

“I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. ³ The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (NIV 84)

Theme: Sheep, Follow your Savior.

1. He is the True Shepherd
2. He is the Gate

When we visited my parents down in Ohio for a few days after Easter, we took the kids to Aullwood gardens and farm. This is a metro park that has all different kinds of animals for those who grow up in the Dayton area and may have never been to a real farm, can see. One of the animals they have are sheep. The sheep and their lambs were in a barn—sheltered from the weather and predators, and a place where they could eat all the feed and drink all the water they so desired. If they wanted to, they could wander outside the barn into a small fenced-in pen.

That’s pretty typical nowadays in America. But that’s not the life a sheep lived thousands of years ago in Palestine. We’d refer to them today as free-range sheep. They scattered throughout the unfenced countryside. Up on the hills and mountains, in the valleys, scouring for something green to eat and some fresh water to drink. It’s a great way to raise sheep. But it’s hard and difficult. Not all of Israel is lush

hillsides—most of it is rock; a good portion desert or wilderness. So it would take a lot of work to find a place to grace your flocks. Plus there are the predators—hyenas, in David’s day, a lion or a bear. A sheep has many predators—that’s because a sheep has no real means of self-defense. It’s not strong or fast. It doesn’t have a large mouth with sharp teeth; it doesn’t have any claws; and unlike goats, they don’t even have horns. They are helpless to defend themselves. Plus they are stupid. They can’t find their own food or water—but have to be led to greener pastures.

That is why shepherds were so important. They stood on a hill and watched over their sheep—deeply caring for each and every one. They would lead them to food and water. They would watch and listen for predators. And if one wandered off—they would go searching for the lost sheep until he found it.

We like to think of ourselves as some big and powerful animals. He’s strong like an ox, or fast like a cheetah—proud as a peacock. Maybe you are loyal like a dog, sly as a fox, or angry as a hornet.

But the truth is, we aren’t oxen, or cheetahs, foxes, or hornets. We are sheep. Of course you know the simile for a sheep—gentle as a lamb. We are sheep, not because we are gentle; but because we are helpless and hopeless. We can’t defend ourselves against our spiritual enemies; and we are too stupid to find nourishment for our soul on our own.

We need a shepherd. We need someone who can protect us from our spiritual enemies and give us true and pure nourishment for our soul.

At the beginning of chapter 9, Jesus gave sight to a man born blind. Later in the day when Jesus saw him, he asked the man concerning himself, **Do you believe in the Son of Man?** The man responded yes. Not only did Jesus give him physical sight, but more importantly, spiritual sight as well. But the Pharisees weren’t so convinced. They had already rejected Jesus as the Promised Messiah. So when they found out that Jesus had performed the miracle on the Sabbath, they began to attack him and his followers. In fact they started kicking anyone out from the temple any who followed or believed him. Finally they confronted Jesus. He replied by saying that they were the ones who were spiritually blind. Then begins our text. Jesus told this parable to the blind man, to his disciples, the crowd, and

most importantly to the Pharisees. In it, Jesus contrasted himself with the Pharisees.

Unless they had shepherds who watched them during the night—like the shepherds the night Jesus was born, sheep stayed in a pen for the night. It had high walls all around it. They were high enough to keep the sheep in. And, more importantly, high enough to keep the predators out. These pens were typically quite large. They would hold sheep from several different flocks. In the morning the shepherd would enter the pen through the gate. He calls his sheep by name and the sheep follow him. They know him, they recognize him, and they remember his voice—so they follow him.

In our text for today, Jesus never specifically says that he is the Shepherd. But it is heavily implied. Plus a few verses after our text, in verse 14, Jesus says, **I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.** Our second lesson calls Jesus, **that Great Shepherd of the sheep.** Jesus is the shepherd. He is to be trusted. He has nothing to hide.. For he knows each and everyone of us by name.

And we know Christ. We recognize his voice in his Holy Word. We remember what he has done for us. In the verse after our text, verses 11, Jesus said, **I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.** Someone who is truly a shepherd will put his life on the line for his sheep. Like David—he puts his life in danger, even to the point of chasing down a bear and a lion for the sake of his sheep. For he loves them all. Jesus did that and more. For not only put his life on the line. But he gave up his life on the cross. He willingly suffered and died for our sins as he took them upon himself. But he not only died—but he also suffered through hell for us. That is how much our shepherd loves us. He gave up the glories and riches of eternal life to suffer and die for us.

And then he rose from the dead. Because he rose from the dead we know that we too will rise from the dead. And through faith in him we know that we will live with him in heaven forever! Through him we have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He saves us from our spiritual enemies. We were helpless and hopeless by ourselves. We were completely dead in our transgressions and sins. We were on our way to hell to suffer forever, and there was nothing we could have done about it. But as a shepherd does for his sheep, Christ saved us.

But not only is Jesus the True Shepherd, he is also the gate.

The purpose of the gate was simple. Through the gate the shepherds and the sheep entered and left the pen. With high walls all around the pen, there was only one way in and one way out. Even if a thief did climb the walls to get into the pen, he would have a hard time getting them out. It's not as if he could throw them over the wall. No, he would have to at least leave through the gate. That gate provides comfort and assurance. It's let's out to find pasture, it's let's in to provide protection.

And Jesus is the gate. Jesus provides protection for us. He guards and defends us against all our enemies. From both physical and spiritual—our Shepherd protects us. There are many dangers we face day after day—many of which we don't even realize. But God shields us from those dangers. He keeps us healthy, the car accident is avoided. The devil wants to sift us like wheat, but the Lord keeps him away. He leads us away from temptation. He delivers us from evil. The Lord is our care and our protection. When we pass through the gate of Jesus, we know that we are safe.

Sheep must also pass through the gate to find pasture. It is only through Jesus that we find spiritual pasture—food for our souls. As Jesus says in verse nine, **I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.** Those who enter through Jesus will be saved. That's because he is the only way to eternal life. As Jesus himself said in John 14, **I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.** We are saved by the work of Christ alone. We can't do anything to be saved. And salvation is not found outside of him. He alone has the words of eternal life. He is the one and only gate. Only those who pass through him by faith will be saved.

When we pass through the gate we find pasture. That is, we are fed and nourished. He does that through his gospel. Through baptism, as we saw today, the Holy Spirit brings us to faith. Our sins were washed away, and we were welcomed into God's family with the robe of Christ's righteousness. It is through the Word that he strengthens faith. That he comforts and assures us with the message of his unfailing love and protection. And as he feeds and nourishes us

through his gospel, he keeps us in the one true faith. Until he takes us safely home—to dwell in his house forever.

That's why our Shepherd came. As he says in verse 10, **The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.** As the True Shepherd, Jesus cares about you. He hasn't come to hurt or harm you. He doesn't come to steal or destroy. No, he has come to guard and protect you. He has come to suffer in your place. To give you his perfect life. To give up his life for you. He has come to rise from the dead. And to give you eternal life.

So that you may have that life to the full. Or as the Greek really says, have life “exceedingly,” or “more than enough,” or “overflowing.” The life you will have in heaven is far greater—exceedingly more than what you have now on earth. It is more than enough. Or it is exceedingly more than what you can ever imagine. The eternal life that Christ has won for you will be so great and glorious that it will be far better—exceedingly better than anything you can ever think or imagine. That is why our Shepherd came—to take us to heaven where we will dwell in his house forever.

So what do we as sheep do? Well we follow Jesus. And we avoid the rest. We run away from all others who do not agree with him in everything. As Jesus says in verse 5, **they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.** But that's hard to do at times. It's easy to get enticed away. Many a false shepherd has led sheep astray. The devil after all disguises himself. He is a wolf in sheep's clothing. He tries to entice sheep away from Christ by scratching their ears. Preaching what people want to hear, not what God says in his Word. It makes sense to us. It sounds good to our reason. It goes along to the way we want to live our lives. It collaborates with our sinful nature. And so we may be easily enticed away. The devil tries to get us to wander from the flock. But something is off. We can tell—he may look and act like a shepherd—but the voice, the message is off. We don't recognize it.

But we recognize the voice of Christ. We know his voice through his Word. We remember all the great things he has done for us. And so we follow him instead. As he says, **the sheep listen to his voice. He**

calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. We know Jesus and he knows us—by name. So we willingly follow him. We have seen what he has done for us in the past. We know he has our best interests in mind because he loves us. So we follow him as he leads us to the greener pastures of eternal life. And we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.