

“The Great Shepherd”

John 10:1-21

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How do you make sense of life?

What are we here for?

Even if people argue about how we got here, the reality is we are here and we must now live life.

So how do we live it?

Do we have any framework that guides us, that informs us how to act and what to think about the purpose of our lives and the future of our lives?

How do we make sense of it, or don't we even try?

Though I've referred to it many times, the English playwright Samuel Beckett captures one response to life quite poignantly in his 25 second play entitled “Breath.”

As the curtain rises, the stage is dark and there are no actors.

At first all the audience hears is the long plaintive cry of a child at birth.

Then as the light comes slowly up on the stage the audience sees garbage strewn about followed by the amplified sound of a long inhaling and exhaling of breath.

And as the light fades on the stage, the audience hears a final piercing cry.

Thus ends Beckett's commentary on the shortness and pointlessness of life.

That is one response to life but there are others.

I think more people simply “compartmentalize” and just don’t deal with the implications of life.

And with that “compartmentalization” usually comes a mad dash to activity – eat, drink and be merry, tomorrow we die.

At the very least they simply keep busy, refusing to think. But life knocks us down or “eternity” intrudes into our thinking and sooner or later we are forced to deal with the “why” and the “future” of life.

Several years ago my family and I stood in the main-floor bedroom of a friend of ours who was dying of cancer.

It was the opinion of the doctors that she had only days to live.

She was the mother of five children, the youngest of whom was 10 and the oldest, 20.

Her body had been so ravaged by the disease that if she not spoken to us we would not have recognized her.

Earlier around the dinner table, without her, her husband spoke openly of how prepared he, his wife and their children were for her death.

- He told how his wife has on several occasions said that she was ready to go home to be with the Lord.
- He told how he and the children, in light of her great suffering, had often discussed their readiness, though certainly not eagerness, to let her go to be with the Lord Jesus Christ.

I looked across that table at the youngest of the children, seated there, and wondered what prepares a child for such loss?

What must they hold on to for this not to be the end of their world?

I looked across at that husband and wondered what must he believe for him to be ready to let go of a relationship that has lasted 25 or more years?

Yes, he feels deep, almost unbearable pain, but he does not despair.

Why not?

And then I thought, what about her, that wife and mother, lying in the other room, aware of the sounds of her family at dinner and very aware that she will soon be gone from all of it.

What must she think; what must she believe; what must she know?

You are about to see the answer to those questions in the 10th chapter of John.

In two conversations, recorded for us there, Jesus says some very fundamental, foundationally important things about himself.

They are things that made all the difference in the world to our friend, her husband and her children.

And those truths about Jesus make all the difference in this world and the next to you as well, whether you feel it the same way right now as my friend did or not.

This morning I want you to hear again from the mouth of our Lord Jesus what he says about himself and about his relationship with us.

John 10:1-21 READ or Watch on video

Just before this speech by Jesus, he had healed a man who has been blind from birth.

Being more interested in their positions than in the people, the religious leaders were upset.

At the end of Chapter nine we saw Jesus standing in Jerusalem with the religious leaders around him.

And as chapter 10 opens we hear Jesus saying, "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate but climbs in some other way is a thief and a robber."

It doesn't take but a second to realize that Jesus is using an allegory to make a point and verse 6 confirms that, indicating Jesus' words are a figure of speech where one thing represents something else.

This figure of speech Jesus uses is something between a parable and an allegory.

Most of us understand when we read an allegory, whether it be this one, or the story of the Good Samaritan, or the Prodigal Son, or even allegories from English literature, that we misuse the story if we try to make every detail of the story stand for something.

Now with Jesus' allegory we have to ask ourselves what parts of the story are supposed to have significance:

Let's see, there are thieves, a shepherd, a gate-keeper, a gate, a sheep-pen, calling the sheep, voice recognition - what parts matter?

God accommodates himself to our question and helps us: Look at verses 6- 7 "Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.⁷ **Therefore Jesus said again...**"

And so Jesus goes on explaining what he means.

But as you study this closely you will notice that even as Jesus explains the allegory he will add new ideas to it.

But Jesus begins with the allegory or parable.

The picture Jesus creates would be very familiar to the people to whom he's talking.

All their lives they had seen sheep, shepherds and sheep pens.

You, too, can imagine the scene:

It's open pasture land.

A holding pen has been built, probably of sticks and stones creating a roofless enclosure.

At one place in the wall there is an opening, with a man stationed there, obviously to keep the sheep in and the predators out.

Jesus says thieves and robbers enter the sheep pen some way other than the gate BUT the shepherd, the rightful one, enters by the gate.

Apparently, as we learn from Middle Eastern shepherding, there are many sheep in the pen - some owned by one shepherd and others owned by other shepherds.

Jesus says one shepherd steps up and calls to his sheep by name; they listen to his voice and he brings them out.

Where I grew up we drove cattle, we didn't lead them.

But in the Middle East they would use their voices to call the sheep.

Actually it was more like a command and the sheep responded.

Evidently they know his voice so well that they would follow only that one shepherd.

If a stranger called out to them, even trying to mimic the owner, the sheep would run away, not recognizing the voice.

In the Gospel of John, this is Jesus' last public speech.

After the resurrection of Lazarus in chapter 11, we move next to the final two weeks of Jesus' life on earth before his return to heaven.

So here we have the last time Jesus explains publicly who he is and why he is here.

And it is this explanation that explains our lives, giving them purpose, direction and destination.

Last week we showed a video reenactment of the healing of the man born blind.

Many of us were in awe of Jesus as we watched and thought about the life-changing miracle in that blind man's life.

So when the man was brought before the Pharisees and their first response to this man's sight was that Jesus shouldn't have done this on the Sabbath, there was an audible gasp from many of you.

We wondered, what kind of people could be so insensitive, no, so selfish as to be more concerned about legalities than rejoicing with this man in his healing?

Worse than that, these were the very men who were supposedly the religious leaders of this man, the ones who should have most cared for him.

It is no wonder that Jesus criticizes them so severely in his parable.

He calls them thieves and robbers, self-serving strangers and interlopers.

A friend of mine told me of his conversation with his sister-in-law who was in a crisis and was not a Christian.

He went to her home in Ohio and had the opportunity to tell her of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus.

He said that she apparently understood and placed her faith in Christ.

But no sooner did he leave than she began to have doubts.

Having no one to talk to her there, he tried phone calls and letters but she began to go back to her previous religious leaders.

My friend said they began to fill her head with ideas that it was simply her good life that would count in the end.

In essence they said that this idea of repentance and faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sins was a little silly and that she could just count on God being fair and gracious in the end.

Now, as well intentioned as these religious leaders might have been, either they were wrong or Jesus was wrong.

And if they were wrong they were destroying people's souls.

They were no better than thieves and robbers.

Due to the shortness of time, I don't plan to say much more about the false shepherds that Jesus so roundly castigates.

But John has much more to say about them in his Epistles of 1 and 2 John.

Let me add only that if you have spiritual teachers who primarily teach material other than the pure Word of God, you might as well be listening to Dr. Phil or Oprah, who are probably at least more interesting.

Yes, Jesus roundly criticizes spiritual leaders who chose ministry as their career path, their way to make a living.

There are no mercenaries in the kingdom of God.

But back to the main point – Who is Jesus?

First of all Jesus declares the Shepherd is Sovereign.

He is unique, he is deity, he is God.

In verses 1-2 Jesus said there are pretenders, usurpers, interlopers who want access to the sheep but he alone is the legitimate shepherd of his sheep.

10:2 “The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep.”

The only legitimate leader of God's people is God.

Jesus has repeatedly told them that he is God and at the same time he is sent from God.

8:42 “I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me.”

Centuries earlier God had said that he, God, would come and replace the false shepherds.

Ezekiel 34:10-16 “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds (who cared for themselves rather than the flock) and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them

from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves...¹¹ ...I myself will search for my sheep and look after them.¹² ... I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered...¹⁵ 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 shepherd the flock with justice.

And here in John 10 Jesus declares it openly and clearly, “**I** am the good shepherd.”

In the OT, **God** is presented as the Shepherd of his people.

When the Psalmist describes it he begins with “The LORD is my shepherd.”

The Shepherd is God.

Even that word “good” in “good shepherd,” is the word that means “right” and “excellent.”

When we hear “the good shepherd,” the usual mental picture is of a kindly old shepherd tenderly holding a lamb, caring for its every need.

My father was the consummate shepherd of his family, he loved us, provided for us, even sacrificed for us, but he was not cuddly.

- His role was not to make us feel good but to make us be good.
- His role was not to be our best friend but to be our father.
- His role was not to let us do whatever we wanted but to do what was right.

The Bible says in Hebrews 12:5-6 “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,⁶ because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”

Jesus is our “good” “right” “excellent” “great” shepherd

Soon enough Jesus will describe his tenderness toward his sheep, but those actions are only possible because of who he is.

He is THE Shepherd, He is God.

The one who created the universe is the **only** one who has the ability to recreate it.

The one who made us is the **only** one who can remake us.

Looking to anyone or anything else in life for purpose and security will end in frustration and death.

Proverbs 14:12 “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”

Secondly, Jesus says the Shepherd is the Savior.

Jesus said, 10:9 “**I** am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.”

He is Sovereign and he is also **Savior**.

Sheep are helpless, hopeless creatures.

I have read many times that left on their own they will not find food or water, they will walk into harm’s way and they are defenseless in the face of attack.

If a shepherd didn’t care for them, they would be wolf-food.

Likewise, listen to God’s description of us:

- Isaiah 53:6 “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.”
- Romans 3:10-12 “There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. ¹² All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”
- Romans 3:23 “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
- Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

One has only to look at the world around us and the mess we make of our own lives and the calamity of our future to realize that we desperately need saving.

And that was Jesus’ purpose in coming into the world.

Matthew 1:21 “(Mary) will give birth to a son, (Joseph was told) and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

John 3:17 “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

Have you ever thought of what Jesus could have done while he was here on earth?

He could have healed many more. He could have freed people from slavery. He could have changed governments.

But he chose the far more fundamental thing that would eventually result in all the other changes – he chose to save his people from their sins.

And here in John 10 Jesus says he (ALONE) is the one to do that.

Later he would say it this way in John 14:6 “I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me.”

He is Sovereign and he is Savior.

I want you to see that Jesus had you and me in mind when he was here on earth.

In John 10:16 he said, “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.”

The “other sheep” includes us.

Later Jesus would pray for us in John 17:10 “I pray also for those who will believe in me through their (the disciples’) message.”

Again that is us, and that is also why we have missionaries around this world.

There are other sheep that Jesus must also bring into his “flock.”

He is sovereign and he is savior!

That leads us to the third thing Jesus says about himself.

He is Sacrifice.

John 10:11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life **for** the sheep.”

The **first** description Jesus gives of his role as Shepherd of his people is that he lays down his life for them.

And he repeats that three more times in verses 15, 17 and 18.

Jesus laid down his life for us, but his death wasn't merely heroism or martyrdom.

You've probably heard the story of the little boy whose sister needed a kidney transplant and it was discovered that his kidneys were a match for hers.

When the day came for the transplant, the nurse needed to draw some blood from the little boy who apparently didn't understand what was happening.

He bravely allowed the blood to be drawn and then asked, “Is this when I die?”

He was willing to die on his sister's behalf.

And Jesus too died for us in that sense – on our behalf.

But Jesus' death was also something even more fundamental.

He died “for” us.

The word “for” means in our place, as our substitute.

His death was a sacrifice.

The penalty for sin is death – we deserve to die – to be separated from God.

Jesus had no sin, he would not have died.

- 2 Corinthians 5:21 “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us...”
- Romans 5:6-8 “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.” For us!!

Jesus makes a big point of the fact that his life was not taken from him, he laid it down voluntarily.

John 10:18 “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.”

Just as Jesus laid his life down so too he has the authority to take it up, to rise from the dead – and we know that he did.

Now fourthly notice that the Shepherd is sufficient.

First, in verses 3-4 he **calls and guides** them: “He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.”

The analogy that Jesus presents is one of many sheep in a sheep-pen but Jesus stands at the gate and calls those who are his.

John 6:44, 37 “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.”

Remember what we read earlier in Romans 3:10-11 “There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹ **there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.**”

It is by grace we are saved.

These verses in John teach what is taught throughout the Bible that God elects, God chooses who will be his.

Jesus calls us by his Spirit and as with the man born blind Jesus grants us spiritual eyes to see, or as he said it to Nicodemus, he grants us “new birth” enabling us to believe, and we respond in faith.

He calls us and guides us.

He also provides and protects:

10:9-10 “Whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full (or as the KJV says it, “have [life] more abundantly.”)

The “health and wealth” teachers want to make of this verse some kind of promise of physical and material prosperity.

Others want to make of it some kind of promise of excitement, happiness, and the good life.

They promise a life that is “beautiful” or “just wonderful.” (Boice, 90)

But far more fundamental than those issues are being truly loved, having significant purpose and an enduring security.

And most fundamental is a relationship with the one who is God and who is able to provide exactly what is best.

And in verses 11-12 he implies protection:

“The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away.”

But Jesus said, I will never leave you or forsake you.

We see the same provision and protection in Psalm 23.

23:1-4 “The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. ^{Ps 23:2} He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters... 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.”

This “full” “abundant” life is a contentedness in knowing and being known by Jesus.

John 17:3 “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

And Jesus promised that he has the authority and ability to resurrect from the dead all who trust him.

John 6:40 “For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

God promised the same through the Psalmist in 23:6 “Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”

And Jesus promised it in John 14:2-3 “In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

How do I make sense of life?

Why do I live and how do I live?

Galatians 2:20 “The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

It’s all about Jesus; we trust in his wisdom and provision and power.

Do you remember the family I told you about as I began this message?

That wife and mother was dying.

Why did she not fill with fear?

Why did her children not succumb to anger?

Why did her husband not despair?

What do they know that gives them peace in the face of such circumstances?

By his grace they are his sheep.

They know his voice.

And they trust and follow him.

Because the Shepherd is Sovereign, Savior, Sacrifice and Sufficient!

Do you know him, do you trust him, will you follow him?

My faith has found a resting place,
 Not in device or creed;
 I trust the ever living One,
 His wounds for me shall plead.

*I need no other argument,
 I need no other plea,
 It is enough that Jesus died,
 And that He died for me.*

Enough for me that Jesus saves,
 This ends my fear and doubt;
 A sinful soul I come to Him,
 He'll never cast me out.

Additional Notes:

Contrasting shepherds:

Illegitimate or legitimate 1-2
 Stranger (sheep scatter) or known (sheep follow) 3-5
 Thieves and robbers or Savior 8-9
 Self-serving or Sacrificial servant. 10-11
 Usurper or Creator 12
 Provides for himself or provides for the sheep 12-15

The Shepherd calling his sheep:

“Early one morning I saw an extraordinary sight not far from Bethlehem. Two shepherds had evidently spent the night with their flocks in a cave. The sheep were all mixed together and the time had come for the shepherds to go in different directions. One of the shepherds stood some distance from the sheep and began to call. First one, then another, then four or five animals ran towards him; and so on until he had counted his whole flock.” (H.V. Morton in Morris, f.n. 502)

A man in Australia was arrested and charged with stealing a sheep. But he claimed emphatically that it was one of his own that had been missing for

many days. When the case went to court, the judge was puzzled, not knowing how to decide the matter. At last he asked that the sheep be brought into the courtroom. Then he ordered the plaintiff to step outside and call the animal. The sheep made no response except to raise its head and look frightened. The judge then instructed the defendant to go to the courtyard and call the sheep. When the accused man began to make his distinctive call, the sheep bounded toward the door. It was obvious that he recognized the familiar voice of his master. "His sheep knows him," said the judge. "Case dismissed!" From Alan Carr at www.Monergism on John 10

I lay down my life for the sheep.

"And I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:15). The precise significance of the preposition is unequivocally defined for us in Romans 5:6-8, where the same Greek term ("huper") occurs: "For when we were yet without strength in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The word "for" here means not merely on the behalf of, but *in the stead* of: "the Greek expression for "dying for any one," never has any signification other than that of rescuing the life of another at the expense of one's own" (Parkhurst's Lexicon). in A.W. Pink

Particular Redemption

It is *for the sheep—only* for the sheep—that the good shepherd lays down his life. The design of the atonement is definitely restricted. Jesus dies for those who had been given to him by the Father, for the children of God, for true believers. This is the teaching of the Fourth Gospel throughout (3:16; 6:37, 39, 40, 44, 65; 10:11, 15, 29; 17:6, 9, 20, 21, 24). It is also the doctrine of the rest of Scripture. With his precious blood Christ purchased his church ([Acts 20:28](#); [Eph. 5:25-27](#)); his people ([Matt. 1:21](#)); the elect ([Rom. 8:32-35](#)).¹⁷⁹ Bob Diffenbaugh at www.monergism.com

The Lord is the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world (1:29) and the Savior of the world (4:42), but he is as emphatically the one who came to

save those the Father gave to him (6:37) and those who are his sheep. As Paul will put it, Christ loved **the church** and gave himself for her. (Robert Rayburn)

The “I have other sheep...” indicates that they are already his sheep, even though they have not yet been called or brought. This is the doctrine of election taught from the beginning to the end of the Bible. Think of the Lord’s telling Paul that he had much people in the city of Corinth prior to the conversion of those people. Paul had to stay to preach so that those sheep might be brought in. The result is that those brought from the first fold of Judaism and those not from that fold will eventually form one flock with one shepherd. That is a pre-Pentecostal way of saying what Paul says in Ephesians 2:11-22, our text for the session visitation this year. Verse 16, by the way, is engraved on the tombstone of David Livingstone, the great missionary to Africa. *Robert Rayburn*

Jn 10:16 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.

“Other sheep” is non-Jews who would become part of God’s family:

Genesis 12:3 “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

Luke 2:28-32 “Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: ^{Lk 2:29}

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. ^{Lk 2:30} For my eyes have seen your salvation, ^{Lk 2:31} which you have prepared in the sight of all people, ^{Lk 2:32} a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

Acts 9:15 “This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.”

“One Flock and one Shepherd” – unity of the body of Christ.

Ephesians 2:11-22 “Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)— ^{Eph 2:12}

remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from

citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ^{Eph 2:13} But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. ^{Eph 2:14} For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ^{Eph 2:15} by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, ^{Eph 2:16} and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ^{Eph 2:17} He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ^{Eph 2:18} For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. ^{Eph 2:19} Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, ^{Eph 2:20} built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ^{Eph 2:21} In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ^{Eph 2:22} And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

John 17:20-21 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

John 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ^{Jn 13:35} By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."