

How to Recognize a Good Shepherd

John 10:1-21

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Introduction: The setting of our passage this morning opens somewhere on the streets of Jerusalem, probably near the temple mount. What Jesus is about to say is connected to, and prompted by, one of the most shameful displays of spiritual leadership in the entire Bible. A man born blind....a beggar....has been caused to see by The God of Creation who has come into the world as the man....the human man, Jesus Christ. The reaction of everyone connected to this event has been appalling. Not a single person rejoiced. His neighbors tried to convince themselves that it was not him, His parents, who had already totally rejected him because of his blindness don't even want to identify him. BUT....most outrageous of all was the behavior of the spiritual leaders of Israel. They are the shepherds of the people and they have brutally abused the flock under their care. Their final recorded response to this man's miracle of sight was deplorable

John 9:34 ³⁴ They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?" So they put him out.

After a few more verbal exchanges with these venomous men Jesus begins to teach the crowds again. It is clear from his opening words that this is not a separate teaching but one that has been precipitated by the events and words of John Chapter Nine. Jesus never begins a discourse with the words "truly, truly." Leon Morris writes,

"It always follows up some previous teaching, It indicates that the following statement is important, but also that it has a connection with the preceding. This passage then must be understood in the closest of connections with the story of the blind man."

As Christ's sheep we want to hear Him this morning and understand our relationship with Him. We want to know Christ's passion for His people and their care. We want to learn how much Christ loves us so that we may rejoice in that, but also know how much we should love one another if we are His true sheep. To do this I want to divide this passage up into three parts.

- **JESUS IS THE PROMISED SHEPHERD FROM GOD**
- **JESUS IS THE PROMISED WAY OF SALVATION**
- **JESUS IS THE ONE YOU CAN ALWAYS TRUST WITH YOUR LIFE**

JESUS IS THE PROMISED SHEPHERD FROM GOD [10:1-6]

Jesus knows that Israel has a long and sordid history of bad shepherds. Just like in politics of our day, when men are chosen to be "public servants" they somehow almost immediately begin to believe that they have been chosen to be served by the public.

Listen to just some of what God said about the dereliction of duty by Israel's shepherds. Anyone in any position of leadership should be warned by this:

Ezekiel 34:2-4 ² "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/ ⁴ "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."

Ezekiel 34:7-10 ⁷ Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ⁸ "As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "surely because My flock has become a prey, My flock has even become food for all the beasts of the field for lack of a shepherd, and My shepherds did not search for My flock, but *rather* the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock; ⁹ therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ¹⁰ 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them.'""

With these words God has exposed and warned evil leaders. It is particularly bad when evil and self-centered men abuse what belongs to Christ. Israel belonged to God. The Church belongs to Christ because He bought her with His own life. Even more importantly she is loved by Christ as a man loves His bride. All of us need to be really vigilant about what we think, feel and say about one another. Your shepherds need to be totally watchful of their own hearts and words toward Christ's church. Pray for us to be good under-shepherds who treat you and love you like Christ does. Speaking to elders, God warns us saying.....

Acts 20:28 ²⁸ "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

So Jesus is going to use this despicable spectacle of evil shepherding to reveal Himself as the One True Legitimate Shepherd of Israel.

"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. ² "But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep: Jesus is saying what God has already said through the prophets. There are good shepherds and bad ones. There are pretenders and there are legitimate ones. God has declared ownership again and again over Israel and in our age the church. The church does not belong to men or denominations. This is a grave error. God has committed its care to men but He watches and scrutinizes them. What God said to Israel in captivity still rings true to pastors, elders and church leaders today.

Ezekiel 34:11-12 ¹¹ For thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. ¹² "As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is

among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day.

The shepherds of Israel heaped abuse on the blind, the poor, the handicapped and those drowning in sin. But Jesus is the true shepherd of the sheep because He has fulfilled every prophecy and worked the works of God. He has entered in by the door and is the true shepherd.

"To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out: The doorkeeper is a hired hand who knows who hired him. He therefore recognizes the true shepherd and opens the door gladly. God's human shepherds have a very crucial mandate. They are to open the door to Christ. IT is never about them it is always about Christ.

"When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. "A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.": Human shepherds are there to keep out the evil men and give them totally free access to The One True Shepherd.

In Israel and much of the Middle East shepherds never drive their sheep. They do not use dogs to herd them. They call to them. Eyewitness accounts to what Jesus describes here abound.

Three shepherds will bring their sheep to a common fold at sunset. They will put them all together into a walled area with only one access point. The doorkeeper will guard that door during the night. In the morning the three shepherds will return to collect their sheep from the fold. They will stand at a considerable distance from one another while the doorkeeper unblocks the door to the fold. Each shepherd will call his sheep and as they come through the door they will go, without fail, to their own shepherd and they will follow him to pasture and water. They do exactly what Jesus describes. They do not just hear his voice, but they recognize it as the one who cares for and provides for them.

This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them: This is a parable, which is an earthly story that men should understand intended to teach a heavenly meaning that men would not otherwise understand. This first parable did not penetrate His audience. Jesus' claim to be that shepherd was not overt here....Not bold. He describes the legitimate shepherd in contrast with the bogus one and the reaction appears to have been....."okay, so??"

JESUS IS THE PROMISED WAY OF SALVATION

John 10:7-10 ⁷ So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ "All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. ⁹ "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and

out and find pasture. ¹⁰ "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly.

So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep: Have you ever tried to explain something to someone and realized that they had just not gotten it? But if you know it is really important you will do what? Of course!! You will explain it again, but if you are wise you will realize that you should say it differently this time.

All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them: Time is short for Christ and for the people. He is comparing Himself to the false shepherds that they have just seen in action. He changes the parable slightly so as to focus here on the sheep....on His hearers. He asserts that the sheep of God will refuse to hear the charlatans that are speaking to them. They will instead realize that salvation is about Jesus and not about religious, hateful, self-righteousness. They have just seen that in action and they have also seen Christ. Full of mercy and tenderness and giving salvation and hope. Jesus comes right out and says then....

"I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture: How do sheep get out of their pen...their fold...and get out to where the food and water are? Everyone knew the answer to this question. They go through the door. So Jesus says that HE is that door. The one and only way that a sheep can get what it needs to live.

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly: These thieves are the false religious leaders of their and our day as well. Today they are on television selling healing and wealth for money. Teaching faith in faith and in themselves. They are evil shepherds who do not expose their flock to Christ or His pure Words of life. It is always about what they do or believe or possess. They are shepherds who kill and destroy....but Jesus came to give abundant overflowing Eternal life. Christ actually gives what religious and self-righteous hucksters only offer.

Jesus explains to us how the legitimate shepherd comes to the sheep in a legitimate way. He does not need to sneak or lurk in the shadows. He does not need to trick anyone or peddle anything. The true shepherd is self-authenticated.

Men....you do not need to show ID to your wife when you come home. She knows it is you! You have the key to the house. You arrived in the family car. You know her name and the name of your kids. You came right through the front door and not over the fence and through a window. She recognizes your voice.

Likewise Jesus....He came to Israel exactly as He should of. He was born where God said His Son would be born. He was born when He was supposed to be and to the parents God had said He would have. Angels announced His birth to men just to make sure. The Prophets of His day recognized Him. He did what only the Messiah could do. He was the legitimate shepherd of Israel and He is yours today. He has taken you and me to create a bride for Himself. If you trust God then you cannot help but embrace Christ.

JESUS IS THE ONE YOU CAN ALWAYS TRUST WITH YOUR LIFE

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep:" This is the invitation of the Cross. Men want to trust the Pope and the sacraments, they want to trust their own morality or religious rituals of any sect. They want to trust in membership or baptism or the saying of some confession, but Jesus has laid down His life for you. Jesus goes on....

He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ **"He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep:** Jesus is the one true and infinitely good shepherd. Religious hypocrites and false teachers are concerned about themselves. When danger approaches you are on your own. The prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel called such men "evil shepherds" but Jesus is the opposite. HE is the good shepherd.

Instead of fleeing the danger and threat of death, Jesus went straight to that death and suffered it so that you would go free. He laid down His life for you.

"I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me Do you think this statement is true? What I mean is this...many say that Jesus just died as sort of an open and random invitation. He had no one in particular in mind when He died, but only the general desire to provide a salvation for whomever might be wise enough or good enough to accept it. Many of us have been taught this all our lives, but is this what Jesus said here in John? Actually anything but that. He says He has always known you.

Even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep: In case we are tempted to minimize this knowledge or make it non-specific or superficial, Jesus explains how absolutely complete and profound this knowledge is with this comparison. I know about you the way the Father knows about me. It is a perfect and total knowledge in every way. There is nothing hidden and it is eternal knowledge. It stretches into eternity past and to eternity future. When Paul wrote about this to the Ephesian church he was exultant....

Ephesians 1:3-6 ³ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

"I have other sheep, which are not of this fold: These are not the lost tribes of Israel living in the mountains of South America. They are Gentiles...other than Jews. We hear them singing Revelation.

Revelation 5:9-10 ⁹ they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood

men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. ¹⁰ "You have made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice: The sheep are still sheep even when they are lost. God knows His sheep and will always find them. He must find them and bring them. It is not a hope...it is a certainty that they will hear and recognize His voice when He calls to them. This is how God explained it to Paul in Antioch and then in Corinth

Acts 13:48-49 ⁴⁸ When the Gentiles heard this, they *began* rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been **appointed to** eternal life believed. ⁴⁹ And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region.

Acts 18:9-10 ⁹ And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid *any longer*, but go on speaking and do not be silent; ¹⁰ for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city."

They will become one flock *with* one shepherd: God's intention has always been to save gentiles. He promised Abraham that all the nations would be blessed through one particular offspring of his.

Galatians 3:16 ¹⁶ Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his **seed**. He does not say, "And to seeds," as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, "And to your **seed,**" that is, Christ.

Galatians 3:26-28 ²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:11-20 ¹¹ Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands-- ¹² *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,

"For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again:" Christ has known us from Eternity the way He and the Father have known one another. Now He speaks of Eternal love. God has always love the Son. He did not start when Jesus dies on the Cross, but of all the perfections that could be cited here Jesus chooses the one that procured your salvation. It is a willing and voluntary gift Christ gives you. IT is not cohered as some have suggested. One recently deceased theologian called Christ's death on the cross "cosmic child abuse." Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus wanted to lay down His life for you. He knew it was your only hope. He did it freely so that you could trust Him without mental reservation with your eternal and

your earthly life. It is the reason the Father loved Him. It begs to be the reason you love Him as well.

“No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”: There is no weakness in the crucifixion murder of Christ. He was not the victim or the martyr. God did not lose control of creation for those 6 hours on Passover Friday. Peter knew that when He preached the first ever Christian sermon.

Acts 2:22-24 ²² "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know-- ²³ this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. ²⁴ "But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

Christ Jesus was and is the Sovereign God of Creation. He was driving the events of that day just like He does the ones in ours. If Christ was sovereignly in control on the Cross, how much more is He so today in your personal affairs and in the affairs of men?

John 10:19-20 ¹⁹ A division occurred again among the Jews because of these words. ²⁰ Many of them were saying, "He has a demon and is insane. **Why do you listen to Him?"**

Your answer to this final Jewish question is vital. Do the words of Christ sound true to you? Are they infinitely more satisfying than religion and self-righteous morality? Does it make sense to you that an infinite and eternal God would have always possessed infinite and eternal knowledge about you, your weakness and sin and even your circumstances in life right now. Does it make sense that this same God mounted an expedition to save you by name by having His own Son become a sinless human man and then take your place in death...dying for your sin. Does it make sense that if anyone loved you that much they would give you everything they possess...even their righteous standing with God?

If the voice of Christ is recognizable to you then follow Him. Do not waste your life trying to decide what to do to please God. That has been done for you. Stop it and love Christ. Worship Jesus. Be in awe of Him and let Him transform you and make Himself more fully known to you.

1 Peter 1:18-21 ¹⁸ knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ. ²⁰ For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you ²¹ who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him **glory**, so that your faith and hope are in God.