

John: The Lord's My Shepherd

John 10:1-21

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Tonight we come to chapter 10 in John's gospel and we're going to read the first 21 verses. We're going to read the parable of the good shepherd. Let's hear together the Word of God.

John 10:1-21

Thus far God's holy and inerrant word. Let's ask for God's blessing; let's pray together.

Our Father in heaven, we turn now to your word; we thank you for it. We pray for your blessing, we pray for the ministry of your Spirit. Open our eyes that we may see wondrous things out of your law, for Jesus' sake, Amen.

Now this chapter in John's gospel convinced at least one person of Presbyterianism. The father of Scottish Presbyterianism, I suppose, is Andrew Melville, but after him it would be Alexander Henderson. Alexander Henderson was a member of The Westminster Assembly that wrote *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. He was also the author of The Solemn League and Covenant. The Steward kings were terrified of Presbyterianism because they thought that if Presbyterianism should replace Episcopalianism, that it would be the end of the monarchy. They were probably right. When Henderson was first ordained to the ministry, he was an Episcopalian. We're talking about the period of 1620s to 1630s or so. When he went to his first church they locked the door on him and he broke in through a window. Not long after that he went to hear the great Robert Bruce preaching and Robert Bruce's text was John 10:1: "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." And that was the text that Henderson heard that led him to reconsider everything, including his doctrine and his ecclesiology, and he became one of the fathers of Presbyterianism.

Now as we come to this chapter tonight, I am fearful because there's so much in it. I need you to pray for me as we go through these latter chapters of John's gospel. We could be here for years and years, and I really don't want to do that; I

want to keep moving through John's gospel. But we come now to chapters that are just so full that I'm going to be skating over texts that are just begging to be mined and we don't have time.

This particular chapter tonight has two of the "I am" sayings: "I am the door" occurs twice in the passage; and "I am the good shepherd" also occurs twice in the passage. The background to John 10 is probably Ezekiel 34. It's a chapter that elders should be reading on a weekly basis. Take it down; make a note of it. It's one of those powerful warnings in the Old Testament pointing out the difference between a true shepherd and a false shepherd. Remember in the New Testament elders are called under shepherds. They are pastoring the flock of God. What we have in John 10: 1-6 is a parable, a form of saying. In verse 6, this figure of speech is a parable which they didn't understand, in which Jesus makes Himself out to be the door into the sheepfold. Because they don't understand it, He elaborates and expands on it in verses 7-21. The rest of the chapter is actually yet another one of Jesus' debates and dialogues and confrontations with the Jews in Jerusalem, this time on the Feast of Dedication, a winter celebration remembering the Maccabean revolt, in which he answers charge, in verse 24, "If you are the Christ, tell it plainly." Now I want to see seven things in the passage.

1. He knows His sheep.

In verse 3: "To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear His voice and He calls His own sheep by name." Verses 14 & 15: "I am the good shepherd, I know My own and My own know Me." Again in verse 27, the same thing: "My sheep hear My voice and I know them." Jesus is contrasting a true shepherd from what He calls, in verse 12, a hired hand, or a hireling.

Now you have to stop thinking here about lamb chops. If you rear sheep for mutton or for meat, you don't do the 'bonding' thing. I grew up on a farm, and on our farm we had (and I know in Texas this is really small) about 400 sheep, but which, in Wales, is fairly substantial. My mother had a rule and she imposed it with a will of iron: You don't name an animal that is destined for the kitchen table. You don't give that animal a name. We had a duck called Charlie; it was destined for the Christmas table—Charlie lived to be very old. 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.

I can't think of this passage without thinking of Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd." And I can't think of Psalm 23 without hearing and almost seeing the figure of Douglas McMillan. Douglas McMillan is with the angels and archangels in heaven and with the Church triumphant. He was an astonishing man. He grew up as a shepherd; he looked like a shepherd. If you wanted to know what a shepherd looked like, you just looked at Douglas McMillan and those calloused

hands of his. He worked on the farm and later in life had been converted as an adult and then had gone to seminary. He was a wonderful, wonderful preacher. He wrote a little book of sermons on Psalm 23. I remember him coming to Belfast in Northern Ireland, about 25 or 30 years ago, and preaching on the 23rd Psalm. I remember him telling us that he was on a train with a friend of his who was also a shepherd and, as they were passing this field full of sheep, this friend of his said, "I *know* those sheep!" And McMillan said, "It didn't even occur to me to ask him, 'How do you know those sheep?'" He knew them because he was a shepherd. He knew them just by looking at them.

Jesus knows His sheep. He knows them by name. You remember how He called Nathaniel and said, "Behold, an Israelite in whom there is no guile." And do you remember what Nathaniel said back to Jesus? "How do you know me?" Do you remember Zaccheus 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. It is one of the astonishing things about Ligon, he makes me feel guilty on a regular basis; he knows your names. I'll be quite honest. I don't know half of you. You keep saying "hello" to me in Barnes & Noble or Kroger, and I don't know your name. I carry around with me now in a bag on my shoulder the FPC Directory because I know names are important. I know how offensive it is when somebody ought to know your name and they don't know your name. You can sometimes tease them along a little. Jesus never forgets your name. He knows who you are. In fact, He knows you better than you know yourself. Remember Paul saying as an under shepherd, as an elder, about the Thessalonians he says, "We always thank God for you making mention of you in our prayers." Did Paul keep a list of names on a prayer list? I think he did. I think he must have done that. He wrote down the names just you and I do and we put it in the back of our Bible or in a journal or something. I think that's what I've started doing, putting people's names down.

Note this is a reciprocal relationship. Look at what He says in verse 14. "I know them and they know Me." And it is based on the Father knowing the Son and the Son knowing the Father. Actually, it is even more wonderful than that. You can go to verse 38, and this is one of those verses that just begs to go down deep and we haven't got the time for it, but at the end of verse 38, "Understand that the Father is in Me and I am in the Father." The first person is in the second person and the second person is in the first person, and your mind is swimming. What it is saying is that every action of the Father is in some way linked to the Son and every action of the Son is in some way linked to the Father, so that they never act independently of each other. And that is partly what Jesus means when He says, "I know you." It means He and His sheep are in union together in a bond of covenantal fellowship. "I *know* you," He says. Isn't that a wonderful thing?

2. He leads His sheep.

Look at verses 3 and 4. "To Him the gatekeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." Again in verse 27: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." The good shepherd leads his sheep; he guides his sheep. "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures, besides still waters. He guides me in the paths of righteousness. He leads me; He guides me."

There is a difference between oriental and occidental shepherds. In the west, sheep are driven. In the east, sheep are led. Douglas McMillan had two sheep dogs and they were called Goodness and Mercy and they will follow me all the days of my life. Aren't those beautiful names. John Stott tells this story of a trip he made to the Middle East. Perhaps it was Israel. They're on the bus and they are doing one of these tours. They have an Arab guide and he's telling you what I've just told you. That in the west, you drive your sheep with dogs but in the east you lead them. You go before them and they follow you. And as the guide was saying this, one of the passengers on the bus is looking out of the window and he sees the very opposite. He sees a man with a stick in his hand and he's driving these sheep. So the man puts his hand up as the bus is going along and he says, "Well look, that's not what is happening out there." The guide stops the bus, gets off the bus, and runs across to ask this man. And he comes back beaming and says, "He wasn't the shepherd; he was the butcher."

Just as He knows our name, the sheep know His voice and they follow Him wherever He leads. And He never leads us into sin. And if He asks you to walk in the valley of the shadow of death or to walk in trouble or trial, He'll never ask you to do that without Him going through there first. A few of us were looking at Galatians 5:16 this morning in Sunday school. "Keep in step with the Spirit." And the verb is *to march in file with*. And two verses later Paul explains what he means by *marching in step with the Spirit*, if you are led by the Spirit. The Spirit leads us, not in the sense of the pace car in the Daytona 500, but rather in the sense of the lead locomotive in a train. The whole point is that we are not being led by our own strength, but we are being led by the strength and power of the Holy Spirit. And Jesus is saying that here. He leads us because He is united to us; because there is a bond, a relationship. You know Richard Baxter's hymn: *Lord, it belongs not to my care. Christ leads me through no darker rooms than He went through before.* Or William Williams' hymn, *Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land; I am weak, but Thou art mighty; hold me with Thy powerful hand.* Or this one by J.H. Gilmore. *He leadeth me: O blessed thought! O words with heav'nly comfort fraught! Whate'er I do, where'er I be, still 'til God's hand that leadeth me. He leadeth me, He leadeth me; by His own hand He leadeth me: His faithful follower I would be, for by His hand He leadeth me.*

3. He feeds me.

Verse 9: "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture." The great concern in the ancient east was finding pasture, finding grass for the sheep to eat. And Jesus feeds us. He feeds us with spiritual food, He feeds us with His Word, He instructs us, He gives us a healthy diet and nourishes us and builds us up. You remember when Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love Me? Feed My sheep. Feed My lambs." Jesus is concerned that His sheep get fed. That's why under shepherds should be able to teach, apt to teach. And why it is that elders and pastors are concerned that the people of God are fed not with the equivalent of spiritual junk food. You know, junk food is 'O.K.' when you're watching football on TV. That's where it is appropriate, but you know, I feel cheated—and Rosemary is here and she can tell you—I feel a little cheated if I don't get my roast beef and Yorkshire Pudding on a Sunday. I don't want junk food on a Sunday afternoon when I come home from church. And Jesus is saying, "I'm concerned about My sheep that they are fed and nourished." That's why the writer of Hebrews urges his readers to eat solid food. It is time to move on from the milk and mush. And He feeds me with His Word, with the Bible, 66 books, 2,000,000 words that is able to make me complete in Him.

4. He saves His sheep.

Again Jesus reiterates this on a number of occasions. He says it in verse 11: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." He says it again in verse 15: "Just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father and I lay down My life for the sheep." He repeats it again in verses 17 and 18: "He lays down His life for the sheep."

Now there are two parts to what Jesus is saying here. In the first place, and you need to go down to verse 29, "My Father who has given them to Me." Before He lays down His life for them, He has received them in covenant from the Father. This is a pre-temporal Covenant of Redemption between the Father and the Son. We'll see this again in chapters 14 and again in chapter 17, so let me pass over that now.

But what Jesus does in His opening ministry and upon the cross has its beginning before time in the covenant between the Father and the Son. He lays down His life for the sheep. He purchases them. Actually, it is the language of 'laying aside' in much the same way as you might 'lay aside' your garments, as we will see in John 13, which we are coming to in a few weeks, where Jesus lays aside His outer garments and takes the form of a servant and washes the disciples feet, as though that was symbolic of what He means by laying His life. He sheds His own blood on behalf of the sheep to redeem them and purchase them and to call them "Mine." John Murray says, "Death was not His fate; it was His deed. He grasped it. Death was His triumphal act. Never was He more victorious than on the cross." John Murray says again, "It was though the eternal

Son of God took His human body in one hand and His human soul in the other and He rent them apart.” Now in the background here is Ezekiel 34 where it speaks of false shepherds who only take care of themselves. It takes a great deal for the great shepherd to purchase these sheep and to call them Mine.

5. He guards His sheep.

And let me allude to verses 12 and 13. He was a hired hand and not a shepherd who does not own the sheep. When the wolf comes, he leaves the sheep and flees. And the wolf snatches them and scatters them. Verse 13: “He flees because he is the hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”

But the good shepherd guards his sheep. I have memories as a young boy growing up in west Wales, and on stormy snowy nights watching my father put on as many clothes as he could to brave the wind and the snow because one of the sheep was making a noise somewhere up in the distance several fields away, and having to walk with a lantern to discover that perhaps the sheep had got caught in a trap or caught in a wire, or worse still, that a fox had come and was attacking its lambs. I remember vividly a dog that we had. It was a dog that somebody had left tied to a gate that we had on the farm. It had been abused terribly and we took it in and nursed it back to some kind of relationship. And one day this dog of ours, whose inclinations were more amorous than anything else, I needn't go into any details now, but it wasn't the sheep that he was interested in, it was another dog that he was interested in, and my neighbor shot him. The dog came limping home, collapsed outside the back door and within minutes died. It was a very sorrowful, pitiful moment, and I remember my father saw red and went storming over to our neighbor to ask for an explanation. The explanation was, of course, as far as our neighbor was concerned, our dog was attacking his sheep and he shot him. He was protecting his sheep. Jesus protects His sheep; He guards His sheep because wolves in sheep's clothing come and threaten the sheep. He guards them. He protects them.

6. He seeks His sheep.

Look at verse 16. “I have other sheep that are not of this fold and I must bring them also.” Isn't this a beautiful text following on our week of Missions? This is a missionary text. Jesus didn't come for a few believers in Jerusalem and Antioch; He came for believers in Athens and Rome and Cairo and Baghdad--yes, and Baghdad--as one of the 24,000 or so people groups in the world. And Jesus is saying, “I have Christians in that country and I have Christians in that people group, and I must bring them also and I must seek them also.” And we must have the heart of Jesus here. Lots of you are asking about war and the ethics of a Just War and all of those things. Let me answer a different question. I heard this statement this week and I sympathize with it to some extent. Somebody said to

me, and I understand it, "After we drop some bombs in Iraq, let's drop one on Paris on the way home." I understand that. But that's not the heart of a Christian. That's not how a believer thinks. That's not how Jesus thinks. His heart doesn't beat like that here. A great concern of the church of Jesus Christ has got to be for missions. We've got to be concerned about the people of God in Iraq. I'm not saying that we shouldn't go to war. Don't anybody leave this building and say that is what I was saying. That's not what I'm saying. But I am saying that as Christians, as believers in union with Jesus Christ, if we are not on our knees praying for the church in places like Iraq, then our hearts are not beating in tune with the heart of Jesus here. He seeks His sheep. He longs to gather in all of His sheep.

He says this in several places. "I am the door of the sheep" in verse 7. The idea of the door is that it is through Him that we enter into salvation. Look at how he puts it in verse 9, "I am the door. If anyone enters through Me, He will be saved and go in and out and find pasture."

7. Salvation is only through Jesus....He only, alone is the door.

He says it again in verses 27-29. He is the door—exclusively. There is no other way of salvation but by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. There is no other good enough to pay the price of sin. He only can unlock the gates of heaven and let us in. The Father and the Son are involved in one and the same mission. That is why He says in verse 30, "I and My Father are One." And He means that as a statement of ontological unity I am sure, but one in purpose and goal and mission too. Look at how he puts it in verse 28., "I give them eternal life and they will never perish nor will anyone snatch them out of My hand." Can't you picture Jesus coming before His Father on the last day and opening His hand and saying, "Look what I've got."

I heard this story on Thursday night. It was one of these e-mails that had been making the rounds. A wealthy man and his son loved to collect rare artwork—Picasso, Van Gogh, and Raphael, and they liked to sit down together and look at these wonderful paintings in their home. And then the son was called up to serve in the Vietnam War. In an act of outstanding courage this young man rescued this Marine, but while doing so he himself was shot in the heart and died. And a month later, near Christmas, there's a knock at the door of the father and there's a man outside dressed in full military uniform and he says to the father, "Sir, you don't know me, but I am the marine for whom your son gave his life. He saved many lives that day and in the process of carrying me to safety a bullet struck him in the heart and he died instantly. And he often talked about your love of art." And he's holding a package and he says to the father of this boy that died rescuing him, "I want you to have this." And it's a painting that he has done. He says, "It's not much, but it was all that I could do and it is a token of my gratitude to you." The father opens the parcel and it is a painting of his son. And he

admires it, especially the way that his eyes have been caught, and the personality of his son has been caught in his eyes. And the father hung this painting from the mantelpiece and every time visitors would come to the house he would show them this painting of his son, amongst all the other great paintings in his home. And a few months later, the father died and there's an auction of his paintings and many influential people are there. There's an auctioneer and he's pounding the gavel and he says, "We'll start with a picture of the man's son." There is silence. There's a voice from the back that says, "We want to see the famous paintings." But the auctioneer persists. "Will someone bid for this painting? \$200? \$100?" And there's silence. And another voice says, "We didn't come for this. We want the Rembrandts, we want the Raphaels, the Van Goghs." And the auctioneer continues, "The son. Who will take the son?" And there's a voice and it says, "I'll bid \$10." It was the gardener. He didn't have much money. He bid \$10. "Will anyone bid \$20?" Silence. "Going once, going twice, going three times. Sold. \$10." And he puts the gavel down and he's walking away and they say, "What about the other paintings?" And he says, "The auction is over. I couldn't tell you this until this moment but there was a stipulation that whoever bought the painting of the son got everything. Whoever takes the son gets everything." And that is what Jesus is saying here. "Whoever takes Me, gets eternal life and no one can snatch them out of My hand." And there's coming a day, friends, when Jesus is going to present His sheep to His Father and He's going to say, "Look what I've got."

Let's pray together. *Our Father in heaven, we thank you for Your Word. We ask you now to bless it to us. We thank you for the Son, the good shepherd. We ask that you write this word upon our hearts and draw us even closer to Him for Jesus' sake, Amen.*

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