

“I Am—the Good Shepherd”  
 Sermon for 18 October 2015  
 Text: John 10:7-21

Last week we discovered that when we shepherd our mission is an extension of Christ’s mission. Therefore we are to lift the curse and to extend hope to those who are stymied—we call the sheep to ourselves and thus to Christ in us! When that happens, the sheep is changed. In this process there may be some pain—usually is. The old man dies, relationships must be recast—there may be some necessary goodbye’s, but there are also many hello’s. Personal sanctification is combined with training—training in shepherding, a broader designation than discipleship. (I think, in contemporary terms, discipleship is rather like an apprenticeship whereby a more mature Christian models, and encourages his, or her protege in Christian living. That training takes place primarily in flock, but also one on one. A Christian who is not in-flocked, that is, not in church is not rubbing shoulders with other sheep . . . is not in the rough and tumble of being a community member. Church involvement entails loving the unlovely in others because we experience others loving the unlovely in us. We have the goal of seeking perfection, and the comfort of knowing it’s okay to be rather less than perfect in the here and now. Eventually, the Lord will perfect us. Then, and only then, will everything be perfect! Glorious even.

So, the Pharisees didn’t fathom the lesson entailed in John 10:1-6. I don’t believe this means that no one got it at all, but it means that the mastery was uneven. Some didn’t get it at all, some got a little of it. And, for others, what little they got was preparatory for take two. That is our passage for this morning. Jesus begins just as solemnly as He did previously: **Verily, verily** . . . that is, very truthfully (as in “true truth”), **I am the gate**. Previously, Jesus had been speaking of gate as being the proper credentials (I am the promised One, I come from the line and lineage of David, I am the proper King of Israel). These credentials the Pharisees either rejected, or contradicted. As if to say, “No, you couldn’t be . . . we won’t believe it.” So the shift is from the shepherd, to the sheep. It is another way of approaching the same claim. At first Jesus was clarifying the proper, true approach to the governance of the church of God. Here, secondly, He is designating Himself as the sole entrance into the true eternal church—the family of God loosed from the constraints of time and place. This we call the spiritual, or invisible church which is established in heaven and, as we are told, is coming *on the earth* at Christ’s return (at the end of the age). Circumcision, baptism, external confession (testimony) are doors into the visible church, but none, except by saving faith in Christ, can be a member of the true and everlasting church! *There has to be a work in the spirit of a man, in his innermost being (or heart) or he remains excluded.*

**All who came before Me are robbers and thieves.** (v.8) This cannot refer to the true prophets of God (or of Moses and the patriarchs); but refers to those who teach any other way of salvation, any other way of life than that which comes by way of believing on Him, the Messiah. **The gate**. For the Messiah has come, has been revealed *for the salvation of the world*. All who teach of another way are thieves and robbers because they seek their own advantage and are not truly concerned for the salvation of the peoples’ souls! *This is a terrifying indictment.* Those who are mine

by eternal election, or are mine by the special operation of grace upon them, **do not heed these false gospels, or follow lying teachers.** Because the Pharisees were deeply entrenched in the temple cult, and still seeking to obey the Law of Moses, this was a discomfiting word. Was Jesus saying, you cannot be saved by the keeping of the Law? Yes, because although it perfectly describes how one ought to live; it does not convey the power to perform it! *Only a perfect man could perfectly keep the Law and be saved by his works.* As Paul writes, the purpose of the Law was to teach us the impossibility of pleasing God by performance, only by a faith that is accounted us as righteousness.

So the door by which any pastor must enter to serve the church is revealed, from the opposite direction, as also the door through which the sheep must go to obtain heaven. Apart from the doctrine taught previously, John 3:16, 18 and 35-36:

**16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.**

**18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.**

**35" The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. 36" He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."**

this present teaching is hard to grasp. But whomsoever believes on Him will be guided, governed and taught—will be kept safe and will want for nothing in the handling of his life in this world: a safe, secure and tended sheep. **Pasture** here means all the supply of which a sheep could possibly want: all the good things for soul and body, here and now and later. It is another phrase for abundant life, as in real life, or true life. Actual life. It is in line with **He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who comes to Me shall never thirst.** (John 6:35. See also Psalm 23 and Psalm 84:11)

Anyone should be able to discern between the motives of a true shepherd, and those of robbers and thieves! The latter wants to feed himself off the sheep; he is an exploiter, and not a shepherd. A meat eater and not a wool gatherer. So it is that those who purport to serve the church, without any call (or derivation of authority) from Me, thrust themselves into the care and conduct of the church of God. These evil motives cultivate the corruption that defiles the church and harms the sheep. **Such as these, Pharisees, are you.** You excel at cursing, at casting out, but do not gather, protect or lead the scattered sheep of Israel. The false shepherds serve themselves at the cost of the ruin of many souls. They are misleaders and deceivers. That would certainly suffice as the heart of the difficulties between Jesus and those who rejected and opposed Him.

There is part of me that wishes this problem of false shepherds, of robbers and thieves had gone the way of the Pharisees! But church history illustrates quite

the opposite—cults, heretics and apostates abound and misled many to their eternal ruin. While those that bring such ruin collect salaries, condole one another and write awful books (books that establish their reputation, professionalize their opinions), they teach another gospel. Frankly, pluralism (all religions are co-equal and co-valid paths to the same god) is one of the better devices of the devil to destroy the sheep! And, no, I do not digress.

***I am not come to destroy, but I come that they may have life . . . to the full!*** (v. 10) This is the Messianic mission as prophesied and as fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Even the judgment that Jesus brought was not unto destruction but unto conviction. He aimed to produce repentance and a turning to God without which no man shall escape the wrath. He has come so that we may live a life of grace in the here and now, and, when our change comes, not miss out on the life of glory yet to come! Jesus did not have a “skin of your teeth” deliverance in mind here. We escaped and just barely got in. Whew-ee! No, rather He has in mind a life in spiritual fullness: filled with the upholding of His power, strengthening of His might, quickening's and comforting's.

We do not have to venture far to see evidence for this. When the Pharisees had completed their cursing of the man born blind, Jesus sought him out. And in the exchange that follows, He enfolds the man to Himself. **Then the man said, “I believe,” and he worshipped him.** (9:38) This is a difficult verse for all who falsely maintain that Jesus did not understand Himself as divine. In public, in the view of friends and detractors alike, the act of worship unfolds. There is no rebuke from Jesus (for error, for misdirected worship) but rather there is acceptance and embrace. Faith is not a matter of visual ability. Faith sees that Jesus is the gate without mentally picturing a heavy door with iron hinges! The formerly blind man was a lost sheep of Israel and Jesus found him and led him home.

Perhaps you are here this morning and you are unaware that you, too, are a lost sheep of Israel. That you have a great purpose for living—something greater than a viral video, a hit song, winning the lottery—that you are God's missionary. And so commissioned and sent, appointed and equipped. Or, if you do know yourself to be His sheep, have you grown to the point of being a good shepherd? Good as it not false, as in bringing life and not destruction. A servant of others who refuses to use, exploit, to abuse others. If so, you should declare yourself—at the very least to yourself and then to somebody else. Find somebody to look in on you, to check up on your job review not as a person, but more as an under-shepherd of the Good Shepherd.

**Amen**