

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 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 shepherd and a hired hand. Jesus once 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 a new, expository series entitled, "Getting to Know the Good Shepherd." Our text for the next four weeks will be John 10. Our aim, simply put, is this--to get to know Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd, better. I'll pull no punches. I want you to know Christ. I want to know the Shepherd better myself. What do we need to do if we are going to get to know the Good Shepherd?

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

- I. Lesson #1: There are many false shepherds (1).
 - A. Their entrance is sly.
 - B. Their actions are selfish.
- II. Lesson #2: 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)?

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

1. They recognize the shepherd.
2. They follow the shepherd.
3. They flee from strangers.

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.

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. Actually, 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, "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, Thou who leadest Joseph like a flock." Isaiah used these intimate terms of Yahweh in Isa 40:11, "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. "He that enters not by the door...is a thief and a robber."

Picture in your mind 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 make what deduction? The guy's up to no good! How do you know? A shepherd doesn't sneak around--he uses the door.

That's what Jesus said (2). But why would He tell such a story? To make an important point--there are many false shepherds--some were right in front of Jesus as He spoke.

There's an unfortunate chapter break between 9:41 and 10:1. We need to look back into chapter 9 to see the context. Controversy was brewing. Why? 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.

An important question--who were the Pharisees? Supposedly, they were the spiritual leaders of Israel. They were the self-professed shepherds of God's people. Were they really shepherds? Jesus confronted them in 9:39-41. The bottom line--The Pharisees claimed to have spiritual sight, but in reality they were blind.

Then in chapter 10, Jesus shifted from the medical metaphor (blindness) to an agrarian metaphor (shepherding). His aim was to show 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 2 marks.

A. Their entrance is sly.

"Verily, verily"--An emphatic teaching device which says, "Listen up!" "He that enters not by the door." A thief is sly. If you're not careful, he'll catch you off guard. When a cult member knocks on your door, he won't say, "Hello, I'm a cult member!" No, he may even come in the name of Christ.

B. Their actions are selfish.

Jesus identifies the 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.

Don't forget what just happened in ch 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.

Jesus stands in stark contrast. Jesus cared for the individual. Never forget this. 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. He's our Shepherd.

Here's the first lesson--There are many false shepherds. It was true in Jesus' day, and 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 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 Jesus, THE WAY, they are thieves and false shepherds.

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

By the way, if you'll notice v 6, you'll discover that Jesus' story went right over the heads of His hard-hearted listeners, "They understood not what things they were which he spoke unto them." By the time Jesus was done, however, some understood Jesus very well--so much so they wanted to kill Him (v 31)!

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. The first was the communal sheepfold (mentioned in v 1). It was located in or near the village itself. The communal 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--a porter. You may wonder, "How would the various shepherds separate their sheep when they picked them up in the morning?" Very simply, the sheep recognized the voice of their shepherd (see v 3).

Another sheep-fold was the hillside sheep-fold. During the warm season, the shepherd did not bring his flock back to the village at night. Instead, he collected his

sheep into an open sheep-fold on the hillside--it was little more than an open space enclosed by a simple wall with one opening. At night, the shepherd would lay down across the opening. He became the door, 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 (we'll consider this more next week in v 7 where Jesus said, "I am the door of the sheep").

What is true of a good shepherd? Take a close look at the verbs Jesus uses in vv 2-4. A good shepherd engages in 4 activities.

1. He enters by the door.

V 2 reads, "But he that enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep." A good shepherd isn't sly. He doesn't sneak in. He doesn't have to--they sheep are his.

2. He calls the sheep by name.

There's a special, intimate relationship between an eastern shepherd and his sheep. We sense that in v 3, "To him the porter opens, and the sheep hear his voice." And v 4, "And the sheep follow him; for they know his voice." Couldn't a thief fool the sheep by dressing up like a shepherd? No, v 5, "And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers."

In our country, sheep are raised primarily for the meat--they have to be killed. Not so in Israel--there they are valued for their wool. Because of this, shepherds are often with their sheep for years. An eastern shepherd gives his sheep descriptive names, like "Brown leg," and "Black ear." A shepherd knows his sheep. He lives with them. He even talks to them. He calls them by name.

I read one account of a person who saw this firsthand (Morris, 502), "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."

3. He leads the sheep for their good.

Growing up, we had a Border Collie dog. What an amazing breed of dog! By instinct, they love to round up other animals. But the Eastern shepherd didn't use a sheepdog. In fact, he didn't drive his sheep. He led them.

So Jesus says of the good shepherd in v 3, "He leads them out." Where does he lead them? To find fresh pasture. What if they don't want to go?

4. He brings the sheep along.

Against their will at times. The verb Jesus used in v 4 is a strong one, "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 formerly blind man--they expelled him from the synagogue. Here Jesus says that sometimes shepherds have to compel the sheep to leave the fold--he may even have to use force--not for his own good, not that he's sick and tired of the sheep and wants them to get lost. No, he has the good of the sheep in mind. The good shepherd never leaves any of his own behind.

Do you know a Shepherd like this--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. 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 vv 4-5 which tell what sheep do.

1. They recognize the shepherd.

V 4b says this of sheep, "For they know his voice." It's a perfect tense verb indicating this is an activity that began in the past, and continues in 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.

2. They follow the shepherd.

V 4 says the "follow" the shepherd--present tense, 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 in the lambing time, to carry them when they are broken and weary. True sheep follow their shepherd.

A word about the Christian life. True sheep do more than hear the shepherd. They listen to Him. They recognize Him. They follow Him. Who are you following in your life? Are you following Christ? Do you make it a daily priority to hear the voice of Your Shepherd? In our congregational survey a couple of months ago, 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 tremendous. It also indicates that 70 people are 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. It's just as vital we allow Him to talk to us.

3. They flee from strangers.

A double negative appears in v 5, "And a stranger (i.e. "one who belongs to another") will they not, no way, follow, but will flee from him." Why? "For they know not the voice of strangers."

Frankly, there are a lot of voices these days clamoring for our attention. Politicians speak to us. Educators beckon us. Religious leaders call for us. They all claim to offer us something good. But true sheep are wary of strangers. They know the one voice they can trust. And they follow him.

Speaking as a pastor, I am disturbed at the voices many sheep are listening to these days. Many listen to whatever voice makes them "feel good." Christians are leaving the Shepherd and running to psychologists, the self-proclaimed experts on matters of the mind. In May, I had the opportunity to hear Larry Crabb speak in Chicago. Larry Crabb has been a clinical psychologist for over 20 years, and has written numerous books. I was stunned by one of his opening statements, "We have oversold professional counseling and undersold godly shepherding." He went on to say that in the American Church, the work of individual shepherding has been turned over to professionals--there were 75,000 in 1975 and 250,000 in 1995. He asked this question--In the Bible, when it

came to problems of the soul, who cared for people in need? It wasn't professional counselors who could probe the inner self--it was shepherds, godly elders. Larry Crabb went on to say his goal in the remaining years of his life is to reverse this trend--to help people see that when it comes to non-medical problems, "experts" can't deal with issues of the soul, but elders can. In fact, 1 Pet 5:1-4 makes it clear that the Chief Shepherd has delegated the care of the souls of His people to undershepherds.

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.

Implications: What impact should Jesus' words have on us?

As one who teaches, I am somewhat encouraged by v 6. 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.

1. Jesus' words warn us.

These words are like a searchlight. They shine on our hearts. We can't listen to these words without wrestling with two questions.

•Is Jesus my Shepherd?

In v 11, Jesus made this claim, "I am the good shepherd." 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 hear all the way to heaven? Do you need someone who can rescue you from the danger of hell? There is such a Shepherd. He laid down His life for you and me. He will save you today.

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 every day, listening to His Word? Then, do you follow what you've heard Him say? Jesus' words warn us.

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."

