

Exegesis

10:1-6 – John does not indicate a break from what's just occurred; thus, using the episode of the blindless man as a backdrop, Jesus now moves to an illustration between the bad shepherds and the Good Shepherd (cf. vs. 21).¹ The religious leaders' misconduct was cause for comment. They had ignored the clear testimony of the miracle before them and took action against an innocent man. The Good Shepherd discourse is as much a lesson about proper leadership as it is a full-scale indictment of Jewish guardianship.

Compared to Jesus, the Pharisees are, at worst, criminals and strangers (cf. vs. 1, 5) who seek to abuse the sheep, or, at best, they're little more than hired hands (cf. vs. 12) who flee at the first sign of danger. Considering that sheep can be used for various reasons, it should come as no surprise that they'd be a commodity highly prized and sought after and thus the focus of the unscrupulous. Besides the meat they could give, a sheep's wool could be made into clothing, their milk turned into cheese (a delicacy), and their skins would be tanned and used for leather products such as pouches that carried water or wine.²

Jesus begins by saying, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep." On the one hand, you have those who are criminals, and then, on the other hand, you have the "shepherd."³ In many places throughout the O.T., God is ascribed in this way (cf. Gen. 48:15; Ps. 23:1; Isa. 40:11; Jer. 31:10; esp. Ezek. 34, etc.).⁴ Shepherd symbolism was also prevalent throughout the non-Jewish world, with kings and gods likened to this well-known occupation.⁵ Thus, the imagery would've been familiar to both Jesus' and John's audiences. However, what would've displeased the Jew's sensibilities was that rather than referring to himself as one of God's flock, Jesus will move from speaking parabolically to saying that he is the very shepherd who leads, keeps, and dies for the

¹ Carson (1991), p. 379.

² Keener (2003), 1:799.

³ Köstenberger (2004), p. 300, surmises that using terms like "thief" and "robber" is an example of Semitic parallelism where the idea of intrusion is being clarified. The word "thief" denotes crimes that are covert, whereas "robber" implies violence. However, we should be careful not to make too much of an issue in the differing words. Jesus' point is hardly about the different ways in which his sheep are being harmed and more about how they're being mistreated in the first place regardless of the specifics (see Carson (1991), p. 381). However, for a thorough description of differences between these two terms, see Keener (2003), 1:803-805.

⁴ Keener (2003), 1:797.

⁵ Morris (1995), p. 445.

flock (vs. 11). And this all foreshadows Jesus' far more explicit claim that "[He] and the Father are one" (cf. vs. 30).

The Lord explains the shepherd's familiarity with his sheep by saying, "To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice." Notice that the shepherd "goeth before" the sheep. This is in contrast to how shepherds in the west usually drive their flocks from behind with the help of dogs rather than their eastern counterparts, who guide their herds from the front.⁶ Jesus always leads where he himself has already gone (cf. Mat. 16:24; 1 Pet. 2:21).⁷ Notice also that Jesus references a "porter," which means the scope of his herd must've been great.⁸ Only a large farm would require someone (often called the "watchman" or "gatekeeper"; 18:16, 17; cf. Mar. 13:34) whose sole purpose was to open and close the gate.⁹ Thus, considering the size, it speaks well of this shepherd that he calls each one "by name" (cf. Ex. 33:17-19; 3 Jn 15). Historically, it was common for each sheep to be given a nickname based on a peculiar physical trait, such as how one family was known to have named their white she-goat "*Chionê*," which is the Greek term for "snowy."¹⁰

The care, protection, and time that a shepherd gives to the sheep garner a close-knit relationship. As the shepherd, Jesus has a personal relationship with every one of his sheep, and, as such, each one knows the tone and timbre of his voice. Interestingly, Morris provides testimony from H. V. Morton in his book *In the Steps of the Master* (1935), who saw this practice firsthand:

"Early one morning I saw an extraordinary sight not far from Bethlehem. Two shepherds had evidently spent the night with their flocks in a cave. The sheep were all mixed together and the time had come for the shepherds to go in different directions. One of the shepherds stood some distance from the sheep and began to call. First one, then another, then four or five animals ran towards him; and so on until he had counted his whole flock."¹¹

⁶ Köstenberger (2004), p. 301.

⁷ Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 169.

⁸ There are many theories as to the identity of the porter. Was Jesus referring to John the Baptist? Moses? The prophets? Given that Jesus does not expound on the person's identity, any suggestion is speculative.

⁹ Carson (1991), p. 381.

¹⁰ Keener (2003), 1:805.

¹¹ Morris (1995), p. 447; Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 168, records a similar testimony from G.A. Smith's *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, 25th ed., p. 210-11, where he saw four different flocks had been mingled together around a Judean well yet easily dispersed to their respective shepherds when called.

What's more, the sheep in Jesus' parable know his voice so well they "will not follow a stranger...but [they] will flee from him [because] they know not the voice of strangers." Just as the nicknaming of sheep is well-attested, so, too, are the reactions of domesticated animals toward people they're unfamiliar with. We can see this today with our own household pets. These loyal sheep not only refuse to follow anyone who is not the shepherd, they also "flee" from an intruder's presence precisely because they sound nothing like their beloved shepherd. Practically speaking, this was a problem that people had to address whenever they bought adult sheep from another farm. The animal would often be agitated for some time and refuse to graze before the newly purchased sheep grew accustomed to the voice of its new shepherd.¹² But in the context of this chapter, Jesus' calling his sheep out of Judaism into greener pastures was a fulfillment of the O.T. covenant. Jesus was not a new shepherd but the old one newly revealed (cf. 1:14; Ezek. 34:10-16). The problem was the religious leaders. They were the strangers who spooked the sheep, and the blindless man (along with the disciples) were those who knew the voice of the Lord. Thus, implicit in Christ's illustration is the charge that the followers of God be wary of false teachers. Sometimes the best thing for a Christian to do is to run as far and fast as they can from a leader who has proven themselves to be a counterfeit shepherd (cf. Mat. 24:4-5, 23-28; 2 Tim. 4:1-5; 2 Pet. 2; 1 Jn. 4:1-6). There's little hope for those who've confused the voice of the Good Shepherd with the howl of ravenous wolves (cf. Mat. 7:15-20; Ac. 20:28-30).

John then tells us that "This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them." A keyword in the Good Shepherd discourse is "know;" which, using two different Greek words (*eídō* and *ginōskō*), shows up 9x's throughout chapter 10. Interestingly, the one exception to this is here in verse 6, where it is translated as "understood not." Thus, in a parable about the sheep *knowing* the shepherd and the shepherd *knowing* the sheep, Jesus spoke to a crowd of people who *did not understand* him, save for the blindless man seated at his feet.

Vs. 7-10 – Since no one understood what Jesus was talking about, he began to explain his parable. Not only that, he also expanded on the metaphors he's already used using them like a springboard to talk about other things.¹³ And so he says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep." This is the third of seven "I am" statements in John (cf. 6:35; 8:12). Where we might've thought he would begin by saying that he is the shepherd, the first part of his parable that the Lord wanted his listeners to understand was that he was the gate. There was

¹² Keener (2003), 1:808-809.

¹³ Carson (1991), p. 384

no other door by which the sheep may enter into his heavenly fold; it was only through Jesus Christ (cf. 14:16). Building on this principle of exclusivity, the Lord then says, "All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them." Terms like "thieves and robbers" doubtless harken back to vs. 1 and the religious leaders; however, it is hard not to see Jesus speaking in a much broader context. As Morris puts it, this claim of Jesus meant that "He brooks no rival."¹⁴ Throughout the many years and numerous false messiahs, there was and is only one way to enter into God's fold.¹⁵ And while those false messiahs have led many people astray, Jesus' saying that his sheep "did not hear them" suggests that even when there are bad shepherds about, the faithful followers of God will show spiritual discernment.¹⁶ They will not be fooled by some slick imposters. They know the real deal when they *hear* it (cf. 9:7). In light of this, one cannot help but think of the man healed of his blindness as he stood his ground against the Sanhedrin (cf. 9:30-34).

Though dropping the phrase "of the sheep" (vs. 7), Jesus reiterates his point by saying, "I am the door: by me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." It seems the Lord is stripping back his own imagery so that the heart of his message would be made even more evident: he alone is the portal to salvation (cf. Ps. 118:20).¹⁷ Just as there were no other messiahs like him, there is no other door by which mankind can be saved. Jesus was and still is the only entryway. And what a salvation this is! Jesus likens it to a sheep that can come and go as they please¹⁸ and find "pasture" (cf. Ps. 79:13; 100:3).¹⁹ This is all in stark contrast to the thief who "cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy...." These criminals are selfish, and they've exploited the sheep. They've looked only after their own interests. And in the process of wanting to please themselves, there have been many casualties. At the root of every conflict is a person who is a slave to their own lusts (cf. Ja. 4:1-10). But, as the door, Jesus "[is] come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." Far from being penned up, shoulder to shoulder with other sheep, those who enter through Jesus Christ find green fields and wide-open spaces (cf. 8:32, 36; Ps. 118:5; Isa. 61:1; Gal. 5:1, 13). Anyone who thinks that the Christian life is a cramped life has not really understood the Christian life. Carson defines this point best when he said, "...the life Jesus' true

¹⁴ Morris (1995), p. 450.

¹⁵ Köstenberger (2004), p. 303, suggests the Maccabean times are a fitting backdrop to Jesus' words as the betrayal of the high priests, Jason and Menelaus, contributed to the desecration of the temple and the deaths of many.

¹⁶ Morris (1995), p. 451.

¹⁷ Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 169.

¹⁸ Keener (2003), 1:811, explains the phrase "go in and out" was a "Semitic way of expressing freedom of movement and saying "all the time" (cf. Num. 27:16-17; Ps. 121:8)."

¹⁹ Köstenberger (2004), p. 304.

disciples enjoy is not to be construed as more time to fill (merely 'everlasting 'life), but life at its scarcely imagined best, life to be lived."²⁰

²⁰ Carson (1991), p. 385.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | John | Week 17

Text: **John 10:1-10**

Few things are more upsetting to Jesus than when his under-shepherds abuse his sheep. In fact, as tonight's passages will show, anyone who misuses their authority is more like a "thief," "robber," and "stranger" than a shepherd. But thankfully, even when those tasked with taking care of God's people fail, God will intervene. If the under-shepherds do not take care of the sheep, God's son will. If the under-shepherds do not protect the sheep, God's son will. And if the under-shepherds will not die for the sheep, God's son will.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: <https://docdro.id/qggHCEP>