

The Marks of a True Shepherd
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John 10:1-5
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Amen. Please turn with me in your Bibles to John 10. It is good to be back, as I said earlier, and it's good to be back into the Gospel of John, and into this new chapter. Last time we finished up John 9, and the last two Sundays the Lord has been feeding the church well from other places, and with other accents. Dr. John Carrick was here two weeks ago and if you don't know it, he's an Englishman. Everything sounds better, theology always sounds better with an English accent, or Scottish accent.

Anyway, it's good to be here in the Gospel of John 10 today. We come to a passage which unfolds for us some rich and wonderful aspects of the glory of Jesus Christ. We have two marvelous '*I AM*' sayings packed into just a few verses. We've noted that one of the features of John's Gospel is he records for us unique features of his Gospel as he records for us the '*I AM*' sayings of Jesus, seven of which have predicates. '*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*' '*I am the vine.*' '*I am the bread of life.*' Here we have two we're going to encounter: '*I am the door,*' and '*I am the good shepherd.*' Normally they are spread out chapters apart, but here we have two right together in this chapter rich in imagery. Jesus draws on the well-known to his audience, the well-known backdrop of 1st Century sheep farming. That is His metaphor, the extended metaphor that undergirds all of this chapter. It was something very accessible to them, it is very far-removed from us and we need to get some background in it as we go, but it was something very near and dear to them, and clear. But it is something that God has used throughout His Word. We read a passage in Ezekiel where He comes as the Shepherd of His people, and He pictures us continually as sheep. One of the most well-loved passages in all of Scripture is surely Psalm 23:

Psalm 23:1-3

- 1 *The Lord is my shepherd,*
 *I shall not want.***
- 2 *He makes me lie down in green pastures;*
 *He leads me beside quiet waters.***
- 3 *He restores my soul;***

The imagery of the sheep and the shepherd, God created sheep to show us what we are like. It wasn't an afterthought. The Lord doesn't do things like we do. So many of the things that we do, sometimes the cleverest puns I ever come up with are by accident. I realize after I've said it, "That was really good." I had no idea, I just stumbled into it. The Lord never does that. He doesn't think, "Hey, that's pretty good. I made those sheep. That's what people are like." No, He made sheep to show us what we are like. Sheep are helpless animals. They need to be led into green pastures. They are not good foragers. They are not like goats. Goats can find a meal anywhere. Sheep have to be cared for because they are helpless, completely defenseless. So that is what we are, the Lord tells us, and He made us that way so that we would learn the incredible treasure of depending, and knowing, and loving our Shepherd, so that we could see that God is our all-in-all. He is everything that we need. So Jesus draws on this rich imagery here, in the context of what was going on in His ministry at this moment in time, and lays out for us some wonderful aspects of His glory. He also teaches us some things about how we ought to be with one another. We're going to read John 10:1-21. We're only going to focus today on Verses 1-5, but I want to read the larger passage.

John 10:1-21:

1 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers." 6 This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them.

7 So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

11 “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, 15 even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. 18 No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”

19 A division occurred again among the Jews because of these words. 20 Many of them were saying, “He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?” 21 Others were saying, “These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?”

Let's pray.

Our Father, we come to You today grateful for the fact that You are a God that speaks, that You have given us Your precious Word to reveal Your heart to us. We ask that You now might grant by Your Spirit illumination, that You might open the eyes of our hearts to see and behold wonderful things from Your law, and that we might be changed for the glory of Your Son. We pray in His Name, Amen.

One of the things that we need to do in interpreting Scripture is always to try to see it in context, and one of the first questions we need to ask in this passage is the question: *When? When did Jesus say this? Is there anything in the text that tells us when He said that?* One of the things that becomes clear as we start looking at that is that John 10:1, we have to watch out that we don't assume there is a break between John 9 and John 10. Remember that the chapter and verse divisions were not original, they were not given in the inspiration of Scripture. Scripture was given as letters, as continuous writing, and later chapters and verses were added some hundreds of years after the New Testament was given. So John 9 and John 10 is an artificial division, and in fact, I think it definitely is an artificial division. I think what Jesus says in John 10:1-21, that section happens in the immediate aftermath of what had just happened in John 9. There is no delay and the reason I

say that is because John usually marks delays real clearly. One of his favorite phrases is the phrase *'after these things'*, occurring a number of times in John 3:22, John 5:1, John 6:1, John 7:1, and again, and again. *'After these things'*, the idea is this happened, now *'after these things'*, sometime later, this happened. Well, we don't have an *'after these things'* in John 10:1, and so as we read the passage, though the theme at first looks very different, if we think about the theme in connection with what goes on before it, it makes a lot of sense because Jesus, having just healed the blind man in John 9. Remember the man born blind was what had just happened. He healed him, and the man who was born blind was then put out of the synagogue. There was great emphasis on that, we noted that in John 9:33. After the Pharisees had interviewed him again for the second time, really badgering him, and he said to them:

John 9:33 ~ If this man were not from God he could do nothing.

In 9:34 they tell him:

John 9:34 ~ They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?" So they put him out.

John 9:35 ~ Jesus heard that they had put him out,...

They put him out of the synagogue. They rejected him. The religious leaders of the day, remember what had happened? When he was healed he goes back and he's telling everybody. They see him walking around seeing, obviously ecstatic that he can now see, "That's the guy that used to beg." "No, it's not. He just looks like him. He can't be the guy that used to just beg, that guy was blind. He was born blind." "No, that's him." "I am the one. He healed me!" Then, what do they do? They take him to the Pharisees. Why? Because they are taking him to their shepherds. They are taking him to their leaders to make sense of this. "Show us what to make of this miracle. Guide us."

The shepherds show themselves to be blind guys, is the point of Chapter 9. They don't see what is so obvious, that the only One that can heal the blindness is the Messiah. This was prophesied, as we saw some weeks back, in Isaiah three different times, the Messiah will give sight to the blind, but the shepherds are bad shepherds, and they don't lead the people appropriately. So Jesus is rebuking them at the end of the chapter when He tells them that He came into the world so that those who see might become blind. Then the Pharisees ask Him, "We're not blind too?" and He says, "Yes you are." What He does at this point is He is appealing,

He realizes that there is a problem for the mass of people that are gathered around, and for the Nation of Israel at that point in time. There is a question, and the question is this: We're helpless, hopeless, defenseless sheep, whom are we to follow? Are we to follow the leaders of Israel, or are we to follow Jesus of Nazareth? That is the question and Jesus, as a loving Shepherd, seeks to help them answer that question by turning to this metaphor that is so rich in Old Testament biblical imagery, and so rich in the experience of their own lives. He basically says, "Look," He's drawing a contrast. The contrast is between the religious leaders, who are the thieves and robbers, and He, the good Shepherd. He basically says, "Look, there was a defenseless sheep who was blind. He was harassed, harangued by those shepherds. I gave him sight." That is the essential bridge into this glorious passage that shows us the wonder of our Savior, that He is a loving and compassionate Shepherd of sheep.

So the question that was before his audience that day was: *Whom are we to follow?* It was the same question before the readers of the Gospel of John. *Whom are we to follow?* Remember that Jesus is speaking around 33 A.D., 32 A.D. probably, we say right in the aftermath of the Feast of Tabernacles, September or October. Many scholars believe 32 A.D., less than six months before His crucifixion. Fifty-plus years later John writes this Gospel, and he is empowered by the Holy Spirit to recount and to give God's perfect Word, and he puts together this Gospel with a particular group of people in mind. Those people are the Jews of the late 1st Century who were faced with the same question. *Whom are we to follow?* Because the Jewish leadership, the synagogues all throughout the Mediterranean world, the Jewish leadership in Israel, had soundly rejected Jesus, the Messiah. They are saying to their sheep, "Reject Jesus," and so John is offering this account, inspired by the Holy Spirit, to again ask that question, to answer that question for those people: *Whom should we follow?* And of course the answer is the Good Shepherd. That question resonates with us today. I mean we are still sheep, every single human being is a sheep spiritually—helpless, defenseless, in need of a shepherd. The question is: *Whom are you going to follow? Whom will you entrust your life to?* That is an evangelistic question, but it continues to be a question every day for the Christian who has already begun to follow Christ. The question each day is: *At this moment, whom will you follow? Will you draw near to your Shepherd, or will you turn to sin?* So this question continues to be important for us.

The primary spotlight is on Jesus as the Shepherd. It is Him versus the religious leaders, but there is a secondary and important application and that is: By indicting the religious leaders of His day in the same way Ezekiel did 500 years before, He also sets up for us a picture of what earthly under-shepherds ought to be. Jesus is

the primary focus, He is the Shepherd we need, but there is also this sense of what is a good shepherd, an under-shepherd look like? That's the language that the New Testament uses. Peter, in his letter, speaks of Jesus as the chief Shepherd, and the idea is the elders are shepherds. He writes to fellow elders in 1 Peter 5, and he exhorts the elders how to lead the flock, to exercise oversight over the flock, to be examples to them, not lording it over them. Then he says, "When the chief Shepherd appears, you'll receive the crown." So the idea is that you are, and the word 'shepherding' is key in the New Testament. It is what the flock is to have. In fact the word 'pastor' means 'shepherd'. We lose that, we think of the pastor as the guy at the church who gets up and talks on Sunday, right? But the pastor really the word means 'shepherd' and it comes from the Greek word 'poimainō' which means 'shepherd'.

Now the way that I want us to look at this today, these first five verses is, the title is, 'Three Marks of a True Shepherd', or 'The Marks of a True Shepherd' and there are three of them. How do you recognize the true shepherd from the false? With the primary spotlight on Jesus compared to other shepherds, and then underneath that, a secondary application, how do you recognize the true shepherds in your life? How do you know if you are at a good church? When you move somewhere, how do you know if you found the right place? So that is the primary focus, now we can all draw from this because we're all called to disciple and to be shepherding each other. So we all need to have these qualities in our lives as well. There are three qualities though, three characteristics, or three marks of a true shepherd.

1) The Shepherd is Known by His Approach to the Sheep:

Verses 1 and 2, the focus is on the shepherd's approach. Look what He says:

John 10:1-2 ~ "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep.

How he enters, how he comes, that's the question. It differentiates, or distinguishes the true shepherds from false shepherds. False shepherds come up some other way. True shepherds come the prescribed way. Now we need to get the picture, and what His audience understood. It was very accessible to Him. Let's talk about this for a moment. Israel, at the time Jesus is ministering, is an agrarian society. Many of the people that He's talking to have their own little flocks of sheep. They have their animals. Some have larger flocks. So it was part of many of the peoples' lives

to be tending sheep. Well they take sheep out, and they lead them to pasture. They take them out during the day, the shepherds in the family, or the shepherds that are paid by the family take them out and they feed them. At night they bring them back to the sheepfold. It was customary to have large sheepfolds with multiple flocks in one fold. It was an efficient way to do things. The point is safety, keeping wolves and things out, thieves out, the sheep in. So they would usually have rock walls, sometimes even briars on top, kind of like the barbed wire effect. They put briars on top to make it hard for animals or thieves to get in. There would be one door where all the sheep came in and went out. They would pay a watchman to be at the door. His point is that the person who tries to climb over the wall to get to the sheep is not a shepherd. It's obvious. Why would you climb over the wall? The shepherd goes through the authorized place, the door. It is thieves and robbers who would climb over, who wanted to fleece the sheep, steal the sheep, take the sheep for themselves, hurt the sheep. So Jesus says basically, "You need to look at the shepherd and see how do the approach the sheep? Do they come in the prescribed way?" The idea really is, do they come in a way that has been marked out, set down, or do they come their own way? Jesus is saying, "I am the Good Shepherd and I have come," at this point He's using the analogy, "I've come through the door God has appointed. I've come in God's appointed way. The other men, they've climbed over the wall. The idea is I've come in complete obedience to God, and complete submission to His Word."

I think the door here is a picture of Jesus' ministry as being exactly prescribed by the Father, "In exactly the way He told me to come, doing exactly what He has told me to do, I have come in humble submission to His way of entry, to the sheep. I haven't made up My own way," which is really something when you think about the fact that Jesus is eternally God. One of the things that John highlights in his Gospel is that though we believe, that Scripture teaches, and teaches here in John, Jesus' absolute equality with God, that He is equal in being. There is no difference in power, or glory, or majesty between the Father and the Son. They are equal, yet there is a functional subordination within the Godhead. The Son submits to the Father from eternity past, proceeds forth from the Father, and you see in His earthly ministry this continual refrain that, "I'm only doing what the Father is telling me to do." He comes not doing His own thing. He is not an inventor or an innovator. He comes doing exactly what the Father had prescribed and planned, and what the Father is telling Him to do.

In fact, just listen to a few different verses that show this. It's all over this Gospel, but John 5:19, when Jesus healed the man at the Pool of Bethesda. He says:

John 5:19 ~ ...“Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.

What He does, He does what the Father directs Him to do. Look at John 6:38.

John 6:38 ~ For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

“I haven’t come to do My own will. I’m not here making this up as I go along. I’m doing exactly what the Father has told Me to do.

John 8:28 ~ So Jesus said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.

“Everything I say is what the Father has taught Me to say.”

John 12:49 ~ For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak.

That is the glory of our Savior. He came in humble submission to the Father. He is a humble and gentle Savior, meek. This also tells us a lot about what kind of shepherds we should look for in our lives. The shepherds of God are marked not by innovation, and clever invention, but they are marked by the fact that they stick to what God has prescribed. Not trying to find a new way to entertain people and intrigue them. You walk along the well-worn paths of the Word of God. The Word of God is sufficient. We don’t need inventors.

I can remember in seminary it had impacted even the schools I was at, which were pretty good schools, committed to the inerrancy of Scripture and that kind of thing, but there were classes on church growth, how to lead the church. This is now more years ago than I’d like to admit, basically 20 plus. There was a church growth philosophy was that the way you lead your church is you look to the principles of business, and marketing, and you also look at what is working out there. Guys are trying stuff and it is working, so that is clearly blessed by God, so do that. Try this kind of particular approach. You have to survey the community. You’ve got to do all these things. That’s not in keeping with the way Jesus ministered. He didn’t come and invent new things, He came in complete conformity to the Word of God.

Everything that God had laid down in His Word He met, and if you think about this, when you read the Gospels, you see that everything about His life was prescribed. He was to be born in Bethlehem, so the Lord worked to have Caesar Augustus, on a whim, to have a census at exactly the right time to get Mary down to Bethlehem from Nazareth because the Son of God is to be born in Bethlehem, because the Word of God said so. Not only that, but Herod, in his jealous rage, wanted to kill Jesus, and so he sends people to murder two years old and under children in Bethlehem, so the Lord has Jesus sent into Egypt because the Scripture had said, “Out of Egypt I called My Son.” Then He goes to Nazareth because He was to be called a Nazarene.

I’m just quoting a couple different references from Matthew’s Gospel from Chapter 2. He shows you this happened to fulfill what was written that said this: “Out of Egypt I call My Son.” This happened to fulfill what was written: “He shall be called a Nazarene.” That’s again, and again, and again throughout His life. He is walking exactly as the Father had prescribed, the prescribed path. There are no accidents. There is no time where He’s off track. He’s on a perfect track obeying God. This says that if He’s the true Shepherd, He is submitted to His Father. Faithful Shepherds are submitted to the Word of God, not trying to come up with new things, but to be faithful to the Word of God.

In fact, we had a men’s Bible study this last year and we studied the book of Titus. Titus is a letter of Paul to a man Titus, and it’s called a Pastoral Epistle. There are three Pastoral Epistles in the New Testament: 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus. They’re called Pastoral Epistles because they’re different and distinct from his normal epistles, where Paul normally writes to churches in a city. That’s why they’re called the epistle to the Romans, the church in Rome, or the epistle to the Corinthians, the church in Corinth, or Philippians in Philippi. You see? But in these three epistles, he writes to an individual and to a pastor. In 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, he writes to the pastor himself. Not to the church, but to the pastor.

As I’ve been out of seminary a while, and pastoring and realizing how difficult it is to pastor, I thought to myself one day, “Why in the world did we not spend a year going over the Pastoral Epistles?” I went to Seminary to learn how to be a pastor, and we just kind of touched on them briefly as we were skimming through the New Testament. That’s the well-worn path. This is the blueprint. We don’t need to know what somebody’s doing out in some town that’s really having a thriving ministry. We need to know what the Word of God says, and that’s what a faithful shepherd does. He doesn’t invent his approach to the sheep. His approach of ministry is to enter the prescribed way. Jesus had submitted Himself in that way.

Now, a true Shepherd is known by his approach to the sheep and:

2) A True Shepherd is Known by His Relationships with the Sheep:

In Verse 3, after the doorkeeper opens to him, it says:

John 10:3 ~ ...the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

There's some beautiful imagery here as well. I mentioned to you that the picture that Jesus is painting is one of a common sheepfold with lots of different sheep in it, several flocks mingled together. The sheep get in there at night, and they don't stay separated, saying, "Hey, I'm in flock A. I'm over here. No, don't cross over." No, they have no chance of doing anything like that, do they? So they're all mingled together. When the shepherd comes in the morning – and this is what's so beautiful about the imagery, and it's lost on us particularly in the West because in the West we don't understand any of this metaphor. We don't have it in our experience, because in western sheep farming we use sheepdogs which is not the way God, I think, intends it. The dog chases the sheep, but the Lord has made sheep to follow. They're the one animal that follows the shepherd. I mean, they're dumb. They're the dumbest animals, but they do this well. They follow.

I mean, go out and try to call your cow, and he's not going to follow you. Maybe if you have some food for him and he sees it, he'll follow you, but even then, they look indifferent. But the sheep will follow, and even today Palestinian shepherds call their sheep. I was watching a video of a guy talking about having studied Palestinian shepherds, and he talked about how he saw two shepherds walk over. It's in this little valley and there are these two hills. They're making their way down with their sheep, pastoring their sheep, and they came together because they know each other and they wanted to talk a little bit. So they come and they visit for a while, and as they are visiting for a half hour talking, "How are things going? How's your family," or whatever, their sheep intermingle. Oh no. Well, what happens is the guy's watching this who is observing it, and the shepherd just calls and all of his sheep follow him. They separate completely perfectly. The other guy calls his sheep, and all his sheep follow him. That is the relationship of the shepherd and the sheep. He calls his own and they follow him. There's an intimacy about the Eastern way of shepherding. There's relationship. It's not a sheepdog chasing, as in, "We're just using you for wool and mutton and we're just chasing you." No.

In fact, I would like to see some study done in the future on the effects of that. I bet you that the Eastern sheep are healthier and probably produce better wool, because they're less stressed. They're not being chased by a dog. Anyway, that just came to me.

Now, the relationship, though, is even expanded on. It's not just that He calls them and they come, but He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. Now, that is beautiful. He names his sheep. And again, this picture is very common even today in Palestine and in the East. Sheep are named by their shepherds. They have a nickname for the different sheep, and they can call the particular sheep. If he's getting a little wayward, call his name. They hear the voice and their own name called.

This is how Jesus shepherds His sheep. This is the difference between Jesus and the religious leaders of His day. He knows His sheep. He's going to expand on this later in the passage. He knows His sheep and they know Him. It's this intimate relationship. This is one of the reasons that it's such folly to not want to follow Jesus Christ. He is truly the Good Shepherd, the only Good Shepherd. Other people who claim to have authority and speak from God, first of all, they're not qualified to lead like He is, but they don't really care like He does. He knows and loves, and one of the things that is beautiful about it – I mentioned how Jesus fulfills every aspect of all of the Old Testament. There are 300+ prophecies fulfilled in perfect sequence in His life and ministry. That's astounding. Everything about Him fulfills the Old Testament. He's like the key, like if you see a complicated key that's got a lot of different grooves on it, and you insert it into the lock and it turns, Jesus is like the key that has a thousand different angles on it with a thousand more different angles on the edges like this. He's a key like that, and you put Him in, and He fits perfectly, and the Old Testament opens up from Genesis to Malachi. He is the One. This is the Messiah. This is God's Shepherd.

One of the ways you see that, too, is the rich shepherding imagery that dominates the Old Testament had two major focuses. There was the one focus that the shepherd of Israel would be the Lord Himself. This was the great hope. One day, God will shepherd His own sheep Himself. He will come among them and call them by name. There was also another independent stream or secondary emphasis or focus, and that was that God would one day send David to shepherd His sheep. That is the Son of David. Is the Lord going to shepherd His sheep Himself, or is a Son of David going to shepherd His sheep? And if you read through the Old Testament and you look for this, you'll see this in different places.

The passage we read, Psalm 34, said, “I’m going to set David over them. They’ll have one shepherd and there will be one flock (Psalm 34:23). But then in Psalm 80:1, the Lord is the shepherd that will come. So what’s the answer? In Jesus, both are true. He is Yahweh personally shepherding His sheep, and He is the Son of David shepherding His sheep. These two apparently distinct streams find themselves merged together in the glory of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We talked about Yahweh, the richness of that Name, the *I Am* Name that was His personal Name, which He revealed in Genesis 2, “The Lord God, the Lord God, the God who is intimately involved in His creation, who breathes on the dust of the earth and His breath creates life.” This is the One who has come to shepherd His sheep, and He’s come as true Man, because we needed a Man to shepherd us.

He’s our near kinsman, our kinsman redeemer, and He knows you by name. If you’re His, He knows you by name. One of the most wonderful promises in the New Testament is found tucked away in Revelation 2:17, where Jesus is talking about the promise to the saints at Pergamum. If they overcome the adversity that is coming upon them, He says that I will give you a white stone and a new name on it which no one knows but the One who’s given it. What He’s saying is that when we enter into His glory, He’s going to give us a name that is between Him and us alone. We’re not one among a myriad like a people. He knows you. It’s kind of like a nickname. Aren’t those neat things?

I mean, sometimes they’re not so neat, but a mom or a dad has for a child, I have nicknames for my kids. They sometimes change a little bit. They have several, but I don’t call them their name much. I call them their nickname, and it’s just dad and daughter, dad and son, and that’s an intimate thing that we share. Sometimes other people – I don’t keep it hidden. We don’t just do it secretly like this is talking about, but there’s something personal about that, and beautiful and lovely about that, and that’s what Jesus says is going to be true of you in Heaven. There’s a sense in which you have a nickname, you have a special place in His heart that no one else has. How can that be? Why would He care? I mean, we’re the dust of the earth. We’re sinful from conception, and yet He has set His affection on you and washed you, brought you into His flock, and says, “You are precious to Me, and I know you by name.” That’s the kind of Shepherd that we serve. It’s relationship with the sheep.

Now, this speaks to the way that we should shepherd one another. It speaks to the way that Elders should be, the way that we should be as we disciple one another. We can’t disciple without relationship. One of the challenges when churches grow is maintaining personal connection, getting to know one another. We have to work

at this and labor at this, because this is how God shepherds us. In fact, the Lord Jesus uses each of us to shepherd each other, doesn't He? He shepherds me through other people. There needs to be intimacy. We need to get to know one another. So a true shepherd is known by his approach to the sheep. He's also known by his relationships with the sheep, and finally:

3) A True Shepherd is Known by His Leadership of the Sheep:

John 10:3-5, the end of Verse 3, talks about how He leads them out, and then Verses 4 and 5 talk about that leadership:

John 10:4-5 ~ When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.”

Now here again you have clearly the idea of leading sheep, not driving sheep. Sheep really are intended to be led, not driven. So, sheep, we need to be led and not driver, and the wonder of it is Jesus is so gentle and loving, and this is how He works in your life. He leads you. He does not drive you. This is His nature. I don't know about you, but I struggle when I want things done a certain way at a tendency to drive. Sometimes we can do that in various ways. We do that with stern words or harsh words, cold attitudes, manipulate, to drive people, and there's a place for discipline and all of that, clearly, but this should mark the way that we raise our children and this should mark the way that we impact each other. We're not to drive one another. We're not to berate one another. We're not to hurt one another, to hit one another, to strike another, but we're to lead one another. We're to say, "Follow me as I follow Jesus."

In fact, Jesus' words were always, "Follow Me." He would come to His disciples and say, "Follow Me," and He keeps walking, and His disciples follow Him. That is the distinguishing mark of true disciples. They keep following Jesus. They're all imperfect, continually demonstrating themselves to be sheep, but they keep getting up and following after the Shepherd. It tells us that Jesus in His shepherding, the fact that we follow Him, I think is also rich in this, that He doesn't ask us to go anywhere He's not first gone. That's what a shepherd does. The sheep following the shepherd means He's walked every place that they've got to walk, and that is uniquely and perfectly true of the one Man, Jesus Christ.

He has gone and walked everywhere that He would ever ask you to walk. There's no circumstance you can find yourself in that Jesus has not been in, no measure of pain, no measure of relational agony, no measure of physical discomfort, long term, extended pain that you know that He has not experienced. He's experienced agony upon agony. He's experienced every kind of circumstance, and He says, "Follow Me." That means that you can find Him in the midst of that. That's what we need to do. As sheep, we need to learn whatever circumstance we're in, look for Jesus. Look to Him. He has walked through this and He will help me even now. He wants me to live my life by looking at Him.

How do you follow Him? How do you look to Him? How, in the midst of the moment, do you find Him? When you find yourself overwhelmed by circumstances, what are you to do? You're to listen for His voice. They follow Him because they know His voice, and a stranger they simply will not follow, but flee from him because they do not know the voice of strangers. You listen to His voice. You go to His Word. That's where His voice is. You immerse yourself in His Word, and you keep clinging to His Word, and you keep believing His Word, and you keep trusting in His Word, and you hear Him, and you will find that as you do that, the Word will sanctify you and it will separate you from the things that are troubling you, and will lead you on the way in righteousness. But Jesus leads, He doesn't drive, and so it's incumbent upon us to follow.

Sometimes the reason that we're making no progress in our Christian life, in our relationships, in our walk with God, is because we've sort of let go to let God. That terminology can have its place in a limited way, but basically that's not really biblical. You let go of trusting in yourself, but you don't let go of actively following Christ. You actively seek His face. You actively pour His Word into your mind. You memorize it. You meditate on it. You speak it to one another. These are the things that are really stopping trusting in self, because you're trusting in the Word. He leads His sheep by His voice.

So how does that apply to earthly shepherds? The earthly shepherds should be known by this, that he leads by example, that he's walking the same path. He can say, "Follow me as I follow Christ." There's not this disconnect between what he's saying. I mean, there's always some disconnect, because what we say and what we preach, and what we live, we strain to live what we're preaching, but is there a radical disconnect? If there's no progress in the one who is trying to shepherd, then that's the test. Jesus says you know them how? How do you know a false prophet from a true prophet? You know them by their fruits. He leads by example, but also he leads by the voice of Christ. This is the blessing of the shepherd.

The under-shepherd is to keep repeating the words of Christ. His message is, “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, look to Jesus,” and when his message is not that, do not follow. The true shepherd is one who is pointing always to Christ. Jesus is everything, and if you think about this, this has application in so many different areas. In biblical counseling, what is the role of the biblical counselor? His role is to shepherd. And how do you do it? I mean, it’s how you approach the sheep. You come away. God has said you trust only in his ordained means. You build relationship and involvement. You love the person, and then you try to lead them by speaking the words of Christ. I mentioned Titus earlier, about, “How do you lead the church?” Remember the Pastoral Epistle. When we were studying it, it struck me how simple the Lord makes it in His Word. He makes the emphasis for the pastor to always be speaking the Word of God. And look at this in Titus 2:1. After he’s talked about false teachers in Chapter 1, he says in Verse 1 of Chapter 2:

Titus 2:1 ~ But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.

Then he goes on and says, “This is what people start to look like. Their character should change. You speak sound doctrine. You’re to teach doctrine. You’re not teaching your own ideas. You’re teaching the Word of God. You’re teaching theology, and if you do, then people are going to start looking like this,” and he talks about older men, older women, younger women, younger men, servants and masters. Then he says at the end of Titus 2:

Titus 2:15 ~ These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

He’s basically saying, “Listen,” and in the middle of that he tells Titus, “Lead by example. Be an example to the young men. Lead by example and keep speaking the Word of God.” That’s it. That is the blueprint in essence for leading, for shepherding. Keep following Christ, keep loving Christ and leading by example in that, and keep speaking the Word of God. That is the tried and proven method, the marks of a true shepherd. He approaches the sheep in God’s appointed way. His relationships with his sheep are like Christ, and his leadership of the sheep is just like Jesus as well. But ultimately the question before us is: Are you following the True Shepherd? The only purpose of the under-shepherd is to lead you to the True Shepherd.

Are you following Jesus Christ? Have you come to know a lot of things about the Lord, a lot of things about Christ, a lot of things about His Word, but have you really given yourself to Him to follow Him? Are you trusting in yourself or have you turned in repentance and faith to Jesus Christ? He is the Friend who sticks closer than a brother. He is the One who knows your needs, and He is the One who is able to lead you in paths of righteousness for His Name's sake. He's done everything necessary by dying on the cross to pay for your sins and to give you righteousness. Go to Him today.

Let's pray...

Father, we thank You for giving us Your precious Son. We thank You for the fact that He is everything that we need. Lord, we need to be cleansed from our guilt and our pollution, our spiritual filthiness, our moral uncleanness. How rich is the fountain of His blood that washes everything white as snow. Father, not only do we need to be cleansed, but we need to be given righteousness, and He provides a perfect, white, brilliant righteousness. He clothes us in garments of purity and holiness. We marvel that You see us who believe in Christ today, just as if we had never sinned, and You see us that way every moment, after we repent and believe, just as if we had never sinned, and not only that, but just as if we had always obeyed. What a glorious Savior.

Father, we need to know what to do in our daily lives, how to overcome the adversities that we have, how to overcome the trials that we have, and we thank You that You have shown that Jesus is willing to come into whatever our circumstance is, and to lead us out. Help us learn to be people who, as we shepherd one another, as we love one another, increasingly help us to focus our eyes on Christ more quickly so that we could keep pointing each other to Jesus. May He be glorified in our lives. We pray this in His Name, Amen.

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