

JOHN — WEEK 13

THE GOOD SHEPHERD



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The cover image is *Ecce Homo* (Behold the Man) by Caravaggio

In this section, Jesus introduces the concept of people as sheep. Jesus first says He is the door to the sheep pen, showing that this is not the Pharisees' job. Then He adds that He's the good shepherd and connects this with His dying for the sheep.

As always, this confuses many people since they aren't expecting His death, but His identity is clear.

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1 John 10:1–6

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.

Jesus is still talking to the group that was with the blind man He had cured. This passage comes right after He said to some Pharisees, *“If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, ‘We see.’ Therefore your sin remains.”*

As I pointed out in the previous lesson, the Pharisees are merely sinful in normal ways. Their role as Pharisees just makes their sin unusually annoying. That role is what Jesus is busting on here—and it’s no surprise that they don’t understand. So Jesus clarifies what He’s talking about.

John 10:7–10

Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

What the Pharisees get wrong is that they think they’re the gatekeepers. There’s nothing wrong with them teaching the law, even if they’re so pedantic that it keeps people from seeing the forest for the trees.

But they aren’t just teaching the law; they’re enforcing it. That’s wrong. God’s law does not institute a bunch of little enforcers. They will end up **making** that very point to Pontius Pilate.

We all tend to be little enforcers. When we think we have something figured out, we naturally tend to think that gives us the right to make everyone else go along. We all do it, though some are bolder and more annoying than others.

This is the root of the cancel culture. It’s also why people think they can enforce their views about climate change. Both of those groups take their pharisaic tendencies to extremes.

But this can get much worse. When ideological people get real power, their pharisaic nature can go nuclear. They become dictators. People frequently end up fleeing their nations in droves, often at great personal cost and risk.

The human tendency to be a Pharisee is the root cause of every humanitarian crisis of our time.

2 John 10:11–21

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

“Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.”

Therefore there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings. And many of them said, “He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?”

Others said, “These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

We’re all familiar with Jesus being the good shepherd. We’re also all familiar with His crucifixion. We’re not all familiar with those two things being connected.

But that’s what today’s passage says. It’s the willingness of a shepherd to put his life on the line that makes him a true shepherd.

Of course, the crowds hearing this don’t understand a word of it. Jesus’s references to His death and resurrection are way beyond anything people are going to understand. That whole concept isn’t just unrelated to their concept of a messiah; it contradicts it.

Their idea of a messiah is anything but a sacrificial lamb.

It might seem far-fetched that a back-then shepherd could fight off predators with nothing more than a staff and a sling, but those tools were up to the task. In the hands of an experienced shepherd, a sling hurls a one-pound rock at about 90 miles-an-hour with enough accuracy to usually hit an animal. That projectile doesn’t just sting; it can inflict damage that takes time to heal. A predator might not be able to hunt anything for a while.

And the predators may not even understand where their pain came from. They spin around looking for what just bit them and there’s nothing there. While they’re looking around for the source of their pain, they get hit by another rock.

That’s usually enough to chase them off.

3 John 10:22–30

Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch. Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly."

Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one."

Everyone knows Jesus has been making messianic claims (and doing clear signs that show He's the Christ) but they keep getting confused. So they ask for clarification.

One minute, Jesus will do something that only the Christ could do. Then, the next minute, He'll say something that makes no sense to them. Somehow, they think this contradicts His being the messiah. Thus they see the whole sequence of events as showing evidence both for and against Him being the Christ.

But why would they assume that the messiah will never say something that's over their heads?

Even the prophets said things that confused (even angered) a lot of people.

Of course, all this is in keeping with Jesus's plan to get crucified. Many of the things He said were designed to reveal the truth while, at the same time, not being understood by His audience at that time.

But there's a simple way that plan could fail. When people don't understand something, they don't remember it. As an extreme example, imagine that someone says something to you that makes perfect sense, but they're not speaking in English; they're speaking a language you do not know. Absent any understanding, what chance do you have of remembering what the person said?

Without the ability to fit something we heard or saw into familiar patterns, we can't store it in our memories and it's quickly lost.

So, while the crowds aren't going to understand what Jesus is saying, the disciples need to, so that they will be able to recall it later (and write it up, thus creating the gospels.)

Thus, you will see, over and over, Jesus explaining things to His disciples. He interprets His parables. He repeats the unexpected and/or confusing points about His crucifixion and resurrection. He explains everything.

They need to understand it to remember it.

It's all part of the plan.

4 John 10:31–42

Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, “Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?”

The Jews answered Him, saying, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.”

Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, “You are gods” ’? If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.” Therefore they sought again to seize Him, but He escaped out of their hand.

And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was baptizing at first, and there He stayed. Then many came to Him and said, “John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true.” And many believed in Him there.

Once again, the crowd reaction removes all doubt about what Jesus said and meant. He is claiming deity. They understood that He is claiming to be God, and He does not deny that they understood Him correctly.

But this passage stands out because of Jesus’s unique counter-argument, which references Psalm 82.

*I said, “You are gods,
And all of you are children of the Most High.
But you shall die like men,
And fall like one of the princes.”— Psalm 82:6–7*

Jesus’s point is that if Psalm 82 can call people gods, how is it blasphemous to call oneself God? Furthermore, Jesus’s works give Him more ground to call Himself God than what most folks have. If humans can, in any sense, be called gods, that title must be even more reasonable in Jesus’s case.

It’s a good argument, but these people don’t follow it.

So when He ends with, “*the Father is in Me, and I in Him,*” they just get even angrier, and Jesus slips out.

So Jesus returns to the place of His baptism. The crowds there seem to have a completely different attitude. They’re familiar with John’s testimony and they compare that to the observations.

John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true.

Thus they draw the correct (even obvious) conclusion.

Jesus is who John said He is.

5 John 11:1–7

Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, “Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.”

When Jesus heard that, He said, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. Then after this He said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.”

There are a number of striking things in this passage. Jesus says, *“This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”*

But Lazarus does die. Jesus then raises him, which the rest of the sentence alludes to.

But why say, *“This sickness is not unto death.”*? That sounds like a blown prediction. Why does Jesus say that?

Then He deliberately carries *two more days in the place where He was*. The Greek word that’s translated as “so” at the beginning of verse 6 carries the sense that Jesus carries two *more* days because He knew Lazarus was sick.

This two day wait seems to be why Lazarus dies. That’s what blows His prediction. Why do it this way?

It’s all a set-up. Jesus wants everyone to get hit with a full dose of grief.

That will make Him raising Lazarus all the more elating.

This same depression-elation sequence will be repeated with Jesus’s death and resurrection.

But His disciples will have seen this before. It won’t be a totally new lesson; it’ll be review.

Review is when the best learning takes place. This is standard educational theory. The lesson being reviewed moves into long-term memory. That makes the learning permanent.

This whole sequence of events is to teach, in the best, most permanent possible way, the lesson of who Jesus is.

His disciples need to know this lesson in their bones. They must not forget it under duress.

And duress is coming.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Where do you see us acting like Pharisees?
2. How is Jesus the good shepherd?
3. What "sticks" things in your memory?
4. What, exactly, did John say Jesus is?
5. Who was the best teacher you ever had?

Items for prayer: