

The Sheep, the Door, and the Shepherd

How Jesus Leads His People to Life in God

John 10:1-21

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Introduction

The church is supposed to be a safe place. But stories of abuse and toxic cultures can crush our hope. This is nothing new to God's people. Israel was once plagued by a corrupt temple system. It was filled with hypocrites, and there were plenty of prideful and power-hungry leaders. The Jews were oppressed from the inside. But when Jesus entered the scene, he came with genuine care, kindness, and compassion for God's people.

Context

Our passage today is John 10:1-21. Jesus had just healed a man born blind, and he said this astounding statement: "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." The Pharisees heard this and were offended, and they asked Jesus if he was talking about them being blind. Jesus told them that because of their pride, they were unable to see.

Paintings

As proof and evidence of the Pharisees being blind, Jesus paints three pictures to illustrate who he is and what he came to do. This is a test to show who can truly see Jesus as the Son of God. They are three separate yet related pictures. My goal is to help you see, interpret, and understand these three paintings, leading you to worship.



1. The Sheep

“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. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the **sheep**. To him the gatekeeper opens. The **sheep** hear his voice, and he calls his own **sheep** by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the **sheep** follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. (John 10:1-6)

Our first painting is a picture of sheep. Jesus illustrates a scene that would have been familiar to the Pharisees. Sheep were normally placed outside in an area with a gate. Several families would keep their sheep together, and the shepherd would come to call them out to pasture. Look at how Jesus describes the sheep:

The sheep **hear** his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep **follow** him, for they **know** his voice. (John 10:3-4)

The sheep hear, follow, and know God. This is a picture of true believers. True believers obey and belong to God. They are individuals. They each have a name. And even before they are called, they already belong to God. If you belong to God, you will hear, and you will follow.

Whoever is of God **hears** the words of God. The reason why you do not **hear** them is that you are not of God. (John 8:47)

Application

Do you hear God? Do you know the voice of Jesus? True Christians will confirm and can have confidence in their salvation because they hear, follow, and know Jesus. This is a plea that you would read your Bible. It is not enough to just come to church. Learn the voice of Jesus as you study the Bible for yourself. You will be able to discern and distinguish his voice no matter who is preaching, no matter what you are reading, no matter what the world is telling you.

Our first painting is a picture of the sheep who hear, follow, and know God. The Pharisees are unable to understand this figure of speech, and Jesus paints them another picture.



2. The Door

So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the **door**. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. (John 10:7-10)

Our second painting is a picture of a door. Jesus riffs off of his first illustration, now describing himself as a door. Look at what the door does:

I am the door. If anyone **enters** by me, he will be **saved** and will go in and out and find **pasture**. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

I came that they may have **life** and have it **abundantly**. (John 10:9-10)

The door provides an entryway where sheep can go in. And when sheep go through the door, they are saved. They are safe. They find pasture. Jesus specifically says that he provides his sheep an abundant life. He explicitly says this in John 14:6:

Jesus said to him, “I am the **way**, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except **through** me. (John 14:6)

In our passage, Jesus promises an abundant life. It means superabundant in quantity and superior in quality. In other words: you will be full, you will be satisfied. Look at how Jesus fulfills these Old Testament passages, specifically speaking of leading to satisfying pasture:

He makes me lie down in green **pastures**, He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. (Psalm 23:2-3)

I will feed them with good **pasture**, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich **pasture** they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. (Ezekiel 34:14)

Application

Is your soul satisfied? Have you found your life in Christ? We look for safety and life in many things. We think that good grades and a good college will give us everything we want. We think that being rich or being an influencer will give us security and satisfaction. We think that a certain relationship or a special someone will make us feel alive. You will find all of these things to be dead ends and empty idols. Today, Jesus offers you soul-satisfying, abundant life.

Our second painting is a picture of Jesus as the door to safety and satisfaction.



3. The Shepherd

Jesus continues by giving us a third and final painting, this time of a Shepherd. He says:

I am the good **shepherd**. The good **shepherd** lays down his life for the sheep. 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. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good **shepherd**. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 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**. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 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.” (John 10:11–18)

Our third and final painting is a picture of a shepherd. Jesus takes one more opportunity to illustrate his identity, and he shows himself as a shepherd. Specifically, he calls himself the good shepherd. Look at what the good shepherd does:

I am the good shepherd. **The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep**. 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. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the **Father** knows me and I know the **Father**; and **I lay down my life for the sheep**. 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. For this reason the Father loves me, because **I lay down my life** that I may take it up again. 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**.” (John 10:11–18)

This passage is rich with meaning, and we can notice several things. The shepherd was a well-known way to speak of the Lord, God, and Jesus is direct about his divinity and relation to God as his Father. We see that there are other sheep who will be brought and gathered together under one

shepherd. Since Jesus was speaking to the Jews, this means that he will now bring Gentiles – others and outcasts – into the family of God. And the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Jesus is pointing towards his crucifixion and resurrection. He will voluntarily give up his life, and his self-sacrifice provides salvation for the sheep that he will gather.

The **Lord** is my **Shepherd**; I shall not want. (Psalm 23:1)

The Lord GOD, who **gathers** the outcasts of Israel, declares, “I will **gather** yet others to him besides those already **gathered**.” (Isaiah 56:8)

When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and **gave** up his spirit. (John 19:30)

Jesus is the shepherd who gathers the flock and gives his life for them.

Application

Do you live like Christ gave his life for the church? Do you love others as true brothers and sisters in Christ? God has gathered all types of people to be a part of his family. As the church, we gather in community to live life together in God. We’re more than friends. We’re family. This doesn’t mean that we’ll always get along, but we will work on our relationships. We rejoice with those who rejoice, and we weep with those who weep. We support each other, we strengthen each other. We forgive each other. The blood of Jesus has bought us and brings us together.

Our third and final painting is a picture of Jesus as the shepherd who gathers the flock and gives his life for them.

Thieves and Robbers

There’s one more group of people we need to talk about from Jesus’ stories. Jesus shows us thieves and robbers. He says that they deceive, that they are strangers, they come to steal and kill and destroy. They are hired hands who don’t really love the sheep. With cutting clarity, Jesus is calling out the Pharisees. They were supposed to be the shepherds of Israel. They were to give God’s people safety and security. Instead, they preyed upon them, scattering them:

“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? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. 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. So they were **scattered**, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. 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. (Ezekiel 34:2-6)

The True and Better Shepherd

David, who grew up as a shepherd boy, who wrote Psalm 23, who became the King, was supposed to fill the role of being the real shepherd of Israel, uniting God's people and leading them to obey the Lord. But even he failed at fulfilling what was promised. Jesus comes and claims the title of the true and better shepherd of Israel.



Big Idea

Jesus paints a picture of the sheep who hear, follow, and know God. He paints a picture of himself as the door to safety and satisfaction. And he paints a picture of himself as the good shepherd who gathers the flock and gives his life for them. Unlike the Pharisees, who feasted upon and scattered the sheep to their death, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who leads his sheep to life in God. This is our main truth and our big idea: Jesus is the Good Shepherd who leads his sheep to life in God.

Gospel

The greatest way that Jesus leads his sheep to life in God is by the cross. It is here where our sins were laid down on Christ. And as the Good Shepherd, he laid down his life for his wandering, wayward sheep:

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6)

God gave his Son to die for the sins of his sheep. He rose from the grave, conquering sin and death. If you believe this, you can be saved and have eternal life with God.

Objection

This now brings up an objection, and it is very specific to a season of youth: When trials test your faith, is Jesus a Good Shepherd? With college coming, your faith will be challenged. You might have already experienced disappointment – maybe you did not get into the college you had hoped for. This discouragement gives you doubt about God’s goodness. Besides the pandemic and persecution, college brings changes. You become separated from your best friends. You see Christians fall away. Your family feels distant. Your church feels different. While college is an exciting time, you will also experience pain, fear, and hardship. Trials test your faith. Does God really love me? Is Jesus really a Good Shepherd?

Response

Paul has an answer to this objection in Romans 8:

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:32)

Paul argues that since God gave his own Son, you can count on him to take care of you. He goes on to say that Christ intercedes for you, and nothing will be able to separate you from his love. God's sovereign plan for his sheep takes into account their suffering. Even if you die, you can be certain that you are his. You are more than a conqueror. You have eternal life and everlasting victory in Jesus.

As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:36-39)

Applications

My faith was challenged in college. I was facing difficulties within my family. I was getting out of wrong relationships. I was insecure about my identity. I was at a crossroads. But God guided and grew me. My faith was strengthened. The thing is, even after college, God continues to bring trials into my life. But he remains faithful. He has not left me. He leads me. He continues to restore my soul. If you are his sheep, you can be sure that he will do the same for you.

When trials test your faith and you doubt the Good Shepherd, I encourage you to hold fast to the Word of life. Remember that you are not your own. You belong to Christ. Do everything you can to reach out to your friends, seek out Christian community, do not forsake your family, commit to the church. Trust that God uses our distress as discipline, to sanctify our souls, to guide and grow us, for our good and for his glory. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who leads his sheep to life in God.

Conclusion

Our passage concludes with the Pharisees being divided over Jesus' words.

There was again a division among the Jews because of these words.

Many of them said, "He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?"

Others said, "These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?" (John 10:19-21)

If you truly listened and heard his words today, if Jesus has opened your eyes to see him for who he really is, you know that he is not demon-possessed. He is not insane. You listen to him because no one ever spoke like this man. He has the words of eternal life. You can find comfort in the fact that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who leads his sheep to life in God. And not only is Jesus our shepherd, but he is the Lamb of God. This picture of Jesus as both shepherd and sheep is how all will see and worship him in Heaven:

For the **Lamb** in the midst of the throne will be their **shepherd**, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. (Revelation 7:17)

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who leads his sheep to life in God. The church is supposed to be a safe place. But the church is a safe place not because of her human leaders, but because of Jesus. He comes with genuine care, kindness, and compassion for God's people. He gives us hope and will lead his sheep to Heaven. Green pastures, springs of living water, and a Good Shepherd at the center.



Our Good Shepherd

Father, thank you for your son
Who serves as our Good Shepherd.
He leads us by still waters,
He leads us into pasture.

He lays his life down for his sheep –
He gives it up to gather
The flock of God. The Lamb of God
Has made us sons and daughters.

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