

Up Close and Personal

John 10

Introduction

One of the warmest, most personal, touching sections in the biography of Jesus Christ appears in the tenth chapter of John's Gospel. Let us pick up our study at John, chapter 10, verses 1 through 5. This, by the way, is the last recorded public sermon in John's gospel.

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 before them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. And a stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.

Now notice the response of the crowd in verse 6.

This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them.

The translation "figure of speech" comes from an original word which means, "to communicate spiritual truths by a story or illustration".

Now, it is interesting that this original audience understood the symbols Jesus used, but not the spiritual truths. And for us today, it is exactly the reverse – we understand the spiritual truths, but no longer understand the symbols of "shepherd, door, and sheep".

So, I want to discuss, not just Jesus' spiritual truths, but reasons why Jesus used the symbols He did.

For us, who are unfamiliar with the shepherding scene; who never grew up around shepherds and flocks of sheep – we may think sheep are white and fluffy, and go "baaaa," and that the shepherd stands around leaning on his staff, and that is about all. But, there are some incredibly wonderful truths wrapped

up in the shepherd and sheep relationship. So, I am going to tie John, chapter 10, together with Psalm, chapter 23, to try to uncover some of these gems.

Now, in John, chapter 10, verse 7, Jesus amplifies and expands His explanation by actually claiming to play the role of two things He mentioned in His story. Look at that verse.

Jesus therefore said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep."

Jesus is taking us to an outdoor scene where the shepherd is corralling his sheep for the night. The shepherd would make a simple enclosure by piling rocks to make a circular wall. Then, because there was no door to this makeshift pen, he would actually lie down in the opening and thus, become the door. Nothing could come in or out, except by going, as it were, through him. If you want to join the flock, He is the only way in!

Paul wrote, in Ephesians, chapter 2, verse 18,

... through Him we ... have ... access ... to the Father.

Look further, in John, chapter 10, at verse 8.

All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them.

Now the church, in every age, has had to deal with those who try to crawl over the fence to take over the flock, claiming to be the door. In our age of anxiety and confusion, we are confronting everything from eastern mysticism, spirit channeling, centering, thought control, cultic religions – false prophets who promise life, but, in the end, bring death.

Look at verse 10.

The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life ...

There is the obvious implication, in Jesus' words, to the thieving religious leaders of this day. The leaders:

- were covetous (Luke, chapter 16),
- took advantage of the poor widows (Mark, chapter 12), and

- turned the temple into a den of thieves (Matthew, chapter 21).

They had no interest in the well being of the sheep.

The word translated “thief,” in verse 10, is the word “kleptes”. From this, we get the English word, “kleptomaniac,” which refers to someone who “steals cunningly or by stealth”. These thieves are not stupid, they are strategic in their planning.

The word “kill,” in this verse, is a rather sinister word which, literally, means, “to kill for food”. That is, these false religions and leaders give off the appearance of wanting to help the flock but, in reality, they only want to live off the flock.

I turned on an a.m. radio station recently, and listened to two or three unbelievable minutes of a well known radio personality, literally, begging for money. I just happened to turn on his program when the phones were not ringing and he had actually begun to berate his listeners.

He shouted, “Where are you out there? I need that ten dollar gift, that one hundred dollar gift, that five hundred dollar gift. Don’t you people know that I’m fighting the forces of Satan? Don’t you care enough to call? Why aren’t those phones ringing? Isn’t there anybody in the country interested in fighting the good fight?”

I turned it off in disgust. He is not trying to fight Satan, he is trying to fleece the sheep.

Jesus said, “The false shepherds only want to get, get, get. The true Shepherd, and all the genuine ‘undershepherds,’ will want to give, give, give.”

There is a vast difference between *fleeing* the sheep and *feeding* them.

Now, before we leave the analogy of the doorway, look at to verse 9.

I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved . . .

James Montgomery Boice made an interesting point. Had Jesus compared Himself to a wall, we would have to climb over it to be saved – that would be hard work and some of us might not be able to do it. Had He had compared Himself to a long, dark passageway, we would have to feel along it – some might be afraid to try. But He is not a wall or a passageway, He is a door – and a door can be entered easily and instantly.

Jesus says, “If you enter through Me, you will be saved.”

Modern thinking and religion do not like the word “saved”. Jesus, evidently, liked it, for He used it in this verse. It literally means, “delivered, safe and sound”.

By the way, a door is not only a means of entrance, but it is also a means of exclusion. To be on the one side of a closed door means to be separated or cut off from those on the other side. There is a big difference between being on the inside and being on the outside.

For now, the door is open and available – like the door leading into the ark of Noah and his family. That invitation existed for decades, “Whosoever will may come.” But, before the rain began to fall, the Lord shut the door – and all those on the outside, died, while all those on the inside, lived.

Jesus is Offering . . .

Jesus is offering the invitation to personal salvation

1. So, Jesus is offering the invitation to personal salvation.

And He is saying, in effect, I am the true Messiah – the One capable of offering salvation to Israel and the world.

A few years ago, a large group of Jews gathered at the Western Wall in Jerusalem to celebrate the birthday of their leader, Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, whom they had been claiming for forty years to be the true Messiah. The reason Rabbi Schneerson was not present at the festivities was because, at ninety-two years old, he lay paralyzed, by a second stroke, in a New York hospital.

One of the leaders of the group said they had believed for forty years that Schneerson was the Messiah, but the rabbi had to wait for a divine command to reveal himself. Now, he said, they expected him to recover from his stroke, come to Israel, and rebuild the temple.

The true Shepherd of the sheep has already been slain and resurrected, over two thousand years ago.

Jesus is offering the joy of personal satisfaction

2. Jesus is also offering the joy of personal satisfaction.

Look at verse 9 again.

I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out . . .

What does it mean, “. . . he . . . shall go in and out . . .”?

In Jesus day, when an army fought against a city, the city would shut its massive doors and lock them. You could not go in or out, because the land was not at peace; there was a war going on.

But what happens when you are saved? The war against God stops. And we, who were enemies of God, fighting against His control and authority over us, cease fighting and there is peace.

Paul had this in mind when he wrote, in Romans, chapter 5, verse 1,

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ

Now notice what the immediate benefit is, in John, chapter 10, verse 9b.

. . . [we] shall go in and out, and find pasture.

That is, we can finally find something to eat that satisfies us. Look at verse 10b.

. . . I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly.

Our English word “abundance” comes from two Latin words combined. The first Latin word means, “to rise in waves”. The second Latin word means, “to overflow”.

My family and I went to the coast recently. We heard the roar of the crashing waves. You have seen the constant wave after wave come rolling onto the shore, and you know that you could never hold it back! My children ran into the water and turned their backs on the waves, but they could no more stop the crashing waves than an adult.

So, also, you can never stop the flow, the crashing waves, of God’s grace.

Turn to Psalm, chapter 23, where David writes, in verse 1a,

The Lord is my shepherd . . .

He announces, “Everybody, look who my shepherd is – it is the Lord!”

Now, it is important to understand what David is not saying. He is not saying, “The Lord is my parent’s shepherd . . .” or “. . . my children’s shepherd . . .” or “. . . my best friend’s shepherd . . .”.

No, this is personal and possessive, “The Lord is *my* shepherd.”

It is also present tense! David is not saying, “The Lord will be . . .”.

No, this is personal salvation.

Then, in the last part of verse 1, he writes,

. . . I shall not want.

He is saying, “Because the Lord is my Shepherd, I will never want or lack anything I need!”

If you can say, “The Lord is my shepherd,” then there will also be the joy of personal satisfaction!

Now go back to John, chapter 10. Jesus changes the analogy and refers to Himself, not as the door, but, in verse 11, as,

I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Notice the difference between a good shepherd and a false shepherd, in verses 12 and 13.

He who is a hireling, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, beholds the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees, and the wolf snatches them, and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling, and is not concerned about the sheep.

So, Jesus has talked about the security of personal salvation and He has spoken of the joy of personal satisfaction.

Jesus is announcing the promise of personal safety

3. Now, Jesus is announcing the promise of personal safety.

Go back to Psalm, chapter 23, verse 2a.

He makes me lie down in green pastures . . .

You could translate this, “He makes it possible to lie down in green pastures.”

Why? Because a sheep is so timid that, as long as there seems to be some threat to his life, he will remain standing. His only recourse, if a wolf or lion should appear, is to run . . . *UNLESS* the shepherd is willing to fight and protect. Remember David,

himself, killed a lion and a bear who had come to kill his sheep.

So David says, “I can lie down in green pastures . . .”.

Why? Because the Lord is my shepherd and He is guaranteeing safety. We can add, from I John, chapter 4, verse 4,

. . . greater is He who is in [me] . . .

(the shepherd)

. . . than he who is in the world.

(the roaring lion).

Look at verse 4 of Psalm, chapter 23.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.

The rod was a short stick, often having bits of rock or metal embedded in the end to do severe damage to invading predators. The staff was a long stick with a crook on the end to pull the straying sheep close to the shepherd.

Now this verse is most often used to provide comfort to those who are dying. Certainly, it is true that God is with us when we are experiencing death. **BUT**, David is not talking about dying in this verse; he is talking about living.

Look at it again – you are not dying in the valley, you are walking through the valley! You do not need the rod and staff for protection when you are dying, you need them when you are living!

So, what is David talking about? I am so glad you asked!

Philip Keller, a former shepherd, turned author, helps us to understand this verse. It refers to the movement of the sheep through the valley, during the winter months, on their way to the high pasture land where they spend their summer.

The valley was the place of rich pasture and abundant water. It provided protection from the icy winter blasts of the high land. **BUT**, the valley was also the place of greatest danger. Wild animals lurked in the broken canyon walls on either side. Sudden floods could overwhelm them. There were deep shadows and dark places, since the sun does not shine as well in the valley.

What is the hope of the sheep? Look again at verses 4b and 5a.

Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me; Thou dost prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies . . .

(Not in the absence of enemies, but in the presence of.)

Now, **YOU KNOW** that the last thing you can do when you are terrified is eat. Some time ago, I had a terrifying moment. It was one night around midnight, and I was lying in bed. Suddenly, I heard a crash and a commotion in the kitchen. I thought, “Oh my stars, somebody has broken into the house!”

I sat up in bed – my eyes must have been as big as saucers. I thought, “Maybe I ought to wake Marsha and have her go check!”

But, it is better to die a hero than a coward! So, I got out of the bed and crept to the door. We have a long hallway that leads right to the dining room. I peeked my head out the door – a real brave guy here! I wondered if I should yell, “Hey, man, I’ve got a ‘38’!”

I decided not to, because the guy could call my bluff and say, “I’ve got a sawed off shotgun.”

So, I thought I would just keep quiet. I looked and, in the kitchen, Marsha leaves a light on over the sink. I do not know why – perhaps to let burglars know which window is available! But it was casting a shadow into the dining room and I could see a figure – something in the middle of the kitchen floor. My heart was beating loudly, “Ka-boom, ka-boom.”

I was scared to death. I began to think, “Now what should I do?”

There was only one thing to do – go find out, just like you would do, right? Either that or you send your wife! So, I headed down the hallway. I had my fist ready, thinking, “Well, I’ll make one good swing as I swing my way into heaven.”

I came into the kitchen, behind our refrigerator. As I walked closer, I could just see it – it was motionless and it was as if it were kneeling. It was only about three and a half feet high. I sprung around the refrigerator, ready to swing.

Now, you are not going to like this, because it was only a sack of trash that had fallen off the counter onto the kitchen floor! Can you believe that? But I was so psyched up, I wrestled that thing to the ground and threw it out of the house!

Now, when I go into the kitchen, I usually stop and open the refrigerator – but not that time!

Turn back to John, chapter 10, and notice what Jesus is offering next.

Jesus is offering the intimate touch of personal supervision

4. Jesus is offering the intimate touch of personal supervision.

Look at verses 14 and 15.

I am the good shepherd; . . .

(By the way, you ought to underline the little article, “the,” in “I am *the* good shepherd”. He is claiming exclusive right. He is not a good shepherd among many, He is *the* good shepherd. Let us go on.)

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.

Jesus says, “I know who My sheep are, and they know Me.”

This is a reference to an intimate knowledge. It is “ginosko,” in the Greek, meaning, “a personal knowledge that comes from a relationship”.

Now, with the Lord, the knowledge of his sheep is immediate and complete. He knows our name, our nature, our needs. For us, it is a journey – we are always learning.

Do you remember, men and women, when you first got married? Perhaps you dated your wife-to-be, or husband-to-be, to be for a month, or a year, or several years. You were fairly confident that you knew that person well! Then what happened, about two or three months into your marriage? You threw your hands into the air and asked God the question, “Who in the world is this man – or this woman?”

How many of you fellows had that experience? If you are smart, you will not raise your hand! And, if your wife asks you about it, you will say, “Not me! I never asked God that.”

The truth is, I have read the findings of Christian counselors, and I would have to agree from my own experience, the majority of marital challenges for the life of the marriage are discovered in the first three months of marriage. The amount of time you dated beforehand really does not seem to affect the learning experience that is necessary after marriage.

For those of you who have children, you have begun a life long journey of trying to get to know them. There is always something new! Now with our

baby girl, there is not a lot to go on. She basically, eats, sleeps, and spits up. But we are still learning more and more about our human relationships.

And our relationship with Jesus Christ – listen to Paul, as he passionately shares his desire, in Philippians, chapter 3, verse 10,

that I may know Him . . .

This is “ginosko,” the knowledge gained through personal intimacy.

Turn back to Psalm, chapter 23, verse 5b.

Thou has anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows.

That does not mean anything to us. We would never want someone to pour oil on our heads! *BUT*, it meant everything to sheep!

Sheep, in particular, are plagued by nasal flies and ticks. From what I have read, they will find a rock or tree trunk on which to scratch their heads. If they go unaided, the sheep will actually become so distracted that they will cause damage to themselves by the constant rubbing and scratching. As one author wrote, “If severely afflicted, they will butt their heads against a rock or tree trunk, desperate for relief.”

The shepherd, of Christ’s day, was constantly on the lookout for troubled sheep. When they noticed a sheep having trouble, they would take their staff, pull the sheep close, remove the flask of oil from their belt, and gently rub this medicinal substance in and around their ears, eyes, and nose. The oil also served as a repellent. You can imagine the relief and comfort, as that one-on-one experience took place.

There is the larger picture, where I am part of the flock. And there is also the intimate picture that Jesus Christ knows our name and sees when we have need of a personal, intimate touch. He then pulls us close and administers whatever we need.

No wonder David finished verse 5 with,

. . . my cup overflows.

It is as if he said, “It just doesn’t get any better than this.”

One more thought from John, chapter 10.

Jesus is announcing He will die as a personal substitute for our sins

5. There is the announcement of a personal substitution.

Look at verses 16 through 18.

And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; . . .

(There are Gentiles who will be saved, not of the fold of the Jewish nation.)

. . . I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock with one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life 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 wants to make it very clear that He will not die as a martyr, killed by men; He will die as a personal substitute for the sins of the whole world.

In the Old Testament, sheep were sacrificed for the sins of the shepherds. At the dawn of this new age of grace, the shepherd was sacrificed for the sins of the sheep.

I read, in William Barclay's commentary, the story of a young French soldier who was terribly wounded during the first World War. His arm was so badly smashed that it had to be amputated. He was a magnificent specimen of young manhood, and the surgeon was grieved that he would now have to go through life maimed. So, he personally waited beside the soldier's bedside to tell him the bad news. When the young man opened his eyes, the surgeon was there and said to him, "I am so sorry to tell you that you have lost your arm."

After a moment of silence, as the news sank in, the young soldier said, "Sir, I did not lose my arm – I gave it – for France."

And so Jesus gave his life – so that He could take it back again and, as our shepherd, offer us:

- personal salvation,
- personal satisfaction,
- personal safety,
- personal supervision, and
- personal substitution.

"Hey everybody, look who my Shepherd is? He is the Lord!"

Is He yours?