Jesus – The Door and the Shepherd

1. Introduction

a. In John Chapter 10 Jesus uses a scenario which would have been very familiar to his listeners. In rural Israel the land was covered with sheep and shepherds caring for their flocks was an everyday sight. Jesus uses this scenario to teach three things about his relationship with the people:

i He is the only Door to salvation

John 10:1 *Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber*

ii He is the Good Shepherd

John 10:11 *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

iii He has another fold

John 10:16 *And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.*

b. However, even if we are familiar with the rural setting of our country the nature of the way in which shepherds care for their flock in the rural hills and fields of England is different to that in Israel. To respond to what Jesus says in John 10 we need to have an understanding of the culture in which he was speaking.

2. Middle Eastern Sheep and Shepherding

a. To get a clear picture of Jesus' meaning in this passage, it is helpful to understand a little of that ancient culture, especially of sheep and shepherding. Of all domesticated animals, sheep are the most helpless. Sheep will spend their entire day grazing, wandering from place to place, never looking up. As a result, they often become lost. But sheep have no "homing instinct" as other animals do. They are totally incapable of finding their way to their sheepfold even when it is in plain sight. By nature, sheep are followers. If the lead sheep steps off a cliff, the others will follow.

b. Additionally, sheep are easily susceptible to injuries and are utterly helpless against predators. If a wolf enters the pen, they won't defend themselves. They won't try to run away or spread out. Instead they huddle together and are easily slaughtered. If sheep fall into moving water, they will drown. However, sheep do fear moving water and will not drink from any stream or lake unless the water is perfectly still. This is the context for David's most well-known Psalm.

Psalm 23:1-4 *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. **2**He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. **3**He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.**4** Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me;*

c. Sheep are totally dependent upon the shepherd who tends them with care and compassion. Shepherds were the providers, guides, protectors and constant companions of sheep. So close was the bond between shepherd and sheep that to this day Middle Eastern shepherds can divide flocks that have mingled at a well or during the night simply by calling their sheep, who know and follow their shepherd's voice. Shepherds were inseparable from their flocks.

The shepherd would lead the sheep to safe places to graze and make them lie down for several hours in a shady place. Then, as night fell, the shepherd would lead the sheep to the protection of a sheepfold.

d. There were two kinds of sheepfolds or pens. One kind was a public sheepfold found in the cities and villages. It would be large enough to hold several flocks of sheep. This sheep pen would be in the care of a porter or doorkeeper, whose duty it was to guard the door to the sheep pen during the night and to admit the shepherds in the morning. The shepherds would call their sheep, each of which knew its own shepherd's voice, and would lead them out to pasture.

e. The second kind of sheep pen was in the countryside, where the shepherds would keep their flocks in good weather. This type of sheep pen was nothing more than a rough circle of rocks piled into a wall with a small open space to enter. Through it the shepherd would drive the sheep at nightfall. Since there was no gate to close—just an opening—the shepherd would keep the sheep in and wild animals out by lying across the opening. He would sleep there, in this case literally becoming the door to the sheep.

3. I Am The door

John 10:1-10 *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. **2** But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. **3** To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. **4** When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. **5** A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." **6** This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.*

***7** So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. **8** All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. **9** I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. **10** The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*

a. The statement "I am the door," is the third of seven "I am" declarations of Jesus recorded only in John's Gospel. These "I am" proclamations point to His unique, divine identity and purpose. In this "I am" statement, Jesus points out for us the exclusive nature of salvation by saying that He is "**the** door," not "**a** door." Furthermore, Jesus is not only our Shepherd who leads us into the "sheepfold," but He is the **only** door by which we may enter and be saved (v.9) Jesus is the only means we have of receiving eternal life. There is no other way.

John 3:16 *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*

b. Jesus is telling us that He is not only the shepherd of the sheep, but also the door of the sheep. In doing so, He is vividly contrasting Himself with that of the religious leaders of His time whom He describes as "thieves and robbers" (v.8). When Jesus says, "I am the door," He is reiterating the fact that only through Him is salvation possible. This is far removed from the ecumenical teachings popular in today's liberal religious circles. Jesus makes it clear that any religious leader who offers salvation other than the teachings of Christ is a "thief" and a "robber."

c. One who believes the gospel and repents of sin is assured of being in "the fold" and of having entered by "the door."

Hebrews 11:6 *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*

Luke 13:3 *No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.*

d. Jesus is saying the same thing he will say in John 14:6: *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* He is the door and if we believe in him, and trust him to be the only path to God, he promises us two things:

   i We will be saved

   ii We will go in and out and find pasture.

e. We are saved from wolves and thieves that come to kill and destroy (John 10:10). Safe from every enemy that would destroy us. If we enter by Christ we will be forever safe, forever saved.

f. But none of us wants to be merely safe. We were not created merely to be safe. The human heart wants infinitely more than safety. Sure, safety is basic and necessary and we want to be protected from what can destroy us. But we want more than just a safe life - we want abundant life. Overflowing, deep and joyful life not just to survive. We want to thrive at every level of our human being. We were made for this.

g. So Jesus says more: "we will go in and out and find pasture." The point of saying this is that the sheepfold itself represents safety and protection. But sheep don't want to stay there. In fact, they will die if they stay in the safety of the fold. They want green pastures and still waters.

h. Jesus is promising us protection and plenty, solid safety and deep soul satisfaction. Abundant life is not about having stuff. It's about having peace, having joy, having God. Jesus is the only door to eternal safety. The only door to soul-satisfying pastures. The only door to God.

4. I Am The Good Shepherd

John 10:11-15 *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.* ***12*** *He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.* ***13*** *He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.* ***14*** *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,* ***15*** *just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.*

a. "I am the good shepherd" is the fourth of the seven "I am" declarations of Jesus recorded only in John's Gospel. Immediately after declaring that He is "the door" in John 10:7, Jesus declares "I am the good shepherd." He describes Himself as not only "the shepherd" but the "good shepherd." What does this mean?

b. It should be understood that Jesus is "**the**" good shepherd, not simply "**a**" good shepherd, as others may be, but He is unique in character.

Hebrews 13:20 *Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant*

1 Peter 2:25 *For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

1 Peter 5:4 *And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*

c. The Greek word *kalos*, translated "good," describes that which is noble, wholesome, good, and beautiful, in contrast to that which is wicked, mean, foul, and unlovely. It signifies not only that which is good inwardly—character—but also that which is attractive outwardly. It is an innate goodness. Therefore, in using the phrase "the good shepherd," Jesus is referencing His inherent goodness, His righteousness, and His beauty. As shepherd of the sheep, He is the one who protects, guides, and nurtures His flock.

d. As He did in declaring that He is "the door of the sheep" in John 10:7, Jesus is making a contrast between Himself and the religious leaders, the Pharisees. He compares them to a "hireling" or "hired hand" who doesn't really care about the sheep. In John 10:9, Jesus speaks of thieves and robbers who sought to enter the sheepfold stealthily. In that passage the Jewish leaders (Pharisees) are contrasted with Christ, who is the Door.

e. Here, in John 10:12, the hireling is contrasted with the true or faithful shepherd who willingly gives up his life for the sheep. He who is a "hireling" works for wages, which are his main consideration. His concern is not for the sheep but for himself.

f. Interestingly enough, the shepherds of ancient times were not usually the owners of the flock. Nevertheless, they were expected to exercise the same care and concern the owners would. This was characteristic of a true shepherd. However, some of the hirelings thought only of themselves. As a result, when a wolf appeared—the most common threat to sheep in that day—the hireling abandoned the flock and fled, leaving the sheep to be scattered or killed (John 10:12–13).

g. As previously mentioned sheep are utterly defenseless and totally dependent upon the shepherd. Sheep are always subject to danger and must always be under the watchful eye of the shepherd as they graze. Rushing walls of water down the valleys from sudden, heavy rainfalls may sweep them away, robbers may steal them, and wolves may attack the flock. David tells how he killed a lion and a bear while defending his father's flock as a shepherd boy.

h. Driving snow in winter, blinding dust and burning sands in summer, long, lonely hours each day—all these the shepherd patiently endures for the welfare of the flock. In fact, shepherds were frequently subjected to grave danger, sometimes even giving their lives to protect their sheep.

i. Likewise, Jesus gave His life on the cross as "the Good Shepherd" for his own. He who would save others, though He had the power, did not choose to save Himself.

Matthew 20:28 *The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*

j. Through His willing sacrifice, the Lord made salvation possible for all who come to Him in faith. In proclaiming that He is the Good Shepherd, Jesus speaks of "laying down" His life for His sheep. Jesus' death was divinely appointed. It is only through Him that we receive salvation.

k. Jesus is gathering a flock who will come under his protection and receive his abundant life. To do this he chooses to lay down his life. He is bound to his sheep, as he is bound to his

Father. He can no more lose them than he can lose the Father. And to save them he lays down his life. But God knows, and Jesus knows, and you know that if a shepherd dies, the sheep are at the mercy of the wolves. They will be scattered and they will die.

l. This is why Jesus says in verse 18: "*No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.*" The Father sent him to die for his sheep. And the Father commanded that he not abandon his sheep, but rise from the dead. And he did.

5. Another Fold – One Flock

John 10:16-18 *And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.* ***17*** *For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.* ***18*** *No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."*

a. As if calling the religious leaders "thieves" and "robbers" and comparing them to "hirelings" and "hired hands" wasn't offensive enough he goes on to declare he had more followers besides those who were already with Him. There were other followers who had not yet believed, including Gentiles.

b. God's salvation plan was progressive, beginning from Genesis 3:15, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." The pronoun he refers to Jesus, and although Satan "struck his heel" at Golgotha, Jesus crushed him on behalf of humanity (1 John 3:8; Hebrews 2:14–15).

c. A series of events occurred after the fall, leading to the selection of Israel as God's chosen people through whom Jesus came to earth (Deuteronomy 7:6; Romans 9:5). The Jews viewed this selection as their national identity, so the inclusion of unclean Gentiles as "other sheep" must have come as an unpleasant surprise.

d. After all, they expected the Messiah to deliver them from the Gentile Romans. However, Jesus was merely proclaiming what God had already revealed through the prophets (Joel 2:28; Zechariah 2:11; Isaiah 49:6). Scripture also hinted at the salvation of the Gentiles when God promised Abraham that "all the people of the earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3; cf. Galatians 3:8).

e. Some of the "other sheep" came when 3,000 Jews were saved in Acts 2:41. Samaritans and an Ethiopian eunuch joined the fold in Acts 8. Then the Holy Spirit led Peter to Cornelius, opening the door for Gentiles to come in (Acts 10). Thereafter, the Spirit chose Paul and Barnabas to take the good news to the Gentiles, a mission that sparked the spread of Christianity worldwide.

f. It has been over 2,000 years since then, and millions of the "other sheep" have come into the fold. In different continents, nations, tribes, and languages, many individuals have pledged their trust to Jesus and received His gift of salvation. Even in countries hostile to the gospel, believers still flourish. However, the work is not done yet. We are called to be witnesses of the gospel, and through our witness, Christ draws more of His sheep into His fold.

g. When the Great Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep, he purchased his sheep from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Therefore, whatever ethnic group we are

among, there are sheep there to be found (Acts 18:10). They need to hear the voice of Jesus. There are brothers and sisters to be found there. We dare not look on any racial or ethnic group with disdain. We dare not hold back the treasure of the gospel, as though we were worthy of it and they are not.

6. In his flock

John 10:25-30 *Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me,* ***26*** *but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock.* ***27*** *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.* ***28*** *I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.* ***29*** *My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.* ***30*** *I and the Father are one."*

a. Those who are in Jesus' flock are those who hear his voice and respond and follow him. As the sheep in the middle east follow the shepherd when he calls their name so we are those who are called by name to follow him. There is one flock and one shepherd for ever (v16).
   i This flock is forever and provides us with great security:
   ii Those whom the Father chose for himself, he also gave to the Son.
   iii And for those who belong to the Son, he also laid down his life.
   iv And those for whom he laid down his life, he also called to himself.
   v And those whom he called heard his voice and followed him.
   vi And to those who followed him, he gave eternal life.
   vii And those to whom he gave eternal life can never be taken from his hand.
   viii And there will be one flock and one shepherd forever.

b. This is how secure we are. This is how solid our salvation is. This is the foundation of our unshakable confidence that we will be with him forever. It is the work of God (1 Corinthians 1:30). Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord! (1 Corinthians 1:31).

c. This is why we can go in and out with him. He died for our sins, so that we are forgiven and have access to God. And he was raised to be the great Shepherd of the sheep. Today, alive, leading us again and again to protection and pasture — life and abundant life.

Hebrews 13:20–21 *Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,* ***21*** *equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*