

The True Shepherd

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[0 : 00] All right, well this morning we're finally coming back to our long-running sermon series through the Gospel of John. We started this series back around Christmas of 2019, and we've been kind of just working through really slow, sometimes verse by verse.

For those of you who were there right from the start, I don't expect that you'll remember everything that we've seen and discovered in John. In fact, I don't even remember everything I've said. But in case you want to go back and refer to a previous message, you can find them all on the church website, and we're going to continue the story this fall.

So if you have your Bible with you, please open it up to John chapter 10. It's a familiar passage to many of us who have been in the church a long time, and this is Jesus talking here.

We're going to start by reading the first 10 verses. This is Jesus. 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.

The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 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.

[1 : 27] 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 the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

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

All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved.

They will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

Father in heaven, as we look into your word, we pray and ask that you would open our eyes to see. We ask that you would help us to take something good from this and that you would strengthen our faith in you.

[2 : 44] We ask this in your name. Amen. Well, as we come to these words of Jesus this morning, the first thing that we want to figure out here is who Jesus is talking to and what's going on here.

Verse 1 in the NIV says, Very truly, I tell you Pharisees. Now, in the original language, it doesn't say Pharisees, and neither do most translations.

It just says, I tell you, plural. But the NIV, I think, is on the right track in trying to help us understand who Jesus is talking to. We might assume that because it's a new chapter, that this is a fresh story about Jesus and that what's here is different from what was in chapter 9.

But actually, the chapter divisions, as some of you know, were added to the Bible over a thousand years after the New Testament was written. So if you can bring yourself to kind of ignore those chapters and titles and just kind of read back and forth from chapter 9 to chapter 10, you'll notice that what happens in chapter 10 is just a continuation of the story from chapter 9.

So what happened back in chapter 9? I'm not going to re-preach those three messages, but basically we heard about how Jesus healed a man who had been blind from birth.

[4 : 01] And then we heard about how the Pharisees conducted their own investigation of his healing. They questioned the man repeatedly, and they did not want to accept that Jesus, their rival, had actually performed an amazing miracle, something that only God can do.

And they wore this poor man out trying to find some way to discredit this miracle to the point where the man eventually got fed up and told them what he really thought about Jesus.

And then they insulted the man, and they excommunicated him from the synagogue. They kicked him out. And then we heard how Jesus, after that, went and found this man who had been blind, and Jesus revealed himself to the man, that he was the Messiah, the one who had healed him. And the man believed and worshipped Jesus. But back in chapter 9, verse 40, we read that at that same time, some Pharisees who were with Jesus heard him say this and asked, what, are we blind too?

Jesus responded to them. He said, if you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin. But now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

[5 : 21] Very truly, I tell you. So you see how it just flows right from chapter 9 into chapter 10. So this is the scene. The blind man is there.

The man who was blind, he's now healed. Jesus is there. And the Pharisees are there. And there's been this exchange. And Jesus is going to continue to speak to the Pharisees.

And what does he say? Verse 1. He says, Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.

So as he's talking to these Pharisees, these religious leaders, Jesus launches into a sort of parable. Kind of a figure of speech, John tells us in verse 6.

Jesus used this figure of speech. Maybe not quite the same as some of Jesus' other parables, but maybe kind of like an analogy. And yeah, he uses the everyday common stuff of sheep farming to make his point.

[6 : 31] And so we're going to try and walk with Jesus through this and understand a little bit of the common, everyday stuff of sheep farming back in the first century. And then we'll try and see what Jesus' point is in all this.

What's he saying to them? So verse 1. Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.

Let's start with the sheep pen. Here's a picture of a sheep pen or a sheep fold. This is probably what Jesus had in mind.

Apparently it was common for them to make them out of stones like this. And there'd often, there of course would be an entrance for the sheep to get in. And sometimes it'd be a little fancier and it would have a gate.

And basically the idea was that you could put the sheep in there and keep them all in one place and it would provide shelter for them. And they would be safe, especially at night.

[7 : 42] So Jesus says, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.

The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. So basically Jesus is saying that there's a way to know who is the shepherd of the sheep and who is not.

Kind of like this, you know, if you were to see this as you're walking by your neighbor's house or driving by your neighbor's acreage, you're probably going to wonder what's going on there.

Could be that they locked themselves out. But in ancient times, they probably didn't have locks on the sheep gate. So you can know who the shepherd is versus who the thief is, whether or not they're using the gate.

If you see someone in the middle of the night dressed in black slipping over the wall, odds are pretty good that they're up to no good.

[8 : 45] Maybe they're slipping in to pull a little heist. Verse 3, Jesus says, the gatekeeper opens the gate for him, the shepherd, and the sheep listen to his voice.

He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And the emphasis here is on the shepherd. It's to him that the gatekeeper opens, not to anybody else.

So there's another way to recognize who the true shepherd is, whether or not the gatekeeper recognizes him and opens the gate for him. Jesus then gives a third way to know who the true shepherd of the sheep is in this same verse.

And the sheep listen to his voice. And probably the sense of listen there is not just that they hear it, but that they respond to it. The shepherd calls or gives his commands and they respond, they move, they come, or whatever it is that he has told them to do.

They do it. And this kind of seems to be the main thrust of Jesus' analogy. He's giving a whole bunch of different ways that we can tell the difference between the true shepherd of the sheep and one who is not the true shepherd of the sheep.

[10:05] Between the rightful owner of the flock or the imposter who's trying to make off with some of the plunder. So three different ways he's already given us and then there are a few more.

It says that he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. So a fourth way to know who the true shepherd is, he calls them by name.

There is a bond between shepherd and sheep that can be easily recognized. He calls them by name. There's a lot of significance in naming things.

Traditionally, you would name things by their unique characteristics. The things that set those things apart from other things. And so my grandparents' dog we called Skippy because from the time Skippy was a puppy, he kind of skipped along on the grass.

He ran in a funny way. The true shepherd has that kind of a bond with his sheep. He has spent enough time with them to know their unique characteristics.

[11:10] Enough to name them. And so that sheep with the floppy ear over there is called Floppy. And that one that likes to roll around is called Dusty. And he leads them out, says Jesus.

When the shepherd says, all right guys, let's go get you guys some food. And walks out the door, they get up and they go. They follow him. So Jesus says, you know the true shepherd from the thief because the true shepherd calls the sheep by their names.

And it's obvious that he knows them. They listen to his voice. They do what he says. There's that bond, that relationship. Verse 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. But they will never follow a stranger.

In fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice. Kind of along the same lines as what we've already heard, but kind of spelled out in more detail.

[12:17] The shepherd goes out the gate leading them and continues on in the field or wherever they're going and the sheep follow. Jesus says, it's because they recognize the shepherd's voice.

In contrast, the stranger, they won't follow the stranger. The stranger may call, but the sheep will run away from him.

They don't know him. They don't recognize his voice. Now, if this was all Jesus had said right here, we'd probably all be scratching our heads wondering, what is Jesus talking about?

In fact, that's exactly what the Pharisees were doing. In verse 6, right after this, John tells us, Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

What does all this have to do with anything? Why are you telling us about sheep and pens and shepherds and thieves? I bet you they were listening very carefully, like, is all of this some clever way of trying to insult us or say something against us?

[13:26] What does Jesus mean by all this? And we'll get to unpacking it in a minute, but first, Jesus has more to say. I'm going to read from verse 7 to verse 11.

Therefore, Jesus said again, Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them.

I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. shepherd.

Okay, so here in verse 7 and in verse 9 as Jesus continues, he tells them that he is the gate.

It's kind of a strange thing. We're not expecting maybe Jesus to say that. I am the gate for the sheep. He says it twice. We're going to come back to that in a couple weeks. But for now we want to focus more on this idea of the true shepherd versus the thieves and robbers.

[14:55] So we're just going to look at verse 8 and verse 10 of this section. In verse 8 Jesus says this, All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them.

That's quite a statement to make. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers. There's a fair bit of discussion here.

But most Christians agree that Jesus when he says all who came before me does not mean all is in every person. He's not referring to the faithful prophets and priests and kings, men like Abraham and Moses and Isaiah.

He's not calling them thieves and robbers. He's already talked about them in the pages that came before this as being some of the faithful men whom God sent. So all probably refers to the many who have arisen in the past and have taken up a role of leadership in Israel but were not chosen by

God or sent by God.

I'm guessing that Jesus is talking about false prophets, illegitimate priests, and wicked kings. prophets. Let's look for a moment back to what God said hundreds of years earlier through the prophet Ezekiel.

[16:17] Ezekiel chapter 34. This is Ezekiel writing, The word of the Lord came to me, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel.

Prophesy and say to them, this is what the sovereign Lord says, Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves.

Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool, and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock.

You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost.

You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd. And when they were scattered, they became food for all the wild animals.

[17:18] My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth and no one searched or looked for them. Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord.

As surely as I live, declares the sovereign Lord, shepherd, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been food for all the wild animals.

And because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock, therefore you shepherds hear the word of the Lord. This is what the sovereign Lord says.

I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves.

I will rescue my flock from their mouths and it will no longer be food for them. For this is what the sovereign Lord says. I myself will search for my sheep and look after them.

[18:21] As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness.

I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land.

I will tend them in a good pasture and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel.

I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the sovereign Lord. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays.

I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak. I will shepherd the flock with justice. Now there's a lot there, but I think it helps us understand what Jesus is talking about here.

[19:30] the leaders or the shepherds of Israel is who the Lord was speaking against through Ezekiel. Not the good kind of leaders like King David, but the wicked ones.

The ones who use their positions of leadership just for personal gain. The ones who took from the sheep so that they could live in comfort and luxury.

Think of men like Samuel's sons or King Ahab or men like the bunch of false prophets that Micah prophesied about. These are the people that I think Jesus has in mind and there were lots of them. When he says all who came before me are thieves and robbers, it's these kinds of people that he's talking about. But Jesus says the sheep have not listened to them.

All along, the true faith-filled people of God through the ages did not listen to those wicked men. They knew that they were corrupt. They knew that they were wicked leaders.

[20:40] They weren't led astray. Are you beginning to see where Jesus is going with this? And here's the clue. The sheep have not listened to them.

this man who had been blind has just had this investigation with the shepherds of Israel, the religious leaders, the Pharisees.

They've been trying to tell him how he should be thinking about Jesus and shepherd and guide him to certain conclusions about Jesus. But even though they're in positions of spiritual authority and leadership, the man who had been blind won't listen to them.

How utterly frustrating. In fact, the Pharisees even said to the man, how dare you lecture us? And instead, they come out the door and find him on his face worshipping Jesus.

and he just accepts every word that Jesus says. It's as though Jesus is saying, you want to know why this man and others will not listen to you, Pharisees?

[22 : 00] It's because you Pharisees are thieves and robbers. You are not the ones whom God has appointed to be the shepherd of his flock. And so they don't listen to you.

Verse 10, Jesus goes on. He says, the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. That's the only time he comes around, is for that purpose.

I have come that they, the sheep, may have life and have it to the full. I am the shepherd, the good one.

Jesus finally lays it on the table. You want to know the big difference between me and you, Pharisees? He doesn't say it that directly. It's all in the analogy. The thief, you guys come only to steal and kill and destroy.

But I have come so that they, people like him, the man who had been blind, might have life and have it to the full. You Pharisees are in it for yourselves.

[23 : 13] And when you come around, it's to take from my people. It results in nothing but loss and damage and hurt and destruction for my people.

But I have come so that they might have life and have it to the full. And Jesus flat out tells them, I am the shepherd, the true shepherd, the good shepherd.

shepherd. This, I think, is the meaning of this parable of Jesus. There are thieves, robbers, strangers, imposters.

That's the Pharisees. That's all the corrupt, wicked leaders of Israel over the ages. And then there is the true shepherd. That's Jesus, the one sent from heaven by God to shepherd his people.

people. There's the Pharisees who burden the people and find religious ways to take from the people who don't give a rip about the weak or the sick or the injured.

[24 : 21] And then there's Jesus who loves the sheep dearly. He has come to shepherd the flock, to search for the lost, to bring back the strays, to bind up the injured and strengthen the weak.

And lead them into good pasture. We'll get to next week, what Jesus means when he says, I am the good shepherd. But for this morning, we're focusing on this truth that Jesus is the true shepherd.

He's not like the Pharisees, who were thieves and robbers. He is the one to whom the sheep really belong. The one whom God has appointed and sent to shepherd his flock.

And unlike the thieves and robbers, as we see in this verse, Jesus, the true shepherd, actually cares for the sheep. He loves them.

What a contrast we see here. Jesus' disciples didn't have a whole lot of compassion for the man who had been blind. They were busy arguing about who sinned that he got that way.

[25 : 27] The Pharisees had nothing but pride and contempt and insults for that man, man. Especially when he wouldn't cooperate with them and falsify his own miraculous healing.

But Jesus truly loved that man. Not only did he heal him, but he revealed himself to him. He went out and found him and brought him into the flock.

Jesus says, I have come so that people like him, my sheep, may have life. And not just any old life, not just a bare minimum disappointment filled kind of life, but life to the full, says Jesus.

Life the way it was meant to be, long ago in the beginning when God created us for relationship with him kind of life. The prosperity gospel has abused this verse greatly.

So I do want to say a couple words about that here. Jesus is not saying that he came to make us all rich with earthly riches. That's not what life to the full means.

[26 : 37] Most of us know that. It is what some people in our world think of when they hear this verse, but not God. However, at the same time, we shouldn't try to eliminate all possibility of material blessing from this promise that Jesus gave.

The life that Jesus has come to give us may include some of that here and now. What did Paul tell Timothy? 1 Timothy chapter 6 verse 17.

He said, command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant, nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

You hear that? He says, command them, those who are rich, to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

In this way, those who are rich will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

[27 : 53] Notice that Paul makes it very clear that worldly wealth, at least in part, is intended to meet our needs, even to increase our joy, so long as we receive it as a gift from God that it is.

But part of the abundant life, the full life, also includes being generous with whatever he has given us and willing to share. So life to the full is not just about having whatever we want or having lots of money or stuff.

Sometimes God will provide us with that out of his generosity and goodness and for our enjoyment. But maybe I could say it this way, part of the fullest life that God gives is learning to enjoy whatever he gives us, whether spiritual or material, as a gift from him and being willing to joyfully share and give away to meet the needs of others and to bless others.

So the thief cares only about himself. He doesn't care what it costs you. He's only there to take from you. Jesus says, it's the opposite with me.

I have come to give to you the life that you need and even more. the fullest possible expression of life that you could ever have.

[29 : 18] A life that's deep, rich, vibrant, and full. That's the difference between the true shepherd and the phonies, the imposters, the con men, and the thieves.

Well, how do we apply all this to ourselves today? There's so much in these ten verses. We could find some helpful wisdom about how to identify dangerous spiritual imposters in churches and in ministries today.

We could focus in on that very special relationship between shepherd and sheep and talk about how we who believe in Jesus must listen to our shepherd and follow his voice and obey his commands.

we could talk about how Jesus, our true shepherd, knows us intimately and deeply exactly what's going on in our hearts and thoughts and lives.

But here's what's on my heart this morning, maybe a little bit of a different angle. I don't know if any of you watched the leadership debate on Thursday night. I did. I watched the major party leaders trade barbs and take shots at each other.

[30 : 37] all the while trying to convince me why I should vote for their political party. And I couldn't help but wonder, is this the best that we've got to lead our nation in the coming weeks, years?

They're all promising to be that ideal shepherd, leader, prime minister that Canada needs right now. And don't vote for those other guys because they won't keep any of their promises.

They've all shown that they're just in it for themselves. They're all saying that about each other. But I think we see through that, don't we? And we know that truly they're all in it for themselves.

They're all playing the political game, trying to say enough of what people want to hear in order to secure their vote and hopefully get to that position of greatest prominence and influence in the nation.

I didn't get a sense from any of them that they really, truly cared about the Canadian people or really understood what is best for the people that they're seeking to govern and lead.

[31 : 50] This one over here would take half of my hard-earned money if I was super rich and then vilify me as a greedy billionaire. That one over there thinks it's good for women to continue to have the choice to kill me if I'm a seven-month-old baby in my mother's womb.

Most of them think that I should lose my job if I'm employed by the irredeemable oil extraction industry. Almost all of them seem to believe that the greatest threat to mankind is climate change caused by human pollution.

I mean, seriously, is this the best that we've got to lead our nation? I don't know about you, but a deep longing was stirred up in my soul from watching this for the true shepherd, the one who truly cares about me and knows what's going on in my life, the one who only ever speaks the truth and always keeps his promises 100%, the one to whom I belong, the one who will shepherd his flock with justice and provide for their every need.

God's flock, the one who gives life to the full, something that can never be taken away. Jesus is the true shepherd of God's flock, God's people, and the good news is this, he is not done shepherding his flock yet.

He's coming back, and when he does, he will lead, he will shepherd, and he will govern like the Pharisees never could, like all of those people on Thursday night never can and never will, and his

kingdom will last forever.

[33 : 36] Do you know the true shepherd, the one who deeply cares for you? Are you one of his sheep? If you are, you have this hope and this confidence that Jesus gives, and if not, then the best you've got are the men and women you saw on Thursday night.

I'll have Jesus as my shepherd. Will you? Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you.

Thank you again for sending Jesus. Thank you that you love us, that you know us, thank you that you have come to lead us, to guide us, to help us, to heal us, and all those wonderful things that we heard.

We long for that day when Jesus will return. Help us to have our hope and our confidence and our focus on that, even as we go to the ballot boxes this coming weekend.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.