

THE SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP

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By the Book™ A Chapter by
Chapter Bible Study Series
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Let's Begin

The Lord's love and care for people is described by many figures of speech. One of the most meaningful is the figure of a shepherd. Though hardly familiar to most of us in the 21st century, a shepherd was perhaps the most familiar figure in the land of the Bible. Jesus knew the intimate relationship between the shepherd and the sheep. Indeed, He is the one who said: "I am the good shepherd" (v. 11).

Chapter ten is a gold mine of truth about God and His people, spoken in terms of a shepherd and the sheep for which he cares. As we explore this chapter together, note the following outline as our guide:

- I. The Supervision of the Shepherd (vv. 1-16)**
- II. The Sacrifice of the Shepherd (vv. 17-26)**
- III. The Security of the Sheep (vv. 27-42)**

I. The Supervision of the Shepherd (vv. 1-16)

Like rays of light shooting through a brilliant diamond, every disclosure of Jesus reveals another facet of His radiant beauty. And nothing is more naturally beautiful than the relationship between shepherd and sheep.

Let's focus first on the *promised* shepherd. In the opening parable of John 10, Jesus identifies Himself with an Old Testament picture where God is revealed and on numerous occasions is compared to a shepherd (cp. Ezekiel 34:1-25; Psalm 23:1; Isaiah 40:11). His people are compared to "the sheep of His pasture," showing God is the One who provides for them. Furthermore, when Jesus calls Himself the shepherd, He is claiming to be the Jehovah of the Old Testament.

All of the other characters who were noted as shepherds actually pointed to Jesus. Abel was a dying shepherd (Genesis 4:2). Jacob was a providing shepherd (Genesis 30:31). Joseph was a sustaining shepherd, hated by his own people (Genesis 37:2). Moses was a leading shepherd, guiding the people to freedom and victory (Exodus 2:16-17). David was a sacrificing shepherd, jeopardizing his life for the sheep (1 Samuel 17:34-36; Psalm 23). All of these shepherds were images of the Good Shepherd, who is Jesus giving His life for the sheep (v. 11).

His life became the liberating force of God's people. Jesus said as the shepherd goes forth, "the sheep follow him: for they know his voice" (v. 4). Because they follow Him, He "leadeth them out" (v. 3). We see Jesus doing this throughout His ministry. He led Zacchaeus down from the tree and Lazarus out of the tomb, giving to them both new life and new liberation.

Second, Jesus is also the *providing* Shepherd. A good shepherd will ever provide for the needs of his sheep. Jesus is the Good Shepherd (v. 11). Therefore, He provides salvation. He says, "I am the door" (v. 9).

Interestingly, the shepherd would literally lay himself at the door entrance when the sheep were pinned. Jesus is the door—that is, the

Reflection Connection

Why is a shepherd a suitable image by which to liken the way God relates to His people? Discuss the obvious similarities. Are there any obvious differences? Explain.



only way to be saved and go to Heaven. Later He would tell the people “*I am the way*” (14:6). By this He surely implied there is no other way. Without Him, there is no going.

Sheep are easily lost, generally speaking, because they possess a poor sense of direction. The prophet Isaiah gave specific insight here: “*We all like sheep have gone astray*” (Isaiah 53:6). Jesus is the shepherd who seeks out the lost sheep (cp. Luke 15:4-7).

One might rightly ask what the purpose of the search is. Only one answer presents itself: Jesus wants to give abundant salvation: “*I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly*” (v. 10).

With this abundant life comes abundant freedom. Jesus says the sheep shall “*go in and out, and find pasture*” (v. 9). This is a perfect freedom, a real freedom in Jesus Christ. This freedom is freedom to be the person you want to be, freedom to enjoy the good things of life, freedom to live for Jesus! Our needs—all of them—material, spiritual, and eternal are met in Jesus Christ.

Third, Jesus is the *protecting* shepherd. As we noted above, sheep have a poor sense of direction. Consequently, they are often prone to wander. This makes it easy to fall into danger quickly.

In addition, their docile nature makes them easy prey for the enemy. Unhappily, we are little different in this respect. Our enemy, Satan seeks constantly to take advantage of our tendency to stray away from God’s watch care.

Nor is it helpful when “*hirelings*” watch over us (v. 13). Hirelings were paid workers who kept sheep only as a means for making money. A hireling had no interest in sheep, only what sheep could bring him—a paycheck! If you are lost, you are watched over by a hireling who has no real interest in you.

Finally, Jesus is the *personal* shepherd. David knew this: “*the Lord is my shepherd*” (Psalm 23:1). Personal shepherds know their sheep (v. 27). Interestingly, Jesus actually was a sheep! (cp. 1:29; Isaiah 53:7). How much more, then, can the shepherd understand us, having become one of us! There is no experience or temptation that could ever come our way that Jesus does not fully and completely understand.

Accordingly, He calls us by name, leading us and going before us. We follow Him willingly for we know His voice and know His good intentions for us. Jesus oversees His people just, as the shepherd supervises the sheep.

*With this
abundant life
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freedom.*

II. The Sacrifice of the Shepherd (vv. 17-26)

No truth in the New Testament is more significant for Christians than this passage. It expresses the magnificent outstretched arm of God’s love to those who are His. Jesus says: “*Therefore, doth my Father love me, because I lay down*

Reflection Connection

God likens His people to sheep. Do you think this image is complimentary? Why or why not?



Reflection Connection

How central is the sacrificial aspect of love to our understanding of God's love for us? Is sacrificial love the type of love Christians are to have for others? Explain. In what ways might Christians show sacrificial love to other Christians? To non-Christians?

my life, that I might take it again" (v. 17). Jesus' self-sacrificing love for the sheep does not begin at Calvary. This love was in God's heart before. In fact, this love was before creation!

Additionally, the loving sacrifice Jesus offered was birthed in the cradle of voluntary submission. No one took Jesus' life. How could they? He was God in human flesh! All power belonged to Him. Instead, Jesus clearly says, "*I lay it down of myself*" (v. 18). Substituting Himself in our place was His free decision. Aren't you glad He did?

Jesus' words about giving His life for the sheep provoked a debate among the Jews: "*There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings*" (v. 19). Walking on to Solomon's porch (v. 23), the Jews followed Him, inquiring if He were the Christ (v. 24). However, their question was moot; to ask such was to admit they were not willing to follow Him, not being sheep (vv. 25-26).

The Good Shepherd is the preserving shepherd. He not only saves the sheep,

III. The Security of the Sheep (vv. 27-30)

He also secures them eternally. Jesus says He gives His sheep eternal life and they shall never perish.

Believer's eternal security is one of the debated truths of the Bible. Some feel it is possible to be saved today but lost tomorrow; that while to be saved takes faith, to stay saved takes works.

In these verses, we find the strongest evidence imaginable to teach us that eternal security is real. That is, if one is genuinely saved in time, one is most certainly saved in eternity. Those who belong to Jesus Christ are safe and secure forever! What an awesome, loving God we serve!

Let us examine three compelling proofs Jesus offers us that teach eternal security.

First, the sheep are in the possession of the "shepherd" (v. 27). Jesus explicitly calls them "*my sheep*." He sought them, bought them, and then, saved them (cp. Luke 15:6). We belong fully to Jesus Christ if we believe on Him. He purchased us with His blood (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 6:19). Because of this, we have been given to Him by the Father (John 17:6, 11-12).

Jesus furthermore refers to us as "*sheep*." People are likened to other animals in Scripture: "*dogs*" (Revelation 22:15); "*pigs*" (2 Peter 2:22); "*goats*" (Matthew 25:32-33). However, when people are likened to sheep, they are the Lord's people.

Being His sheep, we are known by Him (cp. 2 Timothy 2:19; 1 Corinthians 8:3; Galatians 4:9). He prays for us (John 17). If Jesus is praying for us, how could we ever fall?

Thus, knowing the shepherd and being known by Him, we do not fail to follow Him: "*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me*" (v. 27). If we follow Him, we inevitably come to Heaven's gates.

Another compelling proof which affirms our eternal security in Jesus is the power of the Shepherd. Sheep have no power within themselves. By nature, sheep are

Reflection Connection

Many Christians deny that Jesus affirmed the eternal security of the believer in vv. 27-30. What are some of the concerns people who deny the security of the believer raise? Ask your pastor to lead a discussion on this very important issue.



Reflection Connection

If sheep are weak and helpless by nature, what does that say about us who are likened to sheep? How can one be sure he or she is following the right shepherd and not an imposter? Explain.

weak and helpless. Does this sound like your life? It surely does mine. I am weak and helpless apart from the Shepherd. Though when we are saved, we receive a new nature, it still is an experiential fact that we are still in the flesh. Paul says it like this: *"We have this treasure in earthen vessels"* (2 Corinthians 4:7). We desire to do the right but we many times fail and do wrong (cp. Romans 7:1).

Because we are weak, if it were left up to us and our own power, we could, in fact, be lost again. It is at this junction that the grace of God and His love for us becomes so comforting. While we do not have the power to remain in Christ, He has the power to keep the sheep (cp. Luke 15:5; Isaiah 9:6; 2 Timothy 1:12). We are in His hand: *"I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand"* (v. 28). Think of it! We remain in His hand not because we hold firm onto Him but because He holds firm onto us!

The third compelling proof Jesus offers that assures us of our eternal security in Him is the purpose of the Shepherd. The Shepherd's purpose is clear: He desires to give us eternal life: "I give unto them eternal life" (v. 28). This is not probationary life; this is not temporal life; this is not partial life; this is not incomplete life; this is not a life of "if."

Instead, Jesus says, "I give them eternal life." A simple question will here suffice: How long is eternal? When God does something, He does it permanently (cp. Ecclesiastes 3: 14).

The greatest assurance we possess as believers comes from Jesus Himself. He gives eternal life. We do not have to listen to our fears, our failures, or our frustrations; we do not have to worry about it or work to keep it. Instead, we listen to Jesus: *"I give unto them eternal life."* That is enough!

We now move into the closing moments of this scene when the religious leaders begin scheming to rid themselves of the Shepherd. Jesus' crowning words to assure the sheep that they possess eternal life, is found in His stirring affirmation: *"I and the Father are one"* (v. 30). This proved a provocative affirmation. The people standing around picked up the closest rock they could find, John tells us (v. 31). The conversation that follows reveals the hearts of the religious leaders who wanted Jesus dead.

Though Jesus knew the answer, He inquired from the self-righteous Jews precisely which works deserved the consequent stoning they wanted to give Him (v. 32). It was not works at all. Rather, it was the affirmation Jesus made about His relationship with Jehovah God: *"I and the Father are one"* (v. 30).

Critics of the Bible have made it sound like Jesus never affirmed exactly who He was. In addition, some cult groups deny the deity of Jesus. Yet here, like no where else in the New Testament, Jesus clearly equates His identity with the identity of the God revealed to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The greatest assurance we possess comes from Jesus Himself.

Reflection Connection

What does it mean to commit blasphemy? Is it possible today? Were the Jewish leaders right about Jesus? How did He not commit the crime?



Nor was the Lord Jesus just saying that His purpose and God's purpose were the same. Any prophet of the Old Testament could claim such. Even you and I can, to a degree, claim that our purpose is God's purpose. Jesus stated much, much more: "*because that thou [Jesus], being a man, makest thyself God*" (v. 33).

The Jews standing there listening to Jesus knew precisely to what He referred. He was making Himself God! That is why they picked up the rocks; Jesus blasphemed! (v. 36) That is, He blasphemed only if what He said was not true. If it was not true, Jesus broke the Law of Moses.

We know, however, that it was true. Jesus was God in human flesh—God with skin attached! Jesus continued the conversation for a while longer but then moved forward and even beyond the Jordan River (v. 40). Though all the while the Jewish leaders were trying to lay hands on Him He once again escaped their hands (v. 39). His time had not yet come. Their scheme to take Him would have to wait a bit longer.

Golden Greek Nugget

In John 10:28, Jesus assures Christians that He gives them "eternal life" and that they will "never perish." The eternal life that Jesus gives is clearly a *present* possession. It is as if Jesus was saying, "You do not begin eternal life when you go to Heaven; you have eternal life now once you believe." Furthermore, when the Lord said that "they shall never perish" He used what's called in Greek syntax an "emphatic double negative with second aorist middle." That translates as if Jesus said "they shall never, no never ever perish." What assurance the Shepherd of the sheep gives His flock!

Wrap Up

One of the most beautiful images in all God's Word is the people of God likened to sheep and Jesus as their Good Shepherd. He provides; He cares; He sustains; He loves; He protects; He preserves. Nothing can get between the Shepherd and the Sheep.

The question every person must sooner or later answer is this: Do I belong to Jesus' flock? Do you? Would you like to? Turn to Jesus now. He promises He will in no way cast you out. Do it today.

