

Exegetical Notes, John 10:1-21 “I Am the Good Shepherd”

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John 10:1-21

Verses 1-6

“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

- At the end of chapter 9, Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees about their spiritual blindness. Chapter 10 opens in the middle of that conversation. Jesus is still speaking to the Pharisees.
- Jesus uses a sheep pen as an analogy. The sheep pen was a walled yard. While it may have had a covered area for protecting the sheep from bad weather, it was open to the sky. It had one door or gate in the wall through which the sheep came in and went out. Its purpose was to keep the sheep safe from wild animals and thieves and to keep them from wandering off.
- All official business came and went through the door or gate. Any other business was nefarious and dishonest.
- The gatekeeper was not the shepherd of the sheep, but the person who made sure that the gate was opened and closed properly. Since the gatekeeper would know the shepherd, he would open the gate to the pen to the shepherd, giving him access to the sheep.
- When the gate was opened, the sheep would hear the Shepherd’s voice and because they recognized his voice, the sheep would come out to him. Since the shepherd knew the sheep personally, he would call them by name. He would go before them to lead them out to safe pasture.

- The sheep would not follow a shepherd whose voice they did not know. Instead, they would be threatened by the voice they did not know and run away.
- Jesus was saying through the analogy that the religious leaders of Israel had failed. If they were the “gatekeepers” their job was to open the gate so the sheep could come to the shepherd. But they were not opening the gate so the people could come to him.

Verses 7-10

Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.

⁸All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

- Having declared that the religious leaders of Israel have functioned as improper gatekeepers by failing to open the gate so that the sheep could come out to him, he now declares that he also acts as the gate.
- The function of the gate was to keep out that which was harmful to the sheep. Jesus declares that all who have previously stood before the gate have been thieves and robbers. But the sheep did not go out to them because their voices were not recognized.
- However, whoever enters the pen through Jesus, the gate, will find life and have good pasture. His purpose is to insure these blessings.

Verses 11-15

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

¹²The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father— and I lay down my life for the sheep.

- Next, using the analogy in a different way, Jesus declares that he is the good shepherd. He compares himself to a hired man who has no real interest in the sheep but whose primary interest is the salary he receives for watching the sheep. He says that the hired man will abandon the sheep when danger comes because he cares nothing for the sheep.
- Jesus declares that he is the good shepherd because he will lay down his life for the sheep.

Verses 16-18

*I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.*¹⁷ *The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again.*¹⁸ *No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”*

- Jesus has “other sheep not of this pen.” This is a reference to those who have come to Christ from non-Jewish roots. These sheep also know Jesus’ voice, and when they hear it they come to him.
- Jesus declares that he will lay down his life in accordance with the plan of the Father and will take up life after he has died.

Verses 19-21

*The Jews who heard these words were again divided.*²⁰ *Many of them said, “He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?”*

But others said, “These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

- Opinions about Jesus remained divided. Some thought he was crazy. Others were still impressed with his restoring sight to the blind man (John 9:1-41).

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *I Am the Good Shepherd*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship* & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)