

April 18/19, 2020

## **The Noble Shepherd**

*These Things are Written that You May Believe Series*

**John 10:1-21**

Pastor Bryan Clark

So let's pretend that you're a sheep. You're a sheep in the ancient Near East, in the wilderness, surrounded by wolves and bears and lions and thieves and robbers, and the only chance you have is to find the one true shepherd that will stay with you and protect you. As difficult as that might seem, it's even more difficult when you realize that there are many false shepherds, who ultimately are thieves and robbers, and when the wolves start howling, they're going to flee, and you are in trouble.

Actually, that's not really pretend. That's everyone's story, and that's what we want to talk about today. If you have a Bible, turn with us to John, Chapter 10. If you're new with us, we've been working our way through the Gospel of John. In John chapter 9 Jesus heals a man who has been blind since birth. He was a blind beggar, and Jesus miraculously heals him. But the religious leaders don't like it. As a matter of fact, they throw him out of the synagogue, essentially preventing him from getting to God because they're angry, because he's determined to tell the truth. "I once was blind; now I see," and he credits Jesus with the miracle and concludes Jesus must be from God. Well, the leaders don't want to hear that, so they throw him out. When Jesus hears that, Jesus goes and finds him, rescues him, and saves him. That's the background then to the discussion in John chapter 10. We pick it up in verse 1:

**"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. But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and he leads them out. 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." This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them.** (\*NASB, John 10:1-6)

To understand this little parable or figure of speech, you have to understand the background. It's common in the Scriptures to use the imagery of sheep and a shepherd. As a matter of fact, people are often referred to as sheep, and leaders are referred to as shepherds. In the Old Testament, there were good shepherds like David and Moses, both literally and as leaders. And there were bad shepherds and false shepherds who use the sheep in order to advance themselves in some way. Ezekiel 34, for example, talks about that. And then of course there's the ultimate Shepherd, which is God Himself. So the beloved 23rd Psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want," David writes. Common imagery—even though sheep and shepherding aren't so familiar to us—would have been very familiar to them.

What Jesus is describing here is that in the ancient Near East, the shepherds would have their flock out in the pasture by day, but often would come to a sheep pen that typically was right on the edge of town, maybe even connected to a certain house, and would bring the sheep into that pen at night. Many shepherds would bring their flocks and they would come into these large pens and the sheep would get all mixed up, but they would be safe there. A sheep pen was typically made of rocks and mud. It was about waist high or so, and there was always just one entrance in and out. That would be guarded by the gatekeeper, which was essentially an under-shepherd. His job was to sit in the gate or the door all night long and make sure that no predators or thieves or robbers got in, and none of the sheep got out. In the morning, then, the shepherd would come back and collect his sheep.

Now initially it seems like it would be rather complicated. You have all these sheep mixed in together, so how do you find your sheep and get the right sheep? But it was quite amazing. These shepherds would go in the gate. The gatekeeper would allow them in because the sheep belong to them, and the gatekeeper knew that. The shepherd would then call his sheep. Now sometimes they would have a particular call. Sometimes they would actually call the sheep by name. Sometimes they would sing a song as their call. Sometimes they would even play an instrument, like a flute. But the shepherd's sheep knew that was their shepherd, and they would immediately come and gather around that shepherd. That shepherd would then leave and those sheep would follow, and the rest would stay behind. This is what was done day after day.

Jesus is using this imagery and talking about the fact that He has come through the gate. He's obviously the shepherd in the story, and for hundreds of years there was a promise of a Messiah. At a point in time, God became flesh and entered into the world, and Jesus has identified Himself as the Messiah, as that long-awaited Savior. He's not sneaking around; He's not trying to steal the sheep. He comes through the gate and identifies Himself before the sheep, and those who hear Him and follow Him are His sheep.

The **thieves** and the **robbers** would be those who don't come through the gate because they're not the shepherd. A **thief** is a word that describes someone who would be deceitful or practice trickery. A **robber** is more the idea of using force or violence to overpower the guard and to take the sheep. So it wouldn't be uncommon that a thief would try to imitate the shepherd, maybe use the same call, maybe use the same name, sing the same song, play a similar song on a flute. But the sheep amazingly would know that's not their shepherd, and as a matter of fact, they would immediately scatter because they would sense that something's wrong.

This is the imagery Jesus is using. The religious leaders are the thieves and the robbers. They're supposed to represent God. They're supposed to lead people to God, but we're just coming off this story where instead of doing that, they kick the blind man out of the synagogue for telling the truth. Rather than leading the people to God, they're actually preventing people from getting to God, and they're trying to steal the sheep. The sheep don't belong to them. The sheep belong to God, so they're thieves and robbers.

Jesus tells this little parable, but tells us in verse six, they didn't get it. He's already told them they're blind. That's the problem. They don't get the truth; He tells them a story. They still don't get it. So He moves on to a second parable. He changes the imagery, just slightly. Verse 7:

**So Jesus said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they might have life and have it abundantly. (Vs. 7-10)**

So Jesus changes the metaphor. Now He's not the shepherd in this story. He's the gate; He's the **door**. Jesus has already identified Himself as the *bread*, as the *water*, as the *light*. Now He's identifying Himself as the *door*. What is He talking about? Oftentimes the shepherds would take their sheep so far out into the wilderness, it was not practical to bring them back into the larger sheep pen in the evening, so they would stay out in the fields overnight. They would build smaller sheep pens, that again were built from rocks and mud, and would have only one door. And as it got dark, the shepherd would move the sheep into the sheep pen, and then the shepherd would literally sleep in the doorway—so he became the door. It's so the sheep couldn't get out, and predators and thieves couldn't get in.

Jesus is identifying Himself as *the door into the sheep*, or into this flock. He then identifies in verse 8 that those **who came before Me are thieves and robbers**. Most people think He's referring to the religious leaders since it is present tense, *they are*. In the past there were false shepherds; there were false messiahs, but He's saying those who came before Me *are*—present tense—probably referring to the religious leaders. They are the thieves and robbers. The sheep don't belong to them, but they're trying to steal the sheep. They are trying to prevent the sheep from getting to the one true shepherd. So He identifies that they just want to **steal** the sheep, and **kill and destroy**.

The idea, then, when Jesus says that *He's the door* is clarifying again that there's only one way in. There were never multiple gates or doors into these sheep pens. There was one door for their safety and security. I know it's common today for people to want to believe that all roads lead to God. If it is religion, somehow religion gets people to God. But what we've been learning in the Gospel of John is, “That's not true!” Religion, rather than leading people to God, becomes a barrier to God. As long as religion can save you, you don't need a savior; you don't need Jesus. The big conflict is that religious leaders are preventing the people from getting to God.

Jesus identifies, “*I'm the gate*, and if you're going to be part of My flock, you have to come through Me.” Jesus will say in John 14, “**I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father** (in other words, no one comes to God), **but through Me.**” So Jesus is the gate, and if you're willing to listen to the voice of the Shepherd, then through that gate, you enter into His flock. He says, “If anyone enters through Me, he will be saved; he will be rescued.” Rescued from the wolves and the bears and the thieves and the lions, he will be saved; he will be rescued and will go in and out and find pasture.

In verse 10, He says, **He has come that they might have life and have it abundantly**. What is *abundant life*? Abundant life doesn't mean money; it doesn't mean stuff. It doesn't mean prospering in the things of this world. But rather the clue is when Jesus says *they come in, and they go out, and they find pasture*. When the shepherd would stand in the gate and the sheep would enter into the pen, it was an opportunity to count the sheep. If there were sheep missing, he actually

knew them by name and knew which sheep were missing. But it was also a time to inspect the sheep. To make sure they didn't have injuries, he would touch them; he would rub them; he would look to see if they had scrapes and scratches and injuries. He would put oil on their injuries. It was a time of healing, a time of kindness and compassion, and the sheep loved that, and the sheep then would enter the pen. When the sheep were in, then the shepherd slept in the doorway, with the sounds of predators and wolves and lions and bears. You remember David was a shepherd, and David told Saul he had already killed a lion and a bear with his bare hands. This was part of the story of these shepherds.

But the sheep in the pen knew that the shepherd was standing guard, so they actually would rest. They would be quiet; they would be calm, and the sheep knew as long as the shepherd was guarding them, then even if they could hear the sounds of the wolves howling, they were going to be okay and they'd quiet down and rest. So coming in had to do with healing and kindness and compassion. It had to do with rest and calmness and peace. But when morning comes, the shepherd would lead them out into the pasture. They would find green grass there; they would find fresh water, and there they would find beautiful sunshine. Another beautiful day, and there was just a sense that as long as they were following the shepherd, the sheep had an *abundant life* going in, coming out, being cared for.

That's what Jesus is talking about here—that He offers eternal life, that He offers to rescue those sheep that enter through Jesus as the gate. What do they experience? They experience the *abundant life*. What is that? It's a life of forgiveness. It's a life of healing. It's a life of kindness, compassion and care. It's a life of safety; it's a life of security; it's a life of peace; it's a life of calm. We know that no matter what we're going through, the sun's going to come up tomorrow morning, and there He'll take us to pasture and to water, and just the beauty of the sun and another day to be alive. That's what Jesus is offering to those who are willing to enter by *the one and only gate*. Verse 11, then again, He changes the metaphor back and identifies Himself as the shepherd.

**“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.”**

Now Jesus is not saying, “I'm a pretty good shepherd.” The language is emphatic. “I am *the* good shepherd.” As a matter of fact, literally the Greek is, “I am *the good, the shepherd*.” There's only *one* that's *the* shepherd. There's only one that is *good*. Good doesn't mean *pretty good shepherd*, doesn't mean *just morally good*. It's a strong word that means *inherently good*. As a matter of fact, it could be translated *noble*. “I am the good; I am the noble shepherd. I'm the one and only shepherd.”

It's important to understand that shepherds in the Near East weren't kind of soft, cuddly sheep huggers. In order to be a shepherd, man, you were tough! This was a difficult life. You had to be courageous. You had to be fearless. You had to be committed to these sheep, understanding likely they would encounter thieves and robbers, lions and bears and wolves. If you're a sheep, you better have one tough shepherd, or you're in real trouble.

That's the idea of a *good and noble shepherd*. As a matter of fact, He says the **good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep**. Interestingly, in the Gospel of John, John consistently uses that word *for*—**lays down His life for His sheep**—pretty much restricting that term to mean *to sacrifice*

*on behalf of.* In other words, this noble Shepherd is so committed to these sheep, that He will die on behalf of the sheep. He'll die before He allows these sheep to be attacked and killed by a predator. So Jesus identifies Himself as that noble Shepherd that can deliver life, contrasted in verse 12:

**“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. He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep.”** (Vs. 12-13)

Contrary to the shepherd, would be a hireling, a **hired hand**. He doesn't really care about the sheep. He doesn't know them by name; he's just there to collect a paycheck, to do a job. So if the wolves come prowling, there's no way he's going to die for a few stupid sheep. So he leaves; he **flees**. So again, imagine if you're a sheep and in this moment when the wolves are coming, the one you thought was your shepherd, takes off; he's gone! There are very few animals as vulnerable and as defenseless as sheep; so you are in real trouble. That's what Jesus is saying. Verse 14, He says it again:

**“I am the good [the noble] shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.”** (Vs. 14-15)

This is not cold, dead religion. This is a personal, intimate relationship. He's saying, *“I know My sheep, and my sheep know Me.”* As a matter of fact, He compares that to the relationship He has with the Father. For all eternity, God the Father and God the Son have been in relationship with one another and love one another and celebrate one another. This is an analogy, or a picture Jesus will give several times—that the offer of eternal life is to be invited into that level of relationship—to experience intimacy with God, like God the Father has known with God the Son. *“I know My sheep and My sheep know Me.”* Verse 16:

**“I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock *with* one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it up again. 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.”** A division occurred again among the Jews because of these words. Many of them were saying, **“He has a demon and He is insane. Why do you listen to Him?”** Others were saying, **“These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?”** (Vs. 16-21)

In verse 16, Jesus identifies that, **“I have other sheep not of this fold.”** There's a difference between a *fold* and a *flock*. The fold was the large pen where lots of shepherds brought their sheep. Most people think the **fold** that Jesus was referring to is Judaism. So, *“Jesus came into His own and His own received Him not.”* That's what John tells us in chapter one. So all of the sheep in the fold are those in Judaism. But there are sheep outside of that fold, probably referring to the

Gentiles. The message of Jesus will go to the Gentiles, and many, many of those Gentiles will believe. Jesus goes on to say that they then all come together and ...**become one flock with one shepherd**. So you go through the one gate, no matter who you are, and you become part of one flock with one shepherd. I think Jesus was referring to the Gentiles. But I also think, just thinking about the gospel of John, He was talking about those people that Judaism had rejected—those people that were condemned, those people that were thrown out of the synagogue, who had no chance with Judaism as they understood it.

He's talking about the blind beggar who, in the previous chapter, was thrown out of the synagogue, and Jesus as the good shepherd goes and finds him and rescues him and saves him. He delivers him into his pen, where he will find healing and kindness and compassion and forgiveness and safety and security.

I have to think He's referring to the woman caught in adultery, that the religious leaders were willing to use for personal gain. But Jesus had compassion on her. Jesus rescued her; He saved her; He gave her new life.

I think about the Samaritan woman. The Jewish religious leaders hated the Samaritans, but Jesus reached out to a woman who'd been married five times and was living with the next man, as an outcast. Yet Jesus reached out. He found her; He rescued her; He saved her, which led to a revival among the Samaritans.

I think about the prostitutes; I think about the tax collectors, I think about the sinners and the misfits, and the losers who had been rejected and condemned by religion. But Jesus found them, and He rescued them, and He saved them, and He offers them peace and safety and security and forgiveness and kindness in His pen, as part of His flock. That's what Jesus is saying.

But in order for that to happen, in order for Jesus to actually be the door or the gate, Jesus would have to give up His life. And that's what He says, that He will give up His life, not because the plan went badly, not because it was forced on Him, but He willingly chose to give up His life, just like the good shepherd would do for the sheep. In order to sacrifice for the sheep, He would die their death.

The Bible teaches that death is a result of sin. Until the sin problem is dealt with, there's no way to defeat death. Jesus actually came for the purpose of dying to make payment for sin— "*The wages of sin is death.*" Jesus would die that death on behalf of us, the sheep, in order to then take up His life again, which means once sin was defeated—death died! Death was defeated; death was conquered, and the evidence of that is the resurrection of Jesus, who conquered sin and death once and for all, in order to offer life to sheep, in order to be the gate through which the sheep would enter to find the life that their souls longed for!

Once again we have a story that ends with **division**. Some people hear Jesus and think He's crazy. "He's got a demon in Him." Others hear and listen and believe. So they're hearing the voice of the Shepherd, and they're choosing to follow Him to experience the life that Jesus promises.

I want to go back to one part of this story as we close and wrap this up. When the wolf comes, when you hear the wolf howling, the hireling—the false shepherds, the thief and the robbers—they flee, and the sheep are in trouble. It isn't uncommon in life if you really stop and listen. I can hear the wolves howling; they're out there every day. In times like these, it's a little bit more evident. I think if we stop and we listen, we can hear the wolves howling. So the big question is, “Now what? Now, where do we turn?” In moments like this, often what we trusted has fled, and now we're left to try to figure out, “What do we do now?” We're all alone in the wilderness with the wolves. That's what Jesus is trying to say. It's a good question to wrestle with. I can hear the wolves; I think everybody else can too. So now what?

People are filled with anxiety. They're filled with fear. They're filled with panic, so what do we do? People try to figure out ways to cope. I think a lot of people are turning to things like alcohol. I know people think it's funny that people are posting pictures— “Need more beer;” “Need more alcohol.” There are long lines at the places that sell alcohol. But for those of us who clean up the messes this creates, we don't really think that's funny. People are turning to destructive behaviors because they don't know how to cope. I hear people say, “I *need* a drink.” Whenever those words come out of your mouth, you are in trouble. There's a difference between *having* a drink and *needing* a drink. Needing a drink to cope is not coping. You can't cope. That's why you're escaping because you don't know what else to do. People turn to drugs; people turn to pornography. As a matter of fact, the pornographers have offered free pornography for people that are quarantined at home during this time. They're doing people such a wonderful service, aren't they? More families destroyed! More people addicted! More messes that will have to be cleaned up! Why do people turn to something like pornography? It's because they can't cope. They don't know how to cope, so they escape.

With other people, it's their anger; it's their fear; it's their rude behavior. You talk to anybody that's out working in the grocery stores or places where they have to deal with people. Everybody's saying the same thing. “People are so rude, and people are so angry!” People turn into bullies. People get so selfish, they start hoarding. All this is driven by their fear and their panic. They don't know what to do. People get pushy and panicky, and all that is reflective of the fact that we hear the wolves howling, and what we thought we could trust has disappeared. Now, we don't know what to do.

I just want to share something with you. I hear the wolves howling, and to be honest, I'm sleeping just fine. I'm not fearful. I'm not worried. I'm not anxious. It's not because *I'm* something. It's because I know the Shepherd and the Shepherd knows me. He knows me by name. He brings me in; He checks to see if I need healing, if I have wounds, if I need medicine. He touches me and treats me with kindness and compassion. He puts Me in the pen, where even though I can hear the wolves howling, I know He's got this. He's at the gate and nobody's getting in. He's going to take care of me. I can be at peace; I can be at rest. I don't have to be anxious. I can sleep just fine. Everything's going to be fine.

But I also know tomorrow morning, the sun is coming up, and He will lead me to pasture. Green, lush fields, fresh water, and beautiful sunlight that reminds me that as long as I listen and follow the Shepherd, He's got this. Everything's going to be okay. Jesus says, “*If anyone...*” It doesn't matter if you're the nicest person in the world. It doesn't matter if you're the worst sinner in the

world. Anyone who's willing to enter through the gate—through Jesus—and listen to the voice of the Shepherd and follow Him, He promises, “I will rescue you and I will put you in My flock, and I will guard you, and I will protect you and I will save you and I will give you the life that your soul longs for!”

You're really quiet right now. I can hear the voice of the wolves; they're out there. I know that. But if you listen a little bit more carefully, the voice of the Shepherd is calling, and as long as I listen, as long as I follow, everything's going to be okay. He's got this. My prayer is that you will listen to the voice of the Shepherd—the Good Shepherd, the Noble Shepherd, the One True Shepherd—and follow Him, and find the abundant life that He promises. Let's pray:

*Our Father, we're so thankful that in these days of uncertainty, we hear the howl of the wolves, but we know the good Shepherd, and the good Shepherd knows us, so there's nothing to fear. We can trust that He will take care of us. Lord, for those struggling to cope, may they listen for the voice of the noble Shepherd, and may they choose to follow Jesus and experience His forgiveness, His kindness, His compassion and His care. Lord, this we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.*

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE  
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988,  
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.  
Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512  
Copyright 2020 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.

April 19/20, 2020

## **The Noble Shepherd**

*That You May Believe*

John 10:1-21

Pastor Bryan Clark

### **Opening Discussion**

1. What do you know about sheep? Why does the Bible refer to us as sheep?
2. If you are a sheep and the wolves are howling these days, who or what are the wolves?

### **Bible Study**

1. Do a quick review of the story in John 9 as the backdrop for chapter 10. How are the self-proclaimed shepherds caring for the sheep?
2. Read John 10:1-6. How does the Shepherd gather his sheep and separate them from the others? What do you think Jesus meant by that parable? Who are the thieves? How so?
3. Read John 10:7-10. Jesus changes the imagery to him being the door. Compare John 14:6. What is meant by “go in and out and find pasture?” What all did a shepherd do to care for the sheep? How does this help define “life abundantly?”
4. Read John 10:11-21. How does the good shepherd differ from the hireling? Who do you think is the hireling in this story?
5. Who or what are the wolves coming today?
6. Who are the “other sheep” Jesus refers to in this passage? Name some examples we’ve read about in our study of John.
7. There is a division over Jesus. See also 7:43, 9:16, 10:19. How does this division help us make sense of the imagery in 10:1-6?

## **Application**

1. Who or what are the wolves you hear howling these days?

2. When the wolves howl, where do you turn? Are you experiencing the safety, rest and hope of the Good Shepherd? If not, why not?