

Echoes of Scripture

Easter 4a ~ John 10:1-10

Summary of John 10:1-10

Upset with the flavor of the Pharisees leadership (shamefully kicking the man who was formerly blind out of the synagogue) Jesus cryptically speaks to them about true shepherding; illustrating what a heaven-sent messiah/shepherd would do. He would fulfill God's prophetic announcements by seeking the lost, welcoming the outcast and sinner, and binding-up the broken. Jesus identifies himself as God's answer to the leadership crisis. He is the door to salvation. He is the good shepherd who cares so much for his sheep that he is willing to lay down his own life for them. He calls them by name and they follow him.

Suggested Course of Study

- Read Jeremiah 23
- Read Ezekiel 34
- Read Psalm 23
- Read John 9:1—10:42 (the passage must be understood in this context)
- Read John 21:15-19 (Jesus commissioning Peter once again)

Immediate Context

John 7:1-9 The Unbelief of Jesus' Brothers
John 7:10-24 Jesus at the Festival of Booths
John 7:25-31 Is This the Christ?
John 7:32-36 Officers Are Sent to Arrest Jesus
John 7:37-39 Rivers of Living Water
John 7:40-44 Divisions among the People
John 7:45-53 The Unbelief of Those in Authority
John 8:1-11 The Woman Caught in Adultery
John 8:12-20 Jesus the Light of the World
John 8:21-30 Jesus Foretells His Death
John 8:31-38 True Disciples
John 8:39-59 Jesus and Abraham

John 9:1-41 A Man Born Blind Receives Sight
John 10:1-21 Jesus the Good Shepherd
John 10:22-42 Jesus is Rejected by the Jews
John 11:1-16 The Death of Lazarus
John 11:17-27 Jesus the Resurrection and the Life
John 11:28-37 Jesus Weeps
John 11:38-44 Jesus Raises Lazarus to Life
John 11:45-57 The Plot to Kill Jesus
John 12:1-8 Mary Anoints Jesus
John 12:9-11 The Plot to Kill Lazarus
John 12:12-19 The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem
John 12:20-26 Some Greeks wish to see Jesus

The Textⁱ

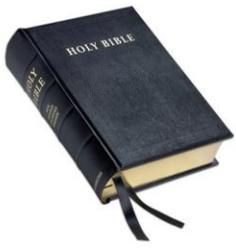
John 10:1-21 (NRSV)

10 "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.

⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers."

⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be



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saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Key Words

VERY TRULY, I TELL YOU – Ἀμήν ἀμήν λέγω ὑμῖν “Amen, Amen, I tell you” Unusual to use Amen at the beginning of sentence. However, there are instances where it is done in the Old Testament (See 1 Kings 1:36 and Jeremiah 28:6). The double “Amen” at the beginning of a saying is said to indicate that what is about to be said has authority in tradition.

THIEF AND BANDIT – The Pharisees (though I should clarify that it is *a group of them* but not *all* Pharisees; see vs 21) had set themselves up as enemies of Jesus in the previous story. Jesus uses the familiar biblical imagery of sheep and shepherds to discuss the leadership of God’s people. He is critiquing the actions of the Jewish religious leaders (the influential group opposed to him) that we see in John 9. Thieves and bandits are enemies of a shepherd in this illustration; they are the anti-shepherd who threaten the safety of the sheep. The shepherd is known to the gatekeeper and the sheep (that’s why the gatekeeper lets the shepherd in; the sheep belong to him). Thieves and bandits are not (they have to sneak in). Thieves and bandits are strangers (vs. 5). We can assume that all unfaithful and illegitimate leaders are in mind here (including that certain group of powerful and influential Pharisees that were opposing Jesus, others who were opposing Jesus, others who claimed to be the Messiah, as well as the false prophets and perhaps even the wayward kings of Israel’s past).

SHEPHERD OF THE SHEEP – The duties of the shepherd are to protect, to care for, to feed, to lead and guide the flock. The duties of the sheep are to listen, obey and follow the shepherd. When a sheep gets lost, it is the shepherd that seeks, finds and saves. Unfortunately in the history of Israel, many who assumed the roles of the nation’s shepherds failed to live up to their responsibilities. This is what we see in Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34. These chapters provide the necessary background to understand what Jesus is saying to the Pharisees who kicked out the man born blind from the synagogue. Contrast those chapters with the words of Psalm 23 and Isaiah 40:11 and you get the picture of what God expects.

See also Numbers 27:12-23 where Joshua is appointed as a successor for Moses (includes the notion of a shepherd who goes before them/leads them out).

See also places where Israel is described as scattered sheep without a shepherd: 1 Kings 22:17; 2 Chronicles 18:16; Zechariah 10:2 for the notion of Israel (sheep) being a leaderless nation (without a shepherd); and particularly Zechariah 11:3-17 that talks about good and bad shepherds.

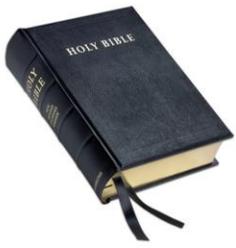
See also Jeremiah 3:15 for the promise of shepherds “after God’s own heart” if Israel will return to God and be faithful.

See Isaiah 56:11 (where God talks about the covenant being extended to all who obey; but that Israel’s leaders have gone astray).

See 2 Samuel 5:2; 7:7-8; 1 Chronicles 11:2, Psalm 78:70-71; Ezekiel 37:24 and Micah 5:2-4 for the connection to King David or his heir.

See Isaiah 44:28-45:1 for a passage that talks about gates and doors and being called by name in the context of a shepherd.

For God as shepherd, see Genesis 48:15; 49:24; Deuteronomy 26:5-8; Psalm 23, 28:9; 74:1 (angry shepherd); 80:1; 95:7; Isaiah 40:11, Jeremiah 13:17; 23:3; 31:10, Micah 2:12; 7:14.



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Another interesting place to look is in 1 Enoch 89:10-90:39 (from the Old Testament Pseudopigrapha).

It is also interesting to note that this conversation takes place while Jesus is in Jerusalem for the Feast of the Dedication (Hanukkah) because that festival celebrates the rejection of false rulers (especially that of Antiochus IV whose desecration of the temple led to the Maccabean revolt in 165 BCE). This festival had a strong messianic emphasis and so the Shepherding prophecies and texts would have been strongly in the minds of the people (which is why Numbers 27, Ezekiel 34, Jeremiah 23, and Psalm 23 are so crucial for understanding this text). The question becomes (as the argument with Jesus and the investigation of the Pharisees into Jesus' healing of the man born blind suggest) "Who is the true shepherd of Israel?" (and by juxtaposition; "Who are the false shepherds?") Jesus is saying/arguing that he is the fulfillment of the hopes of Israel!

GATEKEEPER – *θυρωρός* (notice the similar root from where we get the word "gate/door"). The gatekeeper in this figure of speech is someone hired by the owners of the sheep to control access to the sheep. The gatekeeper recognizes the different shepherds and gives them access. Anyone else would be turned away. In this figure of speech, we can only guess who the gatekeeper is meant to be. The identity is less important than the function.

HEARS HIS VOICE – see John 5:28 (regarding the dead hearing the voice of the Son of God). Notice the context of this passage is chapter 5 defines who receives resurrection of life vs resurrection of condemnation. We also are reminded of the story in Acts 2 with the Spirit of God coming upon the disciples and the variety of people being able to understand the words of the disciples in their own languages.

CALLS HIS OWN SHEEP BY NAME – Having recently read the resurrection appearance passages, we are reminded of how Mary Magdalene recognizes Jesus who she thought was a gardener. Jesus calls her by name and she realizes it is him (see John 20:16).

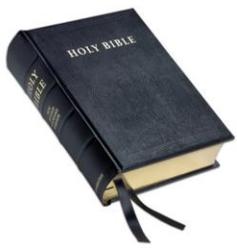
LEADS THEM OUT – See Numbers 27:12-23; Exodus 15:13-17; Psalm 79:52-55, 70-72; Psalm 77:21; Isaiah 63:11; and 2 Samuel 5:2.

SHEEP FOLLOW HIM – See John 1:37-43; 6:2; 8:12; 10:27; 12:26; 13:36-37; 21:19-22. Notice particularly how Jesus commissions Peter at the end of the gospel. In John 21:15-21, Jesus restores Peter to discipleship and commissions him to mission. Three times Jesus asks Peter if he loves him. And three times Peter responds "yes". After each response by Peter, Jesus says 1) feed my lambs, 2) tend my sheep, and 3) feed my sheep. Peter is commissioned to the shepherding role.

A STRANGER – The sheep don't recognize the stranger or his voice.

FIGURE OF SPEECH – The gospel of John doesn't use the word parable *παραβολή*; instead John uses the word we translate as "figure of speech" *παροιμίαν* (meaning "figure" or "image") to indicate a saying or parable-like description that conceals the meaning of what is being said. This is the opposite of *παρρησία* which means "to speak plainly".

I AM – *ἐγώ εἰμι* (*egō eimi*) "I AM". Three times this appears in John chapter 10 (v7, 9, 11). This is how God refers to God's self in the Exodus story where God speaks to Moses from the burning bush (see Exodus 3:13-22). When Jesus says "I AM", he is using God's name for himself. When we translate *ἐγώ εἰμι* into English we add "he" to our translation, saying "I am he" or "I who speak to you am he," but there is no "he" in the Greek. It is simply "I AM". See also 4:26; 6:35; 6:51; 8:12; 8:58; 9:5; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1; and 18:5 for more.



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THE GATE – Notice that Jesus still hasn't identified himself or his role as that of the shepherd. Jesus waits until verse 11 to do that. Here he identifies himself with the gate. What does this mean? The word here is *θύρα* which is usually translated as "door" (notice that this is at the root of the word for gatekeeper). Sometimes a shepherd would sleep across the opening of the sheepfold and act like a door. The idea here, though, is that Jesus acts as the one through whom access to the sheep is granted; that's the "function" of a door. It controls access. The synoptic gospels have saying about the narrow gate/door that leads to life (see Matthew 7:13-14) or salvation (see Luke 13:23-25). We also find this imagery in Psalm 118 (see verses 19-21).

WHOEVER ENTERS BY ME WILL BE SAVED – Jesus says "Whoever enters through me" (the door/gate) will be saved". Again see Ezekiel 34:10, 12, 14, 22, 31. See also John 3:16-17.

WILL COME IN AND GO OUT – (see Numbers 27:16-17 for the discussion about Joshua as the new shepherd of the sheep who will "lead them out and bring them in").

AND FIND PASTURE – See Psalm 23 and Ezekiel 34:14; as well as Isaiah 49:9-13, Psalm 121,

THE THIEF COMES ONLY TO KILL AND STEAL AND DESTROY – *ὁ κλέπτης* (the thief) *οὐκ ἔρχεται* (comes) *εἰ μὴ ἵνα* (in order to) *κλέψῃ* (to steal) *καὶ θύσῃ* (to butcher/slaughter) *καὶ ἀπολέσῃ* (to kill/destroy). It's interesting that Jesus chooses to use the word "butcher" in this metaphor about sheep and shepherds. See John 8:40-44 and John 16:2 for how this might apply to some of the religious leaders).

I CAME THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE LIFE AND HAVE IT ABUNDANTLY – Jesus' whole mission is to bring about the well-being of God's flock. (see John 3:16-17; 4:14; 5:24; 6:33-51; 11:25). This is a very different goal for the sheep.

ADDITION

Want a provocative way to illustrate Jesus' critique of the ministry of that powerful group of Jewish religious leaders who opposed him? Try showing this series of photos; one at a time. At first, people will celebrate the hard work of the shepherds to save the sheep. Only as the last slide is shown, however, they will understand that the interest of the shepherds didn't reside in the welfare of the sheep, but their own welfare (and bellies). When Jesus describes the intentions of the thief, it is interesting that he uses the word for "butchering" or "slaughtering".

The religious leaders (perhaps sincerely and faithfully) thought they were protecting the flock by opposing Jesus. However, Jesus reveals their selfish/self-preserving nature.



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