

John 10:1-11

This is a new section and thought in this Gospel. The entire passage revolves around shepherding and pictures the relation of Christ and his people. This is the second time PJ has assigned me a passage about shepherds and the like. I wonder if there's some method to this or not.

READ: John 10:1-11

Jesus begins by saying **"I tell you a truth"** – What I have to say here is very important. This will bare reference to Jesus' ministry and purpose.

The first section is based on the concept of the sheepfold or sheep pen...

Usually a rough stone or mud-brick structure although a cave would be ideal. Sometimes it would be only branches and debris in a corral for the sheep to rest for the night. There would always be a single opening through which the sheep would come in and go out. The pen served as to protect the sheep from thieves, robbers, and wild beasts during the night hours. Thieves would devise various means to gain access to the sheep. The shepherd would sleep across the entrance to protect his flock.

The shepherd entered by the gate, which was the only lawful way of entry. Only the shepherd could legitimately enter through the gate. Jesus was contrasting himself with the false messiahs who tried to force their way to gain control of the people. Jesus came as the legitimate heir of the chosen seed – fulfilling OT prophecy and revelation. He (Messiah) would come with authorized credentials to be allowed to enter the gate of the sheepfold (Israel). This was the authorization of Messiah. Jesus, as always, is not only talking about something physical or natural but spiritual at the same time. The sheepfold is Israel, and only One is authorized to enter that pen; He is the true shepherd of Israel – Others are imposters, thieves and robbers – false messiahs and prophets.

Jesus gave his credentials as the One authorized to be Messiah/Shepherd in Luke 4:16-19 –

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. 17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

***18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."***

Luke 4:20-21 - Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, 21 and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." NIV

"This prophecy is about ME – I AM the Messiah who was promised by OT prophecy – the ONE Authorized to Shepherd Israel – There is no other."

The “gatekeeper” or “watchman” – is an unknown person in this illustration. However, he knows who the legitimate shepherd is and will only allow him to enter by the gate. To me, this gatekeeper must have authority over the shepherd to allow or disallow entrance to the sheepfold. Since Jesus is the Shepherd and is allowed entrance, I want to think that this gatekeeper is God Himself. He will not allow any other to be the Shepherd of His flock or gain entrance to the pen. Jesus' came at the right time and in the right way. He alone has the right to spiritual leadership of his people. This leadership of the sheep is self-authenticating. They **"listen to his voice."**

It is known that many shepherds in this area would actually name their sheep, so we see that the shepherd could call his own sheep by name and they would recognize his voice. By this familiarity, He could lead the flock where he wanted them to go. **Do you remember when Mary recognized Jesus at the tomb that first morning? It was when He spoke her name. Has He called you by name? Do you recognize His voice and follow when he speaks your name?**

The sheep would learn the call and voice of their own shepherd. Sometimes there would be more than one flock sharing the same pen for the night. The sheep would mix together during those hours. In the morning, each shepherd would call their own sheep with their own call and the sheep would recognize that call and respond. They would only respond to the call of their own shepherd. When the shepherd would call out all his own sheep, they would follow him to pasture. As I have mentioned before, other areas drive their flock, but these shepherds built relationships with their sheep, and the sheep follow their shepherd. He would go on ahead of the sheep and they follow their shepherd anywhere.

A stranger or thief might try to learn the call of a particular shepherd to lure his sheep away, but the sheep know their own shepherd. Even if the call sounded identical to the human ear, the sheep could still detect it was not their shepherd. This would spook the flock, and they would flee in fear. They will not follow a stranger because they do not know his voice.

Even though shepherding was so popular among them, when Jesus used this illustration, they did not understand his meaning. Why? Because it was a spiritual lesson and they were spiritually dead. This was just another story to them. They couldn't accept Him as their Shepherd and they didn't recognize His claims. Besides, they didn't NEED personal faith in Jesus for salvation – They already had that as descendants of Abraham, the Father of faith. They were relying on their heritage and religious understanding for salvation. What are you relying on today? Do you think you are good enough? Do you think by believing in God or attending church you will be allowed to enter the sheepfold of God? Do you think because your family belongs to a particular Christian religion, you have an automatic pass in? **James 2:19 says, "You believe that there is one God? Good for you. Even the demons believe that and are terrified."** What are you standing on to be allowed entrance to the sheepfold – Heaven?

I don't know about you, but this is just like me in the past. I knew about Jesus and even His resurrection, but there was no real connection. I knew about things taught in my religion, but **I didn't know Jesus**. That is the difference between religion and relationship. We can't know someone just by hearing about them; we have to have a relationship with them to really know them. Jesus proclaimed a requirement of a personal faith and NOT lineage or descent as necessary to be a true child of God – It's the same now. This is what he was saying to the hearers then and it is what He is saying to all of us today.

There is a shift of focus starting at verse 7 as Jesus explains the allegory. We move from the Shepherd to the Door/Gate in this section. It seems odd, but it is actually logical. Sheep grazed all day. They were not watched in detail while out for the day grazing. However, in the evening the sheep would return to the pen and there the shepherd would meet them at the door of the pen. He would examine each one that tried to enter the sheepfold. He would have to clean some and anoint some who were scratched or injured. He determines who is allowed to enter his pen. Only those that are his may enter. Many people are upset that Jesus is proclaimed to be the only way to the presence of God, but on what do they make their argument? **The shepherd becomes the door of the sheepfold.** He is the only one who determines who is allowed to enter and who is excluded. Only those who are His are allowed entrance – (Jn. 14:6) – **“Jesus said – I am the way and the truth and life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”** This is not some speculation or understanding of humanity, but the Word of God.

Jesus mentions those who came before him as being thieves and robbers. It appears there were many false messiahs who came either proclaiming or being proclaimed as messiahs. After the death of Herod the Great, there were many factions that rose up and attempted to overthrow Roman rule. This is what many Jews believe their messiah would do – They were looking for their deliverer. Many fell for this and thought these were the messiah. But, Jesus did not come as a political or military deliverer. This was not His purpose.

Let's look at the actual prophecy from Is. 61:1-2 that Jesus read in the synagogue in Luke 4 – the passage He said was about him. This was definitely a Messianic prophecy, but Jesus stopped in mid-sentence.

Isa 61:1-2 -

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, 2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor (and this is where Jesus stopped – WHY?) This was the promise for Jesus' first coming, but He's coming again to fulfill part two of this prophecy...

and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, etc. ... NIV

As a shepherd, Jesus is the door/gate to the sheepfold. He will be waiting for the sheep to return. He will bind up the broken, bring healing to the wounded, set the captives free, cleanse the sin-sick, and bring good news to the poor in spirit. There is only one way into the sheepfold and Jesus is that way. He is waiting at the doorway – expecting all to come to him for salvation and admittance into the sheepfold of God Almighty.

Jesus' purpose was/is salvation (or health) of the sheep, so they would have free access to good pasture and a satisfying life (v. 10). Under his protection and by his gift they/we can have the best life has to offer. That's great for the here and now, but it's even better because this promise has eternal rewards. An extension to this abundant life is that, in Him, it will never end. We will have eternal life if we enter through Him. Jesus can give a whole new meaning to living because He provides full satisfaction and perfect guidance as prophesied in the OT **-(Ez. 34:15,16) - I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. 16 I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak...** NIV

Jesus makes a comparison between himself and the thief who attempts to ravage the flock. A Thief comes with a purpose, but it is all bad – to steal, kill, and destroy – period. BUT – Jesus has a much better purpose – To give us a rich and satisfying life here and into eternity. Why wouldn't we want that, especially given the only alternative... being rejected from entering the Sheepfold of God forever.

Jesus said, ***"I am the good shepherd."*** – There have been several references to a divine shepherd in the OT. Shepherding was a major occupation at this time. His disciples should have related immediately. It involved both a protective concern and a sacrificial attitude. ***"The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."*** A voluntary sacrificial death was implied. Jesus would certainly fulfill this meaning on the cross (Jn. 10:11,17,18; 13:37-38; 15:13; 1 Jn. 3:16).

Laying down his **"Life"** (psyche) – meant more than his physical existence. The word is more likely translated, **"soul"** - The total being – personality, etc.

The Good Shepherd stands ready to sacrifice His total self for the sake of the sheep – (not just physical life).

The death of a shepherd would mean disaster for his sheep, but the death of the Good Shepherd meant life for his sheep and life to its full.

It is oddly accurate that the Bible would use sheep to represent humans. If we do a comparison (especially spiritually), we will see the similarities:

Sheep (one of the only animals) cannot clean themselves – the shepherd cleans them as they enter the sheepfold. We also cannot be clean on our own – we need the Shepherd to cleanse us in order to enter the sheepfold of God.

Sheep will blindly follow other sheep unless guided by a shepherd – so we need the Lord's guidance. How many have been led astray, following the teachings of other men (like the religious leaders of Jesus' day) only to find their teaching was erroneous.

We are taught there are many ways up the mountain of God, and this may be true, but there is only ONE way into the Kingdom of God that is at the top of that mountain. You can try to climb up or follow others up or believe in other ways up, but there is only ONE way to be allowed in. Jesus is the Good Shepherd – He laid down his life for the sheep – for our salvation and recognition when we try to enter that sheepfold on the other side of this life. He will be waiting there to inspect and allow or disallow entrance based on whether we are His or not.

He came to give us a rich and satisfying life that starts here and carries into eternity.

How could anyone reject that gift?