

# GOD WITH US

## Part 8: JESUS

### Message 18 – The GOOD SHEPHERD

#### John 10

##### Introduction

John chapters 8-10 record an extended debate with the Pharisees as Jesus neared the completion of His public ministry. The debate began when He claimed to be “the light of the world” (8:12). He then went on to prove His claim by opening the eyes of a blind man (ch.9), causing even more controversy. In John 10, the debate heightened as Jesus claimed to be “the good shepherd,” in contrast to the leaders who were “thieves and robbers” that took advantage of the sheep for their own gain. This good vs. bad shepherd discussion has roots in *Ezekiel 34* where God pronounced judgment on a past generation of Israel’s spiritual leaders for being “worthless shepherds” that devour the flock, instead of caring for it. In Ezekiel, God says that HE will come to personally shepherd His flock, since the worthless shepherds have failed to do so. Thus, Jesus was saying (to a group of people very familiar with the Ezekiel passage) that He had been sent by the Father to be the TRUE SHEPHERD of the people of Israel, and that they will be held accountable for their failure to shepherd the flock of God.

##### **The True Shepherd enters by the Door: 10:1-3**

***“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 and a robber” (John 10:1).***

In Jesus’ day, flocks were kept in stone enclosures. In many cases, numerous flocks were herded together. One doorkeeper would stand watch over all the flocks in that enclosure. He would only let true shepherds enter the enclosure to call out their sheep. A false shepherd could not get past the gate-keeper.

Jesus’ point was that there were thieves and robbers, false shepherds (i.e., like the Pharisees) that wanted only to take advantage of the sheep for their own personal gain. In contrast, there is the true shepherd, Jesus:

***“But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. The***

***gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out” (10:2,3).***

Jesus is the true shepherd, who has come to care for His flock. The sheep know their shepherd’s voice . . . and he knows them each by name. In that day, sheep were kept mainly for their wool (not their meat) which meant that sheep were with their shepherd for a lifetime. Sheep were personally named and loved, like we name and love our dogs and cats.

*It’s a great comfort that Jesus knows us each by name. He knows us personally and individually. He knows everything about us. All our quirks and flaws. All our issues. All our hopes and dreams; our sorrows and fears. Sheep are notoriously dirty, difficult and dumb! Yet, Jesus still loves His sheep and wants to do life with us, as our good shepherd. Thank Him, today, that He came to be your good shepherd. Invite Him to “lead you in paths of righteousness, for His name’s sake” (Psalm 23:3).*

### **The Shepherd’s Voice is Familiar: 10:4-6**

Continuing with His description of a true shepherd, Jesus spoke about the recognizable voice of the shepherd.

***“When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them” (10:4-6).***

Both then and now, each shepherd has his unique “voice” and “call” for his sheep. When the sheep hear that unique sound, they come running to follow their shepherd.

*One of our 8 traits of a disciple at OPC is that a disciple LISTENS (to the voice of Jesus). As we daily spend time in His Word, as we learn to stay attuned to the promptings of His Spirit, and as we stay engaged with His community of people, we become more and more familiar with His unique voice. The more we become attuned to Him, the less comfortable we are following other voices that are trying to define and direct our lives. How about you? Are you learning to hear the voice of the good shepherd? Are you allowing His voice to define and direct your life?*

## Jesus is the Gate for the Sheep: 10:7-9

As the discussion continues, Jesus adds rich complexity to the shepherd/sheep metaphor.

***Therefore, Jesus said again, “Truly, truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through Me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture” (10:7-9).***

Jesus gives us the next “I AM” statement in John’s gospel. *“I am the gate for the sheep.”* How can Jesus be both shepherd and gate? George Adam Smith was a scholar/expert in the historical geography of the Holy Land. He wrote about an encounter with an Arabian shepherd who showed him the enclosure into which the sheep were led at night. Smith asked how the sheep were kept from wandering out, since there was no gate on the enclosure. The shepherd replied, *“I am the door. When the sheep are all inside I lie in that open space and no sheep goes out but across my body, and no wolf comes in unless they cross my body. I am the door.”*

Jesus is the gate into the sheepfold. This denotes both access into the fold (we enter the family of God by going “through Jesus”) and protection once you are in the fold (we are “kept” in the family of God by the protection that Jesus affords us). In another one of the “I AM” statements, Jesus said it like this: *“I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).*

## Jesus gives Overflowing Life to His sheep: 10:10

***“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (10:10).***

Here is the difference between Jesus and the other shepherds that call out to us: The other shepherds promise us life; but they lead to death. Jesus promises us life; and *He over-delivers*, giving us “life overflowing.” Some translations read, “abundant life.” Jesus was not referring to an abundance of riches, or pleasure, or earthly rewards. He was referring to a life full of purpose, peace and power . . . a version of your life that is the most glorifying to God for His purposes, and the most satisfying to you in terms of who God created you to be.

Often, we seek the “abundant life” in places other than in a relationship with Jesus. We search for it in possessions, pursuits, people, adventures, hobbies, success, etc. Yet, only Jesus can give us the true “abundant life” that God intends for each of us. When we surrender our lives to Jesus and begin to follow Him as our good shepherd daily, He takes us on the journey that He has designed for us. He unfolds before us that path that we were made for. Are you following the true shepherd day by day, listening to and heeding His voice? “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not lack any good thing” (Psalm 23:1).

### **Jesus Lays Down His Life for His Sheep: 10:11-15**

Jesus goes on to describe the most important difference between Himself and every other shepherd that would seek to direct us. He also gives us the next “I AM” statement in the gospel of John:

***“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know Me— just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep” (10:11-15).***

There was a “shepherding rule” in Palestine for hired hands taking care of sheep. If one wolf came, the hired hand was *supposed* to defend the flock; but if two wolves came, he was allowed to run for his life! The fact is, scholars tell us, *that not even true shepherds would lay down their lives for the sheep.* It just didn’t happen. How different Jesus is. He *does* lay down His life for us.

***“The reason My Father loves Me is that I lay down My life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from My Father” (10:17,18).***

### **Jesus Protects His Sheep: 10:27-30**

A little further down in this passage (on a later occasion) Jesus spoke more about the *security* we have in His fold.

***“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, Who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are One” (10:27-30).***

The Pharisees once again tried to stone Jesus again for blasphemy, when He claimed that He and the Father were ONE. While Jesus’ deity is an important point, His main point was that when we are in His flock, *we are secure*. No one can snatch us out of the all-powerful hands of the Father and the Son!

There are many passages in the New Testament that emphasize the “security of the believer” (meaning, once we are saved we are secure in our salvation; we cannot be lost again). For example, Ephesians 1:13,14 says that we are “sealed in Christ with the Holy Spirit of promise.” Romans 8:31-39 says that “nothing can separate us from God’s love.” In Hebrews 13:5 God promises that He “will never leave us or forsake us.” Ephesians 4:30 says that we are “sealed by the Spirit for the day of redemption.” God wants us to be secure in His love, not fearful of losing His love. How about you? Are you secure in His love for you? Read John 10:27-30 again. Who can snatch you out of His hands???

### **Other Sheep that Jesus will gather in: 10:16**

***“I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to My voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd” (10:16).***

Jesus’ public ministry was focused on the people of Israel, not the Gentiles. He knew, however, that the Gentiles would be highly receptive to His message of salvation. In fact, later in John, when some Gentiles came to meet Jesus as His public ministry drew to a close, Jesus spoke of the potential fruit that would come from among the Gentile (“Greek”) world:

***“Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the***

***Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds” (John 12:20-24).***

Jesus is a Good Shepherd for *all people*. The Book of Acts records how, after the resurrection of Jesus, the gospel went to the Gentile world and they flocked into His kingdom. They were hungry for the message of a Good Shepherd, just as Jesus predicted!

*The world is still hungry for the message of a Good Shepherd. See Matthew 9:35,36 where Jesus described the world as a flock wandering without a shepherd. People are following other “shepherds” that will never be able to lead them to the abundant life that God has for them. Who in your sphere of influence needs to be introduced to the true good shepherd?*

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What shepherds are people following today? What voices are guiding the lives of the people you interact with?
2. Read Matthew 9:35,36. How is our world suffering from the lack of a good shepherd? How do you see this manifest today?
3. Read Psalm 23. How does this portrait of a good shepherd compare with what Jesus said about Himself in John 10?
4. What can you do this coming week to tune in more fully to the voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd? Are there other voices that you need to tune out?
5. In the context of Jesus’ debate with the Pharisees, it is clear that the false shepherds He was referring to were *religious leaders*. How do you see this playing out today in religious circles?