

John 10:1-18

As new light dawned upon the blind man, both physically and spiritually. Darkness descended upon the nation of Israel.

John 9:39-41 **"And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.**

40: And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also?

41: Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth."

Yes, willing ignorance had turned into a judicial blindness.

From that point on, Jesus' clear and concise teachings would be hidden in parables.

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So it's really not surprising that the very next chapter begins with a parable.

John 10:1 **"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber."**

Like many of Jesus' parables, this one was based on everyday events.

Yes, everyone in His audience would be quite familiar with the ways of an Israeli shepherd.

However, that might not be true of many of us, so let's take a few moments to talk about sheep and shepherds.

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Certainly, most towns and villages in Israel would be provided with sheepfolds. They would be permanent structures with stone walls and regular doors or gates. However, that wasn't the kind of enclosure that Jesus was describing in His parable.

No, it was a temporary structure being hastily constructed in the wilderness to protect the sheep at night.

Several groups of shepherds would pool their resources, constructing a corral made of thorn bushes, etc.

Having completed their task, and with darkness swiftly approaching, the weary shepherds would light their fires and try to get some rest.

However, there was no rest for one man.

No, every shepherd must take his turn as the porter.

Because this structure was so temporary in nature, there was no possibility of erecting a door to shut out predators. Consequently, it would be his job to curl up in the entrance, being both door and watchman.

All night long he would keep his eyes and ears open for any signs of trouble, be they human or otherwise.

In the morning, the weary man would admit the rightful shepherds, whom, of course, he knew personally.

As each shepherd arrived, he would collect his flock, and lead them out to pasture.

Yes, this sheepfold must be emptied, for it was strictly an overnight accommodation.

Already, the small amount of grass it contained would be thoroughly trampled, and, of course, there wouldn't be any water.

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Initially, this parable seems quite straightforward in nature.

However, as we read on, it becomes increasingly complicated.

Certain items in Jesus' example keep changing their symbolic meaning, and by the time the parable is finished, He has described three separate sheepfolds.

So, in order to keep these sheepfolds
straight in our minds, I will assign a
number to each one.

So let's begin.

In V 1-6, Jesus is talking about the nation
of Israel, which we will call sheepfold
No. 1.

Surprisingly, He begins His parable with
thieves and robbers.

John 10:1 **"Verily, verily, I say unto you,
He that entereth not by the door into
the sheepfold, but climbeth up some
other way, the same is a thief and a
robber."**

Who are these thieves and robbers?

Actually, they're the religious leaders who
have always opposed Him, and no doubt
are standing in the audience as He
talks.

Yes, I'm quite sure Jesus was looking them straight in the eye when He said, **"the same is a thief and a robber."**

And I'm pretty sure they got the point.

After all, they could hardly study the Old Testament Scriptures without being conscious of the fact that God looked upon Israel as His sheep.

And He also looked upon their leaders as their shepherds.

Let's turn to Ezekiel 34:1-3 **"And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 2: Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?"**

**3: Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you
with the wool, ye kill them that are
fed: but ye feed not the flock."**

The point is, a shepherd has every right to eat the fat and use the wool, but he must feed the flock.

The thief is bent upon stealing all of these things without the necessity of contributing his labour.

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Next, Jesus describes the shepherd arriving in the morning to claim his flock.

John 10:2 **"But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep."**

Here, He puts Himself in the parable.

And as you will notice, the one thing that distinguishes the rightful shepherd from the thieves and robbers is the fact that He has entered by the door.

Yes, Jesus, the true Shepherd of Israel had entered by the door of prophecy, fulfilling it to the letter.

After a very dark night in Israel's history, morning had come, and so had their Messiah.

But in Jesus' case, both the porter and many of the sheep had not recognized Him.

I believe the porter represents the religious leaders who certainly should have recognized Jesus, but had refused to do so.

They were "**the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves,**" and wanted to go right on doing so.

Yes, Jesus had come through the door of prophecy, a door they were quite familiar with, but they had rejected Him.

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However, they were only part of the problem. When the Shepherd called out His sheep, only a few responded.

In spite of God's witnesses to Jesus' authenticity, they would continue to follow their false shepherds.

They were not His sheep.

Paul would make this quite clear in Romans

9:6-8 **"Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:**

7: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called.

8: That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed."

Yes, there were many in Israel who rejected Him, but there were those who heard His voice.

John 10:3-5 **"To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.**

4: And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

5: And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers."

No, Jesus' ministry wasn't a failure. His sheep heard His voice.

For instance, there were the 12 disciples.

Most of them were unlearned men, but they had no difficulty in hearing their Master's voice.

As Peter said, "**--- we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.**"

And there were others such as Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha.

They heard His voice.

Why, Lazarus even heard it on the other side of the grave!

However, many had closed their ears to the truth, and now the truth was hidden.

V 6 "**This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.**"

Matthew 13:14 "**And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not**

**understand; and seeing ye shall see,
and shall not perceive."**

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However, as darkness fell upon Israel, the age of Grace was dawning, and this was also reflected in Jesus' parable.

John 10:7-9 **"Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.**

8: All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.

9: I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."

---"Then said Jesus unto them again."

You might say He was beginning a new parable, even though His subject was the same.

No longer was He the Shepherd, entering the
sheepfold of Israel.

No, He was the door.

And the sheepfold has changed its identity
also.

It wasn't a place to be called out of in the
morning. It was a place to enter into
as darkness approached.

And like the sheepfold of Jesus' example,
there was only one door, and that door
was a man.

Also, V 9 says, **"if any man enter in, he
shall be saved."**

There's no doubt in my mind that Jesus is
talking about heaven.

And for the purpose of clarity, we will
refer to this enclosure as sheepfold
No. 3.

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However, right in the middle of V 9, the symbolism changes once again.

At the beginning, the sheepfold represented heaven, and Jesus was the door.

But as we approach the end of this verse, He is talking about a normal sheepfold from which the sheep **"--- go in and out, and find pasture."**

Of course they can't **"go in and out"** without a shepherd, so in V 11, Jesus takes His place as the Shepherd once more --- **"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."**

However, He is no longer picturing Himself as the Messiah, the Shepherd of Israel, but rather a Shepherd who will willingly give **"his life for the sheep."**

He could only be describing His office as
our Saviour, and His flock could only
be the Church of Jesus Christ.

Yes, the symbolism in V 9 needed to change
quickly, because not only is Jesus the
one door into heaven, but through the
ministry of the Holy Spirit, He was to
be the Good Shepherd, leading His flock
through this present evil age.

And like the nation of Israel, the Church of
Jesus Christ could be victimized by
thieves and robbers.

V 10-15 **"The thief cometh not, but for to
steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I
am come that they might have life, and
that they might have it more
abundantly.**

**11: I am the good shepherd: the good
shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.**

12: But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.

13: The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

14: I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

15: As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep."

As you have probably noticed, the church also faces another danger.

In addition to the thief who comes "to steal, and to kill, and to destroy,"

there are the hirelings who "**careth not for the sheep.**"

Praise God for the Good Shepherd and the faithful under-shepherds who feed and protect the Church of Jesus Christ.

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And not only will this new Shepherd give His life for the sheep, but He will do it voluntarily.

V 17-18 "**Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.**

18: No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father."

Here we see another identifying mark of the Good Shepherd.

Not only will He give His life voluntarily,
but He will rise from the dead --- **"I
have power to lay it down, and I have
power to take it again."**

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And where does the Good Shepherd obtain
these sheep that He will die for?

First of all, He calls them out from the
sheepfold of Israel --- V 3 **"the sheep
hear his voice: and he calleth his own
sheep by name, and leadeth them out."**

And then, in V 16, Jesus says --- **"And other
sheep I have, which are not of this
fold: them also I must bring, and they
shall hear my voice; and there shall be
one fold, and one shepherd."**

By definition, other sheep must necessitate
another sheepfold.

We will call this new enclosure sheepfold
No. 2.

And if those other sheep are not from the
sheepfold of Israel, they must come
from that much larger sheepfold which
contains the Gentile nations.

In both cases, His sheep must be called out
because there are other flocks and
other shepherds.

And who are these other shepherds?

In the case of Israel, they are the
religious leaders whom Jesus referred
to as --- **"hypocrites! for ye shut up
the kingdom of heaven against men."**

And who are the other shepherds leading the
Gentile flocks as they roam this dark
world?

Well, there are multitudes of them.

Some may be sincere but misguided, while
others are simply false shepherds.
First of all, there are kings and dictators,
who suppress their people.
Then there are religious flocks, such as
Buddhists, Mohammedans, etc. --- all
with their spiritual leaders.
Added to these, we have the so-called
Christian cults with multitudes of
followers.
Then there's nominal Christianity.
They name the name of Christ, but see no
value in His precious blood.
Every one of these systems, be they
political or religious, provide a
certain amount of protection and a
sense of belonging.
But in the end, they are an illusion.

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Jesus had chosen an excellent illustration to describe God's program for the nations.

However, this same parable provides a lot of instruction for the individual sheep. So, let's spend a little more time thinking about the sheepfolds, the sheep, and the shepherd.

How did the Israeli shepherd identify his flock in the morning?

After all, sheep look very much alike, don't they?

He couldn't brand them like cattle, because of all that wool.

And even if he found some other method of marking them, all those other sheep milling about would make identification very difficult.

Well, the shepherds had a very successful method, which you might call mental imprinting.

It was virtually foolproof, and employed three levels of security.

Sounds kind of high-tech, doesn't it?

Here's how it worked.

V 3 **"To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out."**

Yes, it was all based on recognition.

Level No. 1 -- the porter was a fellow shepherd, and could readily identify the legitimate owners.

Level No. 2 -- every sheep recognized its own shepherd, and would flee from strangers.

Level No. 3 -- the shepherd recognized his own sheep, even to the point of knowing their names. *Rachel, Mary, Reuben!* -- and their heads would pop up.

And even if some thieving shepherd should happen to overhear their names, and even if the porter was half asleep, he can't steal the sheep, for they know **"not the voice of strangers."**

In short, they were all pets.

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What a picture this is of our personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

No fences to keep us in, as was the case in Old Testament Law.

No cowboys driving the herd before them.

That would be Satan's method, wouldn't it?

No, the Christian is to be controlled and guided by his personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Let's take a careful look at this New Testament principle which God has created to govern and preserve our lives.

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The first principle is *following*.

Because King David had been a shepherd in his youth, he knew a lot about leading. And, from the sheep's point of view, that would require following.

Psalm 23:1-3 **"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.**

2: He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

3: He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me

in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

Anyone who knows anything about the Israeli landscape will tell you you're not always knee-deep in clover.

Oh, there are green pastures, but there are a lot of rocky paths and dark valleys in between.

And if you are going to follow your Shepherd, you'll get involved in all of them.

And by the way, those other flocks we talked about experience the same terrain as we do, only they're being led by a very unreliable shepherd.

No, it's not the path that's makes the difference. It's the Shepherd.

And if you're going to be His disciple,
there's only one acceptable path to
follow, and that's His path.

Yes, we must go where Jesus leads, but there
are two ways to do it.

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The first one goes something like this.
You look at the cliffs on the right, and the
frightening abyss on the left, and
maybe the vultures circling overhead,
and say to your fellow sheep, *This is
really ba-a-a-a-d.*

Now everybody is upset!

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However, there's another way to follow:
*Keep your eyes on the Shepherd. He's moving
ahead confidently, and I'm sure He
knows where He's going.*

*Don't look at the vultures. Look at the
Shepherd. Fasten your eyes right
between His shoulders.*

*Don't look down. That will scare the life
out of you. Look at Him!*

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Yes, there are two ways to follow Jesus, and
they both lead to the green pasture.
They have to. That's where He's going.
However, if you have chosen the first
method, you'll have an upset stomach
when you get there.

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So, we have to ask the question, Is there
any value in the rocky way?
Is it just a necessary evil?
Is the green pasture the only real place of
worth?
After all, that's where we'd all like to be.

However, in the green pasture, it is
entirely possible that your head will
be down most of the time, enjoying the
grass.

And it's entirely possible, that you will be
barely aware of the Shepherd's
presence.

Oh, He's around here somewhere, and you're
very thankful for His care.

But after a while, the Shepherd will tend to
take second place to the still waters
and the green pasture.

And I suppose, if you don't intend to go
anywhere, you might not miss Him.

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However, that's not true of the rough way,
is it?

During times of adversity, your Shepherd
becomes very important.

In fact, the harder it gets, the more you
tend to draw near to His side.

At least you should, if you're going to have
any peace at all.

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So I ask you, which is the better place to
be, the green pastures, or the rough
way?

Actually, they're both better, if that's
where your Shepherd is leading you.

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♪♪ *"He leadeth me! O blessed thought!
O words with heavenly comfort fraught!
Whate'er I do, where'er I be,
Still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me"*

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But what if we don't follow?
What if the rocky way is too rough, or the
green pastures are too boring?

What if we wander away?

That's when the second principle of our personal relationship with Jesus Christ comes into play.

The first principle is following. The second is ownership.

Like it or not, we do belong to Jesus Christ.

Paul reminds us of that, in 1 Corinthians 6:20, **"For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."**

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A few lessons back, we talked about the young man David and his care for his father's sheep.

He had even fought with a lion and a bear to make sure nothing happened to them.

Well, Jesus has committed Himself to the keeping of the sheep that His Father has given to Him.

John 6:39 **"And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day."**

Also, in Luke 15:4-6, Jesus uses the same example of the Israeli shepherd to illustrate the benefits of ownership.

"What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

5: And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

6: And when he cometh home, he calleth

**together his friends and neighbours,
saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for
I have found my sheep which was lost."**

Yes, that wandering sheep is just as much
his sheep as the other ninety and nine.
It's the principle of ownership, and it's
the basis of our eternal security.

And just while we're talking about eternal
security, I would like to jump ahead a
little in John 10.

V 28-29 **"And I give unto them eternal life;
and they shall never perish, neither
shall any man pluck them out of my
hand.**

**29: My Father, which gave them me, is
greater than all; and no man is able to
pluck them out of my Father's hand."**

No, the Christian can never be lost, and
that's simply because our Heavenly
Father will not tolerate losses.

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And there's a second aspect to the principle
of ownership.

The Israeli shepherd doesn't keep his sheep
for nothing.

Shepherding wasn't a hobby with him. His
sheep supplied him with wool.

And it's the most natural thing in the world
for a healthy sheep to produce wool.

And as far as a Christian is concerned, it's
the most natural thing in the world for
his new nature to produce the fruits of
the Spirit.

However, don't try to satisfy the Shepherd
with the fruits of your old nature.

A pig can't produce wool, and a sheep can't produce anything else.

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And there's a third aspect to the principle of ownership.

Because we belong to the Shepherd, it's His prerogative to decide what our service will be.

Certainly He expects wool, but sometimes He requires more.

Yes, a few of the flock must give their very lives in His service.

It's His right to lead, and it is our privilege to follow.

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So, in the parable of the Israeli shepherd, Jesus has taught us many things.

We have learned about Israel, and you might say, He has demonstrated Christianity

in a nutshell: No fences, no herding,
simply a personal relationship with our
Shepherd.

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And the next time you see Him standing at
the door of the sheepfold, why don't
you nudge the sheep next to you and
point him to Christ?