

The Gospel of John

Lesson 15: The Good Shepherd -- John 10:1-42

Sheep are not impressive animals. They are not strong or clever or quick. They wander off, they panic, they cannot defend themselves, and left to themselves they will follow each other right off a cliff or into the jaws of a wolf. A sheep's entire safety depends on one thing: the quality of its shepherd. And this is the picture Jesus reaches for to describe His relationship with us. Not a general and his soldiers, not a master and his servants, but a shepherd and his sheep, weak, wandering, defenseless creatures whose whole hope is the one who watches over them.

In Jesus' day a shepherd knew his sheep individually, often by name, and the sheep knew his voice. At night several flocks might be kept together in one fold, and in the morning each shepherd would call, and his own sheep, and only his own, would come out and follow him. Jesus draws on this to make a tender claim: "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me." His sheep recognize His voice amid all the competing voices of the world, and they follow Him because they belong to Him. And then He says the thing no ordinary shepherd would ever say: "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

That is where this chapter takes a turn that no shepherd image could fully contain. A good shepherd might risk his life for his sheep, but he would not plan to die for them; a dead shepherd is no use to the flock. But Jesus says His death is the whole point. "I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." The cross is not Jesus being overpowered. It is the Good Shepherd freely laying down His life for sheep who could never save themselves, and then taking it up again. This is a shepherd who dies for the flock and lives again to keep them.

And to those sheep He makes one of the most comforting promises in all of Scripture: "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand." No wolf, no thief, no enemy, no power in heaven or earth can tear a sheep out of the Shepherd's grip. There is profound security here for everyone who hears His voice and follows Him. Read this chapter slowly, and listen for the voice of the Shepherd who knows your name, who laid down His life for you, and who holds you in a hand that nothing can pry open.

Group Discussion: Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (v. 27). In a world full of competing voices, how do we learn to recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd, and what helps us follow it?

Personal Reflection: Jesus, the Good Shepherd, says He knows His sheep by name and lays down His life for them (vv. 11, 14). How does it affect you to be personally known and personally died for by the Shepherd, and where do you most need to trust His care right now?

Read John 10:1-42

Study Questions

1. Jesus said, “I am the door of the sheep” and “If anyone enters by me, he will be saved” (vv. 7, 9). What does it mean that Jesus is the only door into the safety of God’s flock, and how does this fit with His claim elsewhere to be the only way to the Father?
2. Jesus contrasts His sheep, who know His voice, with strangers whose voice they will not follow (vv. 4–5). What competing voices most tempt you to follow them instead of Christ, and how can you grow more attentive to His voice?
3. Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (v. 11). How is Jesus different from the hired hand who flees, and what does His willingness to die reveal about His heart toward us?
4. Jesus knows His sheep by name and they know Him (v. 14). What would change in your daily life if you truly lived as one who is personally known and loved by the Shepherd?
5. Jesus said, “I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord” (vv. 17–18). What does this teach about the cross as Jesus’ free choice rather than a tragedy that overtook Him, and about His power over His own death?
6. Jesus spoke of “other sheep that are not of this fold” whom He must also bring, so there will be “one flock, one shepherd” (v. 16). How does this shape your vision of the church as one people gathered from every background under one Shepherd?
7. Jesus said, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (v. 10), in contrast to the thief who comes to steal and destroy. What is the abundant life Jesus gives, and how is it different from what the world promises?
8. When opinions about Jesus divided the crowd, some said He had a demon and others pointed to His works (vv. 19–21). When you encounter strong division or opposition about Jesus, how do you hold steady, and what keeps you anchored?
9. This is the great promise of the chapter, and it must be understood rightly: Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” (vv. 27–28). What real security does the Shepherd give to those who hear and follow Him, and how is this assurance different from the idea that a person is eternally safe regardless of whether they continue to follow Christ?
10. Look back over this chapter and the voice of the Shepherd at its center. What is one specific way Jesus is forming you to hear His voice, follow Him closely, and rest in His care?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Psalm 23, the Lord as shepherd who leads, restores, and protects; Ezekiel 34:11–16, God Himself seeking and shepherding His scattered sheep; Hebrews 13:20–21, the great Shepherd of the sheep brought back from the dead; 1 Peter 5:1–4, the chief Shepherd

and the undershepherds who care for the flock; Hebrews 3:12-14, the warning to hold fast and not fall away through unbelief.