

“Shepherds, Sheep, and Thieves”

August 31, 2014

Text: John 10:1-6

**Thru-out the Bible, we find mention of shepherds and sheep,
from Abel, a “keeper of flocks” in Gen 4:2, to the unsold
sheep of Babylon the Great in Rev 18:13.**

Sheep are a picture of total dependency, having no natural defenses.

They aren't equipped to fight, can't run very fast, aren't especially intelligent, & they tend to get lost.

They need shepherds to care for them, & protect them.

But Scripture also portrays God's people as sheep, in need of His shepherding care.

E.g., Psa 23:1=> *“The Lord is my **shepherd**, I shall not want [go wanting].”*

Psa 100=> *“The LORD Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; **We are His people and the sheep of His pasture**” (Psa 100: 3).*

God often provided His people Israel with human leaders, who had been shepherds of actual sheep, and could shepherd the Israelites on God's behalf—men like Joseph/David/Moses.

In Num 27, Moses prayed that, after his death, God would provide Israel with another leader w/ a shepherd's heart=>

*“May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation / who will **go out & come in before them** [that is a shepherding term we see often in Scripture, which represents what shepherd do with sheep], & who will lead them out & bring them in, so that the*

congregation of the LORD will not be like sheep which have no shepherd” (27:16-17).

God answered Moses’ prayer, and raised up Joshua to lead Israel in his place, as they entered the Promised Land.

* He would “*go out*” before the Israelites to lead them in war against their enemies, as they conquered the land.

* He would also “*come in before them,*” bringing them back to the safety of their campsite at Gilgal.

Ultimately, Joshua would give Israel a homeland, where they could find rest, & could serve/worship the Lord in peace.

But God also promised that another Joshua, a descendant of David, would come someday, to shepherd His people.

Ezek 34:23=> “*Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, & he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd.*”

There’s a problem here=> David had come/gone 400 years before Ezekiel, dying long before Ezekiel wrote this.

But God was referring to another David, a Man who would descend from David’s royal lineage=> the Messiah/God, Jesus Christ—who would be like Joshua.

This 2nd Joshua would be the Messiah, and He would bring God’s people into the final Promised Land of heaven.

Unlike the 1st Joshua, He would come in the power of God.

Micah 5:4=> “*He will arise and shepherd His flock In the strength of the LORD, In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God.*”

Jesus, whose name is the Gk translation of the Heb. name “Joshua,” was that messianic shepherd God had promised through Ezekiel.

And by His birth, He fulfilled another of Micah’s prophecies, which Matthew later applied directly to Jesus (Mt 2:6)=>
“*You, Bethlehem, land of Judah, Are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; For out of you shall come forth a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.*”

In today’s text, Jesus alludes to Himself as that “*shepherd of the sheep.*”

In Jn 10:11, He’ll refer to Himself as “*the good Shepherd.*”

In Heb 13, He is “*the great Shepherd of the sheep*”(13:20).

And Peter gave Jesus still another title in I Pet 5=> “*When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory*” (5:4).

Pastors—whose title actually means “a shepherd,” are really under-shepherds, called by the “*Chief Shepherd,*” (Jesus) to faithfully care for His flock, primarily by feeding them. The flock is His, not ours—He bought it w/ His blood. Just as Jesus told Peter, He commands pastors to=>

“*Tend My lambs.... Shepherd My sheep.... Tend My sheep*” (Jn 21:15-17).

“*Tend*” translates the Gk word *bosko*, which means to feed by grazing.

The pastor is responsible for providing Christ's sheep
w/ a rich diet from God's Word, enabling their
souls to graze in both the OT/NT fields.

**Unfortunately, there have always been spiritual leaders who
have abused their privileged position as shepherds, and
earned for themselves God's condemnation.**

E.g. in Isa 56, God complained of Israel's religious leaders=>

*"They are **shepherds** who have no understanding; They
have all turned to their own way, Each one to his unjust
gain, to the last one"* (Isa 56:11).

Like many other spiritual leaders since then, these had used
the privilege of shepherding God's people for
personal advantage, and personal gain.

James warned those of us who lead God's people as teachers, that
He will judge us more strictly than He does others (3:1).

We sense the seriousness of that warning in God's frightening
words to the false shepherds of Israel thru Ezekiel (34:2-6):

*"Son of man, prophesy against the **shepherds** of Israel.
Prophesy and say to those **shepherds**, 'Thus says the Lord
GOD, "Woe, **shepherds** of Israel who have been feeding
themselves! Should not the **shepherds** feed the flock? / You
eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you
slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock. / Those
who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you
have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the
scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought
for the lost; but with force and with severity you have
dominated them. / They were scattered for **lack** of a
shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field
and were scattered. / **My flock** wandered through all the*

mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek for them. ”””

Then God added this threat which should have caused every one of those delinquent religious leaders to drop to their knees in repentance before Him => *“Therefore, you **shepherds**, hear the word of the LORD: ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I am **against the shepherds**, & I will demand My sheep from them ’””* (34:9-10).

This morning we will consider Jesus’ confrontation of Jewish leaders who had failed as spiritual shepherds in His own day.

As we see in today’s text, Jesus declared to these false shepherds that they were **thieves**, and that He was the true **Shepherd** of God’s **sheep**...

So His words will focus on those 3 themes=>

thieves/shepherds/sheep.

*** The Theives**

[**John 10:1**] (Jesus)=> *“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a **thief** & a robber.”*

“Truly, truly, I say to you” is a phrase Jesus often used, as a marker of an especially solemn/important truth.

He was still speaking to the Pharisees mentioned at the end of chapter 9, to whom He had said=> *“Since you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”*

Now He added, “What I am about to tell you next, is crucially important to your souls, so listen very carefully.”

They had unjustly excommunicated from the synagogue a poor blind man Jesus had healed, proving themselves false shepherds, just like those Ezekiel had condemned 600 years earlier.

They had also heartlessly intimidated the man’s parents by threatening them too w/ excommunication, trying to coerce them into making statements about Jesus that would reflect badly on Him.

Jesus’ words to the Pharisees took the form of an analogy, which will be called a “*figure of speech*” in verse 6.

It will be about a sheepfold—an outdoor enclosure (often square), made of rocks piled high to form walls.

Sheepfolds were prob. found near many villages.

Shepherds would place their sheep in the folds for their protection at night, from predators/thieves.

Then they would take them from the folds in the morning so that the sheep might graze freely out in the fields.

The main thrust of Jesus’ analogy was that the Pharisees were like thieves/robbers who brutalized His sheep.

* “*Thief*” here refers to a sneak-thief who steals other people’s goods through secrecy/stealth (often at night).

The Pharisees were thieves who were jealous of Jesus' popularity among the people and wanted to steal away as many of His followers as they could.

* "*Robbers*" is a more violent term—like plunderers—muggers who steal from people, & leave them lying unconscious. The Pharisees fleeced people spiritually, destroying their souls for personal/financial/social profit. They did everything *but* what spiritual shepherds should do=> guard/guide/nurture God's people.

Like the thieves/robbers who climbed over the rock walls of a literal fold, the Pharisees had entered into Jewish religious leadership illegitimately=> thru their own selfish desires.

They were like the prophets about whom God had said=>

"I did not send these prophets, But they ran. I did not speak to them, But they prophesied" (Jer 23:21).

Jesus intended for the images of the shepherd & the door in this analogy to have specific symbolic meaning—they both represent Jesus Himself.

In verse 9, He will say=> "***I am the door**; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out [that's our shepherding term again] and find pasture.*"

In verse 11, He will say=> "***I am the good shepherd.***"

The sheep fold in Jesus' analogy is a happy circumstance of spiritual safety in which the sheep can feel safe at night (those dark/uncertain times of our lives).

Outside the fold there are dangerous predators/thieves,
which is why Jesus will say in verse 4, “*He puts forth*
(lit. “throws out”) *all his own.*”

The Shepherd must force some of His sheep to leave the
safety of the fold, & to trust in their shepherd alone,
for protection.

If sheep were to stay in a fold forever, they would starve to death,
because the grass they need to eat is out in the fields.
So they must face the risks out there, trusting their
Shepherd alone to protect them.

This is where we see the spiritual analogy to our own lives.

We too know that life is full of dangers in this fallen world,
but we must learn to trust Jesus, our Shepherd, to
lead us and protect us from them.

So leaving the safety of hidden seclusion in our fold—
we venture out, following Him, because that is where
our real spiritual growth a/w/a safety lies.

We learn to follow Jesus, “walking by faith,”
entrusting ourselves to His protection/guidance/care.
And that is where our greatest blessedness is to be
found.

As Jesus will say in verse 9=> “*I am the door; if*
anyone enters through Me, he will be saved,
and will go in and out and find pasture.”

What freedom/confidence/security we have in Jesus!

But again, the main object of Jesus' words in vs 1 of our text is to inform the Pharisees, that they are spiritual thieves/robbers.

* **The Shepherd**

[Verses 2-3]=> *“But he who enters by the **door** [Jesus] is a shepherd of the sheep. / To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”*

Notice Jesus said that he who enters by the door is

“a” shepherd—not “the” shepherd.

This is a general statement about the character of every true shepherd, not about any one particular shepherd.

It certainly applies to Jesus the Good Shepherd, but also to every other true spiritual shepherd as well=> he takes his place as a shepherd among God's people by the “door” of Christ's divine appointment—not by self-appointment.

He enters thru Christ, the door, into leadership by God's choice.

He doesn't climb over any sort of institutional walls, by his own efforts.

Who was the “doorkeeper” Jesus mentioned?

He was prob. a hired under-shepherd who stayed in the fold w/ the sheep all night, to guard against intruders.

In the morning, when the shepherd arrived, the doorkeeper listened for his voice, to make sure it really was he.

Then when he was sure he recognized the voice, he opened the door.

The sheep also recognized their shepherd's voice, and if he was a good shepherd, it enabled them to relax, knowing he was near.

In our own case, this is esp. true because our Good Shepherd calls us individually by name=> "Peter, John, Nathanael, Mary, Jim, Larry, Susan: Come here, to Me."

Our Shepherd knows the names of every one of His sheep because He has a personal relationship w/ each one.

There are millions of them, but He never forgets a name, & someday He will give each 1 of them a new name.

His eye may be on the sparrow, but neither His eyes nor His heart ever take leave of an individual sheep.

If you are one of His, He knows who you are, what you are, and where you are, w/ infinite/intimate knowledge.

Moreover, Jesus calls us by name with the gracious familiarity of a Bridegroom's affection for His bride.

It is intensely personal, and full of love.

When He called me at the time of my conversion, I was very young, but I suddenly knew Him & loved Him, even though I didn't yet know much about Him.

Jesus' words "*he calls his own sheep*" are in the pres. tense, which describes an ongoing activity.

He calls us in/out of the fold repeatedly, night by night, and morning by morning.

There have been times when He has called me to His side just as I was going through a personal crisis.

He came to me w/ abundant graciousness/compassion, and I knew He was there w/ me.

Actually, we prob. feel the closeness of our Shepherd at times like that, more than we do at most other times in our lives.

Paul could say, “*At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me.... / But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me*” (II Tim 4:16-17).

Jesus is always closest to His sickest/weakest sheep, comforting/strengthening them in their sorrow/fear.

Lk 15:5 says He lays some of them on His should and carries them.

There is no hand as reassuring on our shoulders in times of trouble as the ones which bear the scar of a large Roman nail.

That is esp. important when we sense that Jesus, our Shepherd, is leading us out of the safety of the fold.

* **The Sheep**

[Verse 4]=> “*When he puts forth [better: Whenever he might put forth—it’s subjunctive] all his own, he goes [keeps going] ahead of them, and the sheep follow [keep following] him because they know his voice [have known & continue to know it w/ a fullness of knowledge].*”

**Many of the sheep would rather stay in the safety of the fold,
but they “all” need to go into the field to graze/grow at
times.**

Not a single sheep is to be left behind, because every one of us
needs to experience both the green pastures & quiet waters,
a/w/a the frightening shadowy valleys on the other, all in
the company of our faithful Shepherd.

So the Shepherd “*puts them forth*”—lit. “throws them out,” w/
nothing more than the assurance that He’s going w/ them.

In that same way, Jesus, our Good Shepherd, overcomes
our objections, and forces us out of our comfort zone
into unknown circumstances that make us feel
uneasy, because they seem threatened, and we may
never have experienced them before.

Our only confidence is the fact that He not only goes w/ us,
but goes ahead of us, scouting out any dangers that
might be lurking in the shadows ahead, unknown to us.

He leadeth me, O blessèd thought!
O words with heav’nly comfort fraught!
Whate’er I do, where’er I be
Still ’tis God’s hand that leadeth me.

Western shepherds drive their sheep ahead of them, using
sheep dogs;

But Near-Eastern shepherds always lead theirs.

Christ never requires us to go anywhere He hasn’t already gone,
nor subjects us to any danger/temptation He hasn’t known.

That was the purpose of His coming to earth as a Man.

“We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are” (Heb 4:15).

If a shepherd is good to his sheep, they follow him in the confidence that they know His voice.

In the same way, God’s elect know the voice of their Savior.

Sheep have an uncanny capacity for voice-recognition, in spite of their not being very bright.

Even if several flocks are mixed together in one fold,
& a number of shepherds call their sheep out,
each 1 will move toward the sound of its own
shepherd’s voice.

Young lambs can even identify their own mothers’ bleating
in the midst of a whole chorus of bleating mothers.

We couldn’t hear the difference, but they can.

In the same way, God’s elect can differentiate between the truth in Jesus’ words, & the deception of false teachers.

In verse 27 of this chapter, Jesus will say=> *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”*

God the Father has given Jesus possession of His elect.

They are all “His sheep” even before they believe in Him
and become saved.

Those whom the Father has given to Jesus will recognize their
Shepherd’s voice, when they read His words in Scripture.

And when He calls them w/ an effectual call to salvation,
His Spirit will enliven them spiritually, & give them
spiritual ears attuned to their Shepherd's voice.
With God-given instinct they'll recognize it, & respond to
it.

Moreover, God's elect will not follow false shepherds.

[Verse 5]=> "*A stranger they simply will **not** follow [a strong negative—they absolutely won't follow him], but will flee from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.*"

Jesus was explaining here to the Pharisees why His own true followers would never leave Him to become their followers.

They were strangers to the elect, & they always would be.

Theirs were the voices from which Christ's sheep would flee.

Their theology was strange/foreign to them, as were their ethics, & their obvious lack of love for the sheep.

Thru Jesus God's sheep had come to know what a true shepherd was like, & the Pharisees were the very opposite of that expectation.

Those who are Christ's, will not leave Him to follow those who deny the truth, and preach Satan's lies.

Recently, a certain pastor was dismissed from his church.

He had become known for what were called "x-rated sermons," because he used curse words in his sermons sometimes included lurid details about specific sexual situations.

He always seemed to want to be out on the edge of acceptability.

But my real concern is for the people in his congregation.

Why would they have stayed so long, if they were truly Christ's sheep, who know the Good Shepherd's voice?

Why didn't they flee?

Surely they couldn't have thought their pastor's words represented Jesus' voice, speaking to them!

Maybe they were just trying to be tolerant, but in light of Jesus' words, I question whether they were really even His sheep.

At this point, the Pharisees again proved by their total lack of spiritual understanding, that they were false shepherds, and were not even among Jesus' sheep.

[Verse 6]=> *“This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did **not understand** what those things were which He had been saying to them.”*

* In last week's text, Jesus said that He had come into the world so that *“those who **see** [think they see, by way of their own human ability] **might become blind.**”*

Jesus was making a general statement, but the point of that statement was aimed at these Pharisees w/ Him.

* In today's text, He had begun by telling the Pharisees that they were thieves/robbers—false shepherds.

And now Jesus had proven both these facts, by teaching a truth which false teachers could-never/would-never understand.

Once again, Isa 56:11 had been fulfilled=>

“They are shepherds who have no understanding.”

The Pharisees didn't understand it, in spite of the fact that Jesus' own spiritual sheep did understand it, and happily accepted/believed it.

The Pharisees weren't Jesus' sheep, so they didn't/couldn't hear His voice.

In verse 26 of this chapter, He will explain that to them=>

“You do not believe because you are not of My sheep.”

They were so sure God was their Shepherd simply because Abraham was their father, that Christ's words made no sense to them, when He compared them w/ thieves, robbers, and false shepherds.

It was an indictment against them as false shepherds, to whom Jesus' own sheep would never listen.

But they didn't understand that, because they couldn't/wouldn't accept it.

Christ's *“figure of speech”* had revealed truth to His followers, while concealing it from those who rejected Him.

Their pride as religious leaders had blinded them to the truth, that they were not true spiritual shepherds, but were really spiritual thieves/robbers/false-shepherds.

The question I would ask you to consider as we close, is this:

Is Jesus calling you by name, right now?

* Maybe He's calling you to spiritual conversion through faith in Him.

You've heard the gospel dozens of times, but before now it was all just general/theoretical to you—not personal.

But maybe this morning, you sense in your own heart that Jesus' eyes are focused right on you personally, because He wants to become your Shepherd.

If so, answer His call, saying in response, what young

Samuel said to Him=> *“Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening”* (I Sam 3:9).

* Maybe Jesus is calling you to serve Him in some special way.

The H.S. called Barnabas and Saul *“for the work to which I have called them”* (Acts 13:2).

Today your Shepherd might be calling you like that as well.

* Maybe Jesus is calling you to leave the fold of comfortable spiritual mediocrity and to venture out into greater faith, greater love for God/man, greater sincerity/obedience/boldness, greater service, or a greater prayer-life.

Whatever Christ's call may be, say, “Speak, Lord; I'm listening.”

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Text: John 10:1-6

1. Scripture portrays God’s people as sheep in need of His [24 shepherding] care.

Gen 4:2; Rev 18:13; Psa 100:3; Num 27:16-17

2. God promised that another Joshua, a descendant of David, would come someday to [18 shepherd] His people.

Ezek 34:23; Mic 5:4; Mt 2:6; Jn 10:11; Heb 13:20; I Pet 5:4

3. Unfortunately, there have always been spiritual leaders who have abused their privileged position as shepherds and earned for themselves [12 God’s] condemnation.

Isa 56:11; Jms 3:1; **Ezek 34:2-6**; 34:9-10

4. This morning we will consider Jesus’ confrontation of Jewish leaders who had [14 failed] as spiritual shepherds in His day.

In today’s teChristt Jesus declared to these false shepherds that they were thieves, and that He was the true Shepherd of God’s sheep; His words will focus on three themes—thieves, shepherds, and sheep.

*** The Thieves**

[John 10:1]

Jn 9:41

5. The main thrust of Jesus’ analogy was that the Pharisees were like thieves and robbers who brutalized His [12 sheep].

Jer 23:21; Jn 10:9, 11

6. The sheep fold in Jesus’ analogy is a happy circumstance of spiritual safety in which the sheep can feel [10 safe] at night.

*** The Shepherd**

[Verses 2-3]

7. Every true spiritual shepherd takes his place as a shepherd among God’s people by [14 divine] appointment—not by self-appointment.

8. Jesus calls us by name with the gracious familiarity of a Bridegroom's affection for His [12 bride].

II Tim 4:16-17

* **The Sheep**

[Verse 4]

9. Jesus, our Good Shepherd, overcomes our objections and forces us out of our comfort zone; our only confidence is that He not only goes with us, but goes [12 ahead] of us.

Heb 4:15

10. If a shepherd is good to his sheep, they follow him in the confidence that they [10 know] His voice.

Jn 10:27

11. God's elect will not follow [12 false] shepherds.

[Verse 5]

12. The Pharisees again proved by their total lack of spiritual understanding, that they were [12 false] shepherds.

[Verse 6]

Jn 10:26

Is Jesus calling you by name right now?

*13. Maybe He's calling you to spiritual [conversion].

I Sam 3:9

*14. Maybe Jesus is calling you to [12 serve] Him in some special way.

Acts 13:2

*15. Maybe Jesus is calling you to leave the fold of spiritual [22 mediocrity] and to venture out.