

“The Good Shepherd”

June 21, 2026

John 10:1-21

I. Introduction

When John wrote his Gospel, around A.D. 85, there weren't chapters and verses. Chapters were added to the Bible around A.D. 1300 and verses were added around A.D. 1550. Although chapters and verses were added to make locating a particular sentence or teaching easier, they sometimes break up a particular situation or story. That's what occurred in today's Scripture. Jesus' teaching of "The Good Shepherd" is actually the conclusion of a story that began back in [John 7](#).

Back in chapter 7, about 6 months before His crucifixion, Jesus had gone to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles as commanded in the Old Testament ([Deut. 16:16](#)). [John 7:14-15](#) says, "Not until halfway through the Feast did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. The Jews were amazed and asked, 'How did this man get such learning without having studied?'" In chapter 8, the day after the week-long Feast, [John 8:2](#) says, "At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them." But, considering all that Jesus had said about them during the last 2 ½ years, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees tried to use a woman caught in adultery to attack and discredit Jesus. Their attack failed. Then, just days later, while He was still in Jerusalem, [John 9:1](#) said that "As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth." Jesus healed him so that he could see; first, physically, and then spiritually. Upset with the miracle and the unblind man's stand for the One who had healed Him, [John 9:34](#) says that the Jewish leadership, "Threw him, i.e., the unblind man, out." That is, he was excommunicated! Chapter 9 ended with the religious leaders claiming in their self-righteousness and pride to be able to see, but they were actually blind spiritually. In the presence of the Light of the world and with all the evidence and facts that they knew, they chose not to recognize the Messiah.

Today's Scripture is a continuation of Jesus' discussion with the blind Pharisees who just didn't get it. But, unlike how many of us would have responded, Jesus didn't give up on them. As a good and loving Teacher, He changed the image to one that everyone could understand—that of shepherd and sheep and

sheep pens as He compared Himself with Israel's false shepherds by using two images, "I Am the Gate" and "I Am the Good Shepherd."

II. "I Am the Gate"

In the Jewish mind, any leader, spiritual or political, was looked on as a shepherd. And Israel itself was privileged to be the *"flock of the Lord."* Psalm 100:3 says, "Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture."

Jesus' illustration was familiar to everyone that listened to Him. Each village in the shepherding area of Palestine had a fold or a pen where sheep were kept at night. The shepherds would graze their flocks in the surrounding countryside during the day and then lead them back to the communal sheepfold in the evening. There the shepherds would stop each sheep at the entrance with their rods and staffs and carefully inspect each one before allowing it to enter the fold. Once in the fold, the sheep were in the care of the gatekeeper—kind of an under shepherd. He would keep watch over them during the night. Only the shepherds would be allowed back into the fold.

Thieves and robbers would not be allowed through the gate. They would have to climb over the wall of the sheep pen to get at the sheep. But even if they did get in, they would never get the sheep to follow them, "They will run away from him." The sheep will only follow the voice of their particular shepherd—the one who cared for them and loved them, "His sheep follow him because they know his voice." False shepherds can never lead the sheep, so they have to try to steal them away.

Those listening didn't understand what Jesus said or even why He said it. Their minds were still on the unblind beggar and the blind Pharisees while Jesus had moved on to a spiritual application. The reason for this lesson was the treatment of the healed blind man. The false shepherds, the Pharisees, didn't care for this man; instead, they mistreated him, called him names, and threw him out. But Jesus, the Good Shepherd, came to him and took him in. As the true Shepherd, He loved the sheep and cared for every one of them.

Since the people didn't understand His parable, Jesus had to interpret it for them. And as He explained it to them, He changed the image a little. In the original story, He was the Shepherd, but here Jesus said, **"I am the Gate for the sheep."** This is the third of the seven "I AM" statements that John records.

Sometimes, instead of the watchman, the shepherd would sleep in the opening of the sheep pen and so guard the sheep. No one could enter or leave except through him. In Jesus' parable, He is the gate through which the sheep enter and leave. As Paul wrote in **1 Timothy 2:5**, **"For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."** Jesus is the only gate to salvation. Those who trust Him, like the unblind man, enter into the Lord's flock and the Lord's pen. They are delivered safe and sound from an eternity in hell. Then, from that moment on, they will **"come in and go out"** freely, having access to God's blessings and protection; never fearing any harm or danger.

In Jesus' illustration, the **"thieves and robbers"** were the religious leaders of the day. They were not true shepherds, nor did they have the approval of God for their ministry. They did not love the sheep, but instead they exploited them, abused them, and excommunicated them. **Turn to Ezekiel 34:2-6.** After 100's of years, things hadn't changed.

III. "I AM the Good Shepherd"

Jesus then shifted back to His emphasis of the shepherd as He made the 4th of His "I AM" statements: **"I am the Good Shepherd."** Obviously, Jesus was comparing Himself to the false shepherds—the bad shepherds—those who were the religious leaders of the day. He had already called them **"thieves and robbers,"** and now He called them **"the hired hand...who cares nothing for the sheep."** Jesus pointed out 4 special ministries that He performs as the Good Shepherd.

A. First, the Good Shepherd dies for the sheep. Being a faithful shepherd entailed a willingness to lay one's life on the line to protect the sheep. Robbers and wild animals such as wolves, lions, and bears were a constant danger, e.g., **turn to 1 Samuel 17:34-35.** Those are the actions of a true shepherd. But Jesus, the Good Shepherd, went far beyond being willing to risk His life for His sheep. Jesus came to die, not as a

martyr, killed by men; He died as a substitute, willingly laying down His life for His sheep. [1 Peter 3:18](#) says, “**For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.**”

The hired hand watches over the sheep only because he is paid to do so. While the true shepherd stays and cares for the flock when there is danger, the hired hand runs away. The hired hand doesn’t have any ownership, so “**he abandons the sheep and runs away**”—“**he cares nothing for the sheep.**” The Jewish religious leaders were the hired hands. They didn’t serve for the love of the souls of men or even love for the truth, but for money and prestige. Their overriding priority was self-preservation and the last thing they cared to do was sacrifice themselves for anyone.

B. Second, The Good Shepherd knows His sheep. Jesus said, “**I know my sheep and my sheep know me.**” The word “*know*” is used here to represent an intimate relationship between God and His people. It represents a relationship of love. Like every good shepherd, Jesus knows His sheep personally and therefore knows best how to minister to them.

1. He knows our names—[John 10:3](#) says, “**He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.**” In our day and age of computers and cellphones, our names are often lost in the shuffle, but the Creator of the universe knows each of His sheep, each of us by name. **2. He also knows our natures.** Sheep are sheep, but each sheep has its own distinctive characteristics, and the loving shepherd recognizes these traits. As Jesus reacted with His disciples, He knew exactly how to deal with each one of them—Peter was impulsive and outspoken; Thomas was hesitant and doubting; Andrew was a people person always bringing people to Jesus. **3. Finally, He knows our needs.** A good shepherd will consider any special need as he tends to his flock. Often, we do not even know our needs, but God does. Psalm 23 is a beautiful description of how the Good Shepherd cares for His sheep. [Turn to Psalm 23.](#) [Feel free to say it with me.](#)

C. 3rd the Good Shepherd brings other sheep into the pen. The “**other sheep that are not of this sheep pen**” are the Gentiles who were outside the covenants of Israel. They, too, will hear Jesus’ voice calling them to salvation and redeemed Jews and Gentiles will become one flock with one Shepherd. This was a totally alien thought; even the early Christians were slow to accept Gentile believers as equal members in the

church. **Turn to Ephesians 2:11-18.** True unity between Jews and Gentiles defines the church because all are sheep who belong to the same Shepherd—“For God so loved the WORLD.”

D. The 4th special ministry is The Good Shepherd takes up His life again. Jesus said, “I lay down my life—only to take it up again.” Jesus’ voluntary death was followed by His victorious resurrection. From the human viewpoint, it appeared that Jesus was executed by Pilate and the Romans; but from the divine point of view, He laid down His life willingly. At His trial, Jesus told Pilate in **John 19:11**, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.” Later in the day, after Jesus cried out while on the cross, “It is finished!” **John 19:30** says, “He bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” Three days later, He voluntarily took up His life again and arose from the dead. The Father gave Him this authority in love. The Lord’s statement that He would take His life up again looked forward to His resurrection.

IV. Controversy

As was always the case, Jesus’ teaching created heated controversy among those who heard Him; “the Jews were again divided.” “Who is Jesus?” Many of them repeated the same thing they had said all along, “He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?” Instead of considering what Jesus had said and done, they chose to ignore His words and His actions. They were deaf as well as blind. Rather than turning in repentance and faith to their own Messiah, instead they responded with ridicule. Having already rejected Jesus (and His claim to be God), they stubbornly refused to be moved and attributed His ministry and words to Satan. Today, 1000;s of years later things haven’t changed, people still do almost anything to avoid facing the truth about who Jesus is. Others, who were not so blind and biased, were able to conclude the obvious and said, “These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon.” Then reaching the same conclusion as the blind man, they added, “Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?” Like the unblind man, they realized that Jesus’ miraculous power was undeniable proof that He truly was whom He said He was—the Messiah, approved and sent from God. These are the only 2 choices: Jesus was and is who He says He is. i.e., Jesus is the Messiah, or Jesus is crazy—demon possessed.

V. Conclusion

Since Jesus is “the Gate,” we would expect a division, because a gate shuts some people in and others out. When one goes through “the Gate” he receives eternal life; he is saved from an eternity in hell. Jesus not only gave His life for us to save us in the future, but He gives His life to us right now. Then as we go “in and out,” we enjoy an abundant life in the “pastures of the Lord.” Jesus’ sheep enjoy fullness and freedom. If Jesus is your Gate; your Door, if He is your Lord and Savior, you have eternal life right now. In addition to that, as [Philippians 4:7](#) says, we have “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding” right now.

Jesus is also the “Good Shepherd,” and the shepherd must separate sheep from goats; those that belong to Him from those that don’t. It is impossible to be neutral about Jesus Christ; what one believes about Him is a matter of life or death—in [John 8:24](#) Jesus said, “If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.” In [Luke 11:23](#) Jesus said, “He who is not with me is against me.” So, what is your decision? Is He the Messiah or is He crazy—demon possessed? On what side of the gate do you stand?

As an earthly shepherd cares for the sheep, the sheep get to know their shepherd better and better. Similarly, the Good Shepherd knows His sheep and His sheep know Him. They get to know Him better by listening to His voice (His Word—the Bible) and by experiencing His daily care. As the sheep follow the Shepherd, they learn to love and trust Him more. Are you loving and trusting Him more?

There’s also a warning for those that are part of Jesus’ flock, for those that are Christians, we need to be on guard for thieves and robbers that try to steal our attention away from God. Every Christian, not just the church leadership, needs to be like the Bereans in [Acts 17:11](#) and examine every shepherd that comes our way—pastors, teachers, writers, podcasts to see if what they say is true. Do you know God and His Word well enough to recognize a fraud and not be misled? [2 Tim. 2:15](#) says, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”