

Main Idea: According to John 10:1-6, there are two basic lessons we must learn if we are to know the Shepherd.

- I. There are many false shepherds (1).
 - A. Their entrance is sly.
 - B. Their actions are selfish.
- II. There is only one good shepherd (2-6).
 - A. What is true of the good shepherd (2-4a)?
 1. He enters by the door.
 2. He calls the sheep by name.
 3. He leads the sheep for their good.
 4. He brings the sheep along.
 - B. What is true of his sheep (4b-5)?
 1. They recognize the shepherd.
 2. They follow the shepherd.
 3. They flee from strangers.

Make It Personal: Consider two implications...

1. Jesus' words warn us.
 - Is Jesus my Shepherd?
 - Am I a true sheep?
2. Jesus' words invite us.
 - I can trust Jesus.
 - I must follow Jesus.

The Bible uses so many pictures to teach us about Jesus. He is the Vine. He is the Living Water. He is the Bread of Life. In our last three weeks together we've seen Him as the Healer of Blinded Eyes. Our text today, and in following weeks, will reveal that He is the Good Shepherd.

There's actually an unfortunate chapter break in our English Bibles that blurs the connection between John 9 and John 10. In John 9, as we've seen, Jesus is the Healer of Blinded Eyes. He healed a man who was born blind by restoring his physical eyes, and He also healed the eyes of his heart so that he was able to *see Jesus* and having seen, to *believe in and worship Jesus*.

That was John 9. As we turn to John 10 we find the image switches from Healer of Blinded Eyes to Good Shepherd. But in reality, in the first half of John 10 it's the same audience. If you'll notice John 10:19, it says, "At these words the Jews were again divided." At what words? The words about the Shepherd at the beginning of chapter 10? Yes, but I think also the words in chapter 9, for notice John 10:21, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind." So they're still thinking about the work the Healer of Blinded Eyes did in chapter 9.

That's because no one image can communicate everything that needs to be said about Jesus. He is the Vine, the Living Water, the Bread of Life, the Healer of Blinded Eyes, the Good Shepherd, and so much more!

Jesus said that eternal life is knowing God and the One He sent (John 17:3).

So as we ponder these images, we have the privilege to do what eternal life is all about. So begin our study of the Good Shepherd.

For several summers during my teenage years, I worked for area farmers baling hay. One particular farmer I had the privilege of working for was Wes Miller. A typical day went like this. Wes's father, Don, would drive the tractor in the field, and would bale

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¹ This message grows out of a series on The Good Shepherd preached at WBC on 5/25/03 PM.

the hay. Wes would be in the barn with several of the hired hands (usually teens--fellows like Paul, Rick, my brother Matt, and me). Our job was to stack the bales in the haymow. On a hot, humid summer day, I know of few places more unbearable than a stuffy haymow. We'd start after lunch, as soon as the hay was dry enough to bale, and work until it was dark.

The bales were supposed to stack like blocks in the top of the barn. By the end of a hard day, who do you think really cared if the last bales were stacked correctly? One in the group did. One in the group went the extra mile, even though it meant staying a little longer in the steamy peak of the barn. Who do you think it was? It wasn't the hired hands. It was Wes. Do you know why? Because baling hay was more than a job for him. It was part of his life.

That's the difference between a true farmer and a hired hand. Or, to use the language of our text, between a *shepherd* and a hired hand. Jesus said this, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees (John 10:11-12)."

I am so glad that Jesus is not a hired hand. He's the Good Shepherd! But what does that image really mean? What difference can it make in our lives to know that Jesus is the Good Shepherd?

This morning, we are going to begin to work our way through John 10. According to today's text, John 10:1-6, there are two basic lessons that Jesus wants us to learn. We'll see those in a moment.

First, some background. It's unfortunate for us that there aren't many shepherds around. I knew a couple of individuals who raised sheep when I was growing up, but truthfully, that doesn't help me understand this text much because shepherds in Israel were very different from western shepherds.

Shepherds were very popular in Jesus' day. Israel was filled with herdsmen. So is the Bible. Many great Bible characters were shepherds. Abraham was. So was Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and of course, David. In fact, the Bible says that Moses and David were actually "shepherds" over Israel.

We are well aware that God saw fit to use the image of a shepherd to reveal Himself to us. In the Old Testament, God is often pictured as a shepherd, and His people as sheep. David wrote, "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want (Ps 23)." Asaph began his prayer in Ps 80:1 with these words, "Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock; you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth." Isaiah used these intimate terms of Yahweh in Isaiah 40:11 [KJV], "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom."

But don't get the idea that when Jesus told a story about a shepherd, He was merely telling some quaint tale. He wasn't. In fact, His teaching about the Good Shepherd in John 10 occurs in a context of controversy. Which brings us to lesson #1.

I. Lesson #1: There are many false shepherds (1).

Listen friends. Not all who work with sheep are shepherds (1). Some are thieves, which is the first observation Jesus made in His allegory about shepherds.

Let's read the entire section of John 10:1-6: "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman

opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.' Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them."

Picture a sheep pen. It's a large, roofless, stone structure with only one opening. A lone watchman guards the door. You can see that the pen is full of sheep. All of a sudden, you see some guy scaling the wall on the back side. You don't need to be Sherlock Holmes to deduce the guy's up to no good! How do you know? A shepherd doesn't sneak around the pen. He uses the door. That's what Jesus said in verse 2.

But why would He tell such a story? He's making an important point, and it has to do with the fact that there are many false shepherds, and some were standing right in front of Jesus as He spoke.

As we look back into chapter 9, we see the context and specifically, we see that a controversy was brewing. Why? All because Jesus had given sight to a man born blind. That should have been a cause for rejoicing, right? Not for the Pharisees. They were incensed that Jesus healed on the Sabbath.

Just who were these Pharisees? Everybody knew they were the spiritual leaders of Israel, the *shepherds* of God's people. At least that's what they were presumed to be. But were they really shepherds?

Jesus confronted them in 9:39-41 and concluded, "Now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains." Ouch. Jesus didn't play the party line. He made it clear that while the Pharisees claimed to have spiritual sight, in reality they were blind.

Then immediately, in the first verse of chapter 10, Jesus shifted from a medical metaphor (blindness) to an agrarian metaphor (shepherding). He's exposing the true character of the Pharisees. They are blind. They are also thieves who steal sheep.

How can we detect false shepherds or thieves? Look for two marks.

A. Their entrance is sly. Verse 1—"I tell you the truth," said Jesus. "Verily, verily" in the KJV. The phrase is an emphatic teaching device which says, "Listen up!"

Who's He talking to? Apparently, He's still talking to the Pharisees from 9:40, and the healed blind man from 9:38. And I would assume Jesus' disciples were listening in—they were seldom far from Him. And probably a crowd of people too—the multitudes were constantly after Jesus.

So Jesus says to this mixed audience, "Listen up! I want to tell you something very true and very relevant. I want to give you a little parable that illustrates what's happening before your very eyes."

And here it is...

"The man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate [KJV "He that enters not by the door."], but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber." A thief is sly. He doesn't advertise his coming, and he doesn't walk right in the front door so you can spot him. He's a hider, a deceiver. He looks for ways to enter the realm of the sheep without the sheep suspecting him.

A quick application at this point. When the man knocks on your door and offers you some "Christian" literature, please consider the source. He doesn't say, "Hello, I'm a cult member! I want to give you some literature that contradicts what the Bible says about Jesus." No, he won't do that. He may even come in the name of Christ.

Jesus wants us to know that, first of all, their entrance is sly. Here's a second mark of a false shepherd.

B. Their actions are selfish. What's Jesus call these false shepherds? Notice the end of verse 1. Jesus identifies this invader as a "thief and a robber." The Greek word for "thief" is "kleptas" from which we get "kleptomaniac." The whole orientation of a thief is selfish.

Again, don't forget what just happened in chapter 9. A blind beggar was given sight, but the Pharisees couldn't care less about him. In fact, they saw him as a nuisance and excommunicated him. Their actions were selfish. So it is with false shepherds.

They're takers, not givers. They're take your money. They're take your soul.

Of course, in stark contrast, look at Jesus. Jesus didn't come to take, but give. He gave up His throne in heaven and came to earth, where He gave up His comfort and personal pleasures and ultimately gave up His life on the cross in order to rescue sinners.

And another word of contrast. Jesus cared for the individual. Thieves don't care. They don't care that their actions will mess up your life. But Jesus cares. Jesus doesn't see masses--He sees individuals. Jesus doesn't see wealth--He sees individuals. He doesn't see our credentials--He sees our need. And He doesn't just see. He gives.

So here's the first lesson. *There are many false shepherds.* I say there *are* because while it was true in Jesus' day, it's still true so in ours. We don't have Pharisees, but we have others who climb the wall to fleece the sheep. You say, "How can I detect these false shepherds?" Jesus said they come in "some other way." They may be religious. They may talk about family values. But if they don't come through the gate, they're false shepherds.

What's the gate? Good question, and it's the question Jesus answers in verse 7. But first, there's a second lesson He wants us to consider.

II. Lesson #2: There is only one good shepherd (2-6).

By the way, if you'll notice verse 6, you'll discover that Jesus' little illustration went right over the heads of His hard-hearted listeners. Verse 6 says, "Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them." However, by the time Jesus was done teaching, some understood Him very well, so much so (says verse 31) they wanted to kill Him!

There are two key questions which Jesus answers in His illustration.

A. What is true of the good shepherd (2-4a)?

In his story, Jesus refers to two kinds of sheepfolds or sheep *pens*. The first was the communal sheepfold, which is the one He mentions in verse 1. The communal sheepfold was located in or near the village itself. This sheepfold held several flocks that belonged to several shepherds. The structure had sturdy stone walls, and a strong door. Shepherds left their sheep there at night, under the care of a guardian, or porter.

You may wonder, "With all the different flocks being mixed together, how would the various shepherds separate their sheep when they picked them up in the morning?" Very simply, they just called for them, and the various sheep recognized the voice of their shepherd, and came (see verse 3).

Another type of sheepfold was the hillside sheepfold. During the warm season, the shepherd didn't bring his flock back to the village at night. Instead, he collected his sheep into an open sheepfold out on the hillside. The pen was little more than an open space enclosed by a simple wall with one opening.

Something else about this hillside pen. At night, the shepherd would lay down across the opening. He became the door/gate, literally. If a sheep was to get out, it

would have to go over the shepherd. If a wolf was to get in, it had to get by the shepherd. The shepherd was himself *the door/gate*.

So hear Jesus in verse 7. "I am the gate for the sheep." Think of the implications. If you are a sheep and belong to the Shepherd, you're not getting out of His care. Impossible. And there's no harm coming your way in life unless He allows it in. You can't escape His care. You can't be removed from His care. He is *the Gate*.

Now, back to the question I just posed. What is true of the good shepherd? Take a close look at the verbs Jesus uses in verses 2-4 and you'll discover that the good shepherd engages in four activities.

1. *He enters by the door.* In verse 2 Jesus says, "The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep." A good shepherd isn't sly. He doesn't sneak in. He doesn't have to, since the sheep are his. So he just enters by the door.

2. *He calls the sheep by name.* There's a special, intimate relationship between an eastern shepherd and his sheep. Jesus gives the sense of that in verse 3, saying, "The watchman opens the gate for him, and *the sheep listen* to his voice." And in verse 4, "... His sheep follow him because they know his voice."

Couldn't a thief fool the sheep by dressing up like their shepherd? No. Why not? Verse 5 tells us, "But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."

In America, sheep are raised primarily for the meat, which means they have to be killed. Not so in Israel. In Israel the sheep are valued for their wool, and because of this shepherds are often with their sheep for years.

I read that an eastern shepherd gives his sheep descriptive names, like "Brown leg," or "Black ear." A shepherd knows his sheep. He lives with them. He talks to them. He calls them by name.

I read one account of a person who saw this 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."²

That's the good shepherd. First, he enters by the door. Second, he calls the sheep by name.

3. *He leads the sheep for their good.*

Growing up, we had a Border Collie dog. Now there's an intriguing breed of canine! By instinct, they love to round up other animals, and in our case, anything that moves, other dogs, lawnmowers, even people!

I saw a man once working his border collie. It's fascinating. With a hand motion, or a whistle, the dog moves to the left, or the right, or straight ahead, and drives the sheep from the field to the desired pen.

But the Eastern shepherd didn't use a dog. In fact, he didn't drive his sheep. He led them. That's what Jesus said about the shepherd in verse 3, "He leads them out."

Leads them where? Wherever He wants them to go, to find fresh pasture, or a place to rest or drink, or perhaps out of danger. But what if they don't want to go?

That's the shepherd's fourth activity...

² Morris, 502

4. *He brings the sheep along.* Quite frankly, against their will at times. The verb Jesus used in verse 4 is a strong one. The KJV reads, "And when he puts forth his own sheep." It means "to expel, to drive out." Ironically, the same word is used in 9:34 where the Pharisees "cast out" the healed blind man. They actually expelled him from the synagogue.

Here Jesus says that sometimes shepherds do that with their sheep. They have to compel the sheep to leave the fold—and he may even have to use force. Not because he's mean, and not that he's sick and tired of the sheep and wants to get them out of his hair. No, puts them out because he has the good of the sheep in mind. The good shepherd never leaves any of his own behind. He always *brings the sheep along*.

Do you know a shepherd like this? Do you know a shepherd who enters by the door, who knows his sheep by name, who leads his sheep for their good, and who brings his sheep along? I do. He's *my* shepherd, and if you've been born again He is *your* shepherd, too.

G. A. Young penned these lyrics about Him:

*In shady, green pastures, so rich and so sweet,
God leads His dear children along;*

*Where the water's cool flow bathes the weary one's feet,
God leads His dear children along.*

*Some through the waters, some through the flood,
some through the fire, but all through the blood;*

*Some through great sorrow, but God gives a song,
in the night season and all the day long.*

My friends, if we know Jesus, we have such a shepherd.

We're going to talk about some implications in a moment. But first, we need to probe a second question Jesus addresses with this story.

B. What is true of his sheep (4b-5)?

Notice the verbs again, three key verbs in verses 4-5 which tell what sheep do.

1. *They recognize the shepherd.* The end of verse 4 says this of sheep, "They know his voice." It's a perfect tense verb indicating this is an activity that began in the past, and continues into the present. Sheep don't get to know the shepherd overnight. It takes time. Day after day of hearing his voice brings the sheep to the point where they recognize the shepherd. What's more...

2. *They follow the shepherd.* Verse 4 again says, "His sheep *follow* him because they know his voice." Follow. A present tense verb, indicating a continual activity. Goats tend to fend for themselves. Not sheep. They depend on their shepherd. They need him to find pasture and water, to lead them to shelter, to medicate their wounds, to aid them when they birth their lambs, to carry them when they are broken and weary. And so true sheep *follow* their shepherd, because they're so helpless and so needy and so utterly dependent upon their shepherd.

Think about that for a moment, fellow sheep. Jesus says that true sheep do more than hear the shepherd. They listen to His voice and *recognize* Him. And they *follow* Him. Do those two verbs describe your relationship with Jesus?

Do you listen to and *recognize* His voice? And are you *following* Him? Let's take those one at a time.

First, do you *recognize* His voice? You say, "How do you hear Jesus' voice?" In His Word. He gave us this Book so we could hear His voice. So do you make it a daily priority to hear the voice of your Shepherd by opening up His Word?

A few years ago, we took a congregational survey which asked several questions. An interesting statistic surfaced. Out of 161 responses, 90 people said they have a personal Bible study at least 3 days a week. That's good. It also indicated that 70 people were not in the Word on a consistent basis. Friends, we can't follow the Shepherd if we don't hear His voice. It's vital that we talk to Him, yes, that's prayer. But it's just as vital, even more vital, that we allow Him to talk to us.

Then comes the second question. Are you *following* Him? When He speaks, are you listening and obeying?

I talked to a man recently who had sinned against his wife. "God's Word says you need to ask her to forgive you. Do you understand that?" "Yes," he said. "Have you done it?" I asked. "No," he said. "Will you do so now?" I asked. "No," he said. "I'm not ready."

He was being honest. He had heard the Shepherd's voice and recognized it. But he was refusing to *follow* his Shepherd.

He's not alone. I've heard my Shepherd and refused to follow many times. That's called sin. And do you know what the Shepherd does when His sheep hear Him and refuse to follow Him? He does things to get their attention, doesn't He? Not because He's a harsh shepherd, but because He indeed is a *Good Shepherd*.

More about that at another time. But for now, a third activity. We're answer the question, "What's true of sheep?" One, they recognize the shepherd. Two, they follow the shepherd.

3. *They flee from strangers*. A double negative appears in the Greek text of verse 5, "And a stranger (i.e. "one who belongs to another") will they not, no way, follow, but will flee from him." Sheep don't follow a stranger. Why not? "Because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."

Frankly, there are a lot of voices these days clamoring for your attention and mine. Politicians speak to us. Educators beckon us. Religious leaders call for us. So do advertisers, and closer to home, so do our family members and friends. They're all claiming to have our good in mind. Who can you trust? Jesus says that true sheep are wary of strangers. They know the Voice they can trust, and they hear and follow Him. But when another voice speaks, particularly a voice that turns them away from their Shepherd, they don't hang around. They start running. They *flee*.

Speaking as your pastor, I am concerned at the voices many sheep are listening to these days. Christians are leaving the Shepherd and running to self-proclaimed experts on just about any subject you can imagine. We live in an information age. We have books, magazines, newspapers, radio and television talk shows, blogs, Facebook, and on and on it goes. The voices are clamoring for our attention, and sadly, many of us are giving it to them.

You only have so much time to listen. If you're giving attention to all these voices, the One voice that often gets ignored is the Voice that matters most.

Friends, if we've got time to read our books and magazines, listen to our CD's and radios, and check our Facebook news feed, and email accounts, but don't have time to listen to the *Shepherd*, something's wrong, terribly wrong.

The point is this. Please be careful not to follow the voice of strangers. Follow the Shepherd. Listen to His voice. We can hear it in the Book.

As one who teaches, I am somewhat encouraged by v 6, "Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them." Jesus was the greatest

Teacher ever, but He was misunderstood at times. Here is a case in point. They heard but didn't understand.

Having said that, the question remains, what impact should Jesus' words have on us? I think there are two clear implications.

Make It Personal: Consider two implications...

1. *Jesus' words warn us.* We can't listen to the words of Jesus this morning without wrestling with two questions.

•Is Jesus my Shepherd? In verse 11, Jesus made this claim, "I am the good shepherd." That's His claim. Now answer this. Is He *your* shepherd? Have you ever admitted to Him, "I am a wayward sheep. I can't live without You. I want to stop rebelling and start submitting to You. Be the Shepherd of my life."? There's an invitation in John 10. Jesus invites us to trust Him.

Friend, do you need a Shepherd today, someone to direct your life from here all the way to heaven? Do you need someone who can rescue you from the danger of hell? There is such a Shepherd. Jesus Christ came to earth, the perfect God-man, and He lived a perfect life, and then lay down His life on a cross. The Shepherd lay down His life for His sheep. And then He conquered the grave.

Do you believe that? Do you believe that Jesus came to rescue *you*? Is He your Shepherd? There's a second question of warning.

•Am I a true sheep? It's possible to be a goat. You say, "How can I know if I really am a sheep?" What are the marks? True sheep recognize Jesus' voice, and follow Him. Do you recognize His voice? Do you spend time with the Shepherd, listening to His Word? Then, do you follow what you've heard Him say?

Jesus' words warn us. What's more...

2. *Jesus' words invite us.* I can do two things because of Jesus' invitation here. So can you.

•I can trust Jesus. No one cares for us like Jesus! He's the Great and Good Shepherd. Trust Him for salvation. Trust Him for daily living. Choose today to trust Him.

Some of you are going through hard times right now. Perhaps you feel as if the Shepherd has compelled you to leave the quietness of the sheepfold against your will, that the storms of life are overwhelming you. Please remember this. The Shepherd is with you. He never leaves us. And when He leads us, He has our good in mind. We may not understand, but we can do this--we can trust Him.

•I must follow Jesus. In the words of John H. Sammis, "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."