

**John 10:1-18**  
**(Ezekiel 34:1-16; 1 Peter 2:21-25)**  
**“The Good Shepherd”**

**Introduction**

Why is it that religious leaders so often miss the point of true religion: that God loves us so much that he has done for us what we could never do for ourselves, becoming one with us, taking upon himself the guilt of our sin, offering us an amnesty signed in his Son's own blood so that we might live at peace with him and each other, now and forever? Instead, they (or should I say “we”) too often use what knowledge we have of God to keep others out, and to resist God's work in their lives. This was precisely the reason that Jesus told these stories of the good shepherd: he had just healed a blind man, and rather than rejoicing, the religious leaders had tried in every way they could to discredit Jesus and deny the miracle. When they failed at that, they excommunicated the man who had been healed for daring to give credit to the one who had healed him.

How often we see this happen today: If someone encounters the living God outside the box of our particular paradigm or practice, we tend to criticize and seek to discredit the experience. Presbyterians just are not supposed to get saved in charismatic churches, and Baptists aren't sure what is happening when one of theirs comes to Christ in a liturgical church. We all have our own comfort zone, our own list of good guys and, if not bad guys, at least guys we're not too sure of. Thus it has ever been.

In his response, Jesus draws upon the familiar picture found in Ezekiel chapter thirty-four of God's anger with the unfaithful shepherds of Israel, and his promise to be the faithful and good shepherd to his people and to protect them from the false shepherds who only used them to increase their own wealth and comfort. Our translation “good” is inadequate to express the word that Jesus uses here. We have no word in English that adequately combines the ideas of both goodness and beauty. The good shepherd is compelling in his virtue, incomparably and altogether lovely. He guides, protects, feeds, leads, and carries home those that are his.

The questions at the heart of our text are as relevant today as they were in Jesus' day or in Ezekiel's: How do we know if someone speaks for God? How do we recognize the faithful shepherd to whom we may entrust the care of our souls, the keeping of our secrets, the direction of our community? In the great chamber of noise in which we live, how are we to discern which voices are true? Jesus answers these questions here in an extended parable that takes us from the heat of a city teeming with merchants and entertainers, out into the countryside of cold nights with falling stars and the yellow eyes of predators lurking just beyond the fire ring, longing to make off with a lamb.

Jesus tells a story, and when his disciples don't understand its meaning, he tells a second. The first story depicts a city pen with high walls and a gate guarded by a gatekeeper, where many flocks are kept together while the shepherds are in town buying and selling. The second depicts a typical night out in the wilderness, where the shepherd must make do with a makeshift pen and place himself in harm's way to protect his sheep.

## Body

- 1. The first parable addresses Jesus' identity and authority (10:1-6):**
  - The gatekeeper (God) knows the good shepherd and opens the gate to him.
  - The sheep know the good shepherd's voice and they follow him.
- 2. The second parable addresses Jesus' redemptive ministry (10:7-15):**
  - The good shepherd is the door through which the sheep must pass to safety and to life.
  - The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.
- 3. The final note points to the mission Jesus has entrusted to his people (10:16-18):**
  - The good shepherd has more than one fold of sheep (all the nations) and is bringing them all together into one flock under one shepherd.

## Conclusion

What will we do with this? How will this change our view of the broken, of the harassed and helpless? At the same time that he told the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15), Jesus told another parable of a shepherd who leaves his ninety-nine sheep and goes searching on the mountains for the one sheep that is lost. When he finds it, he returns rejoicing. So, Jesus says, there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous who simply go their way.

Are you are struggling with the brokenness of your life, tempted to think that no one cares, that no one can help? Then realize that Jesus longs to lead you home to the Father's house, and into a life of abundance and freedom. If you are at peace with the Father, remember that he has given us the task of finding lost sheep and leading them home, so that heaven may rejoice and be glad that another has come home. There is no greater joy than following Jesus. It is for us and for the angels of heaven, "joy unspeakable, and full of glory."

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