

The Lord Is Both the Shepherd and the Door for the Sheep

John 10:1-10

John 10:1-10 - *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. ² But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.*

⁴ And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵ Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."⁶ Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things that He spoke to them.

⁷ Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

Background Notes

In the original manuscripts there were no chapter and verse divisions. The text was continuous. When John wrote his Gospel he went directly on from John 9:41 into John 10 – no breaks or chapter and verse divisions.

At the end of John 9, the Lord rebuked the Pharisees for their spiritual blindness. Then, at the beginning of chapter 10, He began to speak about sheep and shepherds. Why the sudden change of subject? Is there a connection between rebuking the Pharisees, and talking about sheep and shepherds?

The connection is that the Jewish religious leaders were supposed to be the spiritual shepherds for the Jewish people. But they didn't care for their sheep – in fact they actually led them astray. The Pharisees fell into the category of *"false shepherds"* – the thieves and the robbers to whom the Lord referred in verses 1, 8 and 10! The false shepherds led the people astray. The Lord is the **true** Shepherd.

In verse 6 we learn that the Lord was using figurative language: *"Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them."* Some translations use the word *"parable,"* but I've already mentioned that there are no parables in the Gospel of John. So what's going on here?

Well, the Greek word used here is not the word that would normally be used for *"parable."* The word used here would be better translated as *"illustration"* or *"figurative discourse."* This passage certainly uses parabolic language, but it's not the same as the parables of the "Synoptic Gospels" (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). In those Gospels the parables are usually

introduced by the words, *“and He told them this parable.”* For example, in the parable of the sower in Luke 8 was introduced that way. So probably the best way to translate this would be a “figurative discourse” on the sheep and the shepherd. The Lord was using figurative language.

Now to appreciate the details of this figurative discourse, we need to know how a shepherd cared for his sheep in the 1st century. A “sheepfold” was a large walled enclosure made of large stones, usually with no roof. Several flocks of sheep would be kept in these sheepfolds, and a watchman would guard them. When a “legitimate shepherd” came to get his flock, the doorkeeper, or watchman of the fold, would let the shepherd pass into the fold. The shepherd would then call his sheep, and his sheep would recognize the voice of their shepherd, their true shepherd. The legitimate shepherd would then lead his flock out to pasture.

Sometimes in their search for good pastures, the shepherd and his sheep would stay away from the sheepfold overnight. The shepherd would be out all night in the pasture with his flock. At those times, the shepherd would find some kind of sheltered place in or near the pasture, gather the sheep into the sheltered spot, and the shepherd himself would act as the “door” of the sheltered place. He would sleep right across the doorway so no wild animal or thief could get at the sheep without first encountering the shepherd. That background is important for understanding this figurative discourse.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. Christ is the Shepherd of the Sheep.

In this figurative discourse, it’s easy to see that Jesus Christ is the true Shepherd. But what is the meaning of the sheepfold, and the door, and the doorkeeper? I believe these items also have meaning in this discourse.

The sheepfold represented the nation of Israel. Israel was living within the protection of the Law that God had given them through Moses. The Law was good. God gave it to protect His people.

The door into the sheepfold represented the way for the Messiah to enter, for the true Shepherd to come. His way of entry would be right in line with the prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures. False “messiahs” would not line up with Old Testament prophetic Scriptures. The true Messiah would certainly not align with the unscriptural ways the Pharisees wanted the Him to come.

The doorkeeper may represent John the Baptist, who by the Holy Spirit prepared the way for the Messiah. John the Baptist opened the door of the sheepfold when he announced to the nation of Israel that the **true King**, the **true Shepherd** had arrived.

With the arrival of the true Shepherd, the true sheep responded to His voice. These true sheep were the disciples and the other true believers in the nation of Israel, such as Nicodemus and the blind man of John 9. Sadly, not all in Israel were true sheep. The Jewish religious leaders certainly did not respond to the voice of the true Shepherd.

The purpose of Jesus Christ, the true Shepherd, was to lead His true sheep out of the sheepfold - out from Judaism, out from under the Mosaic Law, because the Mosaic Law is not the way of salvation! The Law was good, and the moral

principles of the Law were definitely not thrown out, but Romans 10:4 tells us, *“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”* Jesus Christ is *“the end of the Law”* because the Law is not the way of salvation.

So the Lord Jesus came as the true Shepherd of the sheep, and He came just as the Scriptures predicted. In the prophecy of Ezekiel 34, after the false shepherds of Israel were denounced, the true Shepherd was predicted.

First the false shepherds were denounced: *“And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: ‘Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?’”(v1-2).*

Then the true Shepherd was predicted: *“I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them—My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd” (v22-23).* That one Shepherd is the predicted Messiah who came in the line of David, the One who would care for and feed His sheep. That one true Shepherd is Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ is the shepherd of the sheep.

2. Christ is the door of the sheep.

Christ is not only the **Shepherd** of the sheep; He is also the **Door** of the sheep. The Lord continued this figurative discourse in verse 7: *“Then Jesus said to them again, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.’* I am the Door of the sheep.

In other words, Jesus Christ is not only the true Shepherd who came to lead His sheep out of the sheepfold, but now He Himself is the Door for the sheep as they go out into the pasture area. The sheepfold is left behind. He is the door to salvation and safety, and the door to pasture. Once again, *“I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture”(v9).*

Jesus Christ is the Door to pasture - food for the soul. Jesus Christ is the Door to spiritual life. *“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (v10).* He is the Door to the **abundant life**. The Christian life is not a drag, and it's not just an ordinary life. It is an *abundant* life!

Jesus Christ is the Door of the sheep, and He is the only Door. Good works are not the door! Baptism is not the door! Membership in a church is not the door! Jesus Christ is the Door of the sheep, and He is the only Door.

In Matthew 7:13-14 the Lord Jesus said, *“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”*

Jesus Christ is the only Door! Christ is the Door of the sheep.

Practical Applications

1. Have you heard the true Shepherd's voice?

Have you heard the Shepherd's voice? Verse 3 says that the sheep hear and recognize the true Shepherd's voice. Some people don't want to hear the Shepherd's voice. They want to run their own lives, so they turn away from the Shepherd's voice.

Other people listen to the wrong voice. Sadly, they follow the voices of false shepherds. Self-made "prophets" like Jim Jones and **David Coresh** were examples of false shepherds. In line with verse 10, they came literally to steal and kill and destroy. There are many false shepherds and many misleading voices out there. New Age voices say that we are all part of God, and we can save ourselves. Other voices say that any religion will lead you to God, as long as you're sincere. These are voices of false shepherds.

Jesus Christ is the true Shepherd, and His voice is always perfectly in line with Scripture. It's important to remember that what the true Shepherd says is always in line with what the Bible says. Why? Some people, even Christians, lead sheep astray by telling them that "the Lord told me to do this" or "the Lord told me we should do that." But if the things that they claim "the Lord told" them are not in line with Scripture, their voices are **not** the voice of the **true** Shepherd. The true Shepherd's voice will always be in line with Scripture.

Have you heard the **true** Shepherd's voice? Are you listening to the true Shepherd's voice? Are you following the *true* Shepherd?

2. Have you found the true Shepherd's pasture?

"I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture" (v9). Notice - Jesus Christ is the Door of salvation, but He is also the Door to the pasture. He provides us with food for our souls. *"He will go in and out and find pasture."* Through the Door we find pasture that is food for our souls. (And, we might say, we go "in to worship" "out to witness.")

The primary idea here is that a Christ-centered life is the key for a healthy soul. Prayer and a steady diet of Scripture will keep us Christ-centered and Christ-focused, because Scripture is Christ-centered. We won't find food for our souls apart from Scripture. We certainly won't find nourishing pasture in entertainment, or travel, or sports, or business. These things are not wrong – in fact, they may be good and proper in their place. But food for the soul is only found in Jesus Christ and His Word. Jesus Himself is the Pasture!