

StudyJesus.com presents *Jesus Christ in the Writings of John*

JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

(John 10:1-18)

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Subject:

Jesus the Good Shepherd

Golden Texts:

“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” (Ps. 23:1)

“I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep.”
(John 10:11)

Lesson Plan:

Introduction

The Sheepfold (vs. 1-6)

Jesus the Door (vs. 7-10)

The Good Shepherd (vs. 11-16)

An Ever-Loving Shepherd (vs. 17, 18)

Setting of the Lesson:

Time: Probably the Feast of Tabernacles, October 11-18, A.D. 29. However, some commentators consider that John 9:1-10:21 took place at the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22) in November.

Place: Judea and probably Jerusalem, perhaps in or near the temple.

Persons: Perhaps the blind man whom Christ had just healed, some of Christ's disciples and some of the Pharisees.

Place in the Life of Christ: The latter part of the third year of His public ministry; Jesus fulfilling a new aspect of the Messiah and His work.

Research and Discussion:

The difference between our shepherds and those of the Orient.

The various things a shepherd does for his sheep.

Who are represented by shepherds, by sheep, by the porter, by robbers, by hireling, the wolf?

What by the fold, the door, by “calling by name,” “knowing his voice?”

Christ a shepherd.

False shepherds.

Christ the door.

Who belong to Christ's flock?

What does it mean “one flock, one shepherd?”

This lesson compared with Psalms 23.

How to follow the Good Shepherd.

Inductive Study of the Lesson:

1. Carefully read John 9 and 10:1-21, as if there were no chapter division, keeping in mind the relation of this lesson to what had gone before, not only to Jesus, doing true shepherd work, but to the man who had been driven out of the fold, to the Jewish leaders as thieves and robbers in the guise of shepherds, and to the Jewish religion as the fold.
2. Old Testament light: God from early times has been represented as a Shepherd to His people. Make a list of the qualities of a good shepherd found in these references: Genesis 49:24; Psalms 23 (the Shepherd Psalm); 80:1; Ezekiel 34:11-16, 22-31. Compare this list with the descriptive characteristics found in John 10. Especially place Ezekiel 34 side by side with John 10:1-21.
3. Other References in the New Testament: Luke 15:4-7 (parable of Lost Sheep); Matthew 18:12-14; Hebrews 13:20; John 8:47; 10:27; 18:37; 1 Peter 2:25. Is anything new added by these to the description of the Good Shepherd in John, and if so, what?
4. The Lord our Shepherd: Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 31:10; Zechariah 9:16; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 5:4; Ezekiel 34:23; 37:24; Micah 5:4.
5. Under-Shepherds: Good (also translated "pastors"): Ephesians 4:11; Jeremiah 3:15. Bad: Ezekiel 34:1-10; Jeremiah 12:10.
6. Jesus the Door: John 14:6; Ephesians 2:18. Corresponding passages: Matthew 18:12, 13; Luke 15:4-7; Psalms 23; Isaiah 40:11; Ezekiel 34:11-23; Zechariah 11:14-17.

Beginning Suggestions:

It is well to keep the familiar 23rd Psalm in close connection with this lesson, putting together all the references to God as the Shepherd of His people.

Consider the development or unfolding of the characteristics of Jesus as a Savior:

In John 5, Jesus is the Source of Health;
In John 6, the Bread of Life;
In John 7, the Water of Life;
In John 8, the Truth;
In John 9, the Light of the World;
In John 10, the Shepherd of Love.

In this way we realize what a wonderful Savior Jesus is!

There is a close connection with the last lesson, for by expelling from the synagogue the man who had been cured of his blindness, the Pharisees, who held the place of shepherds of God's flock, had proved themselves bad shepherds. Why? Because they had driven away a member of their flock instead of leading him into green pastures. The discourse revealed in this lesson seems to have originated from this fact. Jesus set a picture before the leaders and people of both the bad and good shepherd, so that they might be convicted of their sin, finding the Good Shepherd and the true fold.

I. The parable (vs. 1-6)

To understand and apply this lesson, the first need is to have a vivid picture of oriental shepherds and their flocks, their customs that are different from what we see and know.

Illustration

As we sat and looked, almost spell-bound, the silent hillsides around us were in a moment filled with life and sound. The shepherds led their flocks forth from the gates of the city. They were in full view, and we watched them and listened to them with no little interest. Thousands of sheep and goats were there, grouped in dense, confused masses. The shepherds stood together until all came out. Then they separated, each shepherd taking a different path, and uttering, as he advanced, a shrill, peculiar call. The sheep heard them. At first the masses swayed and moved, as if shaken by some internal convulsion; then points struck out in the direction taken by the shepherds; these became longer and longer, until the confused masses were resolved into long, living streams, flowing after their leaders. (Porter)

Illustration

A traveler in Greece found three shepherds with flocks of six or seven hundred each, all mingled together, but the sheep would answer to their names when called by their owner, but not if called by another. This traveler experimented with them. He called, and the sheep took no notice. The shepherd called, and they came. Then he said that the sheep knew the shepherd by his dress and not by his voice. But when the shepherd exchanged clothes with the traveler, the sheep would not obey the strange voice; but, when in the traveler's dress the shepherd called, the sheep came at his bidding. In like manner the Christian knows Christ's voice, through God's Holy Word, the Bible. He knows Him not by "church forms" "creeds of men," "religious systems," which may from time to time be changed, but by His eternal nature – His goodness, truth, and love which never change.

II. Its interpretation

What is meant by the fold? Who are the sheep? What is the door? Who are the shepherds? Who are hirelings? What are the wolves? What is it to climb up some other way? What is it to hear the shepherd's voice? What are the green pastures?

Are you a teacher of God's Word? An under-shepherd? If so, then you need to inquire of yourself if in fact you are a good shepherd, caring for your flock, which in this case are the students in your class. Are you trying to lead your students toward becoming good sheep of the Good Shepherd? Are you setting forth as clearly as you can to your students, by example, the privilege and duty of good sheep? The 23rd Psalm and many other Scripture references will be helpful.

Notice also the marks of good sheep: (a) they know His voice; (b) they listen; (c) they follow Him; (d) they refuse to stray.

III. Jesus, the Door of the sheep (vs. 7-10)

Notice especially, (a) that the only way to enter the true fold is through Jesus. Consider how that is; (b) the liberty, largeness, fresh pastures, the going in and out under the Shepherd's leadership; (c) The large and abundant life He gives them; (d) the entire safety of those who follow the Shepherd.

IV. Jesus, the Good Shepherd (vs. 11-18)

- (a) He knows each of His sheep by name. Dwell on the comfort and help from this personal knowledge and love (v. 3).
- (b) He has prepared a fold for them – a church on earth, a home in heaven.
- (c) He goes before them, a perfect example.
- (d) He defends them from all enemies.
- (e) He feeds them in green pastures.
- (f) He gives His life for them. Consider the meaning of this, and His taking His life again. Also, why the Father loves Him; and, therefore, we should love Him and He loves us when we exhibit the same characteristics.

Introduction

The healing of the blind man in John 9 throws a beautiful light on John 10. The restored blind man had been driven out of the Jewish fold, representing the kingdom of God. In effect, Jesus says to him,

Those who have driven you out of the fold had no power to do it, for, though claiming to be shepherds; they are but thieves and robbers, destroying the sheep, stealing their right to food and shelter. Theirs is not the true fold. The door through which they drove you out was not the door. I, who have healed you, am the Door, and by believing in Me, you have come into the true fold. I am the Good Shepherd, and by following Me you will come to green pastures and still waters. You are not excommunicated. You are not an outcast, but one of God's own flock, admitted to the fellowship of God and all good men.

Jesus now sets before the leaders and people, a picture of the bad and good shepherd, that they might be convicted of sin, find the Good Shepherd and the true fold.

Circumstances

The words may have been spoken on the evening of the day when the blind man was cured; and the shepherds on the hills round Jerusalem may have been seen gathering their flocks home from their various pastures to their shelter for the night (Reith).



Scripture Reading: John 10:1-6 (KJV)

The Sheepfold

“This passage is an allegory rather than a parable. This and the parallel passage in chapter 15 are the only instances of allegory in the Bible” (Cambridge Bible).

We have before us a picture of the Good Shepherd, showing us why we should accept, love and obey Him as the Shepherd of our souls; and a picture of the flock, showing us how to act toward the Good Shepherd.

The parable of the Good Shepherd

is a continuation of the conversation which arose out of the healing of the blind man in chapter 9. Jesus explains to the excommunicated man who it is that has power to give entrance to the true fold or exclude from it. (Expositor's Greek Testament)

Speer points out that “perhaps the parable was suggested by the sight of the shepherds and their flocks on the hills about Jerusalem. The image was a favorite one in the Old Testament (Ezek. 34:2; Jer. 33:1; Zech. 11:3; Ps. 23).”

We are first told how we may recognize the Good Shepherd, in contrast with thieves, robbers, and hirelings, like the scribes and Pharisees in Christ's day.

The door

10:1 ... “Verily, verily, I say unto you.” John's Gospel alone uses this double affirmation, and never at the beginning of a discourse.

10:1 ... “He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold.” An Eastern sheepfold is not a covered building like our stable, but a mere enclosure surrounded by a wall of loose stones with thorn-bushes on the top, or a palisade, usually an effectual barrier against wolves. The door consists of a few sticks laid across the entrance, and here the shepherd and his dog watch through the night (Van Lennep). The sheep are brought into it in the evening, several flocks being generally assembled within it. After committing them to the care of a common keeper, the porter, who is charged with their safe keeping during the night, the shepherds retire to their homes. In the morning they return, and knock at the closely-barred door of the enclosure, which the porter opens. They then separate the sheep by calling them. After separating the sheep, the shepherds lead them to the pastures. It is by scaling the wall that robbers penetrate the fold. Calling to mind these customs, described by Bochart in his “Hierozoicon,” and confirmed by most modern travelers, almost explains the allegory (Godet).

The interpretation

1. The sheepfold. Abbott points out that “the sheepfold, in this parable, answers primarily to Israel, the then visible and organic church of God, but secondarily to the church of Christ in all ages, the visible and external organization, in which the professed disciples of Christ, His sheep, are gathered for better protection.”

2. The door. Edersheim points out that “to it the entrance had been His free love, His gracious provision, His thoughts of pardoning, His purpose of saving mercy. This was God’s Old Testament door into His sheepfold.” The door was the appointment of God, the consecration to God’s service, a character fitting for that service, preparation by the knowledge of truth, by spiritual experience, by the presence of God, enabling the disciples to shepherd the sheep. Later the figure is changed, and Christ Himself is represented as the door, all the above being found in Him.

The door represents the right, appointed way of entering the leadership or shepherding of the flock, fulfilling the necessary conditions of a good shepherd. Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, came as the Messiah foretold by God in the prophets; His character was that of a divinely appointed shepherd; His purposes, teachings, works, miracles, methods of work, all were those which must belong to a good shepherd of God’s people. Every true under-shepherd must have the same characteristics, fulfilling the ideal of a good shepherd. Entering His kingdom and the leadership therein requires serious consecration to God’s service, seeking His glory – not our own. A character fitted for God’s service demands unselfish devotion to the good of others, preparation by the knowledge of truth, by spiritual experience, by the presence of God.

3. The sheep are the true servants of God (Hovey). Sheep are innocent, trustful, obedient, teachable, defenseless, and dependent on human protection.

10:1 ... “But climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.” Thieves and robbers represent those who were first all who claimed to be the Messiah, but without authorization of God, without the works and character of the true Messiah, but with some selfish purpose of aggrandizement at the expense of the sheep they ought to feed. They robbed instead of feeding. Therefore these terms included all who claimed to be teachers and leaders of the people, without the truth of God, without being filled with divine purpose, helping and saving men, but seeking wealth, honor, rank, at the expense of the flock they should have fed. They had no characteristics of a true shepherd, such as appear in the following verses. Jesus referred to the same men as having made the temple a den of thieves and robbers; and here they are compared to violent outlaws who climb the wall to plunder the sheep belonging to another. The people could easily see the application.

“The ‘thief’ uses fraud and the ‘robber’ is prepared to use violence” (Expositor’s Greek Testament).

Illustration

Dr. James M. Farrar often told children how that “once a band of robbers tried to break into a castle but found the doors and walls too strong for them. Presently one of them discovered a tiny window unbarred. They found a little boy and put him through the narrow window, and he unlocked the big window, and so all the robbers got into the castle. Any little wrong a child does – or a man – is like putting the little thief inside the castle.”

Blind mouths

Two one syllable words expressing the accurate differences of character in two great works of the church – pastor (elder) and preacher. Pastors see; Preachers feed. The most unpastorial character a man can have is blindness. The most unpreachable character is, instead of feeding, to want to be fed – to be a mouth.

Why do some climb “up some other way?” To avoid being seen by those who care of the sheep. They become preachers, teachers and leaders in the church from selfish motives, without true consecration to God, without spiritual devotion to the good of men, but simply to gain honor, or money, or a living, or an easy life.

This person receives the honor and emoluments of his office without performing its duties. Sadly, unless stopped, the end result is that sheep are led astray into sin and error, robbed of goodness, truth, spiritual growth and, in the end, even heaven. Such a person obtains possession of sheep to which he has no right, like a thief, robbing the true Shepherd; and the sheep are robbed of their spiritual lives, happiness and the true Shepherd’s care and home. This was a picture of the Pharisees, though, like some of us today, they did not recognize it. Other enemies are described in v. 12.

The true shepherd

10:2 ... “But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.”

The sheep enter in by the door into the sheepfold. The true shepherd enters in by the same door with the sheep. The Pharisees separated themselves from the people; but the power to lead men lies in sympathizing with them and walking in the same way with them.

Abbott pointed out that “there is not one salvation for the teacher and another for the taught; the door is the same to all.”

10:2 ... “Is the [“is a”] shepherd of the sheep.” The guide, leader and teacher of the true children of God, wherever they may be found (v. 16). Entering by the door, as described above, is the test whether one is a true shepherd. Such an one only will truly care for the sheep, guarding them from evil, feeding them with truth, leading them (by teaching and example) to God’s “green pastures and still waters” of Psalm 23.

As a student of God’s Holy Word, wouldn’t you agree that all religious authority of any actual validity is derived from Christ who came into the world to redeem it? That Jesus was the true door of access to the spiritual Israel, the children of the promise, who at the time were commingled with the fleshly, hardened Israel? That The Father sent Him? That He came in His own character through the true door which was Himself?

The porter

10:3 ... “To him the porter openeth.” “There is always a caretaker at night with the flocks in case of sickness among the animals. There is an elevated stone

platform both inside the fold and in the courtyard on which the shepherd in charge can rest himself" (Mamreov).

Alford believed and stated that "the Holy Spirit is especially He who opens the door to the shepherds; see frequent uses of this symbolism by the apostles (Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3): and instances of the porter shutting the door (Acts 16:6, 7).

"To him the porter openeth" is an inert factor in the analogy. Efforts of expositors to assign significance to the porter are proof enough that no spiritual meaning is clearly discernible. Thus, Ryle and others hold that the Holy Spirit is meant; some think the porter means Moses; some John the Baptist. McGarvey said, "If he represents anybody, it is God." Webster thought he stood for ministers and teachers in the church. Wordsworth and others saw him as Christ, Who is not only the Door and the Good Shepherd but the Porter also. The view here is that the porter was just one of the facilities of the sheepfold, like the wall or the thorn hedge, or like the bag out of which the sower planted his field, in that parable, the bag not being mentioned but necessarily inferred.

10:3 ... "And the sheep hear his voice."

When several flocks are penned in the same fold the animals naturally get mixed during the night. But there never is any trouble on that score, and it is one of the prettiest and most interesting sights at such times to watch the sheep hurry out of the fold at the sound of the call of the shepherd. They will pause for a second or two, listen attentively, and then trot along to range themselves unerringly around their own shepherds. (Mamreov)

Alford wrote that we should

Listen obediently, give heed to the voice of the true Shepherd. "The sheep" throughout this parable are not the mingled multitude of good and bad; but the 'real' sheep, the faithful who "are," what all the fold "should be." The false sheep (goats, Matt. 25:32) do not appear; because it is not the character of the "flock," but that of the "shepherd," and the relation between him and his sheep which is here prominent.

10:3 ... "And he called his own sheep by name." Eastern shepherds have names for their sheep as we have for dogs, cats, and horses. "Several flocks may be penned in one fold for safety, and in the morning the shepherd calls forth his own, his voice being immediately recognized by the members of his particular flock" (Westminster New Testament).

Longfellow represented Miles Standish as saying, "And like Caesar, I know the name of each of my soldiers."

Ellicott wrote that

we have to think of a much closer relationship between the owner and his sheep, which were almost part of his family, than any with which we are familiar. All animals learn to know those who love and protect them, and the Eastern shepherd was as much with his sheep as we are with domestic animals.

Some sheep always keep near the shepherd, and are his special favorites. Each of them has a name, to which it answers joyfully, and the kind shepherd is ever distributing to such choice portions which he gathers for that purpose. These are the contented, happy ones. They are in no danger of getting lost or into mischief, nor do wild beasts or thieves come near them. The great body, however, are mere worldlings, intent on their own pleasures or selfish interests. They run from bush to bush, searching for variety or delicacies, and only now and then lift their heads to see where the shepherd is, or rather where the general flock is, lest they get so far away as to occasion remark in their little community, or rebuke from their keeper. Others, again, are discontented and restless, jumping into everybody's field, climbing into bushes, and even into leaning trees, whence they often fall and break their limbs. These cause the good shepherd incessant trouble. Then there are others incurably reckless, who stray far away, and are often utterly lost.

Calling by name

Jesus takes a living, personal, peculiar interest in each redeemed soul; bending over it continually with infinite tenderness, watching each doubt, each fear, trial, temptation, fall, each rising again, each conflict, victory and defeat, watching each one individually with a solicitude as special and particular as if His loving heart were fixed only on that one. Hanna points out that

no vague, indefinite, indiscriminate superintendence is that which the great Good Shepherd still exercises over His flock, but a care that particularizes each separate member of it, descending to the minutest incidents of their history.

1. He knows each individual's want, nature, circumstances, ministering to each exactly what is required.
2. He loves, cares and protects us as individuals. Our Heavenly Father knows every star by name (Ps. 147:4), guiding and caring for it as perfectly as if it were the only one in existence. While the purpose of all is gained, the individual is never sacrificed for the whole. He gains his best in gaining the best for all. Providence is not merely the ordering of general laws, so that what is best for the whole will come to pass, no matter who is crushed in the process; but all things work together for the individual good of those that love Him (Rom. 8:28).
3. He assigns our duties not merely as a part of humanity. He calls us by name. No one but a divine Savior, omniscient and omnipresent, could know His disciple by name, and be present everywhere to hear their prayers and grant them aid.

Leading to fresh pastures

10:3 ... “And leadeth them out.” We have here the third characteristic of the true shepherd. He not only (a) enters the fold by the door, and (b) calls the sheep with his well-known and familiar voice, but (c) he is careful to lead them forth to good pasture. He leads them to green pastures and beside still waters. He guides them to the best things in life, to whatever will enlarge their souls, ennoble their lives, develop their capacities, and increase their usefulness. Sometimes the way to the best pastures, the waters of rest lie beyond deserts and mountains, leads through rugged and rough paths.

Some have understood the meaning to be that the Shepherd

Leads the true flock out of the fold of Judaism into the free pastures of Christianity, in which it is supposed to be doubtful whether there is any fold – the restraint of the fold being supposed to be contrasted with the absolute freedom out of it; but nothing can be more contrary to the historical truth. Neither Christ nor His apostles ever led the Christian Jews – the converts to Christ in Jerusalem or Palestine – out of the Jewish fold so long as that fold was in existence. (Sadler)

When the shepherd has called his sheep, and is satisfied that none is missing, he starts for the pasture; but this is continually changing,

for the hillsides and uncultivated plains are practically common lands belonging to the village, and shared by all, so that no one can retain the best pasturage day after day. (Edersheim)

In this way, Jesus leads His disciples, His Holy Spirit guiding into all truth. No one is wise enough to choose his own life for himself. Old age usually brings out a hard truth: many youthful plans did not work out. But Jesus knows, and all who trust in Him will be guided to better places – far beyond our hopes and dreams.

Going before them

10:4 ... “And when he putteth forth.” This stronger expression denotes the solicitude of the shepherd, seeing that each and every one of his sheep is in the flock.

Putteth forth instead of “leadeth out,” in v. 3, implying a “constraint,” as if some of the sheep were unwilling to leave the fold . . . an energetic putting forth of any sheep who might be hesitating to leave the restful fold, or fearful of the dangers in untried fields. (Vincent)

10:4 ... “His own sheep.” “All his own” in R.V. Not one is left out. The Shepherd is too wise to yield to the unwise wishes of His flock.

10:4 ... “He goeth before them.” To this day the Eastern shepherd goes before his flock, leading the sheep, not driving them – keeping them near him through

their recognition of his voice (Schaff). The shepherd goes before, not just to point out the way, but to make sure it is practicable and safe. Likewise, our Good Shepherd goes before us. He leads us where He wants us to go. He is a perfect example of what He wants us to be. He lays no burden on us that He does not bear Himself. He has gone before us through the gates of death, leading the way to heaven. Should we not expect our elders, preachers and teachers to go before the flock, as examples in every good work, guiding and directing the sheep in their fold?

Characteristics of true sheep

10:4 ... “And the sheep follow him.” This is the proof that we belong to His flock, if we follow in the footsteps of the Master, turning neither to the right hand nor the left, whatever temptations may allure us to one side or the other.

The object of the allegory being to set forth the relations of Christ to His sheep, the possibility of bad sheep is not taken into account. That side of the picture is treated in the parables of the lost sheep and the sheep and the goats. (Cambridge Bible)

10:4 ... “They know his voice.” The true disciple recognizes Christ’s voice, knowing whether a teaching or an influence is from Him

1. By the inner witness of the Spirit;
2. By comparing it with the Word of God;
3. By its truth and righteousness;
4. By its tendency.

Whatever leads away from God, whatever tempts to sin, whatever has not the spirit of Christ pervading it, is not from God.

10:5 ... “And a stranger will they not follow.” “By a stranger is meant any one whom they do not know, not necessarily a thief or robber” (Cambridge Bible). If a stranger calls they stop short, lift up their heads in alarm and if it is repeated they turn and flee, because they do not know the voice of a stranger.

The true disciple knows his Master:

1. He is like Him in purpose and hopes.
2. He has the witness of the Spirit.
3. He loves the same righteousness.
4. He is filled with the Word of God.
5. He knows that whatever tempts him to do wrong must be the voice of the enemy.
6. He knows that whatever leads him to a higher life, to nearer communion with God, to all that is heavenly, must be the voice of God.

A soul trained in righteousness easily distinguishes between sinful discords and divine harmonies.

10:5 ... “For they know not the voice.” A true disciple can recognize a different spirit, tone and purpose and will not follow.

10:6 ... “This parable.” Not the word usually translated parable in the other Gospels, but rather a metaphor, an allegory. John 15, concerning the True Vine, is similar. There are no real parables in the fourth Gospel.

10:6 ... “They understood not.” They understood the words, but not the point. They did not understand the meaning and application of the Lord’s imagery. Maurice pointed out that “they did not feel the application of it; they did not see what shepherds and sheepfolds had to do with them.” They did not answer to the description of good shepherds, and were unwilling to see themselves as thieves and robbers. They would have understood if they had known their Old Testament better. So Jesus proceeds to apply it.



Scripture Reading: [John 10:7-10](#) (KJV)

Jesus the Door

The allegorical picture now before them, Jesus now takes up one point, explaining and applying it.

10:7 ... “I am the door of the sheep.” By which sheep and shepherd alike enter. It is the door “of the sheep” rather than of the “fold.” The thought is of a door to a life, rather than to any organization. Schaff pointed out that

In saying “I am the door of the sheep,” Jesus says in effect, (1) that through Him alone has any true guardian and guide of the sheep entered into the fold; (2) that through Him alone will the sheep within the “fold” be led out into the open pastures. The latter thought is easily understood; it presents the same promise of the gladness, and freedom, and life of Messianic times as was set forth by the symbols of the feast of Tabernacles in the seventh and eighth chapters.

The “door” symbolizes the means of entrance, by which the flock can get into the fold, with its safety, shelter, food and care.

Compare the narrow way and straight gate of Matthew 7:14.

How is Jesus the door?

1. Through Him all enter into the blessings of salvation.
2. Jesus brought the truths of salvation from God.
3. He made the only atonement for sin.
4. He brought to men the new spiritual, divine life, without which no one can see God.

5. He brought in Himself every power, leading men to be good. He was and is the embodiment of all the influences by which men became children of God, even under the old covenant. To Him all their sacrifices, ceremonies and all their prophets pointed.
6. He sends the Holy Spirit, and embodies all the influences and motives which lead men into the kingdom of God, and trains their character for its life.
7. The sheep enter this door through obedient faith.

10:8 ... “All that ever came before Me.” Not all teachers or prophets, but certainly all those who came ‘professing to be the Messiah;’ or all those pretending to be teachers from God, substituting false doctrines and principles, selfish ends, formalities, and all methods of man-made salvation for the divine teachings pointing to Christ. They represented themselves as the door through whose teachings the people could be saved, and yet they were actually obstructing the door, placing themselves before Christ, between Him and mankind.

10:8 ... “Are thieves and robbers.” The teachers opposed to Christ were robbing the people of salvation, true life, of the Messiah, and all the blessings He brings, of continued national existence.

When asked to whom this description applies, one naturally thinks of false Messiahs, of whom many appeared in Jewish history. But whether the thought of false Messiahs is admissible or not, the meaning of the words surely extends farther, embracing all who had sought to turn the people from waiting for God’s promise, or had substituted principles of national life for the hope of the Messiah. Such had long been the practical effect of the rule and teaching of Pharisees and Sadducees. They are certainly, perhaps mainly, thought of here (Schaff). Jesus, of course, did not refer to the prophets, because they did not claim to do the work of Messiah, but pointed forward to Him. The Lord was here referring to the proud, assertive Jewish leaders, false shepherds of the sheep, seeking to feed on the sheep and not to shepherd them. Here was a test of teachers, preachers, leaders and rulers of all kinds. Here was a mirror through which the Jewish leaders could see themselves. Each of us needs to look at ourselves through this mirror.

10:8 ... “But the sheep did not hear them.” The true people of God did not go after these false Messiahs, nor obey the false teachings of the Pharisees. The true people still hoped for the Messiah as promised, and looked for spiritual redemption, and did not join in the selfish policy of the Pharisees. They saw in Jesus the marks of the true Messiah.

The false teachers had their followers, but they were only “the blind led by the blind;” they were not the “sheep.”

To the rulers who fattened themselves at the expense of the flock, the Sadducean high priests, and the Pharisaic doctors, the Herods and the Roman procurators – all these wicked shepherds (in the sense of Ezekiel 34) had climbed into their place of domination over the flock by illegitimate means; and it was they who conspired

against the divine Shepherd, Who would lay down His life for the sheep and Who would gather together into one flock the scattered children of God. (Richardson)

10:9 ... “By Me if any man enter in.” To the fold, the kingdom of God, the state of reconciliation and salvation offered by the Messiah.

He saves His sheep

10:9 ... “He shall be saved.” From all the dangers to which sheep are exposed, from sin, death, error, from those who would injure; safe from robbers and wolves seeking to destroy; safe from false teachers; safe from the sins that ruin; safe from the punishment of his sins; safe from troubles, dangers and temptations of life. But being safe is far from all.

He gives His sheep a wide range of freedom

10:9 ... “He shall go in and out.” Once belonging to the flock and the fold, he can go in and out under the care of the Shepherd and be safe everywhere, having freedom of activity for all his powers. Exercise is as needful to the Christian as food. Wherever there is help, or blessing, or wider vision, through all the realms of knowledge, literature, and science; through the most heavenly transfiguration experiences, through trials that purify, battles that ennoble by victories, there the sheep may go under the guidance and protection of the Good Shepherd.

We must “go in” to learn to trust, rest, think, before we can “go out” to do good to others, or to learn best the outer world and make outward things a part of the kingdom.

He feeds His sheep

10:9 ... “And find pasture.” Compare the green fields and still waters of the 23rd Psalm, and the Bread of Life (in one of our past lessons). All the best fruits of earth and heaven are for the sustenance of the disciple of Christ. There is something to satisfy every want and longing of the soul.

Satisfaction for every need of the soul, sustenance that is pleasant and brings life and growth. The fullness of the Christian life is exhibited in its three elements – safety, liberty, support.

Admission to the fold brings with it first security (“he shall be saved”). But this security is not gained by isolation. The believer “goes in and goes out” without endangering his position (Num. 27:17; Deut. 31:2); he exercises the sum of all his powers, claiming his share in the inheritance of the world, convert to the divinest uses all the fruits of the earth. But in all this he retains secure in his home. And while he does so “he finds pasture.” He is able to convert to the divinest uses all the fruits of the earth. But in all this he retains his life “in Christ,” and approaches all else “through Christ,” who brings not only redemption but the satisfaction of man’s true wants (compare John 7:37). (Westcott)

10:10 ... “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.”

False teachers are seeking their own honor or advantage. They are willing to teach error to mislead others, tempting them to wicked conduct, depriving them of liberty and happiness, keeping them away from God, so that they may gain some advantage.

He gives life to the sheep

10:10 ... “The thief ... I am come that they might have life ... abundantly.”

Jesus does for His disciples what the shepherd cannot do for his sheep. For instance, Jesus gives life, eternal life to His sheep. He feeds and inspires this life more and more. It is not mere living a sickly existence, but abundant life, the freshness and overflowing vitality of youth, when mere living is a joy, when activity is a delight, like the song of a bird, or the play of a child. “Of His fullness have all we received.”

1. Life may be increased in intensity;
2. Life may be broadened by unfolding the faculties;
3. Life may be deepened, made rich, not only by broader areas of culture, but by priceless mines beneath the soil.

Abbott points out that

True religion gives this present life more abundant development, and through that eternal life. Therefore, any form of religion that deprives mankind of its free, natural and joyous life, is anti-Christian. The constant tendency of Christ’s teaching and influence is to make the whole life, social, intellectual, moral and spiritual more abundant.

The spiritual life is to be overflowing, without measure, as God continually bestows His gifts. It will be abundant in quantity – like the fullness of life in youth – abundant in quality, overflowing with happiness and with every good.



Scripture Reading: John 10:11-16 (KJV)

Jesus the Good Shepherd

10:11 ... “I am the Good Shepherd.” Not simply “a,” but “the Good Shepherd” foretold in the Scriptures.¹ The word translated “good” cannot be adequately translated; it means “beautiful, noble, good,” as opposed to “foul, mean, wicked.” It sums up the chief attributes of ideal perfection. Christ is the perfect shepherd, as opposed to His own imperfect ministers; He is the true shepherd, as opposed to false shepherds (adapted from Cambridge Bible).

“Perhaps even Christ never spoke more fruitful words than these” (Maclaren).

Marks of a good shepherd

1. He feeds the sheep, leading them by the still waters and into green pastures.
2. He provides a home for them.
3. He defends them from all dangers.
4. He rules over them with justice and kindness.
5. He has a personal love for each one.
6. He will do all these for them, even at the expense of his life.

Westcott wrote that “Christ is not only the True Shepherd, Who fulfills the idea of the shepherd, but He is the Good Shepherd Who fulfills the idea in its attractive loveliness.”

How was Christ like a shepherd?

1. In His care for men (vs. 10-13),
2. In His knowledge of men (vs. 14, 15),
3. In the breadth of His love for men (v. 16),
4. In the eagerness of men’s love for Him (v. 27),
5. In His divine commission to care for men (vs. 15, 17, 18, 25, 29).

“Good” in “the Good Shepherd,” is used “probably in the sense in which we speak of a ‘good’ painter or a ‘good’ architect; one who excels at his business” (Expos. Greek Test.). “Rather, the Fair Shepherd. The adjective is not ‘good,’ but ‘beautiful.’ It implies that Innocence and Tenderness were translucent through human beauty” (Farrar).

10:11 ... “The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep.” Robertson wrote,

In Palestine, at any moment, sheep are liable to be swept away by some mountain-torrent, or carried off by hill-robbers, or torn by wolves. At any moment their protector may have to save them by personal hazard. The shepherd-king (1 Sam. 17:34-37) tells us how, in defense of his father’s flock, he slew a lion and a bear. Every hour of the shepherd’s life is risk. Pitiless showers, driving snows, long hours of thirst – all this he must endure, if the flock is to be saved.

The suffering of Christ was death. But the suffering from which He redeemed us by death was more terrible than death. The pit into which He descended was the grave. The pit in which we should have been lost forever was the pit of selfishness and despair.

Jesus, the Son of God, came from heaven to save men. His whole life was given for the sheep. Then He died on the cross to make atonement for them, bearing their sins on the cross. We owe Him eternal gratitude and love. All our lives should be a singing of the new song of the Lamb, “For Thou hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood . . . Blessing and honor and glory and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever” (Rev. 5:9-13).

Compare the beautiful hymn, "The Ninety and Nine."

Marks of the hireling

10:12 ... "but he that is a hireling." The shepherd in the East is usually the owner or the son of the owner of the flock; though sometimes an agent whose salary is a fixed proportion of the produce, as Jacob under Laban. The hireling is one hired for fixed wages, merely for the day, having no further interest in the flock.

The application is to those ministers who care chiefly for the emoluments and advantages of their position, and retire when the position become irksome or dangerous. (Cambridge Bible)

10:12 ... "Seeth the wolf coming ... and fleeth." He cares more for his own safety than his honor, or for the harm that may come to the sheep.

The wolf

The wolf is the enemy of souls in any of his manifold disguises, as not only persecution, but heresy, worldly living, a low standard of faith and morals (Sadler).

The hireling

Not every one receiving pay is a hireling, but he who serves only for pay, without love for the work, or care for the employer. A hireling seeks his own interests, his own reputation, his own pecuniary gains, more than the good of the flock; sacrificing the sheep for himself. The true preacher of the Gospel never works for pay, but people support him so that he may give all his time to the care of the sheep.

Giving His life for the sheep

Jesus gave His life for the sheep. He died that they might be saved from their great enemy, sin. He laid down His life for the sheep all through His ministry.

He that will save others, cannot save himself. I lay down My life "for" – that is, instead of – the sheep. If the shepherd had not sacrificed Himself, the sheep would have to be sacrificed. This is the enunciation of a general principle by which every good shepherd can be distinguished from the hireling; because every good shepherd is ready to sacrifice his life for his sheep because they are his. The good shepherd may or may not be called on to die for his sheep; but he always lays down his life for them. To lay down the life is to consecrate it, devote it to the flock; as a mother, who is always ready to die for her children, but who, living or dying, belongs to her children, and surrenders herself to them. So we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren (1 John 3:16), through comparatively few are ever called on to die for them. (Abbott)

10:13 ... “The hireling fleeth.” Runs away in time of danger; neglects the sheep for his own advantage.

10:14, 15 ... “And know My sheep, and am known of Mine [even] as the Father knoweth Me,” etc. In a limited way this is true of a good pastor (elder) or shepherd; he knows his flock personally and sympathizingly. He is not merely a pastor to them, but their best spiritual friend and advisor. But this knowledge is never perfect, and in the under-shepherd never can be. His insight is imperfect; his sympathy is partial. It is only Christ Who can say, I “know” My sheep. The completeness of this knowledge can only be compared to the knowledge that God the Father has of His own Son. He knows our secret thoughts, hopes, plans, temptations, what is good for us, the effect of each influence on our characters and lives, what discipline is good for us. Jesus Christ can take perfect care of His sheep.

Hanna pointed out that

There is a bond of acquaintanceship, affection, communion, and fellowship between each true believer and his Savior – in its origin, strength, its present blessedness, and its glorious issues in eternity. No earthly bond offers an adequate symbol to match the intimacies of eternal love, *i.e.*, the mysterious bond between the Father and Son. This bond consists of oneness of life, unity of spirit, harmony of desire and affection.

10:15 ... “And I lay down My life for the sheep.” He knows them, knows their needs, their danger from the enemy, what capacities there are in them for serving God, returning His own and His Father’s love. So, because of this knowledge, He lays down His life for them, that His infinite grace may reach them and perfect them (Sadler).

10:16 ... “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold.” The Gentiles, who were not in the kingdom of God, but would be brought in as members of the church He would soon begin. He does not say “of another fold,” as if there would be another true church, but “not of this fold,” scattereth abroad, without fold as yet.

10:16 ... “And there shall be one fold.” “One flock” in NKJV is better. Coffman points out that

Jesus here changed from the word “fold” to that of “flock,” because, due to the metaphor, it might otherwise have appeared that the Gentiles were to be called into the institution of the Jews. There was to be a new institution, God’s “one flock.”

Jesus’ super-national wisdom appears in this prophecy of the “one flock,” including Jews and Gentiles alike of every tribe and nation.

This dream of a world-wide, universal fellowship of God's people was envisioned in the great prophecies of Isaiah, and glimpsed in the experience of Jonah; but Jesus here dogmatically stated it as if it had already been accomplished – one in heart, one in purpose, one in the service of God and man.



Scripture Reading: John 10:17, 18 (KJV)

An Ever-Loving Shepherd

10:17 ... “Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life.”

Abbott wrote,

Not because I “have” laid it down, as though the Father’s love was caused by the earthly love and sacrifice of Christ, but because I “lay” it down. In other words, because Christ’s Spirit is one of self-sacrificing love, manifested by, but not alone embodied in, the incarnation, He is loved by the Father (see Phil. 2:9; Heb. 1:9).

To say it another way, because Jesus was in such sympathy with His Father, He was willing to die in order to carry out His Father’s purpose. Jesus was worthy of God’s love – He expressed God’s love.

10:17 ... “That I might [may] take it again.”

1. Clark wrote that “His rising from the dead was as necessary as His dying, because by His resurrection He secured the fruits of His death (compare Rom. 4:25). Christ died in order to rise to a more complete life, and to raise men with Him. Westcott determined that “this purpose evoked the love of the Father.”²
2. Dr. Abbott varies this meaning:

The meaning is interpreted by Christ’s declaration to His disciples: “He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it.” Christ lays down His life by His humiliation, His incarnation, His passion, and His crucifixion, that He may take it again in the life of the myriads whom He has redeemed from death by His own death. He takes it again when He sees the travail of His soul, and is satisfied (Is. 53:11), which He does when those who have been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb stand before Him (Rev. 7:14, 15). So every mother, laying down her life in continued self-sacrifice for her children, takes it again in their developed manhood and womanhood.

This taking His life again was essential to the work of salvation. Otherwise He would have ceased to be the Good Shepherd. “Christ was raised.” This is a

passive voice expression, which means that Someone applied power to resurrect Jesus. The Scriptures speak of God the Father raising Jesus from the dead (Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:20a). Jesus Himself spoke of rising from the dead (Luke 24:7; John 10:17-18). The power of the resurrection is the activating power of the Holy Spirit³ (1 Timothy 3:16).

10:18 ... “No man taketh it from Me.” His death was entirely voluntary. Men killed Jesus, but He had full power to escape from them had He wished to do so. No one imposed upon Jesus the duty of leaving heaven, of coming to this world, suffering and dying. He chose to do it, so that He might save us.

10:18 ... “This commandment have I received of My Father.” While He did it voluntarily, it was in accordance with His Father’s expressed will. God gave Jesus the command, that if He would save mankind, He must lay down His life, and take it again. This is the divine law of salvation.

In discussing John 10:17-18, Barclay states:

Jesus always saw the Cross and the glory together. He never doubted that He must die; and He equally never doubted that He would rise again. The reason for this confidence was Jesus’ confidence in God.

Jesus Christ proves Himself the True Shepherd, because He lives to be our Good Shepherd forever!

The Application

Jesus, the Shepherd of Modern Man – Do we need guidance?

We have the same need the sheep have. We are hungry with unnumbered desires; we want food for the body and the soul, and we need to be directed to it. We are perplexed by the devious paths in life, and we need a plain goal, and a straight way to it. The business person has a thousand tangles – his/her relations to employees, competitors, patrons; and he/she needs wise guidance. The student needs direction through the mazes of science. No one can go far in life without a guide.

Do we need protection?

We have the same need the sheep have. Evil people are ready to harm us and pull us down. Satan and his unseen hosts are ready with myriad crafty temptations. Our own passions assail us like wild beasts. No sheep was ever in greater danger than a human soul, however sheltered and fortunate the human lot may seem to be.

How does Christ guide?

By His book, the record of His life and Words. By His under-shepherds, the pastors (elders) of His church. By His voice in our hearts. By the example of those that have lived and are living the Christian life.

How does Christ protect?

By arming us before hand against our enemies, through His warnings and instructions; and especially by purifying and fortifying the soul so that temptations fall away without gaining a foothold. By raising up human friends and helpers. By dealing Himself with the unseen powers of evil, routing them in answer to our prayers.

What more does Christ do?

He died to save us from death.

If I am standing by the rapids of Niagara, above the falls, and my friend stands by me protesting his love, proving it by plunging into the rapids and is swept over the falls to his death, I am impressed only with the pity and folly of it. But, if I am in the rapids struggling for my life, my strength almost gone, and just at the awful brink my friend plunges in, and, at the cost of his own life, rescues me from death, then I know the meaning and reality of his love. (William Harrison)

The shepherd and his sheep, the bread of life, the vine and the branches – in these three Christ pictures the union of His followers with Him. Each represents a closer degree of union than the one before it.

1. The shepherd and sheep are separate,
2. The body and food become united,
3. The vine and branch have always been one.

Footnotes:

¹ See Psalm 23; Isaiah 40:11; Ezekiel 34:11-23; 37:24; Zechariah 13:7; compare also Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:4.

² Compare John 12:32; Philemon 2:9; Hebrews 1:9; 12:2.

³ For more information on the Holy Spirit, see [God the Spirit](#) in A Religion Library section of [StudyJesus.com](#).

"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus ..." (Col. 3:17)

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