

Gospel of John Study Session 21

In our last session we saw Jesus heal a man born blind. This was a spectacular miracle, the likes of which had never been done before. However, that was only the physical side of the miracle. After chapters of John showing us examples of superficial faith, the formerly blind man developed genuine faith after he regained his sight. You might say that he gained his eyesight and then gained his heart-sight and recognized Jesus as the Son of Man and was saved. If you recall, this faith, while it didn't take a long time to develop, was forged by the fires of persecution. The Pharisees were attempting to get this man to denounce Jesus and instead of fearing them and giving them what they wanted, he gave them a sermon based upon the truth and as a result he was expelled from the synagogue. Despite this, the man clung to Jesus as his Savior.

Now in this session Jesus is going to continue speaking. This teaching by Jesus was made not long after the events of chapter 9 as we will see the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) was about to take place and the crowd is still speaking about the man who was born blind but now sees. It could have been later that same day or even later in the week but Jesus' teachings in chapter 10 were not far behind His actions in chapter 9. Here in the first half of chapter 10 we are going to hear some of Jesus' most famous and most comforting statements about Himself and the life He came to give mankind. Yet at the same time, He is going to continue putting pressure upon the religious establishment as He points out a major difference between them and Himself. In the first part of his chapter, Jesus is going to use the common practice of sheep herding to create a picture of the relationship between Christ and His people.

The figure of speech

[John 10:1-5]

Q: Who does Jesus say doesn't enter the sheep pen by the door? (*v.1 - thieves and robbers*)

It is important to note that Jesus begins this parable with a connection to how He ended His last teaching to the Pharisees in chapter 9. He called them blind and remaining in their sins. Here Jesus is going to compare them to thieves and robbers. The word "thief" means a person who steals by stealth and subtle trickery. The word "robber" means a person who steals by use of brute force or violence. Either way, their intent is to take something from another that does not belong to them. The Pharisees were attempting to steal the sheep meant for Jesus.

Q: In this parable, what are the thieves and robbers attempting to steal? (*the sheep*)

Shepherding was an incredibly common profession and activity in ancient Israel. To clarify a few of the terms here, the sheep pen of that day were closed walls several feet high made of mud-bricks or rough stones. They typically did not have roofs though they might be partially enclosed. It would be rare to have only one flock in a sheep pen. They were usually crowded with several flocks of sheep. The sheep knew their shepherd, so when he arrived and called to his sheep, they would follow him out of the pen while the others stayed in awaiting their

shepherd's call. Typically, there was only one door or gate for each sheep pen. One person usually guarded this door and knew the various shepherds. Usually the door keeper slept across the front of the door to the sheep pen at night so that no one could sneak in past him in the dark. The doorkeeper also recognized the various shepherds who tended the flocks in the pen so he could grant them lawful entry into the sheep pen. The pen served as protection against both wild beasts and robbers.

Q: Who enters by the door to the sheep pen? (*v.2 - the shepherd*)

Q: In what way does the shepherd lead his sheep out of the sheep pen? (*v.3 - by calling their names*)

It was common practice for a shepherd to name each of the sheep in his care. The sheep knew of the voice of the one who took care of them, their shepherd. It was normal that a shepherd could call a particular sheep by name and have the sheep respond by coming to the shepherd. Notice that the shepherd leads the sheep. He walks in front of them so that they follow him. He does herd them, like cattle, driving them from the rear. The sheep go where the shepherd leads.

Q: Why would the sheep not follow a stranger? (*v.5 - because they didn't know his voice*)

In this parable, Christ is the shepherd of those who are truly His sheep. The robbers are the religious leaders of the day as well as many false messiahs which had cropped up. These robbers who are false shepherds attempt to gain control over the sheep by pretense or violence. Yet, Jesus came as the legitimate heir of the chosen seed and claimed to be the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises to the people.

We need to go back to the Old Testament to see exactly how this parable not only relates to the Old Testament but how Christ fulfills the promises God made to His people.

[Psalm 23:1-6]

This psalm depicts the Lord as a shepherd whose love and attention to us, His sheep, is gracious beyond expectation.

Q: In Psalm 23, what are some of the ways the Lord takes care of us?

Q: Which of these stands out to you?

[Isaiah 40:11]

This psalm shows us a very tender portrait of Christ as the shepherd of God's flock. In a chapter that shows us God's incredible power, it also shows us God's gentle yet persistent love. Jesus cares for all His sheep, even those who stray, and brings them back and carries them close to His heart.

[Ezekiel 34:1-15]

Ezekiel prophesied in the time of the exile. God's people had been deported to Babylon and other places. The shepherds the Lord is condemning were those religious leaders who cared only for themselves and not the sheep at all. In fact, they were feeding off the sheep and neglecting the sheep that truly needed them the most. In this respect, this passage is very similar in nature to the parable Jesus is telling in John 10:1-5.

Q: What does the Lord promise to do for the sheep in v.12 of Ezekiel 34? *(He promises to care for them and deliver them back to Israel where they belong. In other words, the Lord's sheep will no longer be left to the whims of the false shepherds but rather be safe with the Lord at His side and in His promised place.)*

Q: What does the Lord promise to do for the sheep in vv. 14-15 of Ezekiel 34? *(He will feed them and lead them to rest. Notice how these verses sound a lot like the opening of Psalm 23.)*

Notice how Jesus also delivers the people from false and self-serving leaders as well as feeds the people with the truth of God which is the gospel message. Jesus leads people to the Father and all of His blessings thus fulfilling the prophecies of a good shepherd to come in the Old Testament.

[Numbers 27:15-19]

Q: What was Moses' prayer to God in this passage? *(That the Lord would raise us a new leader for Israel to take his place and act as a shepherd for the people.)*

Q: Who was the person chosen by God to be Moses' replacement? *(v. 18 - Joshua)*

What is interesting is that the name Joshua means "God saves" and is the Old Testament version of the name "Jesus" which also means "God saves". Joshua was a shadow of Jesus in that he shepherded the people of God to the Promised Land and conquered it so that God's people would have a lush pasture of their own. In the same way, Jesus shepherds true believers to follow Him to heaven, the ultimate place of rest for God's people.

There is one more vital passage to show Jesus as the shepherd of God's people. In the 8th century B.C., the rich and powerful people of Israel were living in such a way as to violate the covenant between them and God but what was worse, in God's eyes, is that they set up the nation in such a way as to cause everyone else to break the covenant as well, just by living normal lives. Also, there was a class of people known as prophets whose job was to get a word from the Lord and then share it with the people. However, the desire for riches had corrupted the prophets and they sought to only share "good" words to those who were paying them rather than the truth of God. By these two factors, the people of God were hemmed in - or penned in like sheep in a sheep pen that was oppressive with no means of escape. Yet, God had something else planned for His people.

[Micah 2:12-13]

Q: Who makes a way for the sheep to leave the oppression of their sheep pen? (*v. 13 - the breaker*)

While this may seem, at first, to just refer to an earthly king who leads the people back from captivity, we see that it is actually the Messiah. If you read the rest of Micah, you see that this is the king born in Bethlehem and has a kingdom with an eternal duration. Breaker means one who breaks the blockages and sets the people free so that they can then follow Him. This is a rather dynamic picture of Jesus' shepherding His people in that He breaks down the oppression of the man-made religious systems and sets us free to follow God with our whole hearts.

[II Corinthians 2:14-17]

Notice how Christ is leading His people in His triumph in this passage, similar to the Breaker leading God's people out of the darkness and oppression into spiritual freedom.

[John 10:6]

Q: Did the people listening to Jesus understand this parable? (*no*)

This is incredible considering the commonplace of shepherding in their world and also all the Old Testament prophecies concerning God taking up the role of a shepherd over His people. Yet, they were dumbfounded by this parable and had no clue as to how this parable applied to them or to Jesus. Of course, they could not understand this parable because they were not His sheep and this lack of understanding led them to further reject Him. This leads Jesus, His love never ending, to retell the parable in slightly different terms as so the clarify His meaning.

[John 10:7-10]

There is a shift in the metaphor now. Jesus is not picturing Himself as the shepherd but rather as the door to the sheep pen. This may sound strange at first but it isn't really once you understand the practice of ancient eastern shepherds. Upon finishing a day of grazing, the shepherd would lead the flock back to the pen. He would inspect each sheep as it entered the pen. If the sheep had been scratched or wounded by thorns, the shepherd would anoint the sheep with oil to facilitate healing. If the sheep were thirsty, the shepherd would give the sheep water. (Psalms 23:5-6). After all the sheep had been cared for and accounted for, the shepherd would take the role of doorkeeper by laying down across the opening so that no one could enter the pen without his knowledge. The shepherd literally became the door to the pen at this point. Notice though that this is not so much an expansion of the previous parable but a re-telling of it in different terms to help clarify the original. In the first parable there is a doorkeeper who is not the shepherd where here, the shepherd is the door to the pen. In the first parable, there are considered to be many flocks within the confines of the pen while in this parable, the pen only holds one flock, those belonging to the one shepherd.

Jesus' use of the word "I" in v.7 is emphatic. It means that He is the sole determiner of

who enters the fold and who is excluded.

[John 14:6]

No one comes to the Father, except through Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Jesus becomes another symbol of our safety and security once we become part of His flock.

Jesus mentioned that all those who came before Him were thieves and robbers. He is not speaking of the prophets of the Old Testament. Rather here Jesus is referring to the multitude of messianic pretenders and local despots who cared only for their own self interests rather than God's interests. These would promise people freedom through war and trickery - and ends justify the means mentality. In the period of history following the exile and especially in the first century before Jesus' birth, there was a rash of false deliverers among the Jews promising all sorts of things but primarily freedom for the Jewish people. After the death of Herod the Great many contended for the leadership of the nation as to throw off the yoke of Roman rule.

As we will see, Jesus distances Himself from all those who seek to use political means to gain freedom. His emphasis remains on spiritual freedom and developing a heart for God apart from the political concerns of the world.

Q: What was Jesus main concern for His sheep in v.9? *(The salvation of the person)*

The going in to find safety and the going out to find pasture shows us the access of the fulness of life Jesus offers people. Jesus alone grants us the access to the life of eternal security and eternal provision of our needs.

Q: Based on the context, who is the thief spoken of in v.10? *(The thieves are false Christs, humanistic, political saviors who promise great things but are unable to deliver. They are liars. By extension, these liars are ministers of Satan, who is the father of all lies.)*

Q: What are the actions of the thief? *(v.10 - they steal, kill and destroy. These worldly saviors promise the security that Christ alone can give. In Hebrews, after the Roman empire turned on Christianity, the Roman emperors confiscated personal property, they trampled human life under foot by killing Christians in mass, and they sought to desecrate all that was holy and pure to Christians. Of course, it was the devil behind the scenes pulling the strings of these worldly so-called gods.)*

Q: According to v.10, what did Jesus come to do? *(He came so the man could have life and have it abundantly.)*

In the context of the sheep metaphor, the abundant life is one where the sheep are fat, contented, and flourishing - not terrorized by robbers or wild animals. This is the spiritual life Jesus came to offer to all mankind. In this one verse, Jesus gave a whole new meaning to life. The life He provides is one of full satisfaction and perfect guidance.

[Psalm 118:20-24]

Here we see the Lord as being the gateway to life - a life of salvation which is unknown to the so-called wise of the world and is a life of constant praise to God. Jesus is the fulfillment of this gate mentioned in this Psalm.

[II Peter 1:3-4]

Q: What has God's divine power granted to us according to these verses? (*v.3 - everything we need for life and godliness. v.4 - granted to us His precious and magnificent promises making us partakers of the divine nature.*)

Notice that we gain these divine provisions through accepting the true knowledge of God who called us to Himself. The more true knowledge of Jesus we know, the greater will be our ability to claim and live out these magnificent promises God has given to us in Christ. This is not so much, if anything, in the material world but rather taking on the characteristics of Christ to a greater degree.

[John 10:11-18]

Jesus expands upon Himself now a not just the shepherd but the good shepherd. He not only cares for and protects the sheep but He will lay down His life for the sheep. The word for "good" here could be translated "noble" or "worthy" shepherd. He is comparing Himself with hired hands who have no real connection to the sheep. Against their self-interest, Jesus is the noble shepherd.

In the world of shepherds in the ancient world, it would never have been the intention of the shepherd to die. It would have been a fairly rare event to have a shepherd die in the line of duty fending off some wild animal against the sheep. After all, that would leave the whole flock unprotected.

However, Jesus is pointing now beyond the metaphor to Himself. He does not merely risk His life for the sheep, He lays it down in line with His Father's will. It's not going to be an accidental, occupational hazard that claims Jesus' life but rather an intentional love for the sheep to accomplish His Father's will.

[Hebrews 13:20-21] - This is a direct acknowledgment that Jesus is the Great Shepherd of the sheep.

We need to examine in detail the phrase "lay down His life" as it gives us the key to unlocking the meaning to the rest of the passage.

The phrase "lays down His life" is only found in John's writings. It means a voluntary sacrificial death. The verb translated here "lays down" is translated elsewhere in the New Testament as "lay aside or strip off" as dealing with clothing.

Also, the preposition which is translated "for" is generally used in connection with a sacrifice. When we see it in John referring to Jesus' death (6:51, 10:11, 11:50), the death of Peter (13:37-8), or of a man prepared to die for his friends (15:13). This is not just an exemplary death to prove to another how much he loves the person he is dying for. (The person jumps off a

cliff, screaming on the way down, “See how much I love youuuuuuuuu! This death is not that type of death for another.) The assumption here is that the sheep are in mortal danger and in their defense, the shepherd lays down his life to protect them. This is what makes Jesus the good shepherd, He carries His cross with Him. His intimate relationship with the sheep and His great love for them, individually, is what allow Him to be the good shepherd.

This is not the typical word for life here, either. It is usually translated “soul”. Jesus is speaking of more than just His physical existence in this phrase. He’s speaking of His personality or whole being. It is His whole being which He will voluntarily lay aside for the sake of His sheep. Only the complete death of the Good Shepherd will be sufficient to pay for the sins of all mankind and redeem us from death.

Q: What does the hired hand do when danger arises to the flock? (*v.12 - he flees, leaving the sheep to the ravages of the danger (wolf in this parable).*)

Q: Why does the hired hand flee in danger? (*v.13 - because he is not really concerned about the sheep at all.*)

What is interesting is that the thieves and robbers are actually evil by nature. This is a hired hand. He is not evil, per se, but is just simply more committed to his own well-being than that of the sheep. He is willing to do the work when it is not too strenuous or dangerous so long as he gets paid. While it’s not clear who Jesus is singling out as a hired hand here it could easily refer to a religious leader how will perform their duties well enough during times of smooth sailing, provided they are paid but never display the personal care for the sheep when they are in danger or times are rough.

[I Peter 5:1-4]

Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd again in v.14. This is a reaffirmation based on His knowledge of the sheep. Jesus knows more than just the mere facts about our lives. He cares for more than just the headlines of our lives. He is acquainted with us in a relationship that is both intimate and trustworthy. But this is a mutual knowledge. The sheep also know the shepherd in this fashion, too.

Q: What parallel does Jesus draw between His knowledge of the sheep and their knowledge of Him? (*v.15 - It is as the Father knows Him and He knows the Father - that is how intimate we know Jesus. This goes along with the High Priestly prayer Jesus offers in John 17 on the night before His death.*)

Q: Who do you think are the “other sheep” Jesus mentions in v.16? (*It is the Gentiles*)

[Romans 1:16]

Q: What ultimately happens to these other sheep? (*v.16 - they hear Jesus’ voice and join the flock and become one flock under His guidance*)

Under Jesus as the Good and Great Shepherd, there was to be, and already now is, a one world flock.

[Matthew 28:18-20]

[Acts 1:8]

Jesus' mission is to call sheep from every flock to join His flock. They are no longer known by their former selves but instead are to be known as who they are in Christ. This is because He has laid down His life for us and redeemed us from every nation on the earth, thus fulfilling the Father's will.

[Side note: This reference to "other sheep" DOES NOT refer to the Mormon idea of the fictitious native North American Indian tribes who Jesus supposedly preached the doctrines of Mormonism to after His resurrection. No where other than Mormonism can such an idea exist. Yet, Jesus has spoken several times about His global mission beyond the Jews to the Gentile world in the book of John.]

Jesus sets out the pattern for His relationship to His sheep being like the relationship He shares with His Heavenly Father in v.17. Just keep in mind that the love of the Father for the Son and the love of the Son for the Father existed long before there were any sheep to love. The Father's love is not something He withheld until Jesus agreed to give up His life on the cross. Rather, the love of the Father for the Son is eternally linked with the Son's unqualified obedience to the Father. It was the Son's utter dependence upon the Father, culminating in the ultimate act of obedience that underscored the Father's love for His only Son. Just imagine, this is now the love the Father and Son have for us, the sheep and we can have for them in return.

[I John 3:16-17]

Q: How does this love for Jesus show itself in our lives according to the passage in I John 3 we just read? *(It leads us to care for the needs of others, just as Jesus has tended to our needs.)*

The end of v.17 is a purpose clause. Jesus lays down His life for the purpose of picking it up again. Jesus' sacrificial death was not an end to itself. The resurrection was not an afterthought. He died in order to fulfill His Father's perfect will and proceed to His ultimate glorification, showing us, at least in part, what we, who were part of the fold would be in the age to come. But it is essential to realize that Jesus who laid down His life was also granted authority by the Father to pick it up again. For those of us coming to Jesus for salvation (in any age) we must understand that not part of the crucifixion took place outside the will of God. All of it was in His perfect plan for the salvation of mankind.

The word "authority" in v.18 is another key to what was happening from God's perspective. As we have seen Jesus authority kept people from interfering with God's plan for Jesus. Many times man wanted to kill Jesus prematurely but until "the hour had come" the authority of Jesus kept such fleshly desires at bay. Another proof of Jesus authority over death

was that He not only kept the time of His death to the time the Father had ordained it to happen but also that Jesus submitted to His Father's plan so that He could emerge victoriously alive at the resurrection. Anyone can lay down their life but only the Son of Man could resume His existence after death. The authority mentioned in v.18 means that Jesus was never the helpless victim of a kangaroo court but that He had the right and power to become His Father's instrument of reconciliation between Himself and mankind. Think of it, the Heavenly Father Jesus to not only die on the cross for our sins but to come back to life and be glorified to show His victory over death.

[John 10:19-21]

In this section the word "Jews" refers to those Jewish people who were present, not merely the religious leaders and establishment as in chapter 9. John reverts to his more general use of the term.

Q: What was the reaction of the Jews to Jesus' parables? (*v. 19 - they were divided*)

Q: What was the source of the division between the two groups? (*vv. 20-21 - one group said Jesus was demon possessed while the other was protesting stating that a demon possessed man could not open the eyes of the blind.*)

[I Corinthians 1:18]

This shows the division between those who have been touched in some way by the Holy Spirit and are enlightened to the purposes of God through His Son, Jesus Christ, and those who are still walking in utter spiritual darkness. The world cannot reconcile the teachings of Jesus. They must be interpreted by the Spirit speaking to a person's soul in some way to make sense. This is why it is important to pray for the lost by praying that the Spirit not only convict them of sin but also that He shine the light of truth into their hearts and minds so that they can see who Jesus truly is - in this case - the Good Shepherd.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?