

Text: John 10:1-21

Title: "Believe because Jesus is the good shepherd"

Time: 2/23/2025 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: A couple of Wednesdays ago, we were joined in the morning for prayer by Mitch Filson, a farmer in Weare who raises cattle. Mike asked Mitch if he had a big barn to keep his cattle in during these cold winters, and Mitch responded with a good deal of expertise on how to care for cows in cold weather. He feeds them more. He keeps them dry. And he has a place where they can get out of the strong winds. He explained to us his cows actually do a lot better in the cold than they do in the heat.

King David raised livestock before he became king. He also wrote songs inspired by the Holy Spirit, and one of those psalms reflects on the way the LORD is our shepherd, Psalm 23: "The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul. He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me. Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." We reflected together with Mitch that morning on the way the LORD meets our needs as our faithful Shepherd.

John reflects on this same truth in our passage this morning, applying it this time to the man Jesus Christ. He does so in preparation for the quickly approaching hour of Jesus's suffering (John 13:1). John want us to know that just like

David's LORD was his faithful shepherd, Jesus Christ claimed to be the believer's good shepherd.

In Ezekiel 34, the passage we read together this morning, the prophet tells us that the Lord Himself would shepherd His people, and that His servant, the David of the end times would shepherd His people. One commentator demonstrated how these themes come together in the person and work of Jesus Christ in John's Gospel: "The mingling of the foci – the promised shepherd is the LORD, or the promised shepherd is the LORD's servant David – is peculiarly appropriate in a book where the Word is God and the Word is God's emissary, distinguishable from him" (Carson, 382).

Jesus, the good shepherd, is both the LORD and the LORD's servant David promised by the prophet Ezekiel. John's message is simple this morning. We must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and have life in His name, because He is the good shepherd promised by the prophets, who lays down His life for the sheep. John emphasizes three things about our good shepherd in this passage.

I. The good shepherd is not like the bad shepherds (vv. 1-6).

Application: John tells us that Jesus is speaking to a specific group of people about good and bad shepherds in John 10. They are the same religious leaders that asked Jesus a question in 9:40, "Are we blind also?" Jesus answered "Yes."

Now Jesus is taking his description of these blind religious leaders a step further. He wants them to know that they are not only bad shepherds, but thieves and robbers. Bad shepherds, who are thieves and robbers, differ from Jesus, the good shepherd, in two ways.

1. Bad shepherds do not go through the door of the sheep pen the way the good shepherd does (vv. 1-3a).

Illustration: At this time in the land of Palestine, shepherds would drop off their flock along with other flock in a sheep pen for the night. The pen would be watched by a porter or a doorman. The next morning, the shepherd would come and bring his sheep to pasture, and the doorman who knew the shepherd would let him in.

Thieves and robbers had to operate differently, of course. They jumped the fence because they knew that the doorman would not let them in. In Greek, the *thief* refers to someone who is stealthy, someone who steals in a way that keeps him from being discovered. A *robber* is someone who relies on his force and violence to steal.

One commentator reflected on how many of the world's utopian saviors began as stealthy thieves and ended as violent robbers: "The world still seeks its humanistic, political saviours [*sic*] – its Hitlers, its Stalins, its Maos, its Pol Pots – and only too late does it learn that they blatantly confiscate personal property (they come 'only to steal'), ruthlessly trample human life under foot (they come 'only . . . to kill'), and contemptuously savage all that is valuable (they come 'only . . . to destroy')" (Carson, 385).

That a porter or doorman is involved in opening the gate of the sheep pen to the good shepherd is significant. Some see ministers of the gospel represented by the doorman, and it is certainly important for every minister of the gospel to present Christ to the flock of God. But ministers of the gospel are sheep themselves, part of the flock in the pen, so I think the doorman likely represents the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that opens the sheep pen to the presence of the good shepherd. Each Sunday, when we meet as Jesus's flock in His sheep pen, He has promised to meet with us, and He does so through the agency of the Holy Spirit who dwells

within us. Bad shepherds do not go through the door of the sheep pen the way the good shepherd does.

2. Bad shepherds have a stranger's voice, not the voice of the good shepherd, which the sheep know well (vv. 3b-5; note the Pharisees do not hear Jesus's voice in v. 6).

Illustration: Often in these overnight sheep pens there would be a mix of multiple flocks of different shepherds. A good shepherd would arrive in the morning and know who his sheep were. He could call each of them by name. You may remember our study of the breastplate of Israel's high priest, when we learned that the names of the twelve tribes were worn over the heart of the high priest. Here John tells us that the same is true for our names. Charitie Lees Smith was an Irish sister in Christ who wrote a wonderful hymn about this truth:

"Before the throne of God above  
I have a strong and perfect plea:  
A great High Priest whose name is Love,  
Who ever lives and pleads for me.  
My name is graven on his hands,  
My name is written on his heart.  
I know that while in Heav'n he stands  
No tongue can bid me thence depart,  
No tongue can bid me thence depart."

Illustration: The voice of strange shepherds sounds strange to true sheep. At our president's inauguration, one such strange shepherd's voice addressed our president with these words: "In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now. There are gay, lesbian and transgender children in Democratic, Republican, and Independent families, some who fear for their lives."

Jesus never sounded like that. True sheep do not hear the teachings of the good shepherd in those words. True sheep flee from churches where falsehoods like this one are perpetrated “in the name of [a false] god.” And this flight is what Jesus refers to in verse 4 when He says that He “putteth forth his own sheep.” Literally, that says He casts His own sheep out of the pen they were in. In the case of the blind man of chapter 9, he was cast out of the synagogue. For you and for me, it can mean being cast out of a relationship or a family or a false church. Understand that when that happens, it is the good shepherd who is caring for us, delivering us from a pen that is no longer good for us.

The Apostle John wants us to understand that the good shepherd is not like the bad shepherds.

II. The good shepherd is the door of the sheep pen (vv. 7-10).

Illustration: On some nights a shepherd in the holy land put his sheep in a pen that did not have a gate, and he would sleep in the opening becoming the door of the pen.

Application: That may be the picture that Jesus paints for us here when He says, “I am the door of the sheep.” In verse 8 He says that all who came before Him are thieves and robbers. There are two ways to understand this. We can take Him to mean that all who came before Him in a temporal sense are thieves and robbers. That is hard to reconcile with the fact that many faithful servants of God lived prior to the ministry of Jesus Christ. Some propose that all who claimed to be the Messiah prior to Jesus are those He is referring to, but it is difficult to find any of these in the pages of history. But there is another way to understand verse 8. We can take the word *before* in a spatial sense instead of a temporal one. Jesus is the door, and those who came before the door rather than through the door are thieves and robbers. They came

before the door to discourage others from going through the door. Jesus describes apostate Jewish leaders of His day in these terms in Matt. 23:13, "But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in."

Today's religious thieves and robbers say that there are many doors into the sheep pen. They say we get to pick the door that seems right for us. With their false doctrine they steal, kill, and destroy. Jesus says, "I am *the* door of the sheep." He is the only door. To enter the sheep pen through Him is to be saved, to be free, and to be well-cared-for (v. 9). Will thieves and robbers keep us from entrance into the sheep pen through the only door, the Lord Jesus Christ?

The last thing John emphasizes about the good shepherd explains why He is the only door.

III. The good shepherd is the sacrifice for the sheep (vv. 11-18).

Illustration: The episcopal bishop of Washington, D.C. has been in that post since 2011. I found the 2025 compensation guidelines for clergy in the Episcopal church. For someone in this post for that length of time, the bishop's salary is to include the cost of housing, the necessary contribution to cover self-employment tax, health benefits, plus \$117,451.

Application: Jesus talks about a hireling, someone hired for cash who does not care sacrificially for the true sheep. Such a person cares for money and his own security, not the sheep. If danger lurks, what Jesus calls the wolf – the natural enemy of the sheep, the hireling runs away allowing the wolf to snatch way and scatter the sheep. For this reason, one of the qualifications Paul lays down for a pastor's character is that

he not be a lover of money, not greedy of filthy lucre or covetous (1 Tim. 3:3).

The good shepherd is the best shepherd because, though He was rich, yet for the sake of the sheep He became poor, that we through His poverty might obtain eternal riches (2 Cor. 8:9). This sacrifice was His gift to His sheep (v. 11).

It was a gift that pleased His Father in heaven. Jesus knows the Father, and he knows His sheep, and so the sheep now know the Father as their Father too (vv. 14-15). Some of the sheep would not come from the pen of Judaism, but from the Gentile world. Still, they would be one flock with one shepherd (v. 16). The Father loves the good shepherd, who laid down His life for the purpose of taking it up again (vv. 17-18). His sacrifice was always the path to resurrection.

Jesus taught us to regard our sacrifices for Him in the same way. Mark 8:35, "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." This is what the good shepherd did for us. This is what the Father wants us to do for Him. Are we saving our lives for ourselves, or losing them for the sake of Jesus and His gospel work?

Conclusion: These powerful claims from the good shepherd left those who heard them divided between two options, and only two (vv. 19-21). Either this man had a devil and should not be listened to, or His words and His healing of the blind man meant that His claims must be believed.

In his WW2 BBC radio address to a nation at war, C. S. Lewis told Great Britain that this choice confronts every human heart: "You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill

Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

We must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing have life in His name, because He is the good shepherd who gave His life for the sheep. Is He your good shepherd? Are you one of His true sheep? If you honestly find yourself on the outside of the sheep pen looking in, enter through the door. Believe that Jesus is the good shepherd who laid down His life for your sins. Ask Him to let you in, and He will.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*