

As you have just heard me tell the kids,
an important metaphor used for people in the Bible is that of sheep and a shepherd.
This is in part because we humans are so sheep-like. Those of you who have sheep know that this is so.
It is also because Israel was a pastoral society. That is, they raised sheep and cattle.
People there and then knew all about sheep and many of them were shepherds.
Even today, caring for sheep is close to the heart of so many in this world.
What then is Jesus telling His people in this passage?

Jesus Christ is the Gate of the Sheep.

For His sheep, He is the way in and the way out.
He is the one who enters by the door. He is the one true shepherd.
He calls to His sheep, and His sheep hear Him.
His sheep follow Him.
He is the one who cares for His sheep in the right way.

Sometime after Jesus had the run-ins with the Pharisees that we have read about in the Gospel of John,
Jesus embarked upon the teaching that we read in John 10.
The theme is Jesus Himself as our shepherd, and the audience is Jesus' disciples and other Jews.
We will discover later in the chapter that the Pharisees are still listening in.
They are increasingly upset about what Jesus is saying and doing. Why?

In John 10:7, Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door (gate) of the sheep."
This is the third of seven "I Am" statements of Jesus in the gospel of John.
"I Am" is a reference (a reminder) of God's declaration of His name to Moses in Exodus 3:14.
It is a play on words, on the Hebrew verb "I am" that shares the same consonants as God's name "Yahweh."
It is a declaration of the Lord's self-existence that is essential to His covenant name.
God (Elohim) is what He is. The Lord (Yahweh) is who He is.

"I Am" is a statement of who God is.

When Jesus is saying it, He is saying, "I am God, and here is what I am like which is what God is like."

"I am the bread of life." (John 6:35, 41, 48, 51)

"I am the light of the world." (John 8:12; 9:5)

"I am the door." (John 10:7 and 9)

"I am the good shepherd." (John 10:11, 14) We will look at this next week.

"I am the resurrection and the life." (John 11:25)

"I am the way and the truth and the life." (John 14:6)

"I am the true vine." (John 15:1, 5)

There are two more "I am" statements of Jesus on the Gospel of John. These are not metaphors; rather, they are declarations of God's name, as applied by Jesus to Himself.

"I tell you the truth," Jesus says, "before Abraham was born, I Am!" (John 8:58).

The verbs Jesus uses are in stark contrast with each other: Abraham "was, but I am."

There is no doubt that the Pharisees understood Jesus' claim to be the eternal God incarnate,
because they took up stones to kill Him (verse 59).

Then in John 18, when the mob came to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane,

He asked them whom they sought.

They said, "Jesus of Nazareth," and Jesus replied, "I Am" (John 18:4-5).

Then something strange happened.

"When Jesus said, 'I Am,' they drew back and fell to the ground" (verse 6).

When Jesus said "I Am..." He was making a declaration that He is God. Jesus is the great "I Am" in the flesh.
And here, when Jesus tells us that He is the door (gate) of the sheep...

He is telling us that He is God and He is how God gathers, keeps, and shepherds His sheep.

First, Jesus is God who gathers His sheep.

I. Jesus gathers His sheep.

John 10:1-6

Right away, we discover that Jesus does this in contrast to others who do not, the “thief and the robber.”

You might wonder, who is the thief and the robber?

Well, in this world there are those who act like shepherds or ought to be shepherds, but are not.

In Israel, as any first century Jew would know, not all of their shepherds had been good.

They had had plenty of bad shepherds, as we still have today.

Consider **Isaiah 56:10-12** Those who ought to be shepherds of Israel are greedy and selfish.

Think about the lament of Israel in **Jeremiah 10:19-21**.

Israel’s shepherds were supposed to be the kings and the priests, but they were failing, false, and wicked.

Therefore, the Lord judged those shepherds. **Jeremiah 23:1-4**

We find similar prophesies in Ezekiel and Zechariah.

Now, to think of the Lord as our shepherd is not new to the New Testament, as many of you know.

There is of course the 23rd Psalm. **Psalm 23:1-4**

Literally, this psalm begins, “Yahweh shepherds me.”

And how?

vs. 1 “I do not want” = I lack for nothing.

There is nothing I need that my shepherd does not make sure I have.

vs. 2 “He makes me lie down in green pastures” = an animal lies down only when it is at peace.

vs. 2 “He leads me beside quiet waters” = God’s provision. I am no longer thirsty.

vs. 3 “He restores my soul” = spiritual and emotional restoration

There are troubles in life, tragedy, heartache. He puts me together afterward.

vs. 3 “He guides me...” = Jesus like a shepherd leads us, as the hymn says.

We need a guide through life because none of us has ever done this before.

“in the paths of righteousness” = because this is a path I have not yet walked

And I am naturally not particularly good at following the path on my own.

I am selfish, ignorant, weak (physically and mentally), and shortsighted. I need a guide.

“for His name’s sake” = He leads me because He wants me to represent Him.

He leads me because He has died for me and claimed me as His own.

vs. 4 “Even though... I fear no evil, for You are with me.” = The center of the psalm

There is much evil to fear in this life, in this world. Just look around. Death is the worst.

But not when I’m with my shepherd.

vs. 4 “Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” = the tools that a shepherd carries.

The rod = a weapon with which the shepherd beats off attacking wolves and bears.

The staff = a crooked stick with which the shepherd guides and rescues the sheep from harm

Thus Jesus says in verse 2, “He who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep.”

Jesus is the one who enters by the door. He comes to His sheep in the right way with the right heart.

In verses 2-4 we have this picture of the shepherd, Jesus, who comes in and out by the gate.

He calls to His sheep, and they know His voice and follow Him when He leads them out to pasture.

Sheep know that it is their own shepherd who feeds them and cares for them. They trust him.

The sheep will not listen to a strange voice. They do not trust that voice. (vs. 5)

Sheep, like people, are vulnerable, suspicious, and fearful. They need a shepherd.

I understand that sheep cannot live in the wild. They will not survive, like people.

Jesus has come into this world in the perfect way to gather His people, just as a shepherd gathers his own sheep.

People whom God is calling recognize His voice and follow Him and He leads them.

These people know that they need a shepherd. They realize, in humility, that they cannot make it on their own.

Jesus has a voice. It sounds like God’s words in the Bible.

People have been hearing it and following Jesus for 2,000 years.

All the credit and all the praise for this goes to the shepherd. It is the shepherd who makes the sheep hear.

He calls His sheep by name (vs. 3) because He knows them.

Being called by the shepherd is not a compliment but rather a gift, undeserved grace. This is where we are.

II. Jesus guards His sheep.

John 10:7-10

In verse 7, and then again in verse 9, Jesus says, "I Am the Door of the Sheep."

In verse 7, this is preceded by Jesus' special prelude to many of His statements,

"Truly, truly, I say to you."

In speaking this way, Jesus communicates intimacy, affection, urgency, and an effort to get our attention.

He speaks in this way when He really wants us to listen closely.

To what?

In this case to this, "I Am the door of the sheep."

Door can mean gate. It is the way in and the way out of the pen, cave, or barn in which the sheep are kept.

The door exists so that the sheep can go out and to find pasture, and then come back in to be safe.

The door exists to protect the sheep, to save them from predators.

And predators abound in this rebellious, confusing, and sick world.

Jesus says in verse 9, "If anyone enters through Me, he will be saved."

Saved from what? Or rather, saved from whom?

In this case the answer is found in the context. Consider verses 8 and 10.

So, Jesus as the door, means to protect His sheep from the false shepherds, the thieves and robbers.

He has been doing this for 2,000 years.

Did you know that to be saved means just this.

Yes, Jesus saves you from your sin and this sinful world.

He has rescued you from the penalty of sin. He has paid your sin price on the Cross.

He is rescuing you from the power of sin, as you grow in trusting Him and obeying Him.

And He will rescue you entirely from the presence of sin forever and ever.

Jesus is also at work in this world saving you from those who would lead you astray, false shepherds.

This is one reason that you are here at this church, learning the Word of God, week after week.

This is why He wants you in the Bible every day hearing His voice.

This is why you read good books and listen to those who speak gospel truth.

All this Jesus does for you because there are other voices begging for your attention.

These voices want you to hear them, to follow them.

They desire this not because they care about you or about Jesus. They care about themselves.

These are the voices of the "thieves and robbers" who come to "steal, kill, and destroy."

And, if you do not keep listening to your Shepherd Jesus, these voices will destroy you.

"Who are they?" you ask. And thank you for asking. Who are these thieves and robbers, false shepherds?

Well, you will find them on the interwebs, like spiders lurking, waiting for you to fly into their webs.

They are influencers, asking for followers, wanting to convince you that they are worth listening to.

They do not care about you. They do not know you like Jesus does. They have never met you.

They want to be important and be thought of as great, and you are useful in getting them there.

You will find them in the universities, with letters after their names, Masters and Doctors of this or that.

They want to impress you with their degrees and learning and intelligence and insights.

They would like to indoctrinate you into their way of thinking and living.

They will tell you that they are smarter than God and wiser than His Word. But they too are fools.

You will find false shepherds in media and entertainment, people skillful in speaking and performing.

They bring you their wisdom in songs, movies, television, or commentary.

They will work on you so that you will laugh or cry or applaud or seethe with anger.

They work to entice you into their ideas and beliefs, though they may have little substance.

They know that playing to these emotions will bring you back for more.

You will find them in politics, candidates for office, judges, congresspeople, presidents even.

They are prepared to tell you what ideas are dangerous. Hint: not theirs.

They want you to listen to them, campaign for them, vote for them.

They too pretend to care about you, but they do not even know your name like Jesus does.

You are to them a means to an end. When they reach that end, they will cast you off.

You will find them in your family or our community, these false shepherds, pastors or teachers or leaders.
They want you to approve of their ideas and their lifestyle.
They want you to see them as good and righteous, but they do not encourage you to listen to Jesus.
They do not teach you to read and obey His Word no matter what.
No, they would rather you listen to them and how they read the Bible.
They have their rules, their values, their version of what is right and wrong.
And the things that they disagree with in the Bible they are prepared to explain away.
Because they think that they know the truth better than God's Word, which they sit over in judgment.
If you go down that path, their path, you will die in your sin.

This is why Jesus concludes this little lesson in verse 10 in this most encouraging way.
"I came that they (His sheep) might have life, and have it abundantly (full and forever)."

This is thematic in John's Gospel. "Life"

In John 1:4 we read, "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men."

In John 3:16 John writes, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son,
that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

John 3:36, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life,
but the wrath of God abides on him."

In chapter 4, Jesus offered the woman at the well "Water springing up to eternal life."

In John 5:21 Jesus told the Jews, "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life,
even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes."

John 5:24, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me,
has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."

In John 6:27, Jesus speaks to those He just fed, "Do not work for the food which perishes,
but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you."

John 6:40, "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him
will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

John 6:47-48, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. I Am the bread of life."

In John 8:12 Jesus spoke in the Temple, "I am the Light of the world;
he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

And this is just a taste of what John writes in just 10 chapters about life in Jesus. There is so much more.

Jesus says, "I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly."

Realize that this abundant life that Jesus came to give you, His sheep, means the blessing of God.

It is not about abundant money, or abundant land, or abundant women, or abundant ice cream.

It means the presence of God in your life, now and forever.

Over and over in the Bible we see that God's people had to learn this.

It is better to have God in your life than all of the gifts He gives.

And the gifts He gives us are only calculated to help us to appreciate Him, His goodness, His love.

So, our Good Shepherd always leads us to the Father, and He protects us so that we can be there forever.

So, hear the voice of your Shepherd, and follow Him all the way home.