



The True Shepherd
Message Notes, July 17, 2016
John 10:1-10

Jesus is ever trying to reveal to the people who he is. In this passage, he uses a familiar analogy: sheep and shepherds. Shepherding was central to the economy and life of the people of that region.

The alignment is pretty clear – Jesus is the True Shepherd and we are the sheep. At first glance, to be compared to a sheep is not very flattering. They are very dumb animals: stubborn to their harm but also dangerously nervous and flighty; easily scattered and will follow the herd no matter the consequences. This is especially hazardous given their distractibility – they will blindly graze right into a fire or over a cliff. They are helpless, defenseless creatures, not even knowing how to run and hide.

But when we understand the analogy of the True Shepherd (our Lord Jesus), we joyfully embrace our identity as sheep.

Like sheep, we are not designed for independence. We were created to live under the care and reign of another. If we do not surrender to our loving Maker's care, we will come under the reign of something or someone who will not bring us true life (pasture, water, protection).

In this parable, Jesus is contrasting his care as the True Shepherd with the selfish neglect or abuse of false shepherd. Certainly Satan is the ultimate false shepherd, but he works through many others who would lead us astray into destruction and bondage, even religious ones who do not lead us into truth, who do not lead us to the True Shepherd. The Pharisees were such false shepherds. Jesus' parable is confronting them in the same spirit of God's judgment on the shepherds of Israel in Ezekiel 34:1-6.

What are the high standards Yahweh holds for the leaders of his people in this passage?

Sadly, at times, pastors in our day are irresponsible or destructive leaders of God's sheep. This inflicts deep hurt in us, the sheep. If you have been hurt in this way, hear Jesus say, "I see it. I know your pain. I am with you; I will shepherd you. I will tend your wounds, restore your heart, and strengthen your faith." May we, the sheep, pray regularly for our pastors, that they would stay close to the Good Shepherd, allowing His Spirit to fill them, guide them and strengthen them to shepherd us well.

Read John 10:1-10 and ponder the different characteristics of our True Shepherd.

1. He knows His sheep – each of us, by name. Shepherds in that day actually named each sheep by their unique characteristics. How does Psalm 139:1-6 express the intimate love of God for each of us?
2. The sheep know Him. God wants us to know Him. To hear and know His voice. It is a true, two-way relationship. Sheep were often corralled together in one pen. When a shepherd would come to get his own sheep out, he would call in his unique voice and only his sheep would come. They would only respond to their shepherd's voice.
3. His sheep follow Him. We trust our shepherd and go where he leads. It seems the listeners weren't really tracking with Jesus, so he shifts his focus in verse 7, saying, "I am the gate for the sheep." This may seem a total change of analogy, from shepherd to gate, but it is really not. The sheep pens most often had open entrances with no physical gate. A shepherd would lay there (esp. through the night) and serve as the gate. No sheep would leave and no "strangers" or predators could enter without going through the shepherd himself.



How is this “gate” idea consistent with Jesus’ declaration of himself in John 14:6 ?

All sheep who pass through the True Shepherd gate:

- Are saved. Held, cared for, and eternally secure – no matter what happens in this life.
- Go in and out. Under the True Shepherd’s care they have true freedom.
- Find pasture and water and protection), “that they might have life and life to the full” (John 10:10).

This is the heart of the True Shepherd, to give to his own sheep, ones he knows by name – and salvation, freedom, provision, protection, full life – life rooted in his love and relationship with him.

How does Matthew 9:35-36 reveal Jesus’ loving shepherd heart?

Reflection Questions

1. Do you struggle to believe Jesus knows your name? Why is this difficult for you?
2. What are ways our True Shepherd speaks to us? What are ways you hear his voice?
3. Who are some “strangers” that call to us and lead us astray? Do we sometimes follow? Why do we?
4. What does “life to the full” mean to you? Talk with your Shepherd about this. Bring these longings to him. Listen for his voice about them. Trust your life anew to your Good Shepherd.