

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

The True Shepherd

Part 1

John 10:1-2

One day, at the rapture, the whole of Christ's church will be assembled before Him. Not one born again Christian will be missing. What an exciting day that will be.

Sheep are amazingly helpless animals. They have little in the way of defensive mechanisms, so they cannot fight with attackers with any hope of success. Nor can they, when they are left on their own, effectively forage for the most basic necessities of food and water. Sheep, unlike goats, are therefore completely dependent on shepherds.

This very dependent relationship that has evolved over thousands and thousands of years between sheep and shepherds provided Christ with a perfect backdrop for spiritual truths contained in **John 10:1-21**. We find the first of those truths in **John 10:1-6**.

Let me read this passage for you. **"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. (2) But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. (3) To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. (4) When he puts forth all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. (5) And a stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.' (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."**

So, what is the first truth based on the dependent nature of the sheep-shepherd relationship that Jesus tries to convey in these verses? Jesus, in John 10:1-6, using the imagery of a very full sheep pen, illustrated the *difference* between Himself and the Pharisees.

My hope, as we begin to consider the differences between Christ and the Pharisees, is that we might better understand the intimate nature of the relationship between Christ and His sheep. In other words, there is no sheep of Christ that should ever feel forsaken or forgotten if they fully understand the nature of their relationship to Christ.

So, what is the first difference between Christ and the Pharisees as illustrated by the imagery in **John 10:1-6**?

The first difference between Christ and the Pharisees is that Christ comes through the *door* of the sheep pen, while the Pharisees do not (John 10:1-2). Let us read **John 10:1-2**. **"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. (2) But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep."**

When we read John 10:1-2, it is very easy to see that Jesus uses *metaphors* to communicate what He wants to communicate about the difference between Him and the Pharisees. But where will we find the key to help us understand what Christ means by these metaphors?

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It might be very tempting to immediately look to **John 10:7-10**, which is an expansion of **John 10:1-6**, in order to supply the meaning. But this is not the key for opening the door of our understanding.

The key for understanding the metaphors is to understand them in light of the conflict between Christ and the Pharisees in *John 9*. So, what was the conflict between Christ and the Pharisees in **John 9**?

The Pharisees wanted a certain former blind man to follow them and not to follow Christ. They wanted him to follow them not because they cared about the blind man, but rather because they only cared about themselves and protecting their power and position among the Jewish people.

Christ also wanted the former blind man to follow Him but for quite a different reason. Christ wanted the former blind man to follow Him so that the former blind man might be set free from his sins and be saved. Obviously, Christ and the Pharisees were at cross-purposes with each other in respect to this former blind man and their desire for him to follow them.

To help this conflict come alive for us let us quickly review some of the events recorded for us in **John 9**. Christ had physically healed the blind man on the Sabbath. He obviously had done a wonderful thing for this man, but how did the Pharisees respond when they heard about the miracle? Did they rejoice in his good fortune? No! Why? They were not personally connected to him. They were not personally concerned about him. They were concerned only about themselves and maintaining their power and influence among the Jewish people.

So, what happened next? After the Pharisees had heard the former blind man confirm that it was Jesus who had, in fact, healed him, they said to him in **John 9:16**, "**This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.**" Clearly at this point in time the battle for the allegiance of this particular man was now fully engaged. The Pharisees wanted this blind man to reject Christ and His growing influence in his life. Why? The Pharisees wanted the former blind man to reject Christ and His growing influence in His life so that their own prominent position within Israel and their power among the people would not be threatened.

So, what did the Pharisees do next in their quest to maintain their power and influence? After having a rather fruitless encounter with the former blind man's parents, they went back to the former blind man and declared to him in **John 9:24**, "**Give glory to God; we know that this man is a sinner.**" The Pharisees, the so-called religious leaders of the nation of Israel, were doing everything in their power to *turn* this former blind man away from Christ and to themselves (*John 9*).

Fortunately for the blind man, he did not succumb to their efforts even when they put him out of the synagogue. Rather, when his spiritual eyes were opened, he chose, according to **John 9:38**, to embrace Christ as the Messiah, prostrating himself before Him and recognizing His right to rule over his life.

Was this a good thing that this former blind man did? Was it a good thing that when he saw Jesus for the first time as the Messiah that He prostrated himself before Him and worshipped Him?

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Absolutely! Based on **John 9:41**, his expression of faith delivered him from his sin; or in other words, he was saved.

Hallelujah! In spite of the counter-productive efforts of the Pharisees, Jesus was still able to bring this former blind man to a place of spiritual safety. But this was just one battle between Christ, the true shepherd, and the Pharisees, who were the false shepherds of the nation of Israel.

In order to expose the continuing danger of these self-serving Pharisees, these so-called religious leaders of the nation of Israel, Jesus turns to a string of metaphors in **John 10:1-2**. Let us go back and read these verses one more time. What does Jesus say? **"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. (2) But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep."**

What was the imagery that Christ used in these verses to capture the continuing danger of these self-serving Pharisees? Jesus used the imagery of *sheep* farming in John 10:1-2 to capture the continuing danger of these self-serving Pharisees in respect to the people of Israel.

The details would be familiar to John's readers. The sheep are in a fold, or in other words a sheep pen. This might be part of a family courtyard, but in view of **verse 3**, it is most likely better to think of this pen as a larger and independent enclosure where several families would keep their sheep while hiring an under shepherd to guard the gate. Now, let us try and identify the key individuals mentioned in these verses.

Who are the thieves and robbers mentioned in **John 10:1**? Based on John 9, the thieves and robbers would be the *Pharisees* who, rather than being concerned for the welfare of the sheep, sneaked into the sheep pen to serve their own purposes (John 10:1). So, if the **"thieves and robbers"** are the Pharisees then how should we understand the shepherd who enters by the gate in **John 10:2**? Based on John 9, the person who entered by the gate and who was identified as a shepherd is *Christ* (John 10:2).

Jesus, therefore, has now in **John 10:1-2**, using the imagery of sheep farming, captured a basic difference between the Pharisees and Christ. And what was that difference? Christ was a true shepherd and the Pharisees were not. Christ was concerned for the people of Israel, and the Pharisees were only concerned about themselves.

It is hard to read **John 10:1-2** and understand what it is communicating without thinking back to **Ezekiel 34**. There the Lord berates the so-called **"shepherds of Israel,"** the religious leaders of Ezekiel's day, for slaughtering the choice animals, clothing themselves with wool, yet utterly failing to look after the flock.

Let me read for you **Ezekiel 34:1-4**. **"Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, (2) 'Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord God, 'Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? (3) You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock. (4) Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them.'"**

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What a tragic picture!

This is not the only Old Testament passage that castigates the shepherds of Israel for their dereliction of duty. Listen to **Isaiah 56:9-12**. "**All you beasts of the field, All you beasts in the forest, Come to eat.**" What is he talking about? He is talking about the opportunity that the so-called spiritual leaders of the nation of Israel have provided their enemies by their failure to faithfully shepherd the people of the nation of Israel.

This led the prophet Ezekiel to give the following commentary, "**His watchman are blind, All of them know nothing. All of them are dumb dogs unable to bark, dreamers lying down, who love to slumber; (11) And the dogs are greedy, they are not satisfied. And they are shepherds who have no understanding; They have all turned to their own way, Each one to his unjust gain, to the last one. (12) ‘Come,’ they say, ‘let us get wine, and let us drink heavily of strong drink; And tomorrow will be like today, only more so.’"** What a miserable picture!

If there were so-called spiritual shepherds who abused sheep in the time of the prophets and there were, and if there were so-called spiritual shepherds who abused sheep in the time of Christ, could it be possible that there are spiritual shepherds today who are still abusing sheep? Absolutely! Just as Israel's so-called shepherds abused sheep throughout the course of biblical history, we can be confident that sheep are still being abused today (Isaiah 56:9-12, Ezekiel 34:1-4).

Who might these abused sheep be? Today the abused sheep would be those sheep who are attending churches overseen by individuals who do not have their best interest at heart. Who, when push comes to shove, will serve themselves and not the people the Lord has entrusted to their care. How might this self-serving approach in respect to their position of oversight be manifested? It might be manifested in many different ways, but there is one particular one I would like to spend just a few moments on this morning.

The self-seeking and self-serving character of unfaithful shepherds might be manifested in their unwillingness to supply the necessary biblical nourishment required for the growth of those entrusted to their care. The shepherds in the twenty-first century American church are failing to feed the people that make up their congregations. They are doing this through superficial, watered-down and shallow messages. Is this a new phenomenon? No!

Let me read for you **Hosea 4:6**. "**My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will also reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will also forget your children.**" The people of God, whether that is the people in Old Testament Israel or the New Testament church, must be rooted in the knowledge of God's Word. And it is the responsibility of God's shepherds to do everything in their power through His grace to accomplish this. If they fail, the people that have been entrusted to their care will suffer. And, unfortunately, it is my belief that people who make up the visible church today are, in fact, suffering because of this.

The root cause of this failure, I believe, can be found in the pulpits in America, where preachers have exchanged the full counsel of the Word of God for doctrinally shallow, seeker-friendly "talks."

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When warm and fuzzy moral messages, peppered with cute anecdotes and an occasional skit, have replaced the meat of God's Word, the consequences can be devastating.

The churches of America desperately need a return to strong doctrinal teaching. The proclamation of the whole counsel of the Word of God should always be at the heart of a church's ministry. What did Paul exhort Timothy to do in **2 Timothy 4:2**? "**Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.**" Nothing has changed, this still needs to be the life-blood of the church.

Such preaching and teaching is in short supply these days. There are plenty of gifted communicators in the modern evangelical movement, but today's sermons tend to be short, shallow, topical homilies that massage people's egos and focus on fairly insipid subjects like human relationships, "successful" living, emotional issues, and other practical themes more suited for people whose affections are on things below rather than on things above.

Someone might say, "Are you saying that every evangelical pastor or church leader today who is being sucked into delivering these lightweight and superficial messages or who is supporting the delivery of these lightweight and superficial messages are like the Pharisees in **John 10**?"

No, I am not saying that necessarily! I am confident that there are some pastors and church leaders who are moving in this particular direction because they feel that is in the best interest of the sheep. But even though I am willing to grant that this is certainly possible, and even likely, I also am confident that today many pastors are moving in this direction, not because it is in the best interest of the sheep, but because it serves them and their own personal vested interest, in respect to being "successful." And if this is the case, then they certainly are very much like the Pharisees in **John 10**, who sneaked into the sheep pen in order to meet their own needs rather than the needs of the sheep.

Churches need shepherds who care for the people who have been entrusted to their care more than they care about themselves. Pray for the pastors of our church that we will not fail you in this way. We are certainly human, and we can succumb to the temptations of our flesh to serve ourselves. Pray that this will not happen. But no matter what happens in respect to the present or future leaders of our church, there is one thing I would like you to remember.

Though earthly shepherds *my fail* you, there is one shepherd who *will not*. And who is that one shepherd who will never fail us? The one shepherd who will never fail us is the One True Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you view yourself as spiritually helpless and defenseless apart from Christ? You should, because you are! But if we are true disciples of Christ, then we know that Christ, our true shepherd will take care of us whether that is through our church leaders or in spite of them. But He will take care of us and He is well prepared and willing to supply our every need.

What did the Psalmist say in **Psalms 23:1** "**The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want.**" What a wonderful confidence for us to have. Is this your confidence this weekend?

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This is what the Scriptures teach but is this what you believe? If it is, then this weekend you should feel very confident that all of your needs in Christ Jesus will be met. Can you say with David in Psalms 23 "The Lord is my *shepherd* I shall not want?"