



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 10: 1-6

Fall 2022

"The True Shepherd"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Larry. Well, we are continuing our studies in the Gospel of John. We finished chapter 9, and it was a rather lengthy passage last week. So we are now beginning this great tenth chapter of John's Gospel and we're going to take it in shorter bites throughout this tenth chapter. And we're going to look at verses 1 through 6 this morning.

10 "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. ²But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. ³To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers." ⁶This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them.

John 10: 1-6

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time together in it. And may we understand the things that the Lord was teaching there. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we do come before You and seek Your blessing on us, and request that the Spirit of God, who is within the heart of every child of God, every believer in Christ, that that Spirit will teach us, that we will understand the things that our Lord spoke in a parable to those that were with Him. We pray that You would open this passage up to us, give us understanding of it, build us up in the faith, make its application apparent to us, encourage us with it, convict us where we need conviction.

Lord, we pray for Your rich blessings upon us, as we study Your Word. We know, as Isaiah said, that it cannot go out and come back void. It will never return empty. It will have a good effect, because this Word is unique. It is living, it is powerful, it's sharper than any two edged sword, and it divides the thoughts and the intentions of our heart. It analyzes us and convicts us and encourages us. And so we pray for that ministry this morning.

Now Lord, we pray for our physical wellbeing as well. We pray that You would bless our health and we thank You that You're so faithful to do that. And we pray for others, LORD, within our congregation that You'd bless them. We pray that You would encourage and strengthen them.

We are dependent upon You, LORD, for everything: Every breath we take is a gift from You; and we pray that we would learn to live in light of that and not take anything for granted—but know that every step we take is a gift from You. And You are a faithful shepherd to lead us every step as we look to You. So teach us that this morning, Father, and encourage us, build us up in the faith, that You be glorified in all things. And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) I was born in the city and raised in the suburbs—so farm life is foreign to me. But a few decades ago I got a living lesson on sheep and shepherds when my wife and I lived in Jerusalem. There was a Palestinian shepherd who lived behind our home and every day he would bring his flock through the parking lot below our window and would graze his sheep on Mount Scopus. When I walked by I would hear him call to them in Arabic. Occasionally he might throw a rock at one of the sheep that was

wandering off, but mainly he stood watching his flock, making sure that they were safe and fed. It was an interesting contrast: On the edge of a modern city was a shepherd doing what shepherds like him have done on the hills of Jerusalem for millennia. It's always been a place of shepherds.

From the earliest pages of the Bible we find shepherds. Able was a shepherd. The patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were shepherds. Rachel was a shepherd. Moses was a shepherd. David was a shepherd. The shepherd is one of the most familiar figures in the Bible. He's a symbol of leadership, a symbol of care and concern. Kings are called 'Shepherds'. God is described as a 'Shepherd'. One of the most familiar lines in the Bible is one that we've just sung; "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

And the shepherd is the central figure of our passage, John 10. This is the chapter where the Lord calls Himself, "the good shepherd." (vs11). He introduces it with a parable about the shepherd and his sheep to illustrate His relationship with His people; how He calls us to Himself, guides us through life, and protects us from harm. And protection is necessary because danger lurks all around.

The story begins with thieves creeping up on the fold to steal sheep. The identity of the robbers becomes clear when we make the connection between this chapter and the previous chapter—the two are closely linked. Chapter 10 begins, "Truly, truly." Never in the New Testament do those two words introduce a new section but always follow from a previous teaching; so chapter 10 is connected to chapter 9.

In chapter 9 the Lord healed a blind man who was brought to the synagogue where he made a good confession about Christ as the one who healed him. But instead of receiving care from the religious authorities, (who considered themselves to be 'shepherds of Israel'), he was treated roughly and driven out of the synagogue.

Later, Jesus found him, cared for him, and declared that the Pharisees were the real blind men—blind leaders and bogus shepherds. And with that He told this story in which He declared Himself to be the real Shepherd, the true Shepherd of the sheep; and explained what He does for His people. He's very different from the religious leaders

who opposed Him and who abused all of those who believed in Him. They were like men who raided flocks—not like shepherds who cared for them.

At night, a shepherd would typically lead his sheep into a sheepfold—a walled enclosure. It was usually made of stone or mud brick walls. Sometimes there would be a partial roof over it, but mostly it was open to the sky.

Inside the enclosure the sheep were kept from wandering off at night and protected from harm, whether it was from the wild beasts that were around, (like wolves or bears or lions), or from others that might do them harm.

There's only one door to the sheepfold through which the sheep could pass when they came in at night; and it was guarded by a doorkeeper so that no one but the sheep could enter. So anyone who crept up to the fold and climbed over the wall was, obviously, not a true shepherd but a thief and a bandit.

The real shepherd of the sheep, the Lord says, is "...he who enters by the door." (vs2). The doorkeeper opens to him, and the sheep know him, and the sheep come to him, and he leads them out for their good. The details of the Lord's story were familiar to those who heard Him; they lived in the land of sheep and shepherds and were well acquainted with all of that.

But the meaning of His parable escaped them. John wrote in verse 6, 'They did not understand the figure of speech that He used'; it was a cryptic saying to them. Which seems surprising, not only because sheep and shepherds were so common in Israel, but also because the Pharisees were students of Scripture, (and they're still present in this conversation; verse 19 indicates that).

They should have recognized the obvious Old Testament background to the Lord's parable, especially in connection with Ezekiel 34. There God denounces "the shepherds of Israel", (vs2), the religious leaders, as men who cared only for themselves. Instead of 'feeding the sheep, they ate the sheep, and clothed themselves with their wool.' (vs3). They were unworthy shepherds—and God promised to remove them.

But He also promised in Ezekiel 34, to raise up another shepherd in their place, one who would do the work of a shepherd; and it's one whom He calls, "My servant David." (vs23). It's a promise and prophesy of our Lord.

In His parable, He tells of the good work that He does as shepherd, while exposing the Pharisees' harmful work. They were thieves, fleecing the sheep rather than feeding them. He was the true shepherd. He didn't climb over the wall like a thief, He entered by the door. "To Him", He said, "the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear His voice." (vs3).

The doorkeeper has been identified as John the Baptist, who introduced our Lord's ministry and introduced the Lord to the nation; (and I think that's a good identification; a 'good guess', we could say). But also, others have suggested the Holy Spirit, who opens hearts to receive Jesus. But the doorkeeper may be no one in particular. I say that because this is a parable, and not every detail in a parable is always important.

What is important here is that Christ is the *true* Shepherd. He came a lawful way; He came 'through the door', as it were. And the lawful way is: He came in fulfillment of Scripture, the ancient prophesies. He was born of a virgin. He was born in Bethlehem. He was obedient to the Law, obedient to teaching the truth perfectly. And doing 'works of wonder'—He did miracles. All of these things were the fulfillment of prophesy. Everything about Him proved that He is the true Shepherd, the promised Shepherd of Ezekiel 34, who enters the fold rightfully, and rightly, and calls out His own sheep.

Oftentimes, shepherds with small flocks would use a common sheepfold and the sheep of different flocks would come together in the same sheepfold and mingle together at night. So when the shepherd came in the morning, he would have to separate his sheep from his neighbors' sheep. But that was not a problem because the sheep knew their shepherd's voice. He would stand at the door; he would call his sheep; and they would come.

Middle Eastern shepherds have been known to do just that. I read an account of an incident told by a traveler who was near Bethlehem and who saw two shepherds early one morning who had spent the night with their flocks in a cave. The sheep were all mixed together and in the morning the two shepherds were going separate directions. But one of them stood some distance from the sheep and began to call. One by one, the sheep came out of the mix and ran toward him until the whole flock was there—he counted them up and then he moved on.

F. F. Bruce told a similar story of shepherds he knew as a boy in the Scottish highlands. They had names for each of their sheep, and each one recognized its name and responded when the shepherd called it. Now that's the picture that the Lord gives of the true Shepherd. He knows each of His sheep, "He calls His own sheep by name...", Jesus said. (vs3b). He doesn't call all the sheep, He calls just those sheep which are His own—His elect ones. And they know Him...and come to Him. He then, "leads them out" of the fold. (vs3c).

In this context, the sheepfold is Judaism. Chapter 9, (vs22), suggests that with the healed man, the formerly blind man, coming "out of the synagogue". That's also indicated in verse 16, where Jesus said, "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also..." (And they are the Gentiles.)

So He calls people to Himself out of various sheepfolds from all walks of life; and calls them out individually, calls them by name, so that the sheep make up His flock. Then, when He has put them all out of the fold, the Lord says 'He goes ahead of them; He leads them to pasture; and they follow Him because they know the Shepherd's voice.' (vs4). It's very different, though, when a stranger attempts to take them. 'They won't follow him', Jesus said, "...but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers." (vs5).

And so it is with the true Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ and His sheep. We know His voice because we have a personal relationship with Him and we trust in Him alone.

And in this parable we learn a lot about that relationship, and how He shepherds us with care and concern. That's taught in three lessons here in the parable. One, He *knows* us. Secondly, He *calls* us. And then, (thirdly), He *leads* us.

First, He knows the sheep; and knows them well enough to call them by name. So His knowledge is not casual; it's not general. He doesn't just know the sheep as a number; He knows them personally with complete and intimate knowledge—who they are and what they are. And He knows them well because they are “His own”, His special possession. That's how He describes them here in verse 3 and 4, “He calls *His own* sheep”, and “He puts forth *His own*”. And they are His own sheep because they were given to Him by the Father; that's what He says later in verse 29 that, ‘The Father gave them to Him.’

Now that is the grace of God in election; the grace of God in choosing a people for His Son. As Paul put it in Ephesians chapter 1, verse 4, “He chose us in Him, (*in Christ*), before the foundation of the world.” He chose us to be represented by Christ. (That's, in part, what this expression, “in Him”, refers to—that He was our representative.) But also it speaks of a vital relationship that we have been put in—with Christ. We are connected to Him vitally—and He has an intimate relationship with us; and that goes back “before the foundation of the world” when we were given to the Son by the Father. Given to the Son to represent us—and to lead us in a personal relationship for all eternity.

So His knowledge of us, His knowledge of His sheep, goes back into eternity. If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, He knows you, has known you, forever—and has had you on His mind and in His heart always. —And I mean that personally, individually. He has had you on His mind and in His heart forever. Nothing is hidden from Him. No sin or failure on our part is unknown to Him; or has become a surprise to Him. He knows it all and He loves us in spite of it all—and He came here knowing all of that to save us from those sins and those failures by His death.

Now the Lord knows His sheep; they are "His own". That's the reason He calls them—and that's the reason they come to Him. Back in chapter 6 in verse 37, the Lord said, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me." That's the *second* lesson: He *calls* His people to salvation. He calls them personally, individually, just like those shepherds who call their own sheep by name. And those who have been given to Him, those who are His own, come.

One of them was that man healed of blindness in chapter 9. When Jesus came to him and identified Himself as the Son of Man, "...he said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshiped Him." (vs38). He responded to the voice of the Shepherd: He came out and he followed Him.

Others had already come out. There are examples of that all through the Gospels of those who were personally called by Christ and followed Him. In Matthew chapter 4, Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee and He called Peter and Andrew, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.",(vs19-20); they dropped everything they were doing, left their boats, and left their occupation.

In Matthew 9, Jesus passed by, "...Matthew, sitting in the tax collector's booth; and He said to him, 'Follow Me!' And he (*Matthew*) got up and followed Him." (vs9). In the first chapter of this Gospel, John wrote that Jesus came into Galilee, found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." (vs43). And so it goes. This is the Lord's ongoing work as He continues to call His sheep out of the Jewish fold, out of the Gentile fold, out of one religion and another—and out of every situation and station in life. And as they respond and 'come out of their sheepfold', they enter into His great flock made up of all kinds of sheep, all kinds of people, and 'He leads them out.'

In verse 4 John wrote that, "He puts forth all His own." And that's an interesting statement because it's the same word used in chapter 9 of the Pharisees expelling the blind man from the synagogue: They "put him out" of the synagogue. (vs34). So, it may

have a sense, here, of force; may have that sense of, 'compelling the sheep to leave their sheepfold'—and acknowledging in this that, they may have had an initial resistance to the Gospel; and the Lord overcomes that.

Following Christ can be challenging, more so for some than others. Peter and John and Matthew hear this call and they immediately left their businesses. Christ's call sometimes removes people, though, from very comfortable situations; from old friends and family—and that can be difficult. There's some safety, (and there at least a sense of security), in the old life and the fear of danger outside of it. There's uncertainty about what we've been called to—but nevertheless it is a separation that must be made. And Christ persuades and constrains them to leave and to follow Him.

And when they do, (and all of the sheep do leave the old life and follow Him), when they do, though, they discover that that is where real security is. That's where genuine life is lived. "He goes ahead of them", John said, leading the way.

[Now, that's not how the shepherd I became familiar with years ago would take his flock from place to place. He came in behind it, driving his sheep on, (often below my window), pressing them forward.]

But Jesus doesn't drive us. He leads us. That's the *third* lesson and it gives a very encouraging, reassuring picture of the Lord's relationship with us. He leads us wisely. He knows where it is best for us to go, where it is not best for us to be, where the pitfalls are, and how to avoid them—and where the green pastures are. He leads us through this world as no one else can.

For there are dangers in life and Christians aren't excused from those dangers. We face temptation every day. We face rejection, even hostility when we make our faith known. The Lord knows that. He was a genuine man, He experienced life as we do, experienced temptation as we do—yet without sin. Still, He experienced temptation fully, really experienced the fullness of every temptation, more so than we do. So He knows the pressures of life; He understands the circumstances that we are placed in.

And He faced death. And what He faced in death was exceedingly fearful, unlike anything we've ever experienced—or will experience. He knows the experience and what we feel when we face it, (or what we face when we face any danger at all), and the challenge of it—a challenge that we feel might threaten to overwhelm us. He knows that experience and He leads us through it as a shepherd; as one who knows and one who cares with perfect and complete wisdom. The Lord doesn't require us to go anywhere that He Himself has not gone. There's no danger we might meet that He hasn't faced it first. So we can follow Him with confidence. And the sheep follow because they know the Shepherd's voice.

And like the sheep in the parable, a stranger they will not follow because they don't know his voice. Leon Morris wrote that travelers in Palestine have documented that even when a stranger put on a shepherd's clothing, (maybe borrowed it from one of the shepherds who owned the flock, or was over the flock), and then attempted to imitate his voice, the sheep didn't follow. They ran away, because they know their shepherd's voice and won't follow another; even if it's a close imitation.

And again, we see an example of that in the man of chapter 9 and his clash with the Pharisees. Even before he had saving faith in Christ, (at least before his faith becomes complete at the very end of the chapter), the authorities could not persuade him to deny Christ or turn away from Him. He knew the truth—and to him their voices were that of strangers. They were 'The shepherds of Israel', they would have said, but he didn't recognize any shepherd in their voice; and he didn't follow them.

And the Christian doesn't follow false shepherds; he or she flees from them. Israel had a history of false shepherds who 'ate the sheep', (that's Ezekiel 34 again). But the church does, too. We are warned of them all through the New Testament. In Acts, chapter 20, Paul has a reunion with the elders of the church of Ephesus. It's the last time he will be with them and he gives them 'a farewell address', as it were, and expresses the need that they have of shepherding the sheep—and he urges them in that. He warns

them of "...savage wolves", he said, "that would come in among them, not sparing the flock." (vs29). They were to take the warning seriously.

We are, too. Satan is clever—and Satan is busy. He has his ministers; he has his shepherds everywhere. Well, how can we know that, (because they're very clever at imitating the true Shepherd)? Well, we know them by their voice. As clever as they may be, as effective as they may be in seeking to imitate Him, ultimately, they do not sound like Christ. They won't say what He said.

And so, we need to train our ears to hear His voice. And the best way to detect a counterfeit is by knowing the true. The best way to detect a counterfeit voice is to know the true voice. And to know the true voice, we need to know the true Shepherd. The better we know Him, the clearer we will hear His voice and the quicker we will recognize what is false—and flee. We grow in our relationship with the Lord by knowing His Word; by knowing the Scriptures. —That is where we hear His voice.

It's good to know what false teachers; or what false shepherds teach. It's good to know the errors that are out there and be aware of the consequences of them. But better than that is knowing the truth; is knowing the Savior and His voice.

You can read books about the cults and you can read books about the latest spiritual fads—and you can profit from it. I'm not discouraging that; but we profit far more from knowing 'The True'. That's how we grow strong; that's how we train our spiritual ears to hear what is right; to hear what is true. "Sanctify them in the truth", Jesus prayed, "Your Word is truth." John 17, verse 17. The more we are sanctified and made like Christ the better we will hear Him—and the more quickly we will flee error.

And Christians should flee. There's no value hanging around false shepherds who can't feed the sheep—who can only mislead them. Sheep don't have fellowship with a herd of goats. The pattern the Lord gives is, 'fleeing from that'; they are 'thieves and robbers'. They deny the cross; they deprive the lost of salvation; they rob saints of growth. —They are a danger.

From the moment of salvation, when Christ leads us out of the sheepfold of error into the sheepfold and flock that is His own, we're led by Him—every moment. And He leads us “from glory to glory”; that's how Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 18. He's speaking about the work of the Spirit there, but we can't really separate the work of the Spirit from the work of the Lord. He works in us, He blesses us through the ministry of the Spirit. And there Paul says, ‘He is blessing us at this present time through the work of sanctification, from glory to glory’ ...a great picture of what's occurring in your life and the life of every believer at every moment.

Well that's the pattern and the course of the Christian life. And it only continues: He leads us not only through this world but into the next—and through it. In fact, it never ends; He leads us always—for all eternity.

And we get a picture of that from Revelation chapter 7, which is a vision of heaven. In verse 17 John wrote that “...the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life...” That's a magnificent text and full, like all of the Book of Revelation, with magnificent figures of speech.

Notice the Lamb here is a shepherd. A lot of students of the Book of Revelation have noticed the unusual role reversal with the Lamb as the Shepherd. Whoever heard of a lamb shepherding?

But the Shepherd, who is also a Lamb, is the very best Shepherd because being a Lamb, He can identify closely with His lambs. He is not only God, (and He is God, very God of very God), but Christ is also man. He is one of us and knows our weaknesses; He knows our needs. He can shepherd us perfectly because He is both God and man. And He does that now, leading us wisely.

And He will be our eternal Shepherd; He will be providing for us abundantly in heaven and throughout eternity. That's what's described here. He will guide us to “springs of the water of life.” It's a picture taken from the 23rd Psalm; and the Shepherd making us to “lie down in green pastures”, and leading us “beside quiet waters”,(vs2); gently flowing streams. That's the picture given here: a picture of freedom from the

straits and stresses of life; from all want and all of the earthly burdens that we bear. We will have complete relief from that; and joy unspeakable—and all of that in abundance!

But notice also the word “*springs*” is plural—and it suggests a continual progression from one fountain of water to another; water and refreshment without end. It's a way of saying what life in heaven is like. Now, I think we're to take this figuratively, (so much in the Book of Revelation is figurative), but what this idea of water and “springs of water” represents is a way of saying that life in heaven and life in the world to come will go on forever. There will be eternal refreshment, and joy, and constant progress in that—constant progress from one fountain to another, “from glory to glory.”

And with us, all the way, will be Christ, the Lamb, the Shepherd. His presence with us will be constant. And that's really what makes heaven—heaven; Christ. We will be with Him and He will be with us, our constant companion.

But we're also told that, “God will wipe (*away*) every tear from their eyes.” (vs17b). That's a great promise that we have. And the point is, ‘There will be no sorrow in heaven.’ All tears will be wiped away; all questions answered: A great picture that's given of our future there in that passage. Henry Alford, the Anglican dean, wrote on this passage, “It is exceedingly difficult to express the sense of these glorious words.”

It is exceedingly difficult. In fact I would say, ‘It's impossible to fully fathom what is described there in Revelation 7 of our great hope and what life is going to be like for us.’ But that's our hope. And what it shows is that the work of shepherding us that the Lord began when He called us out of our old sheepfold, He will continue by bring us into glory for eternity. He will lead us safely through this world of woe—and into the heavenly world of unimaginable joy. He is faithful and He is able—and we are to trust Him every step of the way.

And the assurance is, as John makes this very clear, (and the Lord makes very clear later in this chapter), He'll not lose one of us on the way. He's a perfect good Shepherd.

Well, if you're here without Christ, if you've not trusted in Him, you are without a shepherd. You are without a true and wise and loving guide through the present dangers of this world. You are presently moving toward a hopeless end. But there is a Shepherd—the true Shepherd. Call to Him; He will hear you. He came to seek and to save the lost. He will find you and save you—and He will lead you through life and never forsake you.

Now that's assurance that we have; and we'll see it even more clearly as we go through this great tenth chapter of the Gospel of John. So may God convict you of your need of Him and bring you to Him. And give all of us confidence in Him who have come to Him; trust in Him as we walk through this life.

Father, what a joy it is to confess what we've just sung, that we are "debtors to mercy alone." The more we understand ourselves and the more we understand You, our Triune God, the more we understand the need of mercy and grace. And we are all like Joshua, the high priest in Zachariah 3, "plucked as a brand from the burning." (vs2b). That's Your grace and that's Your mercy. And yet having been 'snatched', as it were, You keep us forever secure. You, as our good Shepherd, our Lord, will never forsake us. So we praise You and thank You for that.

May that be an encouragement to everyone here. And may it be an encouragement to live a life of obedience and service to You because of the great service You've rendered to us, and still do, and will for all eternity. Thank You for that.

Now bless us Lord, and bless all those that are coming home today. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In Christ's name. Amen

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