

## John 10:6-18

### Introduction

Last week, we saw that in the Old Testament there's a sense in which any ruler or leader of any people is by default a shepherd of that people – which means that the Pharisees were, at least in name, Israel's shepherds. But Jesus says that not everyone who happens to be in the fold with the sheep is a “true” shepherd of the sheep.

- John 10:1-5 — “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.”

**I. John 10:6-8** — This figure of speech Jesus spoke to [the Pharisees], but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them. So Jesus said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them.”

We have to be flexible when we're reading these verses or we might get confused when rather than identify Himself as the Shepherd who enters through the door (as we would have expected), Jesus says that He is the “door” through which the shepherds (and the sheep) enter. Does this mean we should think of Jesus (the shepherd) entering through Himself (the door)?

Some see in this a picture of the shepherd sitting or standing in the opening of the sheepfold so that the shepherd really is the “gate” or the “door.” But this doesn't fit with the picture in verse 9 of sheep “entering” *through* Jesus or going “in and out” *through* Jesus. The point isn't so much a gate or a barrier that opens and shuts as it is an opening that allows free passage in and out (cf. Gen. 18:1; Exod. 37:5; Prov. 8:34; Song of Solomon 8:9; Mat. 27:60; Lk. 13:24; Acts 3:2; 1 Cor. 16:9). The idea isn't so much the “door” as it is the “doorway.”

What we need to understand is that there's a sense in which Jesus is leaving the “figure of speech” in verses 1-5 behind and yet taking parts of it and developing those parts in new directions.<sup>1</sup> So while the “door” in verses 1-5 had no particular meaning in and of itself, now the door is clearly Jesus. While there was a “doorkeeper” in verses 1-5 (again without any particular meaning), now there's no doorkeeper. Whereas in verses 1-5 we have the sheepfold of the Old Covenant people “out” of which Jesus “puts forth” all His own, now we have the sheepfold only of those who belong to Jesus and who know His voice.

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<sup>1</sup> The difficult thing about Jesus' speech here is that it's not a typical “parable” that corresponds to one overriding main point and neither is it a running allegory where the various details of the allegory are always corresponding to the same things or even to anything at all.

“I am the door of the sheep,” Jesus says, “all who came before *Me* are thieves and robbers.” Can you imagine how shocking and even incomprehensible this must have been to the Pharisees? What is Jesus saying about men like Moses and David? Were *they* thieves and robbers? And even more importantly, what is Jesus saying about *Himself*? The answers to those two questions are wrapped up together. Ever since the days of Moses—the only legitimate way to enter the sheepfold *as a shepherd* was to enter *through* Jesus. In other words, the only legitimate way to enter the sheepfold as a shepherd was to enter as one who was looking to the coming of the Christ – the one who, as David’s greater royal son, is the only “true” shepherd of the sheep. That doesn’t mean that Moses and David were “*false*”; it just means that they weren’t the “true” substance and reality—they were the shadows and the types of that reality. It’s in this sense that Jesus is the only one in all of Scripture and in all the world who is “true.” Now we can see how all the faithful shepherds in the Old Testament were all taken up into and included in Jesus. Therefore, when Jesus speaks of all the “shepherds” who came *before* Him, He’s speaking of all those “shepherds” who failed to be faithful shadows and types of Him and who therefore came separately and independently from Him. When Jesus says that He is the door (through which every faithful shepherd enters), He’s assuming already the reality that He is the only true Shepherd, “whose coming forth is from long ago, from the days of old” (Mic. 5:2-5).

All who came before Jesus are thieves and robbers, “but the sheep did not hear them.” Why didn’t the sheep hear them? Because these sheep already belonged to Jesus even before Jesus came; because their ears were already attuned to recognize and know only His voice when one day He would come and call them by name and gather them into His fold.

On the one hand, Jesus is the door through which every faithful shepherd ever entered. On the other hand, Jesus is the door through which the sheep also enter (and even the faithful shepherds were also sheep; compare Ezek. 34:1-10 with 34:17-22).

**II. John 10:9-10** — “I am the door [Jesus says *again*]; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture [*nome*]. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

When we hear the word “saved” (“if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved...”) we might automatically think of what we already have – especially of the forgiveness of sins. But the forgiveness of sins assumes and guarantees that our salvation includes so much more. In the context here in John, this salvation refers to the fullness of that eschatological salvation that was prophesied in the Old Testament. Salvation *from* sin and death means salvation *unto* righteousness and life. Salvation *from* the coming wrath means salvation *unto* peace and security and joy and abundance.

Since the imagery here is sheep, Jesus pictures this “salvation” in terms of the sheep going *in and out* and finding *pasture*. But there’s more to it than this. Jesus uses this imagery because of how it’s already been invested with so much meaning by the Old Testament prophets — because it’s already been used by the Old Testament prophets to picture the fullness of the coming eschatological salvation.

- Isaiah 49:8–10 (cf. Rev. 7:13-17) — Thus says the LORD: “In a time of favor I have answered you [My Servant]; in a day of salvation I have helped you; I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages, saying to the prisoners, ‘Come out,’ to those who are in darkness, ‘Appear.’ They shall feed along the ways; on all bare [treeless] heights shall be their **pasture [nome]**; they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them.
- Jeremiah 50:17–20 [LXX, 27:17-20] — Israel is a hunted sheep driven away by lions. First the king of Assyria devoured him, and now at last Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has gnawed his bones. Therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing punishment on the king of Babylon and his land, as I punished the king of Assyria. I will restore Israel to his **pasture [nome]**, and he shall feed on [the mountains of] Carmel and in Bashan, and his desire shall be satisfied on the hills [*oros*] of Ephraim and in Gilead. In those days and in that time, declares the LORD, iniquity shall be sought in Israel, and there shall be none, and sin in Judah, and none shall be found, for I will pardon those whom I leave as a remnant.
- Ezekiel 34:11–14 (cf. Zeph. 2:6-7) — “Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains [*oros*] of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good **pasture [nome]**, and on the mountain [*oros*] heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich **pasture [nome]** they shall feed on the mountains [*oros*] of Israel.

Can you see better now the full significance of Jesus’ words when He says, “I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly”? What is Jesus saying? He’s saying that all the fullness of the promised eschatological salvation is now present and available to all—in *Him*.<sup>2</sup> We see again that Jesus is the door not so much in the sense of being a gate or a barrier that opens and shuts but rather in the sense of being the opening or the doorway that gives free passage in and out. The point here is the liberty and the freedom, and the peace and the security and the abundance, that all those who enter through Jesus enjoy.

On the one hand, we *enter* through the door that is Jesus; on the other hand, we go *in and out* and find pasture through the door that is Jesus. Whether we’re “in” or “out” is irrelevant. That’s just an expression that’s meant to sum up all of life. The Psalmist writes:

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<sup>2</sup> Notice that in all three of the above passages, the pastures in which God’s people will feed are said to be on the mountains or the hills (*oros*) in Israel. In John’s Gospel, Jesus’ feeding of the five thousand is associated with a mountain (*oros*; 6:3; cf. the sermon on John 6:1-15). In the parallel account in Mark, we’re told that when Jesus saw the crowd, “He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd” (Mk. 6:34) and then later we’re told that, “He commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass (Mk. 6:39; cf. Jn. 6:10).

- Psalm 121:7–8 (cf. Deut. 28:6) — The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The LORD will keep your **going out** and your **coming in** from this time forth and forevermore.

When we think of the sheep having free passage “in and out,” we see that the point is, *at all times*, the perfect peace and security of the sheep and the abundance that they enjoy.

- Zephaniah 3:11–13 (cf. Lev. 26:6) — On that day... you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain. But I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD, those who are left in Israel; they shall do no injustice and speak no lies, nor shall there be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue. **For they shall graze and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.**
- Ezekiel 34:28–31 — **They shall no more be a prey to the nations, nor shall the beasts of the land devour them. They shall dwell securely, and none shall make them afraid.** And I will provide for them renowned plantations so that they shall no more be consumed with hunger in the land, and no longer suffer the reproach of the nations. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Lord GOD. And **you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture**, and I am your God, declares the Lord GOD.

“I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” What is Jesus saying? He’s saying that the fullness of the promised eschatological salvation is now present and available to all—in Him. There is no other door.

- Acts 4:12 — There is **salvation** in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be **saved**.

But surely the sheep don’t go “in and out” through the door without a shepherd!<sup>3</sup> Jesus says in verses 11-13:

**III. John 10:11–13** — “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep.”

When Jesus says that He is “the good shepherd” He’s not saying that He is “the loving shepherd” or “the gentle shepherd” or “the kind shepherd” – though He *is* those things. What He’s saying is that He is the one who faithfully and perfectly executes *all* of the responsibilities of the shepherd. He’s the good shepherd because He faithfully and perfectly carries out *all* that the shepherd is called to do. And the shepherd’s calling is no light or easy thing.

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<sup>3</sup> In Numbers 27:16-17, Moses asks the Lord to “appoint a man over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep that have no shepherd.” “The next verse in Numbers 27 makes clear that the successor is Joshua, which name, in Greek, is ‘Jesus.’” (Carson)

“The good shepherd,” Jesus says, “lays down His life for the sheep.” There’s a tension here. No good shepherd passively allows himself to be killed for the sheep. That would be irrational. The death of the shepherd guarantees the death and destruction of the sheep (cf. Zech. 13:7 & Mat. 26:31). In the world of animal shepherding, the shepherd “lays down his life for the sheep” in the sense of risking his life or putting his own life “on the line” every day for the sheep (cf. Carson and Michaels). And how does he do this? Jesus explains: A hired hand isn’t truly concerned about the sheep, so when he sees the wolf coming he leaves the sheep and flees. The shepherd, however, places *himself* between the sheep and the wolf. The shepherd lays down his life—risks his life; puts his life on the line—*when he does battle* with the wolf – *for* the sheep. We can think of David, whom God “took from the sheepfolds; from following the nursing ewes... to shepherd Jacob His people” (Ps. 78:70-71):

- 1 Samuel 17:34–36 — David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God.”

A good shepherd isn’t just a gentle healer and a faithful guide; he’s a deadly enemy. A good shepherd is a mighty warrior who does battle for the sheep who are totally helpless against the wolves.

Jesus says: “**I am** the good shepherd; the good shepherd **lays down His life for the sheep.**” We know that *Jesus* does actually die for the sheep. But as the good shepherd, we still have to see this laying down of His life not as a “passive” act of self-sacrifice,<sup>4</sup> but rather in terms of doing battle with the wild beasts that threaten His sheep and emerging from that battle the victor. Why does He do this? So that the sheep might go in and out and find pasture. Why does He do this? So that the sheep may have life, and have it abundantly.

If, in His battle with the enemy that would steal and kill and destroy the sheep, our Good Shepherd must lay down His life and die, how is it that we’re not left to be scattered and destroyed as sheep without a shepherd? Jesus continues in verses 14-15:

**IV. John 10:14–15 — “I am the good shepherd,** and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and **I lay down My life for the sheep.”**

Notice again that Jesus doesn’t say He’s one of many good shepherds. He says, “**I am *the*** good shepherd.” In other words Jesus says, “The extent to which any other shepherd could ever be called “good” was the extent to which he was faithfully shadowing forth *Me*.” There’s a breathtaking absoluteness and exclusivity about these words (cf. Jn. 15:1): “I am the one-and-only good shepherd; there is no other good shepherd.” It’s in light of this that we remember the words of God in Ezekiel 34:

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<sup>4</sup> I am not denying, here, what theologians have termed Christ’s “passive obedience.”

- Ezekiel 34:11–16 — Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, **I, I myself** will search for my sheep and will seek them out... **I** will seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them... **I** will bring them out from the peoples and gather them... **I** will feed them on the mountains of Israel... **I** will feed them with good pasture... **I myself** will be the shepherd of my sheep, and **I myself** will make them lie down... **I** will seek the lost, and **I** will bring back the strayed, and **I** will bind up the injured, and **I** will strengthen the weak.

And then only seven verses later:

- Ezekiel 34:23–24 — I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them.

At the very least, Jesus is saying here in John that He is this “servant David”—the one who was shadowed forth and promised all throughout the Old Testament—who stands now to shepherd His flock “in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God” (cf. Mic. 5:2-5). But He’s also saying something more, isn’t He? How can God’s “servant,” the royal son of David, speak with such absoluteness? How can He say: “**I am the** good shepherd”?

The very next words of Jesus are these: “And I [the good shepherd] know My own and My own know Me.” In the Old Testament this is the language of Deity. This is language that describes that exclusive relationship between God the Creator and Redeemer and all of His chosen people who are in covenant with Him (cf. Ridderbos).

- Genesis 18:17–19 — The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have **known him**, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD.”
- Jeremiah 1:5 — Before I formed you in the womb I **knew** you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.
- Amos 3:2 — You only have I **known** of all the families of the earth...
- Hosea 13:4–5 — I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt; you **know** no God but me, and besides me there is no savior. It was I who **knew you** in the wilderness.
- Jeremiah 31:34 — No longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all **know me**, from the least of them to the greatest.
- Psalms 36:10 — Oh, continue your steadfast love to those who **know you**, and your righteousness to the upright of heart!

What, then, does it mean when *Jesus* says, “I am the good shepherd, and **I know My own** and **My own know Me**”?

Jesus continues: “I know My own and My own know Me *even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father.*” This is a mystery. The exclusive, reciprocal relationship of “knowing” that exists only between Jesus, the good shepherd, and His sheep is *grounded* in the exclusive, reciprocal relationship of “knowing” that exists only between Jesus and the Father. **Because** the Son *knows* the Father and the Father *knows* the Son, **therefore** Jesus knows the sheep and

*therefore* the sheep know Him. That the sheep know Jesus and recognize His voice is due to the fact that they recognize in the voice of *Jesus* the voice of *the Father*, who said through the prophet Ezekiel: “*I, I myself* will search for My sheep...” That Jesus knows the sheep is due to the fact that they’re already “His own” sheep whom *the Father* gave to *Him* before the ages began (cf. Jn. 6:39; 10:29; 17:9, 11, 12, 24; 18:9; 2 Tim. 1:9). So let’s confess this wonderful mystery again: “The exclusive, reciprocal relationship of “knowing” that exists only between Jesus, the good shepherd, and His sheep—between our Shepherd and us—is *grounded* in the exclusive, reciprocal relationship of “knowing” that exists only between Jesus and the Father.

“**I am the good shepherd,**” Jesus says, “and **I know** My own and My own **know Me, even as** the Father knows Me and I know the Father”; and now it’s against this awesome backdrop that Jesus says again, “and **I lay down My life for the sheep.**” The good shepherd sees the wolf coming and does battle with the wolf to save His sheep. But if the shepherd dies, how will the sheep not be scattered and destroyed? It’s in the light of this question that we go on to read in verse sixteen:

**V. John 10:16** — “I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must *bring them also*, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.”

When Jesus says that He has other sheep [sheep not just from among the Jews, but even from among the Gentiles] and that He must *bring them* also, how are we to understand that Jesus does this? The clear implication of Jesus’ words is that it’s *by* His own death for these “Gentile” sheep that are already “His own”—it’s by His own death for the sheep that He will, Himself, “*bring them*” into His flock. The Good Shepherd lays down His life not as a passive victim, but as the warrior shepherd-king who, in the act of laying down His life, is not only defeating the one who would steal and kill and destroy the sheep, but even calling and gathering all of His own sheep—Jews and Gentiles alike—to Himself (cf. 12:32). When Jesus lays down His life and dies for His sheep, the sheep are not finally scattered (cf. Mat. 26:31-32); instead, they’re all gathered in—so that they might become one flock *with one shepherd*. “**I lay down My life** for the sheep,” Jesus says, “I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; **I must bring them also...**”

How can these things be? Jesus continues in verses 17-18:

**VI. John 10:17-18** — “For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life in order that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”

Jesus lays down His life for the sheep *in order that* He may take it up again—*for the sheep*; in order that He might be the good shepherd of His sheep forever, and ever, and ever. Jesus lays down His life for the sheep *in order that* He may take it up again—*for the sheep*; in order that the sheep whom He has delivered from the enemy, from sin and death and hell and the devil himself, might go in and out and find pasture and have life and have it abundantly forever, and ever, and ever—in order that they might be *saved*.

“For *this reason*,” Jesus says, “the Father loves Me.” Here, again, is a wonderful mystery. Jesus didn’t have to earn the Father’s love by His obedience. Instead, it was *as* the fully obedient, incarnate *Son* that the Father already loved Jesus from all eternity past – before the ages ever began (1 Pet. 1:20). God said through the prophet Ezekiel: “Behold, **I, I myself** will search for **my sheep**... I will rescue them... I will feed them with good pasture... **I myself** will be the shepherd of **my sheep**...” When Jesus came into the world, He said, “**I am the good shepherd**, and I know **My own** and **My own** know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and **I lay down My life for the sheep**... in order that I may take it up again [*for the sheep*]. **This commandment I received from My Father.**”

Let’s conclude by taking the words of the psalmist and making them our own:

- Psalm 100:1–5 — Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.”