

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study [www.intothyword.org](http://www.intothyword.org)

**General Idea:** Here, Jesus is giving one of His most passionate and intimate illustrations portraying His people as sheep and Him as the Good Shepherd. He is also the Gatekeeper who watches over us as long as we follow His voice of instructions. *Anyone who teaches falsely is a thief and robber; my true sheep will listen to me and not to them. Those who come to me will be saved.* He calls to us, His own, by name with intimacy and care, and leads us to where we need to be. He gathers us together to be with one another for mutual support and protection and tells us to be careful and not follow bad shepherds who would hurt us. Jesus is the Good Shepherd and is willing, at this point in Scripture, to lay down His life for us voluntarily for our salvation and to nurture us. These are not just good sounding words; rather, He is giving to us a depiction of protection, comfort, contentment, and His Lordship. He comes to us as a Shepherd who lovingly corrals His sheep for spiritual nourishment, personal growth, and protection. He becomes our sheepfold, where those who do not belong or who desire to hurt His sheep, His people, are thwarted and His people are protected and loved. He is the God who cares, loves, and leads us to the safety of His arms. The key for us is to recognize His voice, trust in Him, and follow Him. As usual, those who oppose Truth, the thieves and robbers of the day, objected to Jesus' words and called Him a demon. Others were comforted and reassured that Jesus was the Messiah.

### Contexts and Background

This passage continues at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles, where Jesus had previously healed a blind man and caused the religious leaders to be upset. Here, in the mist of Jesus' retort to the Pharisees, is a passionate depiction of our God who cares and leads with character, and He asks us to do the same. Pharisees considered shepherds to be unclean, unworthy to enter the Temple, or even to know God. Those rich and sophisticated Greeks and Romans detested shepherds because of the smell, but also considered them vulgar. Ironically, Jesus uses this image to instruct and convict the pious frauds as well as to model to the good leaders how they should be.

### Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings

- *I tell you the truth/truly, truly.* Meaning "I am" and "I have God's Truth," not theoretical truth or some idea manipulated by one's faulty reasoning, relativistic ideas, or personal or political agendas. Jesus brings us real, effectual Truth (Matt. 5:18; John 3:1-15; Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:1-8; 2 Tim. 2:15; James 1:18)
- *Sheep pen/sheepfold.* This usually was the fenced in, open courtyard of a large family home or a small group of homes that people shared in a compound. The sheep would use this courtyard as a pen, especially in the cold months, and for safety, where they kept each other warm and made it more difficult for theft. Over the centuries, The Roman Catholic Church has used this verse, out of its context and meaning, to declare that they are the only "true fold," the real Church of God, and that the rest, the Protestants, are out of the pen.
- *Gate/door.* There was a wall made of stone or a wooden fence that kept the sheep in a pen, which had a gate. The shepherd and trusted worker would not need to climb in nor would the sheep as they would be let in by the work and word of the shepherd, just as we are let into the Kingdom of God. We are let into salvation by our Great Shepherd (Num. 27:16-17; Deut. 28:6; Psalm 121:18; Isa. 49:9-10; Matt. 7:7; 18:8-9; 25:10; Acts 14:22).
- *Thief.* Was a person who covertly broke into a home to steal its owner's possessions because he was not willing to work or earn due to apathy, laziness, or sin. He stole sheep while they were in their pens at night. This is also a charge Jesus made concerning unfaithful leaders who steal what they need from God's people.
- *Robber.* Was a person who violently raided people as they were away from their homes, like

“highwaymen,” poachers, and rustlers. They stole sheep that were out in the pastures.

- *Shepherd.* The person whose job it was to guard and care for the sheep. Here, God anoints people to be leaders for His people. Concerning sheep, the person who owned the sheep had a vested interest in them and would do all it took to protect them, as their family’s livelihood depended on them. A hired person had no vested interest and as soon as danger would come, they would scam (Gen. 31:39; Num. 27:15-23; 1 Sam. 17:34-37; 2 Sam. 5:2; Psalm 78:71-72; Isa. 63:11; Jer. 3:15; Ezek. 34:1-24).
- *Sheep* is a metaphor for God’s people. Although sheep are notoriously stupid animals and can’t survive on their own, they show us that without God, we are just like them. They are totally dependent upon their caregiver, the Shepherd. A sheep that gets out and lives on its own will starve because it will not go where the food is. It will hurt itself by rubbing itself to death on a tree or falling down and breaking its leg or falling off a cliff. Sheep need constant care and attention and the sheep that skips out on that care will die. The Shepherd is the one who graciously cares for the sheep in his care, even laying his life on the line against predators and rustlers (Psalm 77:20; 78:52; 100:3).
- *Watchman.* A family member, usually a responsible, older child or elderly person or a hired hand who would keep account of the sheep and make sure no harm came to them.
- *Leads them in/out.* Jesus is the only One who can lead us to God the Father. God is the One who led Israel then and the Church today; the pastors and church leaders are responsible for their part of leadership (Num. 27:17; 2 Sam. 5:2).
- *Sheep follow.* Even though God is the One who gives life and protects, a responsibility is given to leaders to be watchful and aware of people who would fleece and hurt the flock of our Lord (1 Sam. 17:34-37; 2 Sam. 5:2).
- *Stranger.* Here, Jesus is attacking the Pharisees and calling them strangers to God (Matt. 21:34-36; 23:29-36; Mark 13:22-23; John 9:40-41; 2 Tim. 3:5; 4:2-5; 1 John 2:26).
- *I am the gate/door.* Another metaphor that shows God’s role in offering us eternal life and that by Jesus’ life and work, He becomes that door (Psalm 118:20; Matt. 7:13-14; John 6:35; 14:6).
- *Came before me.* Referring to the false teachers who claimed to know truth or to be the messiah. Josephus records other “would be” messiahs who, at that time, were competing for public recognition; perhaps, this was also a statement of jealousy.
- *Be saved.* Only Christ can guarantee and give salvation to those who would receive His gift and trust in Him. Christ’s most amazing and wondrous gift is imputed to us, so our most inward being is transformed and renewed! Without this, we cannot be justified or do any good (John 3:15-16, 36; 14:6; 17:2-6, 24; Acts 16:31; Rom. 8:18-30; 10:9-10; 1 Pet. 1:1)!
- *Have life.* Meaning that through our relationship with Jesus Christ, we have joyful abundance now, personal favor of God with real fellowship with Him, a purpose and meaning for our daily lives, and eternal life to come (John 3:1-16).
- *I am the good shepherd.* Meaning that Jesus is the One who leads, equips, and guides us— aspects we all urgently need. God is the Shepherd for His people and His people are described as a flock that needs His leading and provision. It is our call to hear His voice and obey, as a good sheep does, in order to be fed and not be eaten by predators (Gen. 48:15; 49:24; Psalm 23; 28:9; 77:20; 78:52, 71; 79:13; 80:1; 100:3; Isa. 40:11; 63:11; Jer. 23:1; 31:10; 34:11-16; Ezek. 34:6-16, 31; Hos. 6:6; Zech. 13:7; Matt. 26:31; John 10:1-8; 16:13-15; Rom. 10:7; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 7:17).
- *Lays down his life.* A depiction of “The Lamb of God;” Jesus Christ is the sacrifice of blood—the offering so we can be forgiven of our sins. He represents the only effective and ultimate sacrifice; He

takes away the sin of the world. The price was invaluable and could not have been paid by human measures. This is also an image of Christ who comes as a suffering servant and then becomes the sacrifice to atone for our sins (Ex. 12; Lev. 16; Isa. 53:7-12; John 19:30-36; Acts 2:32; 3:15; 4:10; 1 Cor. 5:7; Gal. 1:1; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet 1:19).

- *Hired hand.* A metaphor of a careless leader who is a coward and not concerned versus a true representative of God who is entrusted to feed and care for His people. Since he was hired, he was only motivated by self interest and getting paid and was not ultimately responsible for the sheep. With no vested interest, he would not stay and fight a lion or fend off robbers. Religious leaders who did not invest themselves in the care of their people were like robbers (Jer. 23:1; Ezek. 34:6).
- *Wolf* indicated predators, false teachers, bad leaders, the devil, and those who are enemies of God and His people. They only act on self interests whereas Christ is concerned with our interests; He nurtures, loves, and cares for us and calls us to do the same for others (2 Cor. 5:20; Eph. 5:1-2).
- *Abandons the sheep.* A warning to callous and manipulative leaders. We have the Truth; what we usually lack is the follow-through!
- *Not of this sheep pen.* The Gospel is not limited to the Jews. Even at the time of Abraham, the Jews were meant to be the display of God and a beacon so others would come to know Him. The image of the shepherd here is of one who gathers his sheep that have been scattered by predators and indecision, common in sheep. Here, God claims His children, both the children of promise and those who are Gentiles (Gen. 12:1-3; Isa. 56:8; Ezek. 37:21-24; Mic. 2:12; John 17:20-23; Eph. 2:11-22)
- *Why listen to him?* The people in Jesus' day who were in His presence were just as divided about Him as people are in our day, even with all of our resources and history. People are divided over who and what Jesus is. Some listen and put their faith in Him; others, by conceit and a refusal to be convicted, demonize Him and His Truth. This also shows the contradiction of logic by opponents of the Gospel, i.e. knowing only God can heal a blind person and then saying He is a devil, when a devil clearly couldn't do such miracles (Ex. 4:11; Psalm 146:8; John 7:20, 43; 9:16).

## **Devotional Thoughts and Applications**

Two of the primary foundations of the Gospel Message are who Jesus is and what He did on the cross for us. We have to trust in our Good Shepherd to lead us to the good pastures and we are also to do our part with gratitude and diligence and not run away from His pen. We also are called to be led by the Word and not by our pride or by false teachers, the thieves who would rob us of God's instructions and replace them with nonsense and dangerous cliffs from which we could fall

Here, Christ comes to us to bringing the Gospel, as a Good Shepherd who puts our concerns and needs before His. This passage portrays how Christ came to us and how we are to serve. Yet, what gets in the way of this? Our life of contentment is trapped between the walls of experience and the ceiling of things we desire, while we tend to ignore the door of the truth and real joy. For us to be in the safety of faith, we not only need to be in Christ, but we also have to obey Him. This is a result of our intimate relationship with Him. We know Him; He knows us, and we do what He says. We are concerned with what concerns Him, and we act accordingly. Like sheep, we can't lead ourselves or others without being forever lost and unfed. Jesus is the Good Shepherd and we are the sheep. The question is, are you a sheep under His care or one that is out on the lamb (pun intended) on the run (1 Sam. 17:34-36; John 2:19; 3:14; 6:51)?

**The Essential Inductive Questions** (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

**Additional Questions:**

1. Do you now or have you had a pet you love? How did it respond when it heard your voice? What can be learned from this for your spiritual life?
2. What does it mean to you that Jesus calls to you personally and intimately? How can you communicate to others how Jesus knows His sheep by name with intimacy and care, and desires to lead us where we need to be?
3. What does it mean to you that Jesus Christ is the God who cares, loves, and leads us to the safety of His arms? What is the key for us to recognize His voice, trust in, and follow Him?
4. Why is Jesus so concerned about unfaithful leaders? How have you seen such leaders steal from God's people what they need to have?
5. How do you feel that Jesus anoints people to be His leaders for His people? Why would a leader neglect or twist this call?
6. Jesus calls us sheep, which are notoriously stupid animals and can't survive on their own; He shows us that we are the same without God. What does this say about you? What do you need to do?
7. Do you feel you need constant care and attention? If not, why? Is this a problem of pride?
8. What does it mean to have to trust in our Good Shepherd to lead us to the good pastures? What is our part? How do faith, gratitude, and diligence play a role?
9. Why do we have a responsibility to be watchful and aware of people who would fleece and hurt the people in our churches? How can we do this better?
10. Jesus gathers us together as a church to be with one another for mutual support and protection. How can you be more careful not to follow bad shepherds and those who would hurt you?
11. How is Jesus your Good Shepherd? How is He your Gatekeeper who watches over you? How have you followed His voice of love and instruction? How can you better do so? What would this mean to your church and personal life?
12. How can you and your church be better witnesses to Christ's testimony and Truth? We need to seek our Lord and ask *of what do I need to be cleansed?*