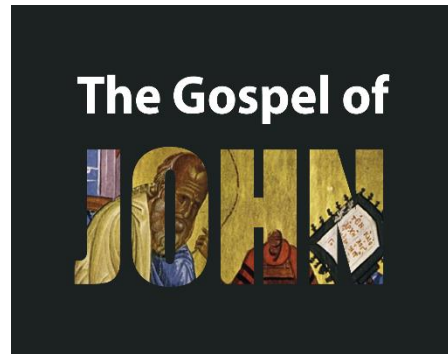




Part 38 – Abundant Life

John 10:1-10

In chapter ten, John records the final public address by Jesus. Here, our Lord reveals a further characteristic of his ministry. He appeals to the ancient and familiar role of shepherd as a way to illustrate his own Person and work. In this he contrasts himself with the unfaithful shepherds of Israel who have failed their calling and brought grief upon the people of God.

Jesus also refers to himself as the Door for the sheep by which they enter God's abundant rest and find peace in his presence. In this life, Satan – the thief – operates with the singular purpose of destroying God's image-bearers. But Jesus, the shepherd and protector of God's people, came to give them life in abundance.

1. The Shepherd

Vs. 1 – The imagery Jesus used would have been familiar to John's readers. We are probably to think of a large enclosure, away from the home itself, used perhaps by several families or by one large farm, with a watchman hired to protect the animals by guarding the gate. Whether Jesus' teaching recorded in chapter 10 is offered immediately after the events of chapter nine or if this is happening weeks or months later, it is clear that there is a direct thematic link. The blind man healed by Jesus is among the sheep who recognize the voice of their shepherd. The Pharisees, on the other hand, are represented by the "thief and robber." They sought to shepherd God's people while bypassing the Christ who alone grants access to the flock.

Vs. 2 – A good shepherd is careful in granting access to the sheep. Those with proper access to the flock will only come through the proper door. They will never approach the flock in the manner of a thief or predator. As Jesus continues to teach, it will become clear that he is presenting himself as the shepherd who guides, provides for, and protects the sheep. But he is also the door by which the sheep come and go and find rest.

Vs. 3 – This presumes that several flocks would have been kept overnight in the same fold and that the shepherd would separate his sheep from the rest simply by calling to them. In this case, notice, that some emphasis falls on the fact that the shepherd calls each sheep by name. He calls them individually, one by one, and leads them out of the fold.

Vs. 4 – Once outside the common pen, the sheep continue to follow their shepherd because they know his voice. Sheep are not particularly bright or self-sufficient. They have no natural means by which to guard themselves against predators. But despite their many deficiencies, they do know the voice of their shepherd.

Vs. 5 – As he continues, Jesus will further develop this theme that the sheep know the familiar voice of their shepherd and will not follow a stranger.

Vs. 6 – Jesus taught in metaphors and parables not to be easily understood by anyone who happened to hear but to remain a mystery to those who clung stubbornly to their sin (Matthew 13:10-17). As we see so often in the gospel accounts, Jesus' own disciples had a difficult time understanding his metaphors and parables.

- Sheep are particularly vulnerable animals. They lack the sorts of teeth, claws, or speed which typically help other animals protect themselves from predators. It is as though God created sheep to need human oversight and protection. "When human beings are metaphorically described as sheep, it is to highlight their helplessness and inability to take care of themselves. Sheep without a shepherd are in life-threatening trouble."¹
- God appoints leaders for his people. Throughout her history, Israel was repeatedly failed by her political and religious leaders. Nevertheless, God appointed a structure of leadership for his people over time which included judges, kings, priests, prophets, and apostles. Since the apostolic era God has called ministers to give spiritual leadership to his people. First Timothy and Titus are particularly helpful in our understanding of the character, calling, and role of ministers.

¹ Karen Jobes, John Through Old Testament Eyes (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2021) p. 173.

- Jesus' words imply that his people will have shepherds, those who serve under Christ for the sake of the church. "This implies some endorsement of those who enter into leadership in Christ's name, leaders who come after him whom he knows. But it also implies a warning, for there are illegitimate shepherds whose entry he prohibits."²
- This is why the church must practice formal and rigorous processes for the identification, training, and ordaining of qualified men to serve the church as ministers. This sort of process is seen in the Book of Acts and the Epistles 1 & 2 Timothy, and Titus. It is a process anticipated by Jesus' training of the disciples.

2. The Door

- Here Jesus shifts the vantage point from the sheep to himself. "There are two ways of viewing Him, as the Door and the Good Shepherd, and He deals with them successively. Both have to do with salvation. As the Door He is the one way of entrance into salvation. As the Good Shepherd He is the One who cares for the sheep and provides for their salvation at the cost of his life."³

Vv. 7-8 – While references to a door are found in a few other places in the New Testament, this is the only time it is used by Jesus in reference to himself. By it, Jesus is communicating the same basic truth as that which is found in 1:51 where he is depicted as the ladder between heaven and earth and 14:6 where he declares himself to be the only way to the Father. There is only one way of inclusion into the sheepfold of God and that is Jesus Christ. In reference to those under shepherds of God's people, it is only Jesus who grants them access. That is, any "shepherd" who denies Christ and his gospel is no shepherd sent by God and will only do harm to the flock. Jesus' "I am the door," is the third of his seven I Am statements.

"If men are to bring other men into God's fold they must first enter it themselves (cf. 1 Timothy 4:16). And the only way of entrance is through the one door. These men declined to come to God through Christ. They therefore stamped themselves as imposters. All who seek to bring men to life, but themselves do not enter into life through Christ, stand condemned."⁴

Vs. 9 – Jesus repeats his "I Am the door." We can easily hear his parallel words: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (14:6). Sticking with the sheep / shepherd imagery, Jesus promises "pasture" to those who come to him. Pastures were places of an abundance of food and water. They were peaceful places free from the typical hiding places for predators. Jesus is the Door to God's eternal and peaceable kingdom where life is lived in all of its fullness.

- Chief among the functions of any door are security and access. A good door helps to secure a structure from threats and thieves. But a door simultaneously grants access to those who belong. What a rich portrait of Jesus is brought to mind in considering the safety and access granted by a proper door. "The very first questions in religion that must be answered are these: 'How can I draw near to God? How can I be justified? How can a sinner like me be reconciled to my Maker?'"⁵

3. The Life-Giver

Vs. 10a – "The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy." – This, of course, may be taken as a reference to Satan. He is the wicked opposition to the Divine Door of God's flock. But it is also a reference to those false shepherds who prey upon and scatter God's flock (vs. 1).

Vs. 10b – "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." – This echoes the prophet Ezekiel who, railing against the faithless shepherds of Israel, spoke of the plentiful pastureland that the Lord will provide his people. Whatever provision and blessings we experience in this life are merely a foretaste of the limitless abundance of peace and joy to be had when the Lord brings us into his blessed presence.

- Life is a vital theme in John's gospel. Repeatedly we hear Jesus promising life eternal to all who believe in him (3:16). In his prologue John declares: "In him [Jesus] was life and the life was the light of men" (1:4). "Eternal life," Jesus said, is to know the Father and Jesus Christ (17:3). Jesus himself is "the life" (14:6). Life as it is offered by and found in Jesus alone is qualitatively and quantifiably better than anything found in the world by a magnitude hard to imagine. He is the author, provider, and sustainer of our life. In Christ, the eternal nature of the life he died to secure begins the moment a sinner believes.

² Gary Burge, *John*, NAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) p. 290.

³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) p. 505.

⁴ Morris, p. 507

⁵ J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts On John, Vol.2* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2012) p. 130.