
Day 1

Learn: Prayerfully read John 10.1-6. At the end of John 9, Jesus was talking publically to some Pharisees [Jewish religious teachers], and this seems to be a continuation of that conversation. It is sad that they did not understand what Jesus was teaching them. Jesus begins with “Amen, amen” the way he starts some of his most profound teachings. The shepherd in this parable is trustworthy. He knows his sheep intimately. As in the near eastern cultures today, this shepherd would lead from in front, not herding and chasing the sheep, but facing the danger first, leading by example, proving worthy of following. The sheep follow the shepherd because they know and trust him. In contrast to the thief and robber who want to hurt the sheep, the shepherd does everything with transparent integrity, and he leads the sheep from in front to bring them out to be blessed in pasture.

Now prayerfully read Ezekiel 34.1-24. In Ezekiel’s prophecy, God said the shepherds of Israel had taken care of themselves but failed to take care of the flock – including not healing the sick [remember, the Pharisees were angry about Jesus healing the blind man in John 9] – so now God would turn against them, would hold them accountable for their sins, and would remove them from authority. God then said through Ezekiel, first that he would take care of his sheep, and second that he would put one shepherd over them, his servant David. Jesus is the divine Son of God, who was born as the direct human heir to David’s throne, and – as we learned in John 9 – he is the Ultimate Davidic King who will reverse the curse on the Earth so the physically blind will see, and reconcile God the Father with the spiritually blind – particularly the Jews – so that they will spiritually see.

Reflect: The religious leaders like the Pharisees were supposed to act with religious authority to protect the flock, but in fact they were more like thieves and robbers. Now Jesus would be God the Father’s shepherd for the Jews, and from this flock, he would call out his people. Today there are faithful Jews who believe in Jesus as the Messiah-savior and Ultimate Davidic King, there are other religious Jews who do not believe in Jesus, and there are some who have no faith at all [just as is the case with Gentiles!]. What would be obstacles for Jews to believe in Jesus today? What parallels can you see with any religious leaders today compared to the Pharisees?

Day 2

Learn: Prayerfully read John 10.7-10. Again Jesus begins with “Amen, amen.” In this metaphor, he says he is the door or gate to the sheepfold. The current religious leaders were not protecting the flock, they were looking out only for themselves, but Jesus would act as the gate to keep his sheep safe. They could come through him for safety at night and go through him to provision in the pasture during the day. He would be the one path for their salvation and blessing. Prayerfully read John 14.6. Do you see that Jesus is teaching the same thing here?

Reflect: Hegesippus, who lived right after the apostles in the second century, wrote that Jesus’ brother James was killed in part because of how he answered a question about this “gate” or “door.” James answered honestly about his faith in Jesus as the Messiah-savior and echoed the words of Jesus himself in Matthew 26.64, so they threw him off the temple mount and then stoned him to death. Look at John 10.9-10 again. Why would someone put their trust in Jesus as the gate? Why would that trust lead a believer to be willing to risk physical death for the sake of testifying for Jesus? What do you think Jesus meant by the end of v.10, that we would not only have life but have it abundantly? If you could have all that the world offers but be in spiritual darkness or you could have all that Jesus offers but lose everything the world offers, which would you choose, and why? How would you explain that to someone who did not know Jesus or was young in the faith?

Day 3

Learn: Prayerfully read John 10.11-15. This is a new metaphor: Jesus is the “good” shepherd. The Greek word καλός [kah-LAHS] means good or useful. In this context, the best lexicon [dictionary] of biblical Greek [known as BDAG] says this word might take on the connotation of being blameless. Take a look at what Hebrews 13.20 calls Jesus. A shepherd of actual sheep might risk his life to protect his sheep, but Jesus goes farther: Jesus actually plans to give up his life for his sheep. The death of the shepherd of actual sheep would leave his sheep at risk, but Jesus’ death protects his sheep. Jesus says he gives up his life “for” the sheep. The Greek preposition ὑπὲρ [hoo-PAIR]

means “in behalf of” here: Jesus dies *for* his sheep, *in behalf of* his sheep. John often used this preposition to show someone sacrificing to help someone else. The shepherd here is not dying to be a mere example, he is dying in the defense of the sheep, to save them. Thus it is wrong to view Jesus’ death as just an example of humility and love [as some cults do]; rather, he laid down his life to pay the penalty of our sins, to take our punishment, so that we could have forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and eternal life. The thief in v.10 wants to slaughter the sheep, but the Good Shepherd wants to sacrifice his own life for the sheep. The hired hand will not risk himself for the sheep, but the Good Shepherd here is planning on how to die for the sake of his sheep.

Reflect: Jesus said that he knew his sheep and they knew him just as God the Father and Jesus knew each other. What does that suggest to you about faith? Is it merely intellectual learning or does it have to be more experiential? If the latter, what does that mean to you? How can you “know” Jesus the same way he knows God the Father or God the Father knows him? The New Age movement and cults like Mormonism try to tell us we can be like gods, we can be deified, or we can become part of God. How is what Jesus describes here different? Even if we can become sanctified to be more like Jesus and thus more like God in character, what is the process here that is different that becoming a god ourselves? Why does Jesus have to give up his life for us?

Day 4

Learn: Prayerfully read John 10.1-5, 16-21. At the beginning of this dialogue, Jesus implied he was calling his sheep out of the sheepfold of the Jews. Now Jesus says there are other sheep not from this sheepfold [or pen]. Read John 3.16-17: was Jesus’ salvation for Jews only or for the whole world? Jesus said salvation comes from the Jews, since he is the Jewish Messiah who fulfills the promises God made to the Jews through the Jewish prophets and scriptures [as in John 4.22]. And he offered this salvation first to the Jews. But he had other sheep among the Samaritans and the Gentiles, as even Jewish prophecy foretold [see for example, Psalm 98; Zechariah 2.10-11; Micah 4.2]. And Jesus would make all these sheep into one flock with himself as shepherd [the NKJV corrects the mistake in the KJV about one “fold” instead of one “flock”]. Now believers are one flock regardless of heritage [see Galatians 3.28-29; Ephesians 2.11-22].

Reflect: Can you see in the church, the body of Christ, the flock of Christ, that race, ethnicity, and other such distinctions should not matter so long as we are unified in faith? Jesus, as the Son of God and Messiah-savior, carried out the mission of God the Father, and then he passed this mission on to his followers in Matthew 28.18-20. Read that passage and then consider how you should respond to make disciples where you live and to help reach all the people groups of the world.

Day 5

Learn: Prayerfully read John 10.1-21 again [maybe try a different translation!]. Regarding v.17, scholar D. A. Carson wrote, “It is not that the Father withholds his love until Jesus agrees to give up his life on the cross and rise again. Rather, the love of the Father for the Son is eternally linked with the unqualified obedience of the Son to the Father, his utter dependence on him, culminating in this greatest act of obedience now just before him: his willingness to bear the shame and ignominy of Golgotha [where Jesus went to the cross], the isolation and rejection of death, the sin and curse reserved for the Lamb of God.” Note that Jesus gave up his life for the purpose of taking it back again: the resurrection was not an afterthought or coincidence, it was the climax of the crucifixion episode, in view from the start, when Jesus completed his victory over death and sin, when he proved his identity and the acceptance of his sacrifice by God the Father, when he gave a visual promise that we too would be resurrected, when he reached the pinnacle of his earthly glorification.

Reflect: In human terms, the enemies of Jesus conspired to kill him. But Jesus could have stopped them. Rather, he chose to be obedient to the wishes of God the Father, to die to pay the penalty for our sins, so he could rescue us, his sheep. Prayerfully read Acts 4.27-29, where believers are praying. What do they say about the enemies of Jesus? What did they say about God’s sovereign will? Look again at John 10.18: to whom did God the Father grant authority in this situation? What did Jesus do with his authority? What reason does he give for doing it? Going back to Acts 4.29, how did the believers react to facing the same threat of death as Jesus? Why did knowing the death of Jesus was in God’s control embolden them to face the same threat? Read again John 9.25; how does this testimony embolden believers in the New Testament? What does all this imply for you?