

John 10: 1-21 **The Lord's My Shepherd**

This morning we are at chapter 10 in John's Gospel and the parable of the good shepherd. Last week Lyndall Bywater looked at chapter 9 where the blind man from birth was healed on the sabbath. Lyndall spoke on how something that happened to an ordinary blind beggar had a knock on effect on the whole community and how Jesus challenged the thinking of the Pharisees. As Pastor David repeats, the chapter headings don't divide the narrative and perhaps we ought to look at the last few verses of chapter nine to see how they run on into chapter ten.

Verses 39-41 *Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."* Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" *Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.* Then Jesus talks about the Good Shepherd without any break in the narrative, as if he were speaking to the same Jews who were arguing about whether a blind man should be healed on the Sabbath.

Firstly some background: so many parables of Jesus are agricultural and His listeners could relate to them because they worked on the land. Today we think lamb comes in a plastic punnet wrapped in cling film. A week ago at Kidzklub, our theme was hearts...it was close to St Valentine's Day... so we had hard loveheart sweets and soft heart shaped jelly sweets... but we also had some real lambs' hearts which most of the children and the student helpers had never seen, let alone eaten. Just looking at them got an "urgh, how revolting" response, when my response at their age was "Yummy, can I work the mincer" as we usually crammed the boiled hearts through a meat mincer, cleaning it to use up the last bits with brown bread. There are pretty lambs in the fields now. We look at them in Bourne Park at Bridge. I've never seen a shepherd in the fields surrounded by barbed wire, there isn't a sheepfold to be seen, and the sheep sleep in the open overnight. There wasn't any barbed wire to stop the sheep wandering off 2000 years ago and the pastures were like those on the moors where the sheep wander all over the place. The shepherd led from the front when he looked for fresh pasture and they followed him about. At night he would put them in a large pen or cave and probably sleep by the doorway. He did this because wild animals would attack the sheep at night as there were still lions, leopards and wolves about. The parallels today might be the goat and cattle herders in Africa who would stay with their animals day and night, and put them in a kraal overnight for protection in the dark. Last night on TV there was a programme about Arabian wildlife in the Dhofar mountains in Oman... and the goatherder led from the front looking for pasture, and goats had been killed by some animal that got into the barn where they

were kept overnight... by leaving some infrared cameras out, it was clear that there was a pack of a dozen Arabian wolves that wandered around the village at night as well as the odd hyena. These predators as well as leopards which would take goats and sheep if opportunity arose. No different from what was normal in Palestine 2000 years earlier.

Secondly, this particular chapter has two “I am” sayings:- (a) “I am the door” or in the NIV “I am the gate” occurs twice in the passage; and (b) “I am the good shepherd” which also occurs twice in the passage. Whenever Jesus says “I am” He is using something that isn't quite, but sounds like the name of God that He revealed to Moses. I looked up in Jewish translation of the Books of Moses what Hebrew scholars had to say about the sentence in Exodus where God said to Moses “I am who I am” in the NIV (with the note it could also mean “I will be what I will be”. The Jewish scholars reckon it says “I will be there howsoever I will be there” (ehyeh asher ehyeh). The Hebrew word ehyeh has also been translated as “being there” or “He who is” or “He who causes (things) to be” The Greek John uses to translate the Aramaic words of Jesus is simply “I am”. This phrase has a resonance that the Pharisees and the teachers of the law would recognise. Reference to “The Good Shepherd” also has an Old Testament background in Ezekiel 34 where God says “*Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of their flocks?*” In fact one could almost say that Jesus is referring to this passage which the Pharisees and teachers of the law would recognise was aimed at them. He has just accused them of blindness, and now He was pointing out what a good shepherd was compared to a bad one, just as God told Ezekiel to warn the leaders of his day who were also Levites and teachers of the Law.

Ezekiel 34 is one of those powerful warnings in the Old Testament pointing out the difference between a true shepherd and a false shepherd. Jesus tells the Jews listening to Him in the first six verses of John 10 that it is a parable, a form of saying. In verse 6, it says that this figure of speech is a parable which they didn't understand, because Jesus refers to Himself to be the door or gate into the sheepfold. As they don't understand it, He elaborates and expands the parable in verses 7-21. After that, the rest of the chapter is actually yet another one of Jesus' debates, dialogues and confrontations with the Jews in Jerusalem, this time on the Feast of Dedication, a winter celebration remembering the Maccabean revolt, in which he answers charge, in verse 24, “*If you are the Christ, tell it plainly.*”

But let's go back to the passage we're looking at this morning... the first 21 verses. I have seven points.

1. He knows His sheep.

John 10:1 says *“Truly, truly I say to you, the man who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.”* This verse makes a simple statement... we can apply it to our houses – we enter through the door, but a thief and robber will try to get in some other way. The Jews listening would grasp what Jesus was saying – there's a right way to do something and wrong way. Verses 2-3 *“The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear His voice and He calls His own sheep by name.”* Verses 14 & 15: *“I am the good shepherd, I know My own and My own know Me.”* Again in verse 27, the same thing: *“My sheep hear My voice and I know them.”* Jesus is contrasting a true shepherd from what He calls, in verse 12, a hired hand, or a hireling.

Today's farmers make sure they don't get too close or sentimental with their animals reared for slaughter. .. bonding with them and then eating them a little while later isn't a good idea. Ewes and breeding rams live for a good number of years, same as dairy cows. These animals are with the farmer for years and are recognisable... they may be sheep, but even sheep have their little ways and different baas – every lamb recognises its mother's baa, so they must all be a bit different and so too the shepherd recognises the baa of all his sheep. In the days of Jesus, sheep were raised, on the whole, for their wool and lambs rather than for mutton; and the value, of course, could be substantial. So you could bond with them. A true shepherd knew his sheep.

Jesus knows His sheep. He knows them by name. Remember how He called Nathaniel and said, *“Behold, an Israelite in whom there is no guile.”* (John 1:47) Do you remember what Nathaniel said back to Jesus? He asked *“How do you know me?”* Remember Zaccheus up the tree trying to get a look at Jesus as He was passing through? He calls him by name. As far as we know, they had never met. It is one of the astonishing things about Jesus: He never forgets your name. He knows who you are. In fact, He knows you better than you know yourself.

This is a two way relationship. Look at what He says in verse 14. *“I know them and they know Me.”* And it is based on the Father knowing the Son and the Son knowing the Father. Actually, it is even more wonderful than that. You can go to verse 38, and this is one of those verses that just begs to go down deep and we haven't got the time for it, but at the end of verse 38, *“Understand that the Father is in Me and I am in the Father.”* The first person is in the second person and the second person is in the first person, and your mind is swimming. What it is saying is that every action of the Father is in some way linked to the Son and every action of the Son is in some way linked to the Father, so that they never act independently of each other. That is partly what Jesus means when He says, “I know you.” It means He and His sheep are in union together in a bond of covenantal fellowship. “I know you,” He says. None of us can hide from Jesus, He knows us all and He wants

us to know Him.

2. He leads His sheep.

Look at verses 3 and 4. *“To Him the gatekeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”* It isn't clear who the gatekeeper or watchman is and whether he hangs around all day in case someone drops by. Again in verse 27: *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”* The good shepherd leads his sheep; he guides his sheep. *“The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures, besides still waters. He guides me in the paths of righteousness. He leads me; He guides me.”*

There is a difference between the shepherds in the Middle East and the man and his dog shepherds we see in Britain. In Britain the sheep are driven. In the east, sheep are led. Now there was a shepherd who always had just the two sheepdogs who kept the flock in order as he moved them from field to field. On his way home they walked behind him. Can anyone tell me ... from the Bible... their names?

Answer Psalm 23:6 *“Surely 'goodness' and 'mercy' will follow me all the days of my life”*

Back to the middle east - John Stott tells a story of a trip he made to the Middle East. Perhaps it was Israel. They're on the bus and they are doing one of these tours. They have an Arab guide and he's telling you what I've just told you. That in the west, you drive your sheep with dogs but in the east you lead them. You go before them and they follow you. And as the guide was saying this, one of the passengers on the bus is looking out of the window and he sees the very opposite. He sees a man with a stick in his hand and he's driving these sheep. So the man puts his hand up as the bus is going along and he says, *“Well look, that's not what is happening out there.”* The guide stops the bus, gets off the bus, and runs across to ask this man. And he comes back beaming and says, *“He wasn't the shepherd; he was the butcher.”*

Just as He knows our name, the sheep know His voice and they follow Him wherever He leads. And He never leads us into sin. And if He asks you to walk in the valley of the shadow of death or to walk in trouble or trial, He'll never ask you to do that without Him going through there first. The whole point is that we are not being led by our own strength, but we are being led by the strength and power of the Holy Spirit. That is what Jesus is saying that here. He leads us because He is united to us; because there is a bond, a relationship.

3. He feeds His sheep – that's you and me.

Verse 9: *“I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find*

pasture.” The great concern in the Middle East was finding pasture, finding grass for the sheep to eat. And Jesus feeds us. He feeds us with spiritual food, He feeds us with His Word, He instructs us, He gives us a healthy diet and nourishes us and builds us up. You remember when Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love Me?” Jesus answered “Feed My sheep. Feed My lambs.” Jesus is concerned that His sheep get fed. That’s why we need to feed on the Word, and not with the equivalent of spiritual junk food. Some may think junk food is ‘O.K.’ for some occasions, but not for others when a proper sit down three course meal is expected. Jesus is saying, “I’m concerned about My sheep that they are fed and nourished.” That’s why the writer of Hebrews urges his readers to eat solid food. It is time to move on from the milk and mush. He feeds us with His Word, with 66 books and 2 million words in the Bible that is able to make us complete in Him. There are a lot of easy passages in the Bible – Like “Jesus loves us” (Rev 1:5) and “The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him,” (Nahum 1:7) but there are also challenging ones we cannot chose to ignore like “The LORD is slow to anger but great in power;

the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished.” (Nahum 1:3) or “the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in” (Proverbs 3:12). We need to look at the Bible as a whole to ensure that we are properly fed on all of it, not just the choice bits that tickle our fancy.

4. He saves His sheep.

Again Jesus repeats this on a number of occasions. He says it in verse 11: “*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.*” He says it again in verse 15: “*Just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father and I lay down My life for the sheep.*” He repeats it again in verses 17 and 18: “*He lays down His life for the sheep.*”

Now there are two parts to what Jesus is saying here. In the first place, and we need to go down to verse 29, “My Father who has given them to Me.” Before He lays down His life for them, He has received them in covenant from the Father. This is the Covenant of Redemption between the Father and the Son. We’ll see this again in chapters 14 and again in chapter 17, so let me pass over that now.

What Jesus does in His opening ministry and upon the cross has its beginning before time in the covenant between the Father and the Son. He lays down His life for the sheep. He purchases them. Actually, it is the language of ‘laying aside’ in much the same way as you might ‘lay aside’ your garments, as we will see in John 13, which we are coming to in a few weeks, where Jesus lays aside His outer garments and takes the form of a servant and washes the disciples feet, as though that was symbolic of what He means by laying His life. He sheds His own blood on behalf of the sheep to redeem them and purchase them and to call them “Mine.” In the background here is Ezekiel 34

where it speaks of false shepherds who only take care of themselves. It was very expensive for the Good Shepherd to purchase these sheep and to call them Mine. The price was the death of Jesus on the cross, so that we may be saved and receive the gift of eternal life when we confess with our lips that Jesus is Lord, and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead. It is with our hearts that we believe and are justified, and it is with our mouths that we profess our faith and are saved.

5. He guards His sheep.

Let's look at verses 12 and 13. The hired hand isn't the shepherd and doesn't own the sheep. When the wolf comes, he leaves the sheep and flees. And the wolf snatches them and scatters them. Verse 13: *"He flees because he is the hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep."*

The good shepherd guards his sheep. Every year stray dogs and foxes out among the sheep will be shot by shepherds guarding their sheep, especially at lambing time. Every year sheep are attacked, but the focus always seems to be on the poor dog instead of the bloodied sheep. Upset dog walkers who think the countryside is a park and that their pet wouldn't harm anyone get very upset when it's their dog that is shot for worrying the sheep, not realising that ewes will give birth prematurely and every lamb lost is money lost to the shepherd who owns the sheep. The farmer protects his sheep. Jesus protects His sheep; He guards His sheep because wolves in sheep's clothing come and threaten the sheep. He guards them. He protects them. We have that wonderful assurance that He watches over us and protects us – Psalm 34 verse 7 says *"The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and He delivers them."*

6. He seeks His sheep.

Let's look at verse 16. *"I have other sheep that are not of this fold and I must bring them also."*

This is a missionary text. Jesus didn't come for a few believers in Jerusalem and Palestine; He came for believers all over the world. Jesus is saying, "I have men and women made in my image in every country and I must bring them also and I must seek them also." Our mission is to have the same desire as Jesus, thaty none should perish, but all come to repentance and be saved.

A great concern of the church of Jesus Christ has got to be for missions. We've got to be concerned about the people of God everywhere. As Christians, we need to keep on praying for the church in places like Kenya where David is today where Vaughn and Au are today, where Paul and Genevieve are today, where Amy and Kody are today. Jesus seeks His sheep. He longs to gather in all of His sheep.

He says this in several places. *"I am the door of the sheep"* in verse 7. The idea of the door is that it is through Him that we enter into salvation. Look at how he puts it in verse 9, *"I am the door. If*

anyone enters through Me, He will be saved and go in and out and find pasture.” Revelation 3 verse 20 says “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.”

My final point 7

7. Salvation is only through Jesus....He only, alone is the door.

He says it again in verses 27-29. He is the door—exclusively. **There is no other way of salvation but by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. There is no other way good enough to pay the price of sin. Only Jesus can unlock the gates of heaven and let us in.** The Father and the Son are involved in one and the same mission. That is why He says in verse 30, *“I and My Father are One.”* He means that they both have a common purpose, a common goal, a common mission. Look at how Jesus puts it in verse 28., *“I give them eternal life and they will never perish nor will anyone snatch them out of My hand.”* Can’t you picture Jesus coming before His Father on the last day and opening His hand and saying, “Look what I’ve got.”

I came across this story some years ago. It was one of these e-mails that had been making the rounds. If you've heard it before... well it's worth hearing again.

A wealthy man and his son loved to collect rare artwork—Picasso, Van Gogh, Rembrandt and Raphael, and they liked to sit down together and look at these wonderful paintings in their home. And then the son was called up to serve in the Vietnam War. In an act of outstanding courage the young man rescued this Marine, but while doing so he himself was shot in the heart and died. And a month later, near Christmas, there’s a knock at the door of the father and there’s a man outside dressed in full military uniform and he says to the father, *“Sir, you don’t know me, but I am the marine for whom your son gave his life. He saved many lives that day and in the process of carrying me to safety a bullet struck him in the heart and he died instantly. He often talked about your love of art.”* The marine was holding a package and he says to the father of this boy that died rescuing him, *“I want you to have this.”* And it’s a painting that the marine has done. He says, *“It’s not much, but it was all that I could do and it is a token of my gratitude to you.”* The father opens the parcel and it is a painting of his son. And he admires it, especially the way that his eyes have been caught, and the personality of his son has been caught in his eyes. And the father hung this painting from the mantelpiece and every time visitors would come to the house he would show them this painting of his son, amongst all the other great paintings in his home. Not many months later, the father died and there’s an auction of his paintings and many influential people are there. There’s an auctioneer and he’s pounding the gavel and he says, *“We’ll start with a picture of the man’s son.”* There is silence. There’s a voice from the back that says, *“We want to see the famous paintings.”*

But the auctioneer persists. *“Will someone bid for this painting? \$200? \$100?”* And there’s silence. And another voice says, *“We didn’t come for this. We want the Rembrandts, we want the Raphaels, the Van Goghs.”* And the auctioneer continues, *“The son. Who will take the son?”* And there’s a voice from the back and it says, *“I’ll bid \$10.”* It was the father's gardener who had looked after the garden for years and knew the son from childhood, loved him and missed him.... he remembered times in the garden when the son was boy and a young man; he remembered the father. He didn’t have much money. He bid \$10. *“Will anyone bid \$20?”* Silence. *“Going once, going twice, going three times. Sold. \$10.”* And he puts the gavel down and he’s walking away and they say, *“What about the other paintings?”* And he says, *“The auction is over. I couldn’t tell you this until this moment but there was a stipulation that whoever bought the painting of the son got everything. Whoever takes the son gets everything.”* And that is what Jesus is saying here. *“Whoever takes Me, gets eternal life and no one can snatch them out of My hand.”* And there’s coming a day, friends, when Jesus is going to present His sheep to His Father and He’s going to say, *“Look what I’ve got.”*

Let’s pray together.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for Your Word. We ask you now to bless it to us. We thank you for the Son, the good shepherd. We ask that you write this word upon our hearts and draw us even closer to Him for Jesus’ sake, Amen.