



ROSE  
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CHURCH

John 10:1-21  
So That You May Believe: John  
“I Am The Gate...And The Good Shepherd”

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Anyone who’s been alive for even just a decade, or two or three like me 😊, let alone several like most all of you 😊, knows that we often are given opportunities in life to go one direction or another. We can choose to go this way, or we can choose to go that way. Sometimes the choices are between a couple of good opportunities and the fact is, it’s hard to go wrong with either one. Like a guy who’s got multiple gals hoping he will ask them out...which, I have zero experience with that situation. Not just now, because obviously I’m married...but even before marriage. 😊 Or like a High School senior with two or more college acceptance letters in hand. Now, *that’s* a conversation I’m familiar with because we’ve had it in our household the last couple years. 😊 Those decisions can be difficult to make, but really, in the end, it’s a decision between two or more good options, and the hard part is simply that you can’t say “yes” to both.

On the other hand, sometimes the decisions are just as difficult, but the choice is between something good, and something that’s questionable – morally questionable, spiritually questionable, relationally questionable, and so forth. **Oftentimes, there’s a temptation calling you one way, and what you know to be right is calling another way.** Like the proverbial devil on one shoulder and angel on the other. The most difficult of those are when the wrong choices masquerade as being good and beneficial, but they really aren’t – like financial scams. I know someone who invested a bunch of money in gold, and it turned out to be a scam. Fortunately, it was discovered in time to recover all, or nearly all, of the money. But it was a case of a “wolf in sheep’s clothing” for sure.

There are lots of those that come at us every day. They’re not necessarily “big” decisions; they can be, but they can also be innocuous, seemingly small decisions. But over time they can wreck our marriages, our jobs, our self-confidence, our journey of faith, our churches, neighborhoods...I mean, the list goes on. Wouldn’t it be nice if we could navigate those better, with more confidence, and with greater ability to make good decisions? Well, believe it or not Jesus has something to say about this, and has a way for us to navigate

life and stay on the right path so we'd have a full life, as Jesus even says in today's passage. So, as we continue our series in the gospel of John, we're in John 10:1-21 this morning. We're going to start with **the first 6 verses**.

So, this teaching from Jesus is continuing his conversation with a group of Pharisees – they're some of the Jewish religious leaders of the day, and they were having some doubts about the legitimacy of Jesus' ministry and who he is after Jesus had healed a man of blindness, but Jesus had done so on the Sabbath, a day of rest. And healing was considered "work" and not "rest." And there was division among the Pharisees as we saw in 9:16, where some are open to the idea that Jesus is "from God" but others think otherwise.

And if you skip ahead to 10:19-21, and we'll read those verses in a few minutes, we see that same difference of opinion of the Pharisees expressed, including a reference to the healing Jesus did. So, the context simply continues from last week's passage.

Anyway, as we just read: **Jesus dives into a metaphor about himself and those who follow him, using imagery and language they would all be familiar with: that of sheep and a shepherd and a sheep pen.** Now, the metaphor at this point is admittedly a bit vague, in that, Jesus doesn't explain it or give any real context for it. Verse 6 tells us that they didn't all understand the point he was trying to make.

But the image is one that really, they all knew and would be familiar with. Shepherds were common in their day. Today, Jesus could use a metaphor of "I am the school principal" or "I am the orchestra conductor" or "I am the computer programmer" and we'd all have a basic understanding of who those people are and what they do. Well, maybe not computer programmer except those of you who do that. Computer programming is a mystery to a lot of us. But I'm sure you get the point. So, Jesus reminds them that sheep follow the voice of their shepherd, who comes to them through the gate. Anyone else who comes in by any other way, is a thief and has only bad intentions. But, the figure of speech leaves them hanging a little. I mean, they understand sheep and sheep pens, and gates, and shepherds, and all that. But where is

Jesus going with this? What's the point he's making? Let's keep reading to find out. (**John 10:7-10**).

So now Jesus keeps the metaphor and explains it, but he kind of changes it up some, too, from what we might expect. Because thus far the focus of the metaphor has been on the shepherd, and how the sheep follow the shepherd's voice. **But: What he says here in first explaining it is that he's the gate for the sheep.** Whoever enters the sheep pen by him, Jesus says, will be saved. Jesus is the gateway to the sheep pen, to the place of safety. Entering by any other method or along any other point of the sheep pen – like climbing over the wall – simply doesn't work. That's not how sheep enter the pen. They go through the gate. And Jesus is that gate.

Jesus is the one entrance to this place of safety. He is the gate through which one enters in order to be saved from whatever dangers and perils might come at us. Jesus then continues to explain further, so let's continue on in verse 11, and read through the end of verse 21 (**John 10:11-21**).

So, now Jesus comes back more to where he started, with an emphasis on the shepherd. And: **Jesus says that he is the shepherd. And he's not just any old shepherd, he's the good shepherd.** Jesus then explains what makes him particularly good: that he lays down his life for the sheep. This is kind of an astounding claim. Jesus is not afraid of the wolves of life. He'll take them on, to protect the sheep, and even lay his life down for them. We have the benefit of hindsight and being on this side of the cross, and so it's easy for us to see this as a prophetic word about his death on the cross, and the meaning of his death. Jesus laid down his life for the sheep, for those who would hear his voice and follow him. Really, Jesus laid his life down for all people. Jesus died for the sins of the world, as Jesus himself says elsewhere, and as is taught in other places in the New Testament. Jesus died for me, and he died for you. He laid down his life for you. The question is: Is he your Good Shepherd? Do you know his voice?

Now, this is really kind of a complex metaphor, partly because Jesus says that two elements of it represent him: the gate and the shepherd. And actually, in their day, the shepherd would sometimes function as the gate,

laying down at the entrance to the sheep pen. So, it might actually make more sense to their ears than it does to ours. But even then, the shepherd has two distinct roles: to regulate who goes in and out of the sheep pen (gate) and then to lead the sheep where they need to go when they come out of the pen (shepherd).

We need not try and make more of this metaphor than it is, however. In regards to Jesus as the gate, John Calvin, in his commentary on this passage, writes, **“Let us be content with the general view that Christ likens the Church to a sheepfold in which God assembles his people, and compares himself to the door since he is the only entrance to the Church” (John Calvin).**<sup>1</sup> When he says, “Let us be content with the general view...” it is his way of saying, “let’s not make this more complex than it needs to be.” And that is just as true for the rest of the metaphor of Jesus as the shepherd as well.

So, what is Jesus saying with this? **First, for those Pharisees then, or anyone today, who question whether or not Jesus is from God, and therefore a “man of God” and “safe” for their spiritual well-being, Jesus is saying that he absolutely is safe.** In fact, he’s the *only* one you can come to and through for safety, because he’s the gate. There is a prophetic fulfillment in him, in fact, that his audience would almost certainly have been familiar with from the Old Testament (Jewish Bible). Ezekiel 34 is an entire chapter of God speaking through the prophet Ezekiel against the false teachers and false prophets of Israel using this metaphor of sheep and shepherd.

For instance, 34:2 says, “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?” (Ezekiel 34:2). So, they weren’t doing their job of shepherding, of leading Israel. But a bit later, there are a couple of promises that God makes, that point to a new future. First in 34:11, God says through Ezekiel, **“For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them” (Ezekiel 34:11).** The next several verses expand upon this, saying that God will rescue them from the places to which they’ve been scattered; he will bring them into their own land; he will tend to

them in good pasture; he will search for the lost and bring back the strays; he will shepherd the flock with justice.

The point, is that God says he himself will shepherd them. But: he's still going to do it through a human shepherd, and this is his second promise. He's going to choose someone and send someone to be his earthly representative so God can shepherd them through that person. So, the passage continues and says, **"I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken"** (Ezekiel 34:23-24). Now, King David lived several hundred years before this, so what does this mean that David will be the servant through whom God works? It simply means that one who is in the lineage of David will be the one who leads them. And, as many of you are aware, Jesus' earthly father, Joseph, was in the lineage of David. So, Jesus checks that box.

And then probably many of us know that Psalm 23 as well as Psalm 80 and Isaiah 40 are other places where God is said to be our shepherd. And so, Jesus comes along and makes this same claim – that he is the good shepherd. *He's* the one whose voice we are to listen to. *He's* the one who lets us into the pen – as the gate – and keeps us safe. *He's* the one who even lays down his life for the sheep. That's how devoted he is and how deep his love runs. So, this claim of being the good shepherd is quite an astounding claim, with deep Scriptural roots – Jesus didn't just make up this metaphor on the spot.

So, what does all this have to do with what I started with: the choices we have in life when something presents itself and we're not sure which way to go? Well, first, Jesus acknowledges that some people try to break into the sheep pen and lead the sheep astray. **There's a lot that seeks to lead us astray in this world: Power, pride, lust, ego, wealth, and more.** Many of these things are linked together, and many come to us like wolves in sheep's clothing. They look alluring. They make promises that you'll feel better, that you deserve this, that you'll be more successful or wealthier or happier. But the voice behind those things is not the voice of the shepherd. They're not coming in through the gate. They only come to kill and destroy, as Jesus

himself says. They kill and destroy marriages, sibling relationships, parent/child relationships, churches, and more. It's always because something gets into the sheep pen that's come in over the wall. And it still happens today. So, we want to be on high alert for those kinds of things, and be aware that not everything that looks our sounds good, actually *is* good.

**Second of all, Jesus teaches us that therefore, we need to learn to recognize the voice of the good shepherd.** He even says that his sheep know his voice. He calls them, he knows them by name, and they follow him. For most of us, that's not going to be an audible voice from heaven. Maybe that would actually be easier if it were...maybe not. Usually, it's much more about God's voice coming to us through Scripture, and through other Christians speaking into our lives, praying for us, and so forth. Then through those things we are encouraged in the calling that is upon us sheep to live with the fruit of the Spirit, to live holy lives, to bring glory to God in what we say and do. So, that all begins by acknowledging Jesus as the good shepherd of our lives...acknowledging that He is the one who protects us and leads us...and learning to follow his voice – and more importantly, to follow him and make decisions that honor him and are in line with his voice.

**Third: Jesus teaches us that we are *not* called to be in the sheep pen all the time.** As John Calvin hinted at in that quote, the sheep pen seems to be a metaphor for the Church. It's the collection of sheep who have passed through the gate. It's a place of safety and protection, for sure. But it's not the place where the sheep just stay. They follow the shepherd. Jesus says so in verse 4 that he leads them; in verse 9 he says they will come and go and find pasture, and then later he talks about sheep in another pen, and they're all joined together to make one flock. He's letting his Jewish audience here know that he is not there only for Jewish people, but he's the gate and the shepherd for other people, too – people like you and me. And Jesus is still seeking to reach other sheep and bring them into the flock. So clearly, hanging out in one sheep pen the whole time just isn't in the cards.

**So: The challenge in making decisions – about what to do, or where to go, or how to live, who to let influence us, etc. – is simplified when we know the voice of Jesus.** Some things line up with his will and his word,

others do not. Frequently, for us Christians, especially if you've followed Jesus for a long time: the difficult decision for us is whether to follow Jesus out of the pen or not. The sheep pen is safe and comfortable. It's familiar. We're with sheep who look like us, who "bah" like us, who...I guess smell like us (?); they eat like we do, think like we do, and it's all just very comfortable. But Jesus calls us out of the sheep pen, precisely because there are other sheep he needs to get to as well. Rather than leaving us in one sheep pen, tended to by a hired hand while he goes and reaches out to those other sheep, he invites us along to reach them. He takes us with him on this mission. And that can be kind of scary. It's stepping out. It's leaving the comfortable. It's leaving what's familiar.

But if we're *really* trusting in Jesus and not just our surroundings or our relationships or our material wealth or whatever else we might trust...**If we really trust Jesus instead of all that stuff, then we can step out, knowing he's still with us, leading us, and he's the Good Shepherd who lays his life down for the sheep.**

So, in making decisions, we simply need to know the voice of the good shepherd, the voice of Jesus, and follow him. I'm not saying it's always easy. It doesn't mean there's no risk in following him. But we can trust that he is good and loves us. So, we need not fear when we follow him, including when we follow him out of the comfortable confines of the sheep pen, out into the world, to live our lives among other sheep who need to know the good shepherd. We need not fear when a job loss or cancer or a temptation to lust or power or trust material wealth or whatever comes our way. Listen to Jesus' voice, and trust him when making decision in those situations. He is the gate and the good shepherd. I pray that you enter the pen through him, know his voice, listen to it, follow him, and welcome others into the one flock as he leads us, trusting that Jesus is bringing us all together here in Kirkland, the rest of the Eastside, and throughout the world. Let's pray...Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: John. He makes this statement in his comments on 10:1.