

See Ps 23; Jer 23:1-8;
Ezek 34

"sheepfold" (1) - Courtyard surrounded by a stone or mud-brick wall. It only had one opening (potentially with a gate) through which the sheep could enter when they came in for the night

(1-5) describes a morning scene. A shepherd enters through a gate into the sheepfold which has several flocks. The enclosure is guarded at night by a gatekeeper to prevent thieves and beasts of prey from entering.

"they did not understand" (6) - Since shepherds and sheep were so common in Palestine, why did the people not understand what He was saying?

"I am the door" (7 & 9) - Jesus is the gateway for eternal life as well as the one who leads the sheep.

Why does Jesus shift the metaphor from the shepherd to the door?

"have life and have it abundantly" (10)
Ezek 34:12-15; 25-31

The connection with the preceding chapter is seen in Jesus' contrast of the Pharisees with the man born blind. The Pharisees—spiritually blind while claiming insight (John 9:41)—were false shepherds.

John 10:1-10 (ESV)

1 **"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.**

2 **But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.**

3 **To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.**

4 **When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.**

5 **A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."**

6 **This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.**

7 **So Jesus again said to them, "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 listen to them.**

9 **I am the door. If anyone enters by 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.**

Parable? This discourse resembles the parables of the Synoptic Gospels. Mt 18:12-14 and Lk 15:3-7 both cite a parable of a shepherd and his sheep; and all three Gospels emphasize the aspect of careful concern that the shepherd feels for them.

"gatekeeper" (3) - not to be identified with any particular person, but, rather illustrates Jesus' coming at the right time and in the right way. He alone has the right to spiritual leadership of his people (Rom 5:6).

(3-5) when the time came to go out to morning pasture, each shepherd separated his sheep from the others by his peculiar call. Instead of driving them, he led them so that they followed him as a unit.

"All who came before me" - Highlights the misleading ministry of previous generations of Israel's leaders who had been leading them astray (Ezek 10:1-10).

Teacher's Notes

Context

John 9:35–41 (ESV)

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you." ³⁸ He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.

Compare To

Psalm 23 (ESV)

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

³ He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,

they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD

forever.

Jeremiah 23:1–8 (ESV)

¹ "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD.

² Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: "You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended

to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the LORD. ³ Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. ⁴ I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the LORD.

⁵ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶ In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

⁷ "Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when they shall no longer say, 'As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,' ⁸ but 'As the LORD lives who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.' Then they shall dwell in their own land."

Ezekiel 34 (ESV)

¹ The word of the LORD came to me: ² "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? ³ You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. ⁴ The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. ⁵ So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; ⁶ they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

⁷ "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ⁸ As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, ⁹ therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ¹⁰ Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

¹¹ "For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. ¹² As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³ And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴ I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their

grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. ¹⁶ I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

¹⁷ "As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats. ¹⁸ Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture; and to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet? ¹⁹ And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have muddied with your feet?

²⁰ "Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹ Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, ²² I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. ²³ And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

²⁵ "I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. ²⁶ And I will make them and the places all around my hill a blessing, and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing. ²⁷ And the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase, and they shall be secure in their land. And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke, and deliver them from the hand of those who enslaved them. ²⁸ They shall no more be a prey to the nations, nor shall the beasts of the land devour them. They shall dwell securely, and none shall make them afraid. ²⁹ And I will provide for them renowned plantations so that they shall no more be consumed with hunger in the land, and no longer suffer the reproach of the nations. ³⁰ And they shall know that I am the LORD their God with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Lord GOD. ³¹ And you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord GOD."

Parable

Matthew 18:12–14 (ESV)

¹² What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? ¹³ And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. ¹⁴ So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

Luke 15:3–7 (ESV)

³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

At the Right Time

Romans 5:6 (ESV)

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

The Parable of the Good Shepherd

Throughout his Gospel, John aims to show that Jesus is the Messiah long promised by the prophets. In the Parable of the Good Shepherd in John 10:1–5, Jesus declares that He is God's shepherd, fulfilling the prophecy of Ezekiel 34.

Through the very simple parable in John 10:1–5, Jesus shows the difference between Himself and all the others who laid claim to religious leadership in Israel. There are two distinguishing characteristics of the Good Shepherd: He enters through the door and is recognized by His sheep, and He will lay down His life for the sheep.

In Ezekiel's day, the religious leaders were more like predators than shepherds. Ezekiel describes them as eating the sheep rather than feeding them; they were more akin to thieves than caretakers (Ezek 34:2–10). It is against the backdrop of Ezekiel's prophecy that Jesus declares Himself to be the Good Shepherd whose care for the sheep, including His sacrificial death on their behalf (John 10:11), distinguishes Him from all who have previously come (John 10:8).

The True Shepherd

In contrast to the thief, who must jump over the wall, the true shepherd uses the door to enter the fold (John 10:1). Each night, the shepherd guards the door (compare John 10:12–13). When he calls, his sheep respond because they know him, trust him, and follow him (John 10:3–4).

In Jesus' day, many shepherds shared the same pasture and even drove their flocks together into a sheepfold at night. In the morning, each shepherd would stand at the open gate and call for his sheep. The flock would recognize his voice and follow him out.

After hearing the parable, the Pharisees were confused. They knew all about sheep and shepherds, but they failed to see Jesus' point. It was often this way with the parables Jesus told, but on this occurrence He took time to explain it to them.

Jesus said that in addition to being the Good Shepherd, He also acts as the door to the sheepfold (John 10:7, 9). This aspect of the parable calls attention to the unique role Jesus plays in God's redemptive plan. While there may be other shepherds who care about the sheep, none of them can offer entrance into the fold of God. Jesus states this plainly in John 14:6, saying, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

As in Ezekiel's day, many in Israel at the time of Christ were taking unfair advantage of God's people. They were like thieves who sought to use religion for personal gain. Jesus described them as coming only to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:8, 10). They considered the people of Israel solely for their own use. The religious system of Jesus' day, practiced primarily on the basis of ritual rather than righteousness, placed heavy burdens on the people while ensuring that the religious leaders grew in wealth and power (e.g., Matt 23:2–4; Luke 11:46).

But Jesus—the promised Messiah—came to care for the sheep and lead them back to God. His great concern for the sheep was in His willingness to do what was best for them. Unlike the person merely hired for the job, the true shepherd would act in the best interests of the flock, despite the risks He might face. He came not to take their lives or profit from their lives, but rather so that they may have life, and have it abundantly (John 10:10).

The Shepherd’s Sacrifice

Toward the end of Jesus’ explanation, we find the second distinguishing characteristic of the Good Shepherd: He is willing to lay down His life for the sheep. Jesus makes this astounding statement four times in John 10:15–18. This repetition, a common literary device in the ancient world, shows that this is the main theme of the parable.

That the shepherd would die to save the sheep may be an allusion to another Old Testament passage. In Isaiah 53:6, the prophet gives voice to every repentant sinner’s heart in confessing, “All of us have wandered about like sheep; we have each turned to his own way; and Yahweh let fall on him the iniquity of us all.”

Jesus makes it clear that His sacrificial death was not forced upon Him. Rather, Jesus chose to follow the will of God the Father all the way to the cross. He willingly took upon Himself the task of sin bearer and endured agonizing shame (compare Isa 53:10–12). Now, He has been given His rightful place at the right hand of the Father in heaven (see Heb 12:1–2).

Like sheep, every one of us has wandered away from our Creator, transgressed His law, and rebelled against His right to rule over us. We all deserve the full punishment God’s law requires for our waywardness—death. But God has desired to express His glory by rescuing those who neither deserve rescue nor have the ability to bring themselves to safety.

The Good Shepherd has come to bind up the broken, bring back the scattered, and return the lost to the flock of God. To lavish His love on us while satisfying His divine justice, the Good Shepherd took our punishment upon Himself so that we might eternally be part of His flock.

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¹ Hegg, D. W. (2012, 2016). [The Parable of the Good Shepherd](#). In *Faithlife Study Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.