

John 10

Good, Good Shepherd

Throughout John, Jesus makes several “I AM” statements. Thus far, Jesus has claimed to be the Bread of Life (John 6:22) and the Light of the World (John 8:12). In chapter 10, another infamous “I AM” claim is made. “I AM the Good Shepherd.”

Remember the original copy of John lacked chapter divisions. Thus, the story of the blind man who “saw the light” bleeds into Jesus’s teaching on being the Good Shepherd. Just as the spiritually blind do not see the Light (though they claim to have perfect eyesight), so too the true sheep of God hear the voice of their Shepherd and follow him (vs. 1-6). This connection is made evident in verse 6. There, they hear but do not perceive. In chapter 9, the Pharisees see but do not believe.

Throughout Jewish history, the motif of the shepherd is a precious one. The earliest patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) were all shepherds. So too were Moses and David (among others). The pastoral imagery was often applied to both God (Psalm 23) and man (the priests). However, the later prophets condemned the failed shepherds of Israel (the prophets, priests, and kings) who led them astray. The promise was that a true shepherd would come and lead his people (Ezekiel 34).

Jesus claims to be the fulfillment of that Messianic hope. “I am the good shepherd” (vv. 11, 14). The proof of his identity is demonstrated at the cross (note the Lamb language), “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (vv. 12, 15). As such, the true sheep of God follow their Shepherd (vv. 14).

Furthermore, the sheep of Jesus is broader than ethnic identity. When Jesus claims “I have other sheep that are not of this fold,” most agree he is referring to Gentiles – an entire class of people the Jews openly condemned and rejected. Clearly, the healing power of the gospel crosses ethnic, racial, gender, socio-economic, and political barriers. The only thing that will bring peace and reconciliation is the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep.

The response to this teaching mirrors that of the blind man. There, detractors rejected the evidence (they were blind) whereas the blind man believed. Here, some rejected

Jesus's teacher claiming madness ("He has a demon" in vv. 20) whereas others cannot deny his miracles (vv. 20b).

In the remaining passage, the division between the crowd becomes more manifest (vv. 22ff). Those who reject Jesus seek to stone him on the basis of blasphemy because he made himself out to be God (vv. 33).

However, what is significant is, again, the connection to the blind man. In chapter 9, critics are blind whereas in chapter 10, they are deaf. Therefore, Jesus references hearing. "I told you and you do not believe" he states in verse 25. "My sheep" he repeats "Hear my voice ... and they follow me."

Nevertheless, those who "see" and "hear" the Good Shepherd, are given an incredible promise. "I give [my sheep] eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand" (vv. 28) The Light (chapter 9) has become the Life. When Jesus opens eyes, they see forevermore. When Jesus gives life, they live forevermore. Nothing and no one will ever change that.