

January 4, 2026 (Lesson 5)

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

1. Sheep Know the Shepherd's Voice (John 10:1-10)
2. Jesus Sacrifices Himself for His Sheep (John 10:11-21)
3. The Shepherd Knows His Sheep (John 10:22-30)

Central Truth: Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, leads and provides for us.

Focus: Understand Jesus has good purposes for those who follow Him and learn to attend to His voice.

Evangelism Emphasis: Sinners who turn to Jesus receive salvation and come under His care.

Golden Text: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

The picture of the shepherd and the sheep is woven into the thought and the language of the Jewish people. Often in the Old Testament, God is pictured as the Shepherd of His people. Psalm 23 begins, "The Lord is my shepherd" (v. 1).

Other references from the Psalms include these: "Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron (77:20). "We thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give thee thanks for ever" (79:13). "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou who leadest Joseph like a flock" (80:1). "For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand" (95:7). "We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture" (100:3).

Isaiah pictures God as the gentle and loving Shepherd: "He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young" (40:11 NKJV).

In the New Testament, Jesus is portrayed as the Shepherd who goes out to the mountains and the hills, the valleys and the ravines, the cliffs and the crags to seek and to find the sheep which is lost (Matt. 18:12; Luke 15:4). Matthew 9:36 and Mark 6:34 record Jesus was moved with compassion for the people, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus called disciples His “little flock” (Luke 12:32). Jesus warned His disciples that He, the Shepherd, would be smitten, and the flock would become leaderless and scattered (Matt. 26:31; Mark 14:27).

In John 10, the allegory of the sheepfold and the Good Shepherd is closely related to the previous narrative of the restored blind man who was excommunicated by the organized religion of his day and then received into the fellowship of Jesus Christ. The Pharisees, who rejected Christ because of His healing activities on the Sabbath and who expelled the once-blind man because he testified to the messiahship of Jesus, were false shepherds in contrast to the Good Shepherd.

1. SHEEP KNOW THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE

A. The True Shepherd (John 10:1-6)

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. ² But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ 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. ⁶ This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.

The sheepfold was a walled enclosure with a barred door through which alone there was access to the sheep. Through this door the sheep were led at night; then the gate was barred. The porter, who slept near the gate inside, opened to the shepherds' knock in the morning. A particular shepherd then called out his sheep by name. Thieves and robbers, unlike the shepherd, would attempt to get to the sheep by scaling the wall. The “robber” is a more formidable criminal than the “thief”; the former uses violence, the latter cunning. Recall that Judas was a “thief”; Barabbas was called a “robber” (John 18:40).

There is a contrast in verses 1 and 2 of the text—between Christ and the Pharisees, between the true shepherd and the false ones. Here “the door” is simply intended as a contrast to the idea of “climbing up some other way.” It signifies, then, the lawful way of entrance for the shepherd.

Verse 3 reveals the character of the true shepherd. The porter opens the gate to him, knowing by this manner of approach that he is a friend and not an enemy. The sheep recognize his voice and obey what he says.

Knowing all his flock individually, the shepherd calls each sheep by name. He leads them out to feed, desiring daily to promote their health and well-being.

Whenever a shepherd in the East takes his sheep out to pasture, he walks before them. He never requires them to go where he does not first go himself (v. 4).

Verse 5 concludes the picture of a true shepherd and his flock. Jesus’ audience knew sheep accustomed to one shepherd’s voice would not obey a stranger’s voice, but would be frightened by it. Just so, Christians have a spiritual discernment by which they distinguish a false teacher and will not follow him.

Verse 6 says the Jews did not understand the teachings of Christ. They did not understand because they were not sincerely looking for the truth. Through the hardness of their hearts and the lack of spiritual life, they had become so blinded in their minds they were incapable of understanding the spiritual meaning of Christ’s words.

Intimacy With Christ

The intimacy between shepherd and sheep is evident from the fact that he names them. This is a very ancient practice. Here, it strongly suggests the intimacy between Christ and His own. He knows us individually by name, and is concerned for our safety and care.

B. The Door (John 10:7-10)

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. ¹⁰ 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.

The Jews did not understand the meaning of the story of the Good Shepherd. So Jesus took the parable and plainly applied it to Himself. He began by saying, “I am the door” (v. 7).

Here Jesus was not referring to the communal sheepfold where all the village flocks were sheltered when they returned at night, as described in verses 2 and 3. Such folds were protected by a strong door of which only the guardian of the door held the key.

But when the sheep were out in the hills during the warm season, they did not return to the village. Instead, at night they were collected into sheepfolds out on the hillsides. These hillside sheepfolds were open spaces enclosed by a wall. In the wall was an opening by which the sheep came in and went out, but there was no door of any kind. At night the shepherd himself lay down across the opening, and no sheep could get out or in except over his body. The shepherd was the door; there was no access to the sheepfold except through him. This is what Jesus was thinking of when He said, “I am the door.”

Before the Lord proceeds to elaborate on His claim, He marks a contrast between His mission and that of the false shepherds who have preceded Him. He obviously did not refer to Moses, the true priests and kings, and the prophets of God, but rather to the Pharisees whose claims and authority were spurious and injurious to the people. These are elsewhere called “ravaging wolves in sheep’s clothing” who had been, and still were, the ruin of the nation—who were, in truth, “thieves and robbers” (Matt. 7:15; 23:14; Luke 11:39, 52). They had their blind adherents, but Christ’s sheep did not heed or follow them. The Pharisees did not speak with the voice of divine authority, but had taken to themselves the right to lead the people for their own selfish ends.

Repeating His claim to be “the door” (John 10:9), Jesus here clearly explains its spiritual meaning. He is the door of salvation for those who will enter by faith. The verb translated “saved” means here not only to be rescued and delivered, but also includes the condition that results afterward—to be safe. The term embraces everything God longs to do for believers through Christ the Savior.

The expression “shall go in and out” seems to suggest not reckless conduct by believers, but rather the spiritual freedom which includes a going in for fellowship and devotion and a going out to serve the Lord. To “find pasture” refers to spiritual satisfaction from abundant nourishment and spiritual rest in the Lord (Ps. 23; Matt. 11:28-30).

Jesus Christ has come to provide abundant life for His own (John 10:10). By contrast, the figure of a thief is given as one who comes “to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.” Satan is the great thief and destroyer. False prophets and false religious teachers are his agents, who rob people of moral character, of high ideals, and of the true knowledge of God. Jesus Christ, on the other hand, came to give, to sustain, and to bring abundant life to us.

§ *Who would you identify with the “thieves and robbers” in verse 8, and the “thief” in verse 10?*

2. JESUS SACRIFICES HIMSELF FOR HIS SHEEP

A. The Shepherd’s Love (John 10:11-15)

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.

The Greek word translated “good” means more than that; it also signifies “noble,” “excellent,” “beautiful,” and “ideal.” Our Lord sums up all that we could desire in a shepherd of souls.

This claim of Jesus was clearly an affirmation of His absolute deity. He was here addressing Israelites; Israel's Shepherd was none other than Jehovah. When Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd," He identified Himself with the Jehovah of the Old Testament.

This title, like all of His other titles, revealed Him in a distinctive relationship. He was a shepherd of His Father's appointing and sending, to whom the care of all the sheep, or chosen ones, was committed.

Verse 11 is one of the many scriptures that clearly define both the nature and extent of the Atonement. Jesus gave His life not as a martyr for the truth, not as a moral example of self-sacrifice, but for people. He died that we might live. By nature, we are dead in trespasses and sins; and if Christ, the divinely provided substitute, had not died for us, there would be no spiritual and eternal life for us.

"Giveth his life" implies deliberation—the planned and thoughtful yielding of life for the sheep. Christ was "slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). Salvation is well described as a "plan."

In our modern day, shepherds are in no danger, but Christ's hearers knew well the hazards of the shepherd's calling—the constant peril from wild beasts and from the attacks of desperate people. It was no calm and peaceful service which we call "pastoral" that Christ undertook as He became our Good Shepherd, but a work that required the surrender of His life under the most terrible conditions that could be imagined. All this was willingly faced by our Shepherd.

In striking contrast to the unselfish concern of the Good Shepherd for His sheep, the hireling shepherd is concerned only for his own wages and personal safety (John 10:12). He has no special care for the sheep. Therefore, in the moment of danger, he flees for his life and lets the sheep be scattered and killed.

The *hireling* is an emblem of the Pharisees and Jewish rulers, generally, who served the Lord in a purely legal spirit and only pretended to shepherd the Lord's flock. Sincerity, love, and compassion were lacking; hence, the people were scattered as sheep without a shepherd.

The words in verse 14 express the intimate union there is between Christ and all His believing people. The mutual knowledge of Christ and His sheep is like the mutual knowledge of the Father and the Son—so deep, so intimate, so ineffable that no words can fully describe it (v. 15). Jesus, the Good Shepherd, not only knows all His sheep, but willingly lays down His life for them.

Like Ravenous Wolves

The wolves which infested the countryside did not hunt in packs but prowled by night separately, and were the special foes of the sheep and goats. The wolves caught and killed some of the flock, while the rest scattered in fright. How often this has happened in the history of the Christian church! A local church comes under false leadership; the spiritual life of some is destroyed, while the blessed fellowship of the church is broken up.

B. The Flock of Jesus (John 10:16-21)

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.

¹⁹ There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings.

Verse 16 is an example of what may be called the “futuristic present.” Looking into the future, Jesus saw “other sheep,” doubtless the Gentile world, to whom this Gospel had not yet been preached, and who were yet “without God and without hope in the world” (Eph. 2:12); and He anticipated the day when many of them would be included in His sheepfold. Christ came to redeem the whole world. This was a truth that the Jews of that day, even the disciples themselves, were hardly prepared to accept. This statement must have shocked the Pharisees; at the same time it

pointed the direction in which the disciples must presently move. The horizon of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, embraced one “fold” (both Jews and Gentiles) under the care of one Shepherd—Himself! Entrance into this fold depends first of all on hearing the voice of the Shepherd. And hearing involves personal response, and response involves obedient trust.

In John 10:17-18, Jesus again emphasized the voluntary character of His redeeming death and the power by which He would rise from the dead. It was for His sheep that He would lay down His life. Because of this sacrifice for His sheep, His Father loved Him. No man compelled Christ to lay down His life; He did it of His own volition.

Every time Jesus spoke of His death (John 6:52, 60, 66), there was furious opposition on the part of many of His listeners. His claims were offensive to many, and they attributed His miracles to demon power (10:19-20). Yet others, still amazed at His miraculous healing of the blind man, insisted that demon power cannot restore sight. Therefore, they reasoned, Christ’s claims must have validity.

§ *What did “many” in the crowd say about Jesus (v. 20), and why?*

3. THE SHEPHERD KNOWS HIS SHEEP

A. The Witness of Works (John 10:22-26)

²² And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. ²³ And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon’s porch. ²⁴ Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. ²⁵ Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me. ²⁶ But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.

Now Jesus returns to Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication, which commemorated the rededication of the Temple after its desecration about two centuries earlier (v. 22). The discourse in our lesson took place in the part of the Temple known as Solomon’s porch (v. 23). “So the Jews

surrounded Him and began saying to Him, ‘How long are You going to keep us in suspense? If You are [really] the Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed), tell us so plainly and openly’” (v. 24 Amp.).

Instead of giving a direct “yes” to their question, Jesus calls them to remember His earlier words. He had been clearly teaching His eternal relationship to the Father. The problem was not that Jesus was somehow unclear; the problem was their unbelief. This is always the case in our struggles and doubts about His Word.

The New Testament is not incomplete, nor is Jesus presented in a confusing manner in the New Testament. Just as He revealed Himself to the Jews in Jerusalem through His spoken words, so also the Lord has clearly revealed Himself in the New Testament to all who will read and hear. The problem is ignorance—the ignorance born of unbelief. The problem is if we in our pride do not want the Jesus of the Bible, but would rather have a Jesus who would allow us to have our sin with the false promise of eternal life.

In verse 25, Jesus affirms that His works testify to who He is. The Jews refused to believe His words, so He appealed to His deeds. When He had left Jerusalem after the Feast of Tabernacles, this had been exactly the point of controversy. Many considered His deeds (such as healing the blind) to be signs that He was demon-possessed. But others realized that Satan would not strive against his own kingdom. They knew by simple reason that Jesus really was who He claimed to be by the demonstration of His power.

The reason people do not believe is they are not His sheep (v. 26). This is not a statement about predestination or election. Rather, it is a statement about the sinful heart refusing to repent. It is a statement about hardness of heart and ears regarding divine truth. It is the triumph of sinful human pride over the convicting call of the Holy Spirit.

Christ Revealed

As the sun can be seen only by its own light, so Christ can be known only by His own Spirit.—

Robert Leighton

B. The Shepherd's Keeping Power (John 10:27-30)

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: ²⁸ 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. ³⁰ I and my Father are one.

After showing that unbelief lies at the heart of rejecting divine truth, Jesus describes the characteristics of saved sheep. They hear His voice. It is obvious that hearing His voice is His way of saying we believe in Him and obey Him. But note the language of obedience, “Follow Me,” does not immediately follow the language of *hearing*. This is because relationship is the pivotal link between *hearing* and *following*.

The relationship of *knowledge* (“and I know them,” v. 27) between Jesus and us is what keeps obedience from being legalism. Jesus does not call us to obey Him as robots. He calls us into a relationship in which obedience flows as an expression of love rather than an expression of obligation.

The three promises of verse 28 touch the foundations of our security. First, Jesus promises to give to us *eternal life*. It is not something we earn but a gift we receive on the basis of the relationship of faith.

Second, Jesus promises we shall *never perish*. The verb form and tense is the same as in John 3:16. It is the divine promise, based on the character of and revealed in the saving relationship, that we shall not perish.

Third, Jesus promises we shall not be seized (snatched) and carried off (the meaning of *pluck*). This same thought is given in verse 12, where the wolf *catches* the sheep for destruction. This comes

as a result of the hireling's cowardice and uncaring attitude. Jesus cares for us and thereby promises that the wolf will not be able to seize us from the safety of the flock.

The power of this protection is emphasized in verse 29. It is not simply the promise of Jesus (as if that were not enough!), it is the eternal will of the Father. His greatness cannot be challenged. The Creator of the universe is able to keep His sheep from being seized by the Evil One for destruction. And those who are in the Father's hand are also in the Son's hand, because Jesus and the Father are "one" (v. 30).

§ *What characterizes Jesus' followers (v. 27)?*

§ *Describe the security Christ provides His followers (vv. 28-29).*

JESUS IS GOD HIMSELF

When He declared, "I and My Father are one," Jesus astounded His opponents with what they rightly understood as a claim to divine essence—to unity and equality with God. Given this clear-cut assertion, either Jesus is fully God, or else His word is not reliable. He is either the Son of God or a charlatan. The rich witness of Scripture compels us to accept the first alternative.

Shirley C. Guthrie Jr. said, "To know this man [Jesus] is not just to know a very great, very good, very wise man. It is to know God himself" (*Christian Doctrine*).

Daily Devotions

- M. The Shepherd of Israel (Psalm 80:1-3)
- T. The Divine Shepherd's Flock (Isaiah 40:9-11)
- W. The Shepherd-Savior Smitten (Zechariah 13:7-9)
- T. Compassion of the Good Shepherd (Matthew 18:10-14)
- F. Imitate the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:1-4)
- S. The Shepherd Wipes Away Every Tear (Revelation 7:13-17)