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# Christ, the Good Shepherd

## John 10:1-18

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**Introduction** What does it mean to be a Christian? Over these past few weeks, we have been considering that question in the pages of Scripture and have found the answer to not be in us, but in the person of Christ. With apologies to Descartes, I'm in Christ, therefore I am. My existence and my identity are bound up in who Christ is. Even more so, \*our\* existence and \*our\* identity as the Chapel is bound up in Christ. Our identity comes from outside of ourselves. It is given to us. So as Christ is God's Son and has been declared to be God's Son, we are joint-heirs with the Son as Sons of God. Even as Christ is our righteousness, we have been declared righteous as saints. Christ, the Servant, has made us his bondservants in service to each other and the world. And Christ the Warrior-King who waged war on our behalf and won has outfitted the Christian as a soldier. This morning we continue our series on Christ and our identity in him with a look at Christ as the Shepherd. Tonight, Pastor Devon will then consider the Christian as a sheep.

### Consider the Shepherd

This is the time of year when we are reminded of the significant role that shepherds play in the biblical story. What good Christmas pageant doesn't have shepherds? The shepherds are everywhere. If you're not Joseph, you're not a wise man, or you're not an angel, you're a shepherd. The shepherds, since there are more than one, are a group effort at the pageant. Yet, those shepherds are a big part of the story. It may be the only time of year we even think about shepherds.

The Bible tells us that shepherds were the first public audience to be told of Christ's birth. They were the first visitors of the new born baby in the manger. It makes for a dramatic story. Shepherds tending sheep have their otherwise uneventful night on a Bethlehem hillside radically interrupted by a blinding host of angels announcing the birth of the Messiah, marking the beginning of The Event of all events. Christ is born in a manger, not a palace; and it is shepherds, not kings and princes, who witness the occasion. This momentous event that changed the course of history would have escaped notice of the entire world, had it not been for the angels appearing to shepherds. So we have our classic nativity scene: Mary, Joseph, the baby, a manger, an ox and lamb to keep time, and shepherds. All we're missing is a spotlight, an elementary school stage, a blanket, and of course, Linus to tell us the story.

Have we ever stopped to consider \*why\* it is that shepherds were the first recipients of the good news and the first to worship the newborn baby? If we have stopped long enough to consider the question, the popular answer has been to point to the lamb at the manger who is keeping time (at least that's what the song says the lamb is doing). Surely, these shepherds in this scene are a reminder that God has provided a lamb to take

away the sins of the world. And there is some truth to this answer. But this morning, I want us to consider another possible answer; one that I think is too often overlooked.

Let us begin our study in Ezekiel, chapter 34. God wants Ezekiel to pronounce an oracle of judgment on the leaders of Israel. Remember Ezekiel is in exile, prophesying against what is happening back in Jerusalem. God's people are being judged for their disobedience. Jerusalem is under siege and is being destroyed. The temple, the symbol of God's presence among his people, was flattened and burned. And God's people were systematically being carted off to Babylon, the pagan nation responsible for the carnage in Jerusalem. And among the judgments proclaimed by Ezekiel against Israel and her leaders is this one: Ezekiel 34, beginning with verse 1. This is what the word of God proclaims to us:

<sup>1</sup>The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. (And before we go on, we should note that Ezekiel here is prophesying against the leaders of Israel. Most likely he is speaking of kings, who, beginning with David were considered the shepherds of God's people. But not only kings are in God's firing line, but also any others who would have exercised leadership over his people, including religious leaders.) Son of man, prophesy, against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? <sup>3</sup> You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. <sup>4</sup> The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. <sup>5</sup> So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. <sup>6</sup> My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them. <sup>7</sup> “Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: <sup>8</sup> As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, <sup>9</sup> therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: <sup>10</sup> Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

<sup>11</sup> “For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. <sup>12</sup> As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness... (VERSE 15) <sup>15</sup> I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. <sup>16</sup> I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice. (VERSE 22) <sup>22</sup> I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. <sup>23</sup> And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. <sup>24</sup>

And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.”

Israel’s shepherd kings had played the fool. They were oppressing and fleecing the flock for their personal and sordid gain. They pillaged the land of its resources, at the flock’s expense. In arrogant self-interest, they fed themselves instead of the flock. To highlight how bad it had become, God notes they are not only feeding themselves instead of the flock, they are feeding \*on\* the flock. Instead of protecting the sheep from predators, the shepherds themselves have become the predators. And God says there is coming a day when he will act on his flock’s behalf. He Himself will rescue His sheep and put a stop to the tyrannical rule of wolves parading as shepherds. The Lord is coming against the shepherds of His people. He will step in and replace the bad shepherds with one Good Shepherd. God himself will gather and lead His people to pasture.

That \*day\* ultimately began at \*night\* in a Bethlehem manger with an angelic message to unsuspecting shepherds. That One Good Shepherd has arrived in time and space to rescue His people. As the shepherds gather at the manger, He is the Shepherd above all Shepherds.

But it would not be until a little more than 30 years that this One Shepherd would be so obvious. And that’s where we find ourselves in our main text this morning. John Chapter 10.

This passage is really a continuation of the events in chapter 9. Verse 1 of John chapter 10 probably represents an artificial chapter break. Even though the conversation takes a new direction, it’s the same conversation that was begun in the latter verses of John 9.

John chapter 9 is the well-known story about Jesus healing the man born blind. Jesus spits on the ground, makes mud with the saliva, puts the mud on the man’s eyes, and has him wash in the pool of Siloam. When the man who was born blind washed the mud off of his eyes, he was able to see for the first time. Because Christ healed the man on the Sabbath and the religious leaders weren’t too keen on Sabbath breaking, a controversy ensues between Jesus and the Pharisees with the man who was healed in the middle. The man who was healed lectures the Pharisees about their understanding of the situation and gets thrown out of the temple. When Jesus heard about the way the man had been treated he introduces himself to the man born blind who then professes his belief in and worships the true Messiah.

Let’s begin with verse 39 of chapter 9: <sup>39</sup> Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” <sup>40</sup> Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?” <sup>41</sup> Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.

The man born blind confesses Jesus as Lord. That confession is set in contrast to the Pharisees indignant denial. And that denial receives its just reward in Christ’s pronouncement of judgment against the Pharisees. Christ had more than physical sight in his purview in healing the man born blind. The man’s eyes of faith had been opened. And Christ uses both the healing and the man’s faith as a contrast against the Pharisees who were spiritually blind. Jesus answers their question “are we also blind” (which is along

the lines of “are you talking to me?”) not only in the affirmative, but with a pronouncement of judgment.

The Pharisees were in far deeper darkness than they realize. Their sight is an illusion. These are the same religious leaders of whom Jesus had said, “You are of your father, the devil”. Their actions against the man born blind has exposed their hearts as following after their father the devil in rebellion against the divine light who couldn’t possibly be possessed by a demon.

What follows Christ’s sobering pronouncement of damnation, “your guilt remains”, in chapter 10 is Christ’s prophetic oracle in the tradition of Ezekiel 34. Christ turns the conversation from sight and blindness to the traditional imagery of sheep and shepherds in speaking of God and His people. (VERSE 1) <sup>1</sup>“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup>But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

## What is a shepherd?

Before we proceed further, let’s take a look at the shepherd language being introduced in this passage. Few analogies in scripture are used more to describe spiritual realities than the Shepherd and the flock. Few pictures are more enduring than the picture of a shepherd, presumably Christ, with a sheep draped around his neck. It is an image of both strength and gentleness... with a well-buffed, long-haired white European male reminiscent of Fabio tenderly carrying a pristine, well manicured, tender, little lamb to safer environs.

That image masks over the reality of what a shepherd was in the Mediterranean region. The shepherd was a “sheep-herder”. The reality is that the shepherd was at the low end of society’s totem pole, even though early in biblical history, the shepherd had been a key piece of Israel’s economy. It was interesting to note as Russ took us through the book of Genesis that the fact that Joseph’s family were sheep-herders is a big deal, because shepherds were an abomination to the Egyptians. Regardless, Pharaoh honors the shepherds with the choicest of Egypt’s land for their flocks. The same ironic contrast is found in the story of the shepherd boy David of humble beginnings who became king of Israel, pre-figuring long before Ezekiel the coming of the ultimate Shepherd-King who would rule his people. It’s also interesting, especially in the cases Abraham and Jacob, that good shepherds could become quite wealthy in an occupation at society’s low end. In New Testament times, shepherds were not considered credible witnesses in a court of law, much like women in that day (which makes it interesting that the first witnesses of Christ’s birth were shepherds, and the first witnesses of Christ’s resurrection -- or rebirth, if you will -- were women). Shepherds were considered unclean by the ruling classes in Christ’s day, and they were almost always relegated to the outside of the city (which is ironic since the patriarchs of Israel’s history were shepherds).

Shepherding is embedded in Israel’s history; some of its most famous names were shepherds; Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David and Amos were all shepherds (Gen 12:16; 26:14; Gen. 30:29; Ex 3:1; 2 Sam 7:8; Amos 1:1), and all prefigured Christ as the Shep-

herd-King. Isaac, Jacob, and Moses all married shepherdesses. Shepherds not only became the prototype for Israel's royalty, but Israel's leadership in general.

The responsibilities of the shepherd included: Protection (from predators such as fierce animals and sheep stealers), Feeding & Watering (in plots of grass called pastures), Gathering (back to the flock sheep, who are inherent wanderers), Sheltering (from inclement weather), and Tending to injuries.

Shepherds were responsible for making sure that the sheep got into a secure sheepfold at night and safe places to graze and water during the day. Shepherds had to find food and water for the sheep and lead them to it. Given the dry and stony conditions of the Mediterranean region, finding water for the sheep sometimes might take hours or days. The idyllic grassy meadows where sheep frolic and play is almost exclusively the artists's imagination.

The middle of the shepherd's day was spent watching over the sheep as they lay down for several hours in a cool and shady place. The sheep once out to pasture, have no clue on how to get home. They have to be led back to the pen or fold. Psalm 23 reads like a day in the life of the shepherd. Shepherds were inseparable from their flocks. Shepherd and sheep spent so much time together, many shepherds in the Ancient Near East had individual names for many of their sheep. The shepherd was so familiar with his sheep, it was (and still is) possible for the shepherd to call his flock with his voice and they will separate from other flocks mingling in the area. That call, too, was an almost an art form, unique to the shepherd. It was a distinctive guttural sound, learned as part of the trade, and difficult for imposters to imitate. It was this unique and distinctive call by which the shepherd led his sheep to pasture and separated his sheep from other flocks.

Protecting the flock from predators was always a high priority for the shepherd. Sheep are notoriously vulnerable, with virtually no defense mechanism. The sheep's defense is completely wrapped up in the defense provided by the shepherd. The shepherd carried at least two protective weapons: a club-like weapon called a rod and the more famously familiar crook. Some also carried slings, such as the one we read about in David's story. They were also expert watchmen. The shepherd never took his eyes off of the sheep, many times having to be the eyes for the sheep.

Shepherds existed for the very life of the sheep. Sheep could not survive the stony terrain and the hostile environment of the middle east without the shepherd. Thus, the ancient economy of Israel was only as good as the ability of the shepherds to keep their sheep alive and well. We are given an inkling of this in the feud between Jacob and Laban in the book of Genesis.

The shepherd, through the development of Israel's history, became symbolic of leadership and authority. The sheep's livelihood was so wrapped up in the shepherd's ability to feed, provide for, protect, and care for the flock, that when things did not go well for the sheep, the shepherd's credibility was on the line. One could take a look at the flock, and know what kind of shepherd it is that is caring for, or not caring for, the sheep. Throughout the text of scripture, that kind of analogy from the shepherd is impressed on Israel's civic and religious leaders as well as its kings. So, when God's people rebelled, not only

did he judge the sheep, but he also meted out judgment against the shepherds who were responsible for the flock.

## Christ's Use of Shepherding Imagery

And that brings to us \*why\* Christ chose to invoke the shepherd imagery from the Old Testament here. Throughout the book of John there has been ever-increasing conflict between Jesus and the Jews, especially the Jewish leaders. This conflict eventually will lead to their desire to kill him (John 5:18, 7:1) coming to fruition in his crucifixion. The Pharisees had already tried to have Jesus arrested (John 7:30,32,44). They have accused Jesus of being a liar (8:13). They have implied that Christ was an illegitimate son (John 8:41). They have gone so far to say that Jesus has a demon (John 8:48) and a child of the devil. And Jesus has been accused of "leading the people astray" (John 7:12). The Pharisees have just finished taking out their hatred of Christ on a man who had been cured of his blindness. They throw \*him\* out of the temple. And they refuse to acknowledge the obvious: This man was no longer blind. Christ healed this man and there's no way a demon could have done it. This healing was one more manifestation that Jesus is the long expected "Messiah" and they refuse to believe it. The question then becomes: \*who\* is leading the people astray?

This passage in John 10, functions as the indictment of the judgment pronounced in the last verse of chapter 9. They will die in their sins. Their unbelief is incurable. Their treatment of the man born blind and their rejection of Christ as Messiah has exposed Israel's religious leaders as the bad shepherds they are. And over against these Pharisees Christ's posits himself as the fulfillment of Ezekiel 34 as the One True Shepherd of Israel.

Here's what God's Word says, in John 10, beginning with verse 1: <sup>1</sup> "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup> But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." <sup>6</sup> This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. <sup>7</sup> So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup> I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. <sup>11</sup> I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. <sup>13</sup> He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. <sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. <sup>17</sup> For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay

down my life that I may take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” <sup>19</sup> There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. <sup>20</sup> Many of them said, “He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?” <sup>21</sup> Others said, “These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

What does this One True Shepherd look like in these verses? (and by the way, as we go through this, it is not my intent to unpack how this applies to those of us who are elders, but it *\*is\** good to remind ourselves that not only is this presenting us a picture of the good shepherd, but how those who are shepherds following after our Savior’s own leadership of the flock will lead His flock).

First of all, **the Good Shepherd enters by the door** (verse 1-3a). The shepherd would come early in the morning for his sheep. And if there was a gatekeeper, the gatekeeper regulated who had access to that pen. Anyone who enters any other way than the door is a thief and a robber. Anyone who refused to acknowledge that Jesus is the only way to God does not have the best interests of the flock in mind. In their rejection of Christ, these religious leaders had forfeited their authorized access to the flock. The locks have been changed. Now, they, as intruders, are climbing over the wall of the fold to get in. God, as he promised in Ezekiel 34, has removed them as shepherds.

We also find **that the Good Shepherd calls his own sheep by name** (verse 3b). This call is effectual that is, it effects its own outcome. The call itself creates a response. The Shepherd calls, and the sheep come. And this call is specific to His flock and none other. His calls attract His sheep. There is a mutual trust between shepherd and sheep. There is familiarity. There is a special bond between the shepherd and His sheep, a bond he has with no other flock. He uses His voice to lead them and they come. This is in distinction to the stranger whose voice is received with a deaf ear. No wonder the Pharisees had been unable to convince the man born blind that Christ had a demon and was not who he claimed. This man did not respond to their voice. Already Christ’s words in John 5:25 were being fulfilled: “an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.”

**The Good Shepherd leads his sheep out to pasture** (verse 3c-5) **via his voice**. This voice not only calls the sheep, but it leads the sheep to the food and water they need to flourish. There is no sheepdog to corral the flock into getting where it needs to go. It is the Shepherd’s voice that beckons them along from the front at the head of the flock. The Shepherd leads and the sheep follow. This is not true for the stranger. The stranger will bark his voice hoarse and the sheep not only do not hear, they run far, far away. Earlier in John, during a period in which there was a mass exodus of people who had been following Jesus, Christ said to his disciples “do you want to go away as well?” And the answer from Peter was “to whom shall we go?” (John 6:66-68). There are no others to follow than Christ, who leads His flock to pasture where they feast on the Bread of Life, drink from the Water of Life, and find eternal rest for their souls.

**The Good Shepherd is also the Door of the sheep** (verses 7-10). Not only does the real, and true shepherd have the only access to the sheep fold, He *\*is\** the access. And he alone is the legitimate access. Here we find a variation on the same thought as Christ

will more blatantly express later when he says "I am the way". In this instance, he is suggesting that no one else has the right to lead the flock. He alone holds the true pastoral leadership of the flock because salvation is only through this Door-Shepherd. Here Christ takes his claim of exclusivity with the flock one step further. It is only through this Door-Shepherd, that there is access to the pasture. "If anyone enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture". The false religious leaders who are thieves and robbers, attempting to gain access to the fold through illegitimate means have no true pasture to offer. Participation in this flock and access to the pasture that sustains eternal life is found only in \*this\* door. This not only applies to other shepherds, this also applies to the sheep. Christ is applying Psalm 118:20 to himself, where the Psalmist says, "the is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it." Only in Christ, the Door of the sheep, is there security, sustenance and salvation. It's interesting that this statement of Jesus years later ultimately cost his brother his life. A second century historian relates an account in which James the half-brother of Jesus is arrested and before he is executed he is given the chance to recant if only he would answer one question: what is the door of which Jesus spoke? James gave them the same reply as His half brother: Jesus is the only door for salvation; and he was promptly executed for blasphemy. It is only through this Door, the One who calls himself the I AM, that true sheep will find entrance into the kingdom of God.

**The Good Shepherd gives his sheep life.** Christ came to be the One Shepherd for God's flock promised by God in Ezekiel 34. This Shepherd not only leads His sheep to life, He gives them life. This Door-Shepherd says "I am the way, the truth, and \*the Life\*", and not just life, but eternal life in all of its blessed abundance. The Good Shepherd makes sure that the sheep are well taken care of, even at his own expense. The Good Shepherd desires and secures the well-being of his flock, in contrast to the false shepherds who are bent on killing the sheep. Here again, we have echoes of Ezekiel 34, in which the evil kings of Israel are plundering their own people, grasping at illicit profit and gain at the people's expense. Certainly this same kind of abuse is being recapitulated in the Pharisees who are so bent on securing their own power and prestige, that nothing, including the healing of a blind man, will stop them from killing the truth, even if it means, for all intents and purposes casting the man out of the temple and the life of the people.

The wickedness of the Pharisees can be heard on the lips of the disciples: "who sinned that this man was born blind?" The question was uttered by the disciples, but it most certainly was a question because this is exactly what the religious leaders had been teaching the people. The Pharisees say as much when they cast him out, saying he \*had\* been born in "utter sin". That kind of viewpoint represents a severe and oppressive rule over God's people. Against the backdrop of leadership that not only couldn't care less about God's people, Israel, but are willing to kill Jesus in order to secure their own necks, comes the Good Shepherd offering all of the covenantal promises ever offered to Israel. His is the pasture flowing with milk and honey... an abundance of eternal communion with the Creator in God's lavish garden. THAT is eternal life in its abundance that is found only in the Good Shepherd.

**The Good Shepherd is the I AM.** Hearing this must have again infuriated the Pharisees. Fresh off of hearing Christ say before Abraham was, I AM, now in the wake of their ejecting Christ's newest disciple from the temple, again they are hearing indictment and



judgment from the burning bush. More than just being a model shepherd, more than just being a better shepherd than the religious leaders, with the combination of Good Shepherd and the "I AM" Christ is making an absolute claim to being THE Shepherd of God. Again, Ezekiel 34 reverberates through the passage. God has said that He himself will shepherd His people. Christ here says "I AM God and I have come to Shepherd my people." The other gospel writers tell us that Christ was moved with compassion for the crowds because he viewed them as sheep having no shepherd. They have no shepherd because they, like the man born blind, have been abandoned by those who were supposed to be their shepherds. But that is no longer the case! The Great I AM has come to shepherd the sheep himself. The Great I Am has come calling his sheep, leading his sheep, feeding and watering his sheep, and giving His sheep life more abundant.

**The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.** (verse 11b) Set over against what we've been told is the purpose of the Door-Shepherd coming in verse 10... to lavish on the sheep the abundance of life to be found only in the Shepherd's pasture... is now the means for making that abundance of life possible: it is at the expense of the Shepherd's life. Instead of sacrificing the sheep for ill-gotten gain as is the practice of the bad shepherds, the Shepherd offers himself as a sacrifice for the sheep. There is more than risk involved here. Christ is pointing ahead to his vicarious and substitutionary atonement on His flock's behalf. One life is exchanged for the abundant life of the flock. This is more than the false shepherds will do. Not only are they not willing to risk their lives for the sheep, they run at the first sign of trouble. Not the good shepherd. The Good Shepherd, for the joy that was set before him, offers his life in exchange for the security and salvation of the flock. It is in this sacrificial act of laying down His own life for the sheep, that the Good Shepherd lays claim to the flock as His own and to His claim as the exclusive and absolute shepherd of God's flock.

**The Good Shepherd knows his sheep.** There is more than a familiarity and trust between the Shepherd and his sheep. The Shepherd \*knows\* his sheep intimately. This is the I AM who knows his people. Behind the backdrop of Christ's statement, "I know my sheep, and my own know me" is the great covenantal statement of God's love and care for his people that flows through redemptive history, "I will be their God, and they will be my people." No statement in scripture captures God's plan to fellowship in relationship with his people than that statement which was first given to Abraham. Now, here in John 10, the Good Shepherd invokes that thought in relation to His flock: The Shepherd knows His sheep because He has chosen to dwell with them and commune with them, and call them His own. Christ, the good shepherd, leads his sheep and feeds his sheep even as He communes with His sheep.

**The Good Shepherd seeks for and gathers his sheep.** Just as Christ went and found the man born blind, the brand new outcast, to bring him into the fold, Christ declares that there are other sheep. Here Christ points to his great work of expanding the identity of God's people to include Gentiles. Could those reading Ezekiel 34 have anticipated this? In the wake of shepherds fleecing God's flock, God will change not only the Shepherd, but the makeup of the flock as well. God has sent His Shepherd, the Good Shepherd Christ, to shepherd a newly constituted people that includes both Jew and Gentile. This becomes part of the judgment of Israel's false shepherds in Jesus' day. They have forfeited their right to shepherd God's flock and now God has given His flock to another,

the Good Shepherd, who, unlike the Pharisees, knows the Father. In the wake of the man born blind's expulsion, Jesus declares there is One flock, Jew and Gentile, and One Shepherd, the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for that one flock.

And finally, **the Good Shepherd rises from the dead for his sheep.** Not only does He lay down his life, but He takes it up again. The language here is interesting... He lays it down "in order that he may take it up again." The life for life exchange between Shepherd and Sheep is not possible if the Shepherd is dead. What gives life to the abundant life of the sheep is the resurrection of the Shepherd. This is \*why\* the Good Shepherd can claim equality with the I AM that appeared to Moses in the burning bush. This isn't just \*any\* Good Shepherd. This Good Shepherd can and will rise from the dead. This places the shepherd on a plane that no other shepherd can touch. The Son, who is the Good Shepherd, in obedience to the Father, has come to Shepherd God's flock by dying for the sheep and rising again for the sheep. The Good Shepherd emerges from the grave to call his sheep, to lead His sheep into the abundant life of pasture in the Father's land.

## Lessons

### What lessons are to be drawn from this passage?

**There are alternative shepherds who vie for our soul.** Their intent is to maim and destroy the flock of God. They try to convince us that there is abundant life to be found someplace other than the Good Shepherd and His pasture. This was the serpent's lie to Eve in the garden. It continues to be his lie to us today. The grass is not greener on the other side. Abundant life cannot be found in the good life that this world has to offer. Nor can it be found in the do's and don't's commonly associated with the "good" Christian life. Abundant life will not be found in whatever it is that takes our eyes and our ears off of the Good Shepherd. The enticements of thieves, bandits, and hired hands, who are not looking out for our best interests, are deadly.

**Abundant life, which is eternal life, is only to be found in Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd.** The sustenance of the flock is in the Shepherd. The Shepherd of all Shepherds is our Bread of Life, he is our Water of Life, he is our Light of life, and he is our Resurrection (which is precisely what Christ says in the raising of Lazarus, which immediately follows this passage). Christ, our Good Shepherd, always acts in our best interest and for our wellbeing. Our ultimate satisfaction in life can and will come from no other than the Good Shepherd who lays his life down for the flock.

## Response

### What is the response of the sheep?

**We must see ourselves as the man born blind,** not only in need of the light of the World, but also in need of a Good Shepherd. When we hear those around us whispering, "who is it that sinned that we were born blind?" can we hear the Good Shepherd say "this flock has sinned in Adam, but they have been born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in the flock"?

**We must follow the Good Shepherd.** John, this same author, writes of the saints standing with the Lamb in Revelation that they "follow the Lamb wherever He goes". That language is the language of the Shepherd and the sheep... yet John chooses to place the Lamb at the head of the flock. This Shepherd, as a Lamb, has given his life for the sheep.

The Shepherd has called, and we have come. And where this Lamb-Shepherd goes, we will follow, even to the laying down of our own lives.

**It is the Good Shepherd who has Come seeking us and finding us and rescuing us from that which would destroy us.** Having revealed Himself to us as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep, we shout with the man born blind, “Lord, We Believe” and we worship the One True Shepherd of Israel that has come to dwell among his flock. Indeed, these are written that we would believe in the name of the Son of God. In the words of Ezekiel, we once were lost, but we are no longer strayed. Christ, the Good Shepherd has rescued us and we are no longer prey. It is Christ who leads us into abundant life, more than we could ever ask or think. He is our God and we are his people. And there is coming a day when we will hear the Good Shepherd say, I AM their Shepherd, and they are my sheep.

## **Benediction**

### **Psalm 23**

<sup>1</sup> The LORD is our shepherd; we shall not want.

<sup>2</sup> He makes us lie down in green pastures. He leads us beside still waters.

<sup>3</sup> He restores our souls. He leads us in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.

<sup>4</sup> Even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil, for you are with us; your rod and your staff, they comfort us.

<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before us in the presence of our enemies; you anoint our heads with oil; our cup overflows.

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives, and we shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.