

## ***Shepherd or Madman***

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John Series

**John 10:1-21**

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Turn in your Bibles to John 10:1 please.

<sup>1</sup> “Very truly I tell you **Pharisees**, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup> The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” <sup>6</sup> **Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.**

<sup>7</sup> Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. <sup>9</sup> **I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture.** (Psalm 121) <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

<sup>11</sup> “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. <sup>13</sup> The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

<sup>14</sup> “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—<sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. <sup>17</sup> The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. **I have authority** to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

<sup>19</sup> The Jews who heard these words were again divided. <sup>20</sup> Many of them said, “He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?”

<sup>21</sup> But others said, “These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

This is the Word of the Lord.

Beloved of God,

Picture a group of three shepherds gathering together in the evening. These are men—maybe even women in today’s world—who farm sheep. They each have, let’s say, 100 sheep that they graze in various pastures during the day. At night, though, they all come together and so do the sheep. All the sheep get corralled into one pen. The herds mingle while in the pen. They sleep side by side. But how do the shepherds get their own sheep to follow them in the morning when it’s time to separate the flocks? Do you know?

Jesus hints at in our reading. Each shepherd calls his sheep and they recognize his voice. Some people say sheep are dumb. But they actually are so attuned to the voice of their own shepherd that they will only follow that person. I think that's pretty remarkable. Even smart. And that's why Jesus gives us this great analogy about what it means to follow him. We must listen to his voice.

## The Voices We Hear

But do we? We live in a world of noise. We live in a world that calls to us with different voices. Each one might call our name or tug at our heart in different ways. Money, fame, a life of ease. Maybe even things like marriage, family, or grandchildren. None of this is necessarily wrong in and of itself. You can have money. You can become famous. You can be so well-off that you hire people to do everything so that you can relax, especially if you have good people in charge. And maybe you're single and all you want is to be married. Maybe you're married and all you want is to have children. And maybe you've had your children, but they aren't having kids and all you really want is some grandkids. Like I said, those things aren't bad in themselves. But your obsession with them can be harmful. If that's the voice you heed all the time, instead of the voice of Jesus, then you'll get in trouble. Your life will not find the kind of fulfilment Jesus wants for you.

Just think about the voice of success. You need to work hard and get ahead in this world. Many of us have probably been exposed to that voice in our lives. But we often define success in worldly terms—climbing the corporate ladder or making six figures at minimum. A million dollars would be even better. But this voice can make us a slave to money and someone who tramples on others who get in our way. On our climb, we fail to heed the voice of Jesus and, so, we lose our way. That will not fulfill us or give us “life to the full” as it is called by Jesus in v.10.

Similarly, we can be listening to the voice of self-fulfillment. Don't let anyone tell you what you can or can't do or be. Be true to yourself and follow your own dreams and desires. This too leads to all sorts of self-damage because we're following the compass of our own heart. **I don't know if any of you have seen this cute video of a sheep get rescued from a ditch and then jumping right back into it.** This is what seeking our own way does to us. We need to not only receive the rescue that Jesus provides but also allow him through his Spirit and Word to guide us so that we stay out the devil's traps and ditches.

We need to listen for the voices that are drawing us away from Jesus. That's the point here. In v.10, one of my favourite verses in the Bible, our Lord Jesus promises his sheep the fulness of life **in him**. Right from the beginning, Satan has tried to deceive us into thinking our own way—or his—is better for us, raising doubt about the truth and value of God's voice. Remember his words of temptation to Eve? “Did God really say you should not eat from the tree?” Satan wants us to doubt the voice of Jesus and the wonderful life our Lord is promising us. He plays on our discontent and doubting hearts. We might think, I'd be happier if I had more money. I know I'd be fulfilled if I was a star in

Hollywood or maybe a hockey or soccer superstar. I'm not content single but I know I'd be happy if I was married so I'm going to pursue that even if I have to go outside of God's design for marriage. I'd be happier if I had children. I'd be happier if I had grandkids. I'd be happier if I followed my own pathway to self-fulfillment. My life would be full if I was healthier. There's no end to the voices we are tempted to listen to because we think they offer us life to the fullest.

But would you be happier or more content? Are those things the key to happiness or fulfillment? To a full life? There are voices in our world and maybe in your head and heart that might say yes. But does the voice of Jesus promise that to us?

No. Think about Psalm 23 and what the sheep are promised there. What is the voice of the Shepherd offering? We are promised his provision—pastures and water. And we know **that** the provisions of the Lord for us are not necessarily what we think they should be. He gives us what he knows we need. Sometimes his plans for us are not at all what we thought our life would be like. Certain things don't come about. Other things change or are taken away. Old age brings limitation we don't necessarily appreciate. But there's grace for us to lean on so that Jesus still provides for us in this chapter of life. No one's life is exactly what we might want. But when we surrender our days to Jesus, we receive what he gives us with thankfulness and become content. We find that the Lord is still faithful. And as we learn to rest in him, we find life to the fullest.

Congregation, most importantly, hear this: we are promised the presence of the Shepherd—I am with you even in the darkest valley or the valley of the shadow of death. Or think of Psalm 121 where the Shepherd says he watches over our coming and going now and forevermore. So he's always here for us. Now, of course, the valley of the shadow of death is not a place any one of us runs too and is eager to enter. But Jesus promises to go with us through it and get us to the other side. And when we get there, we can be certain that he has been with us through it and accomplished things there that we weren't expecting. He refines us, is the word the Bible uses. But in that struggle, he shows himself faithful and even our provider. He gives us what only the Good Shepherd knows we need to help us become what he wants. He brings us to the place where we learn to live more fully into the life that he calls "full." That is, what's really best for us to become better disciples or sheep who better know how to listen to and trust the voice of the Shepherd.

### **The Voice We Need to Heed**

So, let's recognize that what Jesus says we really need is to learn to listen to his voice. He'll never steer us wrong. Not that he won't steer us down a path we weren't counting on or one is uncomfortable or hard for a time. I think it was Jesus who wrote the lyric, "I beg your pardon, I never promised you a rose garden!" Yeah, I know he didn't! But he did promise us green pastures. Yet, even in those pastures there can be weeds that could cause us harm. So it's not that he's promising a life of ease but it is the best life for us if we learn to listen to and trust his voice to lead and guide us through all that we face in our lives.

First of all, we need to recognize that he makes this full life possible. He is the gate by which alone we enter the fold of God's family. He is the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.

Second, he's the one who shepherds us each day. He promised us direction. He guides us in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. He directs us by his infallible word. It is completely trustworthy. It is the voice of truth in our world of lies. By his word and Spirit, he helps us know the truth so that we not deceived by the lies of the hired man who doesn't care about the sheep. We are not trapped by the wolf who comes only to steel, kill and destroy. His voice directs us and keeps us from these lies and traps.

It takes a little training, my friends. It takes repeatedly learning to listen to God's Word and seeing that it is always right. I'm sure that I could bring up here different people who could testify to us that they tried doing life their own way. Maybe they were just naïve. I've seen this so many times.

Someone might say, I'm going to marry a non-Christian because he's a nice guy and I'll change him. For one woman I know, the marriage only lasted a year. Similarly, people have chased after riches and got them, only to find out that money brought a whole new level of pressure they just couldn't handle. It wasn't what Jesus was leading them to but they pursued the call of the wrong voice and ended up in misery instead of life to the fullest.

I was listening to a story recently that goes back a ways. A few decades ago, young black lawyer was ready to start practicing law. He was super qualified. Graduated from an Ivy League law school. Could have gotten a job in any prestigious law firm in New York. But, instead, he went into defending those who were wrongfully imprisoned. As he saw it, people with money can often get away with murder. "Think of O.J. Simpson," he said. "We all know he was guilty but he got off because he had money to buy high powered lawyers. But there were and still are many people in jail who are often minorities but they are in jail because they can't defend themselves with a proper trial." Anyway, this young lawyer turned down big money and prestige to protect what Jesus would call "the least of these." And his life has been very fulfilling, even though he hasn't become rich like many other lawyers. He heard the voice of Jesus calling him to sacrifice the riches of this world for the joy of the Lord.

Are you listening for the voice of the Good Shepherd to lead and guide you each day? You see, to this day, in the Middle East, a shepherd will go into a crowded sheepfold or pen and call out his own sheep one by one, naming them. They will recognize his voice and come to him. They will follow his voice and ONLY his voice.

Now think about that. Who knows you best? Our Lord Jesus! The shepherd, after all, spends day after day in the company of his sheep. He knows their individual characters, markings, likes and dislikes. And the sheep know him. They know his voice and know that he can be trusted. Someone else can come to the pen and they won't go near him, even if he calls their name. They are listening for the one voice that matters, the voice they trust. And that's the picture Jesus wants us to come away with from this story as John tells it.

I like how this story ends. John circles back to the story of the blind man in the 1st verse we read. He wants us to see that those who won't believe that Jesus is the gate by which we enter the kingdom of God will remain lost in their pursuit of other ways to find a full life. They are blind. But they are also deaf. Those who don't listen to the voice of Jesus the Good Shepherd will be deceived by other voices offer a life that isn't really true life. They'll miss the fullness of life in the kingdom Jesus is promising. These people are blind and also deaf, spiritually speaking. Instead of seeing Jesus as the Messiah and Good Shepherd, they are like the Pharisees here in John 10 who call Jesus a madman.

Here's the thing, congregation. The heart of the true shepherd is revealed in his voice. Jesus is constantly calling us to the fullest life possible by following him into the pastures he has prepared for us. With faith and grace, we see that his life is the best and fullest life there is. His heart is set on blessing us. And our heart, the heart of the sheep, hungers to hear his voice. He long to walk with him and talk with him in the pastures of life. We desire to know his will and do it.

So, friends, when we follow the voice of Jesus in our lives, we aren't always going to be applauded, especially not by people who think Jesus is a madman. And we aren't always going to get what we might have thought was going to be fulfilling—by worldly standards. People might look at us and think that we've sacrificed so much that we're crazy like that lawyer I mentioned. We might be called a lunatic. Meanwhile, Jesus smiles because he sees us following his voice and he blesses that. Consequently, we find ourselves more fulfilled than we ever imagined because Jesus can do the unimaginable in our lives. That's just the kind of Shepherd he is. The Good Shepherd. Really Good. Amen.