

## Jesus the Good Shepherd

John 10:1-21

If this is your first time with us we have been going through the book of John and the theme is 'Hi I am Jesus'. Mostly we here at OBC like to work our way systematically through whole books of the Bible. With the occasional break here and there.

Sometimes, if we aren't careful we can treat the Bible like Swiss cheese, we can leave a whole lot of holes in it. The temptation is when we read a passage of Scripture thinking, "Whoa, that's difficult to understand, or that's difficult to accept or that is a bit too counter cultural," so the temptation is to skip over it and go to another passage that is much easier to deal with," that is not helpful, nor healthy.

So we have been tackling the Gospel of John and today we're up to chapter 10. We're going to read the first 21 verses together.

In this passage Jesus describes himself using the image that he is the Good Shepherd. Actually there are two images he uses in this passage. He says, "I am the Good Shepherd and I am the gate/door. I'm the gate to get to God and I'm the Good Shepherd who looks after your soul."

Now, if you have not been here through this series, I'd encourage you to jump online. You can go back and listen to or read the previous sermons in this series.

So let's read John 10, starting in verse 1—if you don't have a Bible this will be on the screen.

**10** *"I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber! <sup>2</sup>But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup>The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup>After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup>They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know his voice."*

### **The true Shepherd**

So Jesus is using a metaphor, or image, to try to differentiate His ministry from

a good shepherd to bad shepherd. Now despite the fact that NZ has something like 26 million sheep, I am guessing that most of us here don't necessarily know the in's and outs of being a shepherd, maybe apart of Mike with his 6 sheep, which is the new average number of sheep each kiwi has. Mike correct me if I am wrong.

Back in Jesus day a shepherd's flock was not that big, maybe 20 sheep or so, and occasionally multiple flocks would come together in a sheepfold or a pen. The shepherds would bring their sheep together and they would be surrounded by high, most likely rock walls to keep predators out and there would be a gate by which the shepherds would enter. So Jesus is using this image and He says, **"The true shepherds are the ones who go through the gate."**

If you driving along and were to see somebody climbing through a window of a house you would probably conclude that they were up to no good because there would be no need to climb through a window if they belonged there. They would use the door. And Jesus says, "If you see a shepherd scaling over the walls then chance are they do not belong there, that they are up to no good."

And He says, "The way in which the sheep know the shepherd is that they know his voice. They are not going to follow the voice of a stranger." So, the first question we ask is – **do we know the voice of the shepherd?**

I came across a story of a traveller who was over in the Middle East who noticed that there were some shepherds who had brought some sheep down to a watering hole. And apparently one of the shepherds stood up said, "Follow me," to the sheep. And the shepherd just turned around and took off walking. It appeared he didn't even bother to count the sheep or to see if all of them had followed him. But all of the sheep that were in his flock followed him. The traveller was impressed by this and was chatting to the two shepherds who were remaining. He asked, "If I were to try that, would the sheep follow me" And he said, "No. My sheep only follow my voice." He asked, "Is there a time when sheep will follow the voice of a stranger?" And he said, "Oh yeah. If a sheep gets sick it will follow anyone."

The question that I want you to consider this morning is 'do you recognize the voice of your shepherd'?

We have a whole host of voices speaking to us, some of them gentle, some of them strong, television, radio, online, friends, parents, teachers, pastors. We read/hear a lot of things, many that are meant to be in the name of Jesus but are not necessarily of Jesus. Do you know the difference? How do you know the difference?

When you hear some new teaching, what do you do? Would you ask, “Does that sound like the voice of Jesus?” Yes following Jesus does require trust, and yes we may not understand it all, but we do need to be wise and discern. That is why we stress to read and understand the bible, not because of some religious habit, but to be familiar with Scripture, with God’s word, so that you when you hear something, you know, “That is the voice of the shepherd,” or, not.

The disciples are not picking up on this image very well, so Jesus goes a little deeper.

*<sup>6</sup>Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn’t understand what he meant, <sup>7</sup>so he explained it to them: “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup>Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. <sup>10</sup>The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.*

So, Jesus is giving them a little bit of a forewarning of what He’s going to teach in John 14 where Jesus says, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Nobody comes to God the Father except through Me.” This is a wildly unpopular idea today. There are plenty who say, “That doesn’t sound right. That doesn’t sound fair. How could Jesus be the only way? We live in a culture that loves our options. Everyone has their own truth, so don’t tell me that there is only one way.”

If it wasn’t for the fact that I believe that Jesus is the Son of God and therefore can only speak truth, I would agree that it is an incredibly arrogant statement. So ‘Jesus is the gate’, and Jesus warns us there is a thief, who is quite capable of jumping a fence, or climbing in a window, who comes to steal, and kill, and destroy. The thief will twist and confuse our thinking.

An example of twisted thinking is how many have misunderstood Verse 10. When Jesus says, *“My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life”* or as other translations say *“I’ve come to give you life and to give it abundantly.”* We have to understand what this means. Abundant life does not mean driving a Beamer and living in a mansion. There are some who will teach that, “if you have an expensive car, and nice clothes, and if you’re living in a flash house then, obviously, that’s a sign of God’s blessing in your life.”

Now, please hear me. There is nothing inherently wrong with those things. In fact, most of us here came to church in a nice car today. Relax you don’t need to give it away. There is nothing inherently wrong with those things – it’s just not what Jesus meant by rich and satisfying or abundant life. Don’t cheapen Jesus’ blessing that way.

When Jesus says, “I’ve come to give you abundant life,” He’s talking about something way better. He’s saying, “I’ve come to be your Shepherd. I’ve come to offer you life, a fulfilling life. I’ve come to offer you protection, and provision, and guidance.” Let’s read on.

*11“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. 12A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don’t belong to him and he isn’t their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. 13The hired hand runs away because he’s working only for the money and doesn’t really care about the sheep. 14“I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, 15just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep.*

### **The good shepherd**

Even though most of us may not have any experience in caring for sheep, chances are you have seen enough episodes of country calendar to know the relationship between a shepherd and their sheep. If I were to say, “I want to shepherd you,” you would have an idea of what I’m talking about. Hopefully you would know that I’m not going to take you out to a paddock and let you feed on grass nor flip you over on your back and shear you.

When we are talking about shepherding, we are talking about somebody who looks after your soul, somebody who cares for you, somebody who may say

tough things, to encourage you in the right direction—those are functions of shepherding.

Here's the thing about a shepherd. A shepherd is not somebody who says to their sheep, "If you take care of that, I'll take care of the rest of it." No, a shepherd says, "I will take care of all of it." A shepherd and sheep do not enter into negotiations. The sheep do not say, "Well, I'll follow you in this, I won't follow you in that." The sheep doesn't realise it but it is completely dependent upon the shepherd and the shepherd says, "Relax, I have it. I'll take care of everything." A shepherd says, "It will be okay. I'm going to protect you. I'm going to provide for you. I'm going to offer you provision, and guidance, and care." How many of us actually see God that way? Or, do we see Him as a Task Master or a Judge. Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd."

Here's another question: **What does it mean for us to be sheep?** Here are a couple of character qualities of sheep I want to give to you.

**Sheep are Stupid.** Whenever the Bible uses this analogy, whenever it calls us sheep - you do understand that that is not a compliment. It is not meant to be a flattering thing. When the Bible calls us sheep it's actually a sobering criticism, or at least a reality check. Sheep are not that smart!

Have you ever noticed that there is no such thing as a wild sheep? Any of you ever been out in rural NZ and been scared about coming across an out of control wild sheep? Probably not. There are wild horses, there are wild pigs, there are wild deer, even wild cats—but there's no such thing as a wild sheep. Why you ask, because a wild sheep don't survive. They are not a predator. It doesn't have any way to defend itself. They don't go wild, they just get lost. They wander around disoriented! If you let almost any animal go out into the wild, it will either make its way home, or it will go completely wild and be self-sufficient. Not a sheep. Sheep just baaa's and dies. That's all that they do.

So the bible compares us to sheep, lost sheep, disoriented sheep, and at a spiritual level it sadly seems to be true. Instead of worshiping God as creator, we worship His creation: We worship sex; we worship material stuff; we worship work; we worship pleasure. It's like the enemy has come in to steal, and to kill, and to destroy and gets us to think that evil is good and good is evil.

Here's the second thing: **Sheep are dependent.** That's what the whole shepherd/sheep relationship is. The sheep are utterly dependent upon the shepherd. The phrase, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want" means that

He must become everything to me. We will get to this in chapter 15 of John when Jesus talks about being the vine. Jesus says, “Without Me you can do nothing.” Without the care of the shepherd we don’t stand a chance.

We all love Psalm 23, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want,” but we suppress the truth of it, because the truth of it is that we have to let go, we have to become completely dependent upon the shepherd, and we really don’t like that, because we still really like to call our own shots. But Jesus says, “I am the Good Shepherd. You must be completely dependent upon Me.”

So here is another question, **what does it mean that He is our shepherd?**

*<sup>16</sup>I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.*

This verse has got a few people excited over the years. What is Jesus referring to? As far as scholars can discern Jesus was pointing listeners to the margins of Jewish society (i.e. the Gentiles) who must be included in “his flock”. These sheep are “outside,” they are different, but they are nevertheless equally loved and valued. Jesus’ desire is to see one body, one genuine unity, in which all of his sheep move as one flock.

We need to wrestle with the identity of these sheep for our church. Who lives on the margins of our world? The poor, homeless, immigrants, Aucklanders. Jesus’ vision here is for a unity that breaks the bonds of racial, economic, and cultural divisions, that sees a person’s identity in Christ first, while all other markers fall away.

*<sup>17</sup>"The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. <sup>18</sup>No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded."*

That is a hugely significant verse. He’s saying; “Nobody took my life, I laid it down and I also have the authority to pick it back up again.”

*<sup>19</sup>When he said these things, the people were again divided in their opinions about him. <sup>20</sup>Some said, "He’s demon possessed and out of his mind. Why listen to a man like that?" <sup>21</sup>Others said, "This doesn’t*

*sound like a man possessed by a demon! Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"*

It seems the truth of Jesus Christ will always separate people into two camps. As we bring this message to a conclusion the question is; which group are you in?

So let me give you three quick points of application here.

Here's the first one: **Stay with the flock** - this is important for everyone, but especially for youth as you gain independence, leave home, study somewhere, get a job - Could I just encourage you to stay with the flock?

The flock is the gathered Christians, it's the church. It doesn't have to be this flock, just a flock somewhere. It might be big, or better still small so they get to know you. Satan's first step to pick you off and to take you out is to get you alone—to get you away from the flock. He'll get you to say, "Hey, I don't need any of those sheep. Those sheep are out of touch. Those sheep don't know what they are talking about. Those sheep are stupid." Yes you might be right, a bit, but there is safety in numbers and hopefully one or two sensible sheep?.

You see, sheep versus a wolf is really no contest at all. Sheep have a difficulty defending themselves. Cats scratch, dogs bite, but what can a sheep do? So there is safety among the flock with a shepherd.

Hebrews 10:25 encourages us, "Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing." That's what it is, it is a habit. But he says, "Let's gather together."

Here's the second thing: **Be a shepherd to others**. Have the mind-set of a shepherd. We see this throughout Scripture. In Ezekiel 34:23 God tells David, "David, be a shepherd and feed my people." When Peter messed up big time and later Jesus has breakfast with him on the beach, He asks Peter three times—I love that symbolism—to cover the three times Peter denied Jesus—He says,

*"Peter, do you love me?" "Yes, Lord" "Feed My Lambs."*

*"Do, you love Me?" "Of course I do, Lord." "Take care of My sheep."*

*"Do you love me, Peter?" "Okay, I'm kind of getting offended here."*

*"Then feed My sheep."*

See that's what it means to be mature in Christ. Maturity in Christ is not filling your head with knowledge of the Bible. Maturity in Christ is letting the knowledge of the Scripture make its way into your heart and your hands to where you begin to serve other people.

Wouldn't it be great if everyone one of you had someone who was "shepherding" you, and someone you were "shepherding"? No matter what age you are. It can happen just by caring, keeping an eye out for someone, or it can be a bit more intentional, "hey will you meet with me for a chat and pray together" – we call that discipleship.

Here's the third thing: **Rest in the safety of the Shepherd.** Some of you are going through some stuff (you might want to use a stronger word). You just need to rest. You just need to realize that Jesus is your Shepherd. He says, "I have come to take care of you." "Let me take care of it."

Or it might be that you have messed up big time, or lost your way a bit. Again rest in the safety of the shepherd.

Luke 15 says that the Good Shepherd leaves the 99 and goes after the one. I love that picture. And it's not like the shepherd comes back with a sheep around his neck going, "good grief, how many times am I going to have to go and rescue this sheep? It keeps wandering away." No, actually what the shepherd said is, "Let's throw a party. I found the stupid one."

You cannot wear out the love of Jesus Christ. He knows you to the core and everything you try to hide from Him He already knows.

Jesus is the good shepherd I encourage you to trust him

### Matthew 11:28-30

<sup>28-30</sup> "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."