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Good Shepherd, Sending the 70 (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg analyzes John chapter 10 and discusses the parable of the Good Shepherd. He points out the differences between the true shepherd who cares for his sheep and the false ones who only seek to benefit themselves. Gregg emphasizes that the true shepherd will lay down his life for the sheep, emphasizing the selfless nature of the Good Shepherd. Ultimately, Gregg emphasizes the importance of recognizing the voice of the true shepherd, as only his sheep will follow him and gain eternal life.

Transcript

John chapter 10 actually divides into two different time frames. The first 21 verses take place apparently at the same Feast of Tabernacles for which Jesus made a trip to Jerusalem in chapter 7. As near as we can tell. It's possible that some things intervened, but we're not signaled of it.

Therefore, as far as we know, that Feast of Tabernacles where Jesus went down at the beginning of chapter 7 has been the scene for all that has happened up till this point, including the announcement that he would give living water to those who thirst, his conversation with the Jews about their pedigree, whether they are children of Abraham or not. His healing of a man born blind, which was in chapter 9, and now the first 21 verses of chapter 10. After that point, the scene changes at verse 22 to the Feast of Dedication, which was about three months later.

The Feast of Tabernacles was in September or October, and the Feast of Dedication is just another word for Hanukkah, which happens around our Christmas season. So there's about a three-month gap between verse 21 and 22 of this chapter. Now, there are some things that take place in those three months, and we get those from the Synoptic Gospels.

So we'll just take the first 21 verses of John chapter 10, after which we're going to have to look at some Synoptic materials before we come back to John again because of that gap there. Jesus apparently is just keeping talking from the previous chapter, which of course suggests the same context. At the end of chapter 9, when Jesus had approached

the blind man whom he'd healed and who had subsequently been thrown out of the synagogue by the leaders, he said, I guess we could probably pick it up in verse 39 of chapter 9, For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.

Then some of the Pharisees who were with him heard these words and said to him, Are we blind also? Jesus said to them, If you were blind, you would have no sin, but now you say, We see, therefore your sin remains. Most assuredly I say to you, he who does not enter, the sheep fold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same as 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. 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 might have life and that they may have it more abundantly.

I am the good shepherd, the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. But he who is a hireling and not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leads 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 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? This final comment makes it very clear that the context of this conversation is quite inseparably connected to the healing of the blind

man, since they say, Can a demon open the eyes of the blind? Now, there's a number of things that occasion these words about the shepherd and the sheep and so forth. One is the fact that the shepherds of Israel had come up for rebuke by the prophet Ezekiel, who, after speaking evil of the shepherds of Israel, said that God himself would be a shepherd, and lapsed into a messianic passage about the good shepherd, and Jesus obviously identifies himself as that good shepherd here. There is therefore the background of Ezekiel 34 to this passage, and other passages of course.

For example, over in Isaiah chapter 40, there's a passage that we are reminded of if we're familiar with it, when we come to this passage. It says in Isaiah 40, in verse 11, well, verses 10 and 11, it says, Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him. Behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.

He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those who are with young. So, God as the shepherd of Israel, Jesus actually, gathering the lambs in his arms, carrying them, leading them gently, feeding the flock.

Remember David said in Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd. And the word the Lord there is Jehovah. Jehovah is my shepherd, David said in Psalm 23.

Here also, it's Jehovah, I take that back, it's Adonai Elohim in verse 10. So, it's nonetheless the same God. It's God who is the shepherd of Israel and who will lead them and so forth.

Over in Ezekiel 34, the passage I mentioned a moment ago, I'd like to show you some of the things that are there. The shepherds of Israel are the leaders of Israel. At least in Ezekiel 34 they are.

And they were therefore the princes and the priests and the king and whoever else was in leadership. They were the shepherds who should have been taking care of the sheep but were doing a poor job. And it says in Ezekiel 34, the word of the Lord came to me saying, son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel.

Prophesy and say to them, thus says the Lord God to the shepherds, woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves. Should not the shepherds feed the flock? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool. You slaughter the fatlings but you do not feed the flock.

The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away or sought what was lost. But with force and cruelty you have ruled them. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered.

Now this is the condition that Israel had come into under their present leadership. Notice he says that they have not sought those that were lost. And in contrast to Jesus in a certain place, saying the son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Also here, by the way, that would be in Matthew 9.36 I believe, if I'm not mistaken. But in other places, actually Jesus said it more than once. But there's also a reference to, let's see, they had not bound up or healed those that were sick.

These are the kinds of things that shepherds would do for their sheep and we can see that those are the things Jesus comes to do for his people when he finally came. Now he goes on to talk about what God is going to do. He says he's going to punish the shepherds and he says he's against them in verse 10.

Behold, I'm against the shepherds and I will require my flock at their hand. Then in verse 11 he says, For thus says the Lord God, indeed I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock in the day, he is among his scattered sheep.

So will I seek out my sheep and deliver them from all places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and will bring them to their own land. Now this probably had its initial fulfillment in the return of the exiles from Babylon since Ezekiel and his generation were in Babylon at the time.

They had been scattered. I will feed them on the mountains of Israel in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture and their folds shall be on the high mountains of Israel and so forth.

Then it says, verse 16, I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick. There can hardly be any doubt that this is looking forward now beyond the Babylonian return to actually when Jesus came and did all these things. But I will destroy the fat and the strong and feed them in judgment.

Jesus did that too eventually. As for you my fellow, well let me get down here a little bit. It gets kind of repetitious and takes quite a bit of time to get through.

I don't want to read it all. But look at verses 23 and 24. I will establish one shepherd over them and he shall feed them, my servant David.

He shall feed them and be their shepherd and I Jehovah will be their God and my servant David a prince among them. I the Lord have spoken. Now this reference to David, actually believe it or not, this is the millennium that he is talking about and David himself will shepherd Israel but under Jesus because it says my servant David will shepherd my servant and follow my servant David.

I think more realistically David is a code name for the Messiah. The name of the Messiah was never revealed in Old Testament times. His actual name, of course figurative names like his name should be called Emmanuel in Isaiah 7.14 and his name should be called Wonderful, Counselor of the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace in Isaiah 9.6. So there are names really that are not so much his proper name as symbolic names or names descriptive of who he is.

In Jeremiah 23.5 it says his name should be called the Lord our Righteousness or Jehovah Sidcanu. These are different names for the Messiah but none of them are his proper name by which he was called when he was on earth. In other words the name Jesus is not revealed as the name of the Messiah.

But David is a good type of Jesus. Jesus was descended from David of course and we know that the Messiah was to be descended from David and he is a type of the Messiah. So I think for that reason Ezekiel and also Jeremiah does this and I believe there is one other prophet that does this and I think it might be Hosea who also refers to the Messiah in a passage and calls him David.

So this is a messianic passage and it is cast in the context of God disapproving of the leadership that Israel had and providing leadership of a better sort himself and that was a messianic passage. Now when Jesus said I am the good shepherd of the sheep then obviously he was identifying himself with this passage in chapter 34. Now of Ezekiel.

The leaders of Israel, the shepherds of Israel that Ezekiel was speaking against were the religious and political rulers who simply didn't care for the sheep and I think Jesus brings it up in this context. Of course the real context is that of the Old Testament of the Messiah being sent as a shepherd of the sheep. But the immediate context is the way this blind man was treated by the leaders of Israel.

He was one of their sheep and rather than caring for him they objected to the fact that he was healed. He was healed on the Sabbath and that bugged them and that made them find fault with the man who had healed him, Jesus. They didn't care about the well-being of their sheep.

They cared about themselves and their system and their traditions and so forth and anything that rocked the boat they didn't care about and they kicked him out. They not only didn't gather the scattered sheep they drove out the sheep and that provided a good backdrop for Jesus to talk about this and to bring up this imagery from Ezekiel. Here the leaders of Israel in his own day were very much like the leaders of Israel in Ezekiel's day.

They didn't care for the sheep and he could now apply the prediction that Ezekiel had made and say I'm the fulfillment of that. The shepherds of Israel are not good shepherds, in fact they're hirelings. They don't own the sheep and they don't care about the sheep

but God owns them and he cares about them.

So it's probably because of the treatment this blind man received and it's in the same conversation where the blind man is standing there having just recently been kicked out by the leaders that Jesus gives this utterance. So having that in view let's read it verse by verse and talk about what it means. Now here we're going to have Jesus giving two symbols of himself in the same story because we read of the door and we read of the shepherd and in verse 7 he says, most assuredly I say to you I am the door of the sheep but in verse 14 he says I am the good shepherd and also in verse 11 he says it.

I am the good shepherd. Now he's the door and he's the shepherd. Now in the parable as he's telling it or this illustration as it's called in verse 6, Jesus uses illustration.

There is a door and there's a shepherd and they're not the same but they both represent him. So I mean that's a bit confusing because he talks about the doorkeeper opens the door to the shepherd when he comes and lets the sheep out. Now I don't know how many of you have heard about the way sheep were tended in Israel.

It's not too hard to find information about this especially there's a lot been written about the 23rd psalm and about this chapter and so forth and I guess I've encountered the background material of so many different places I almost feel like everyone must know but that's probably not true. The shepherds in Israel would often not take the sheep home at night that is all the way back because their grazing would take them far afield from their home and they would often if the weather was decent keep them out overnight and just continue grazing in the same place the next day. To do that they had to have structures either temporary or permanent that could confine the sheep at night where the sheep could sleep and not only would the sheep therefore not run away but also it would be harder for predators to get them.

And these structures were usually a low wall about three feet tall maybe four feet tall either of a hedge or made of stone and it had an opening of course for the sheep to go in and out from. It did not because it was usually out in the middle of nowhere it didn't have a hinged door or anything like that and the shepherd typically would sleep across the doorway. This would mean that of course the sheep could not escape without his learning of it because they'd trample on him.

It also meant that no predator could get into the sheep without getting to him first. In a sense that made him vulnerable more vulnerable than the sheep and in a sense by lying there in the doorway he was laying down his life for the sheep a good shepherd would do that. Of course that raises issues about animal rights and the value of human life versus animal life.

I mean is it really right for a man to lay down his life for an animal? That would seem wrong to do as a matter of fact in most situations but the point is the shepherd doesn't

really want to die for his sheep he just wants he's willing to protect his sheep because that's his charge. That's his family's livelihood and by protecting his sheep he's protecting his family or his master's goods or whatever and it's a dying thing for him to face life threatening situations. In the interest of the others whose interests he's defending.

It's not so much that a sheep's life is worth saving so much after all sheep were slaughtered every day for food except men were not and so it's kind of an awkward thing that a good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. It doesn't seem like the right values to surrender human life for animal life but I think what it means is that the shepherd's whole occupation is one of risking his life. His life is on the line all the time for the sheep and particularly at night.

When the shepherd like the sheep had to sleep but he slept in a particularly vulnerable spot. If a wolf or a lion or a bear came along with their sheep they'd get the shepherd first and that's what Jesus I think is pointing out that the shepherd's life and his care for the sheep jeopardizes his own security in order to keep the sheep secure. Now in that sense the shepherd could be said to be the door and the shepherd although that's not necessarily the way Jesus tells the illustration.

A shepherd sleeping in the doorway became himself the human door you know through which anyone going in or out would have to pass and yet that's not the illustration he makes here because he talks about the shepherd enters by the door and the doorkeeper opens for him so he's thinking principally not of a sheepfold that has a you know that doesn't have a hinged door it has a doorkeeper and so forth. No doubt depending on the location and the wealth of the owner of the sheep and so forth some would have servants who just have hinged doors and so forth and they'd tend to them but the illustration is not the details of the illustration are not to be oppressed but the thought of the illustration is. I mean for instance to try to determine who is the doorkeeper in this parable.

Is the doorkeeper the will you know to open to Jesus your heart you know if he's knocking at your door? Are you the doorkeeper? Is your will the doorkeeper? Is the Holy Spirit the doorkeeper? All kinds of speculations have been done about this but I don't know that Jesus would have us make a distinct identification of the doorkeeper with some particular entity. The point is the illustration is used very loosely by him in pointing out that he is the door seen one way he's the shepherd seen another way and yet the door and the shepherd in this particular story he tells or this illustration are not one and the same. There's a doorkeeper there's a door that has to be opened and the shepherd just comes and calls and the doorkeeper opens them and so forth.

So let's not try to press the point of verses 1 through 5 into too tight an identification with details but to realize that Jesus is talking about a lifestyle of shepherds that

everyone was familiar with and of sheep because many times shepherds of several flocks would share a sheepfold that is one of these enclosures out on the hillside because you know there might be a lot of sheep under other people's care and different owners that were out sharing the general area and at night it would be convenient for them to all put them together. Now I have read what travelers to Palestine have written about this many times and one fellow I don't know if it was Operator Sam or someone else who had been to Palestine said he was out on the hillsides and he saw the shepherds and their sheep and they put their sheep in a sheepfold they mixed them all together in a sheepfold and he said he wondered how they'd sort them all out in the morning. I mean the sheep looked so much alike they didn't have brands on them or anything to identify them.

He was wondering how the sheep from 3 or 4 different flocks would be sorted out by their shepherds in the morning because they all looked so much alike and he said he slept the night there and in the morning each shepherd would come to the door of the sheepfold and call his sheep and they literally knew the voice of their shepherd and those that were his came out. The others stayed and then the next shepherd would come and call his sheep in his sheepfold and his sheep would come out and that it was literally the case as Jesus said. I mean you might have known that if you ever tended sheep.

I wouldn't have known that because I never tended sheep but what Jesus was talking about was something all his listeners were acquainted with. I mean a lot of them were shepherds. They knew this phenomenon that sheep recognize the voice of their shepherd and when they hear their shepherd call they come.

They follow him. Alright so that's what he's talking about there. He says the shepherd doesn't have to climb over the wall.

He doesn't have to sneak around and do something illegitimate to get the sheep to follow him or to possess him. All he has to do is speak and those who are really his sheep will come out. Now he says that he's the good shepherd and his sheep know his voice.

So the idea here is that all he has to do is speak. All he has to do is go in the temple and teach or preach on the hillside or whatever and those who are his real sheep, the ones that the father is giving him, they will respond. He doesn't have to resort to trickery or he doesn't have to resort to Madison Avenue advertising techniques or church growth techniques.

He doesn't have to resort to any psychological strategies. All he has to do is just speak the words of his father and those who are his father's people, his sheep, will come to him. And that's what he witnessed, he saw.

Now others, like the Pharisees, the people weren't following them. I should say the chief

priests, the leaders of Israel, the people weren't following them. People didn't like them and yet they were trying everything they could to keep the loyalty of the people for themselves.

That's why they were trying to kill Jesus. They were threatening to throw people out of the synagogue if they said anything good about Jesus and so forth. I mean they were obviously insecure about their following.

And I think they are the thieves and the robbers that Jesus is talking about here. The thieves and the robbers, they can't just stand at the door of the sheepfold and call the sheep and have them follow because they don't have any sheep. They don't own the sheep.

They're hireless. They don't care for the sheep. When real danger comes, they'd rather sacrifice the sheep than sacrifice themselves.

It's quite clear for everyone. There are examples that the Pharisees' whole traditional way of interpreting religion was challenged by Jesus healing on the Sabbath. It called into question the whole validity of their ideas about Sabbath keeping.

I mean he did a miracle. They could hardly deny it was from God. And yet he did it in a way and on a time that they thought God would never allow such a thing to be done and that God wouldn't approve of.

So their whole life and their whole interpretation of religion was challenged by Jesus' action. And instead of responding like sheep would, they responded like evil shepherds and tried to kill him and tried to kill those who followed him or tried to get rid of those who followed him and kick him out. And these are the thieves and the robbers.

They're claiming a position for themselves that isn't rightfully theirs. Jesus was the shepherd of Israel, therefore he should be the king. The leaders of Israel didn't much want Jesus to take their power from them and that's why they eventually killed him.

They were seeking illegitimately to be shepherds like a thief or a robber taking a sheep that isn't his and wants it for himself. And that's what Jesus is suggesting. These guys, these thieves and robbers climbing over the wall is just basically I think a symbol of the fact that they're not capable of doing what the true shepherd can do.

Just call and they'll come. These people have to resort to all kinds of sneaky things and stuff to try to maintain their control over the sheep like the thief does. Now by the way, with reference to the thief, it says in verse 10, which we'll come back to some of the earlier verses in a moment, but in verse 10 it says the thief does not come except to steal, to kill and to destroy.

I read this verse in this connection because we were discussing who the thieves were. I

think the thieves were the Jewish leaders. They were false shepherds and hirelings and thieves.

I mean Jesus used everything except shepherd to describe them. But this verse 10 is often quoted as if the thief is Satan. At least I've almost always heard it quoted that way.

In fact, it's one of the most predictable things that when people are talking about Satan, if there's a sermon or a study on Satan, this verse will be quoted by him. The thief comes to rob, to kill and to destroy. Well, that's not necessarily the context.

The thief, as far as we know, is not Satan because thieves are spoken of generically earlier in the chapter. And while it is true that Satan may well be a thief, that doesn't seem to be the focus that Jesus has here. He's talking about the contrast not between himself and Satan, but the contrast between him and the leaders of Israel.

How he's a totally different sort of leader than they are. He's a real shepherd and they're thieves. And by the way, the Word of Faith people use this scripture a lot in order to support the prosperity doctrine because they say, well, it's the devil who wants to steal from you.

It's the devil who makes you poor. Jesus said, I have come that they might have life and have it more abundantly. See, that's in the same verse.

The thief comes to rob, to kill and destroy, but I have come that they might have life and they might have it more abundantly. This is and has always been a favorite proof text for the prosperity people. They say, you see, it's the devil that steals from you.

If your circumstances are leading you toward poverty and your things are being taken from you, that's not the Lord. That's not following the Lord. That's the devil.

You need to rebuke the devil and tell him to get his hands off your property and so forth. And Jesus came so that you'd have an abundant life. And I can't tell you how many people, even those who are not familiar with the prosperity doctrine per se, that is people who are not in the Word of Faith camp, who have used that abundant life line to speak of an affluent life.

I guess because they think of abundance in terms of finances. However, I'd like to show you something that Jesus said in Luke chapter 12. I want to clarify some misunderstandings on this particular verse in John 10.

In Luke 12, verse 13 says, Then one from the crowd said to him, Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. But he said to him, Man, who made me a judge or an arbitrator over you? And he said to them, Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses. Now, compare that with John 10.10. Jesus said, I have come that they might have life and they might

have it more abundantly.

Now Jesus said a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. In other words, whatever Jesus meant when he said, I have come that they might have life and have it more abundantly, he was not saying he wanted their abundance to be measured in terms of their possessions. He was not talking about abundance of possessions because a man's life isn't measured in those terms.

A man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses. So whatever the abundant life is, Jesus certainly put no priority at all on abundance of possessions and he didn't equate those things with life at all. In fact, of course, Jesus' words, I have come that they might have life and have it more abundantly, suggest that it's not an abundance of something in a person's life, but the abundance of life itself.

Eternal life is an abundant thing. I mean, there's a lot of it. Forever.

It's eternal. It's infinite. And he came to bring abundance of life, not abundance in life.

But life itself is the thing which he wants us to have in abundance. Now, that is in contrast to the thief who wants to kill. Jesus wants to give life.

He wants to give abundance. Now, on the point of the thief coming to rob and to kill and to destroy, and the idea that this is, you know, it's the devil who wants to take away your life. He wants to take away your possessions.

He wants to make you poor and sick and so forth. And they use that scripture to prove it. I'd point out to you that in the context, Jesus is not talking about the sheep being robbed.

That is, the thief doesn't come and take something from the sheep. He's trying to steal sheep from the shepherd. A thief in this illustration is not stealing anything from sheep.

He's not coming at night, for instance, and stealing their wool. He's stealing the sheep themselves from their shepherd. That's what a thief did.

He came to steal the sheep so he could have the sheep for himself. So, whether we made the thief out to be the devil or not, it's not anything to do with how the devil affects your life in terms of, you know, you having abundance or little. The devil doesn't come to rob you of those things.

At least, that's not what this verse is saying. If the devil is in view at all, it would just simply be saying that he wants to rip you off from the Lord. He wants you to be stolen from God, who is your true shepherd.

He wants you to belong to himself. Now, again, I'm saying that in the context, the devil probably isn't. Satan's probably not the thief in question.

I don't know if they use this verse, but they do use a verse later in the same chapter, which is also about the shepherd. And that's in verses 28 and 29. 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 from my Father's hand. Just before that, he said, my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and so forth. So, the idea is that no one can snatch his sheep from his Father's hand.

Yeah, but the fact of the matter is that his sheep do wander. I mean, in a sense. I mean, in the Old Testament, that was his complaint.

Isaiah 53, he says, all we like sheep have gone astray. I guess not so much going after the voice of strangers, but just wandering off the path we should have been on. The sheep aren't always where they should be.

And sometimes they stray to their own doom. You know, I mean, sheep can do that. Now, it can't be said that anyone plucked them from the shepherd's hand in a case like that.

The shepherd would fight to the death to prevent a thief from taking them. And therefore, and since God is greater than all, Jesus says, my Father who gave them to me is greater than all, and no one can pluck them from his hand. It's like saying, it would take someone stronger than God to pluck them from his hand.

Any sheep that are in his protection, in his hand, no one can take them. But, it's not the same thing as saying they can't wander off on their own. Because shepherds, even strong shepherds, who would defend their sheep from bears and lions and thieves, and successfully do so, still sometimes would have sheep that wandered off.

And the Bible complains about that fact, that some of God's sheep have wandered off. So, once again, we need to be careful about pressing the analogy too far, making more of it than is intended. To say that no one can pluck them from God's hand is saying that no thief is going to get them from him as long as he's on duty.

But, if you wander off on your own, that's another story. See, no one, by twisting your arm, or torturing you, or tempting you, or whatever, can force you to become a non-Christian. God can keep you secure.

But, if your love for God grows cold, and you don't press in, and you become lukewarm, and you just kind of drift, there's many warnings in Scripture against that possibility happening. In that case, it's not the same scenario that's being described here. The shepherds, or the so-called shepherds, or the leaders of Israel, were more like thieves than like shepherds.

And the sheep, the real sheep, like this guy, this blind guy, he wasn't fooled by them. He said, oh, you guys are pretty dull if you don't know where this man's from. How could a man open the eyes of the blind if he wasn't from God? He was unimpressed with these Jewish leaders, but he was very impressed with Jesus, that's because he was one of the sheep.

He recognized in Jesus' voice, the voice of the true shepherd. Now, actually I've jumped ahead to verse 10, simply because we're talking about the whole imagery of the thief, and that's an important point to consider. I need to go back and deal with some of the earlier verses, though.

It says in verse 3, concerning the real shepherd, who's not a thief or a robber, To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. So he knows each one of his sheep by name, and obviously they follow him, and he says that a little later, that they know his voice and follow him. And when he brings them 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. That is, they don't recognize those voices as their shepherd's voice. A person who is following Jesus Christ is showing himself to be a sheep of his.

That's the description. They follow me. My sheep follow me.

My own sheep follow me. If you're following the shepherd, then you're one of his sheep. Now, you could, of course, stop following the shepherd, but I don't think any of you will.

And I seriously, my thought is that most persons who stop following Jesus probably never were his sheep in the first place. The only reason I say most, instead of all, is that Calvinists would say all of them. Anyone who follows Jesus for a while, and then doesn't follow him anymore, they say never was a sheep of his.

And I think that's true, because the Bible does talk about his sheep getting lost at times, when they're not following him. But, as long as you're following the shepherd, you're clearly showing yourself to be one of his sheep. The question of whether, if you wander away to your doom, whether you were ever a sheep or not, is kind of a moot point once you're in hell.

It doesn't matter whether you were once a sheep of his or not. If you're not when you die, that's what's really going to matter. But the point is, following Jesus is the place of safety and security, and those who follow him know his voice.

Now, I want to say something about this expression, they know his voice, in verse 4. Because it's a verse frequently used when we talk about divine guidance. That God's sheep know his voice. And a lot of Christians feel like, well, I'm not sure I know God's

voice.

I mean, I get impressions, but I don't know if that's Jesus speaking to me. I don't know if that's God, or just my own mind, or if that's maybe a deception from the enemy, or what. I mean, how do I know his voice? Well, there's two ways I would, two directions I would go with this.

On the one hand, if he means that the sheep need to know his voice while following him, if that's what he means, then he is referring to divine guidance. And we can say that God has to take the initiative to speak in a way that you can understand, if you're going to be required to follow him. A sheep cannot hear a voice that isn't uttered audibly.

And if a sheep doesn't know where his shepherd is because his shepherd hasn't spoken loud enough for him to hear, it's not the sheep's fault, it's the shepherd's fault. And if a shepherd intends for the sheep to go anywhere, he must speak in a voice loud enough to be heard, so his sheep who knows his voice will hear it. Now, when we make that, when we make application to personal guidance in the Christian life, it really puts the responsibility on God.

It puts the responsibility on Jesus to speak to us if he has something to say, to speak to us in a way that we can understand intelligibly. It's for us only to remain sheep. A sheep is an animal unlike, say, a goat.

A sheep is an animal that by nature follows. It's a following animal. It's its nature to follow, it wants to follow, it irresistibly follows.

The herd, and the herd follows the shepherd. Now, if it's in your nature to follow Jesus, that is, if that's your commitment, you're going to do what he says, then it's up to him to speak in a voice you can hear. And as long as your heart is surrendered to him and wanting to do his will, then you've done your part.

If you don't hear anything from him, maybe he's not saying anything right now. Actually, I think as the shepherds would lead the sheep around, it's not so much that they called them by name while they were walking, they called them out of the fold in the morning by name. But the sheep followed the shepherd by sight more than by sound, as far as the daily grazing was concerned.

The shepherd probably whistled for them or did something to get their attention when it was time to move, but they saw him, they kept their eyes on the shepherd and followed him by sight. They do that still. And, you know, following Jesus is very largely a matter of keeping our eyes on him, of following his example, seeing what he did in situations.

And we do hear his voice, you know, in some ways too. But I guess what I'm saying is I'm not sure this verse is intended to make you worried about whether you're one of his sheep because you haven't heard an audible voice, you haven't heard something you

know to be his voice before. You are a Christian because you heard his voice.

And the way that Jesus uses the expression hearing his voice earlier in John suggests it has more to do with conversion than with guidance. It has more to do with recognizing Christ initially than it has to do with hearing him on a daily basis. If you look back at John chapter 5, for example, in John chapter 5, verse 25 says, Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming and now is when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.

Well, we know that in one of those senses it's at the resurrection, but what's the other? He said the hour is coming and now is. In what sense were people at that moment hearing this voice of the Son of Man and coming to life? Well, the previous verse says, verse 24, Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in him who sent me has everlasting life, shall not come into judgment, but is passed from death into life. The dead hear his voice and come to life.

They've passed from death into life. If what? They've heard his words and believed in him who sent him. That is to say they've listened to Jesus, recognized him for who he is and embraced him as the Lord.

Sheep can discern who Jesus is. They get the revelation. And to hear his voice, in this case, I think means to recognize his voice, to recognize who he is, to hearken to it.

And that is also apparently what he's talking about in John chapter 10 where he says, The shepherd calls his sheep, they recognize his voice, they know his voice and they follow him. Now it doesn't mean he keeps calling them all day long verbally. Once they've come out of the foals and they've gathered as a flock, they follow him by sight for the most part.

They follow his example. They go where he goes. They go where he leads.

And they follow his leadership. But it's not all hearing his voice. It's more the initial thing.

Separating between him and other shepherds, making the decision of whether you follow him or follow someone else. This is, I think, the decision that's been made. That recognizing the true shepherd as opposed to the false shepherd is something that you did at conversion.

You heard his voice. You came to life. He hears my voice, he says, you know, it's passed from death unto life.

And so I guess what I'm saying is the tendency to use this passage about my sheep hear my voice, about divine guidance in the life of the believer. There may be some application, but I really think it's principally about conversion, not about daily guidance. Now I don't mean to take away from the idea that God does speak to us.

God does. God speaks to us in many ways as Christians. And, you know, even though this verse might not be primarily talking about that, I don't want you to think I'm trying to annul that reality.

But God speaks to us in a lot of different ways. Frankly, he speaks to me more often through the Bible than any other way. Sometimes I've heard, I've gotten impressions which I believe were from God, and when I acted on it, it would appear the fruit was good, and I'd have to say I guess that was God, it would seem.

And other times I've gotten impressions that I thought were God, and they weren't. You know, I'm not always sure which voice I'm hearing. But the scripture, see, that's an important place to hear him, because Jesus said, he that hears my words.

There they are in the Gospels. He that hears my words and believes in him that sent me is the one who hears my voice. And so he's talking really about initial recognition of who he is, and recognizing him to be your shepherd that God has sent.

Those that are true sheep of his, God reveals to them who Jesus is. It's made known by revelation. Remember when Peter said, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus said, flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven has revealed it to you.

It's an inward witness. Just like the sheep instinctively have come to recognize who their shepherd is, those whom God has given to Christ recognize who their shepherd is and come to him. And so I think he's talking here not about the Christian walk.

After all, this blind man had not embarked on a Christian walk yet, nor was he going to be following Jesus around as far as we know. We don't have any record that this man followed Jesus geographically after this point. He may have never heard Jesus speak again.

But he recognized the voice of his shepherd in Christ when we see in verse 35 of chapter 9. Chapter 9, 35, Jesus heard that they had cast this guy out, and when he had found him, he said to him, do you believe in the Son of God? He answered, who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him? Jesus said to him, you have both seen him, and it is he who is talking with you. Then he said, Lord, I believe. He recognized his shepherd.

He recognized that he was the Lord. And that's, I think, all that Jesus is getting at here. Though, again, there are certainly other places in the Bible that talk about being guided by the Spirit, led by God.

And it's a different study, a different issue, really, than I think is being addressed in this passage. Though this passage, the reason I say it, I bring it up here, is because it's often used that way. You know, the sheep know his voice.

If you don't hear Jesus, you know, and you don't recognize his voice, then, you know, there's something deficient. Maybe you're not a sheep. I don't think that's what it's talking about.

I think if you've come to God, genuinely, it's because you did hear his voice. You did recognize him as a shepherd, and that's all he's talking about there. You're really one of his sheep, then.

Verse 7. And Jesus said to them, again, most assuredly, I say to you, I'm the door of the sheep. All who ever came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. Now, all that came before me are thieves and robbers.

It's interesting to know what he's talking about here. Some have felt, I've actually read commentaries, and think that he's actually implicating everyone who's ever come before he did, including the Old Testament prophets, and everyone, even Moses. Not to say that they weren't prophets of God, but that they were imperfect.

They were imperfect men, and more like thieves and robbers than they were like God. I don't think that's what he's saying. In the context of saying, I'm the good shepherd, which he says in a moment, or I'm the door, he's saying anyone else who came before who pretended to be the shepherd, or who pretended to be the door, they were imposters, they were thieves and robbers.

Anyone, including the Jewish leaders who were in power at that time, who came before Jesus did. And any of the false messiahs, like Judas of Galilee, who started the zealot party, and many others who had been false messiahs, they were all phony. They all claimed to be the shepherd, but they were not.

And when he says, all who came before me, I think it needs to be restricted to all those who were making claims like his. That is, all who claimed ownership of the sheep. The prophets never made such claims for themselves, so he's not implicating them in this statement.

He says, I am the door, if anyone enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. Now once again, I think it's the desire to press the details of the parable too far, that has led people to say, well what does it mean to go in and out? Does that mean we go into fellowship and we go out to evangelize?