploiting the very ones they say they serve. The government doesn’t care for the people – the sheep who have been entrusted to them! The government doesn’t care about the minority population, or the families coming across our southern border or the condition of our inner cities – and even the teachers’ unions don’t care for the children entrusted to them! Individual teachers, civic leaders and politicians aside – the people are a means to power, wealth and position for these “shepherds.”***

Jesus, the Good Shepherd of the sheep, He cares and He gives His life for the sheep – (cf, Matthew 20:26-28). The hope and life this shepherd offers requires Him to die for His sheep – 10:10.

- This is a sovereign act of Intra-Trinitarian love (cf. 10:17-18). This was an eternal plan conceived by God (Father, Son and Spirit) and compelled by love (cf. John 3:16; 17:20-26; 1 John 3:1-16). Jesus was sent by the Father as the Divine Son incarnate AND He was given authority (in the plan of God) to give His life for those for whom He was sent – the elect – the sheep of God. More than that – He had authority to take His life up again – He didn’t stay dead!! He has been raised again to life and exalted in glory to the Father’s right hand. He is alive and remains our “Good Shepherd in that the promises have been secured in Him (10:10)!!

- The Good Shepherd – to this day - has a unique intimacy with His sheep – He cares!! He knows them and He calls them by name. They know Him and they recognize His voice when He calls. This speaks to election and the sovereign plan of God - Father, Son and Spirit (cf. 10:14-15). Which includes those elect who are not of the “fold” of Israel (cf. 10:16).

He calls to our hearts – He woos us and when we hear His voice of love calling us – if we are truly His - we respond (cf. John 1:10-13; 9:25, 35-38; Romans 8:28-30; Acts 2:36-47; 13:48; Galatians 1:15f; Philippians 3:1-10).

- So what will you do with Him – Does He have a demon or is He indeed the God He says He is who has loved you with inexplicable grace?