

# Session 13

May 24, 2020

## Unit 2: Jesus Encounters . . .

### The Pharisees

Jesus is the gate through which we find salvation.

#### The Word

John 10:1-18

### Engage the Word

The Pharisees continue strong opposition to Jesus. While this section conveys much reassurance for followers of Christ, it also contains sharp language toward Jewish religious leaders. Jesus makes His teaching emphatic by the duplicated phrase “Very truly” (am?n, am?n, pronounced “ah-mane”). Only John includes this stylistic feature. Also, John 10 has echoes of Psalm 23. In the psalm “the Lord” is “my shepherd.” The reader of, and believer in, Psalm 23, affirms that God is the true shepherd. Another background text is Ezekiel 34, which thinks of earthly kings as godly “shepherds.” Ezekiel spoke prophetically to his era, confronting kings for living selfishly and failing to properly care for the nation. Notice how Jesus positions himself in this debate about who is the one true shepherd of Israel.

### THE SHEPHERD’S VOICE LEADS

#### John 10:1-6

A familiar voice can invite listening. Trust grows from intimate relationships. Jesus knows His followers “by name.” Believers are called individually, but are then brought into community. Jesus, the ultimate leader, leads. While in Israel, our tour bus came upon a large flock of sheep. They were on both sides of the road, and in the road, seemingly in no hurry to move. Our bus stopped and waited. It turned out there were two flocks and two shepherds. The two shepherds stood on opposite sides of the road. As they called the sheep gathered in those two places, and the road quickly cleared. The sheep knew their shepherd’s distinctive voice and followed him. In John 10 Jesus calls with the good shepherd’s voice. The Pharisees spoke with the voices of strangers.

The theme of Jesus' opponents not understanding Him continues. The Pharisees failed to comprehend Jesus' message, even though He used what appears to be readily understandable figures of speech drawn from the Old Testament (Psalm 23; Ezekiel 34). He kept "telling them again and again" ? (the Greek imperfect tense suggests the idea of Jesus continually seeking to make His words understood). The Pharisees' rejection of Jesus in chapter 9 was a determined resistance, a deliberate continuing in ignorance.

## **THE SHEPHERD IS THE GATE**

### **John 10:7-10**

To those attempting to come into the sheep pen some other way, Jesus used strong language, calling such individuals thieves and robbers. Jesus is always welcoming to the many, but He makes clear that the way to a full and rich life, the experience of salvation, is through Him. He is the gate.

Jesus seems to envision an enclosure of rocks and brush, a variety of natural barriers built and improved over time into a "pen." The rough walls of this pen would provide protection from threatening animals at night. Likely there was only one rather small entrance. When the entire flock was safely in the pen, the conscientious shepherd could then position himself between the vulnerable flock and threatening wolves. During the day the flock might move more freely, going in and out, grazing on nearby pasture, and visiting a safe watering hole. The shepherd continued to keep the flock in places of safety and security, places of life. To stay near to the shepherd was to know life "to the full" and to "be saved" (or "kept safe").

The letters of John refer to some who "went out" from the churches, calling them "antichrists" (1 John 2:18; 2 John 1:7). In the gospel, dangerous opponents are "thieves" who seek to "steal...kill...and destroy" (10:10). The competition for disciples continued, with the Pharisees and Jesus' followers vying for some of the same people. This would make understandable the labels and sharp warnings of John chapter 10. Divisions within the Christian churches, as the letters seem to depict, may have been a later development. No doubt the competing voices as to who exactly Jesus was would still have agreed that the shepherd, Jesus, was the gate, or door, that one entered to experience spiritual safety, to "be saved."

## **THE SHEPHERD DIES TO GIVE LIFE**

### **John 10:11-18**

Until now in chapter 10, Jesus had referred to himself as the "gate" for the sheep enclosure. Now He speaks of himself as the shepherd. Some think this shift of emphasis is due to John blending two parables, both of which had to do with sheep and shepherds. But there seems to be no compelling reason to think of this chapter as somehow a "blended" creation of two parables into one. As mentioned above, the faithful shepherd might well have also functioned as "the gate" at nightfall. Such a shepherd would not first think of saving himself, but rather look out for the flock. Three times Jesus spoke of laying down His life for the sheep. The good shepherd does not run away, but rather runs to the place of threat, to defend and rescue the vulnerable sheep.

Jesus' death was not a tragic accident. He died that others might live. He claimed an authority, the full power, to lay His life down, and to take it up again. Jesus and the Father know each other in an intimate way. This spiritual connection, God reaching out to persons in saving ways, means that Jesus is a "missionary" come from God. Jesus had, and has, "other sheep" (referring most likely to Gentiles). These others will listen to Jesus' voice and become part of the one flock.

## **Did You Know?**

John's gospel includes seven metaphorical "I am" sayings of Jesus. Two are in chapter 10. The seven sayings make an interesting study. In addition, look for absolute "I am" sayings in John. These are places that reflect the encounter of Moses with God (Exodus 3), where God identifies himself as the "I am."

## **Think About It**

When Jesus refers to himself as "the good shepherd," might He have been presenting himself as King? Kings in Ezekiel's time had often failed at being the shepherd/king (see Ezekiel 34). Jesus would not fail.

## **Reflect**

Take time to think about Jesus as the "shepherd" and the "gate" this week?

Rick Williamson