

John 10:1-6 "Listen to His Voice. Follow His Lead."

JOH 10:1-6 "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2 The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. 3 The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." 6 Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

As we consider our text this morning we need to keep in mind the context which has to do with the blind man being healed by Christ and subsequently being excommunicated by the Pharisees because of his insistence that Jesus was not a sinner as the Pharisees said, but rather a prophet sent from God.

This former blind beggar had come to believe on the one who sought him out after he was thrown out of the Synagogue.

JOH 9:35-38 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." 37 Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." 38 Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshipped him.

What Jesus had done in directing this man to Himself, as the one and only Messiah, the leaders in Israel should have been doing all along. It was the duty of these leaders of Israel to feed and guide the people of God in such a way as to bring them into the presence of God.

In other words, the primary duty of the priests, the scribes and Pharisees was to act as the shepherds of Israel as they directed the nation to the One who desired to bring them into green pastures and beside still waters.

And as we come to our text this morning we see Jesus rebuking these leaders for not doing their jobs before the Lord and in essence relinquishing their responsibilities to the God/man, who

appeared to them, as a mere itinerant preacher with no formal education.

That would be like the Pastor and his staff of leaders giving the responsibility to lead and feed the church to the janitor.

Now, Jesus was no janitor, but in His rebuke of these leaders in Israel He makes it clear that they should have recognized who He was and then in turn direct the nation of Israel to Him as the Messiah. That's what a shepherd of God does; leads people to the Lord who saves.

And so, as we come to our text we need to keep this in mind as Jesus now uses imagery of sheep, sheep pens, and shepherds, all with the intent of showing the responsibility of caring for the people of God.

JOH 10:1-3 "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2 The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. 3 The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."

A quick glance of these verses might suggest that Jesus is talking about the kingdom of God, or heaven, and how people are trying to get there through their own means, but the context doesn't allow this explanation.

Remember, this whole passage has to do with Israel and how the leaders have fallen down in their responsibility to feed and protect and direct them to the One who has come for them.

When Jesus says, "the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber," He is talking about the leaders in Israel who are fleecing the flock of God and are therefore showing themselves to be the illegitimate keepers of sheep.

The man Jesus refers to in verse one is the person who is supposed to be a shepherd of Israel. But instead of being a shepherd this person proves himself to be something much different because of the way he tries to get into the sheep pen.

Instead of entering into the sheep pen through the normal, or God-ordained means, these particular people are climbing over the fence, which only a thief or robber would do.

Now, before we go further with this imagery it might be instructive to understand what all of this meant to a Jew of Christ's day. I dare say that most of us here are not shepherds and don't need to understand the nuances of how sheep are kept safe.

In his commentary on John, A.W. Pink points out how sheep in any particular village in the Palestine area of Christ's day, would have been cared for.

In those days, wild animals and thieves were a real threat to a shepherd and his flock. And so, what the shepherds of a village would do was to collectively construct what is referred to in verse one as a sheep pen where all of the shepherds of that place could put their sheep at night when they weren't feeding.

This sheep pen was a large enclosure which could protect each flock of each shepherd. The wall that surrounded this sheep pen was often some ten or twelve feet high.

At the end of the day all of the shepherds would lead their sheep from the pastures back into the village. The only way into the sheep pen was one door or gate that was protected by a watchman or gatekeeper.

This gatekeeper knew all of the shepherds and their sheep. One by one each shepherd along with his flock would pass through the gate as the gate keeper opened the door for them.

But this wasn't the most important job of the gatekeeper. His job really started once all of the sheep were placed inside. The shepherds were now able to go back to their homes and families knowing that their livelihood was safe in the hands of a person who was faithful to carry out his responsibility to protect their investment.

If a wild animal tried to get in the gatekeeper would fight it off. If a thief tried to get in and make off with the sheep the gatekeeper would alert the villagers and thus protect the sheep from being stolen.

By the way, you'll notice in verse one that the one who tries to climb up some other way rather than going through the gate is referred to as a thief and a robber.

They are actually two different Greek words describing two different types of evildoers. The word for thief in our text is a word

which describes a person who uses cunning to get what he wants. He's the slick talker who deceives and tricks others.

The word for robber is a word describing the person who simply plunders. He's the violent person who doesn't deceive but simply takes what he wants through any means.

And so, Jesus equates the leaders in Israel as being both types of people; those who deceive the nation to keep their place of prestige and their power, and those who wouldn't think twice of murdering someone to keep their place.

This is why, for example, we see some of the Pharisees plotting to kill Jesus when He comes to Jerusalem. They would be considered the robbers of the sheep. Other Pharisees tried to use cunning to discredit Jesus, as in the case where they tried to trick Jesus with what they thought were hard questions. They might be considered to be thieves who deceive to get what they want.

And so, as we come to verse two we see the contrast between the thief or robber and the legitimate shepherd who is known and respected by the village and who doesn't need to sneak into the sheep pen, but who is welcomed by the watchman or gate keeper.

JOH 10:2-3 The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. 3 The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

Again, don't forget who Jesus is speaking to here in our text. He is speaking to the Pharisees. This is a direct confrontation of these people who have been given the responsibility by God Himself to shepherd His people. And Jesus is accusing them of being thieves and robbers who plunder the sheep of God.

All of this needs to be put into the context of what the prophet Ezekiel records for us.

EZE 34:1-3, 9-11 The word of the LORD came to me: 2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? 3 You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. 7 "'Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: 8 As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has

been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock, 9 therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: 10 This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them. 11 "For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them.

This is quite an indictment against the shepherds of Israel as it shows how God Himself gave them the responsibility to shepherd His sheep. But what is encouraging here is that God will ultimately step in and take back the responsibility to shepherd His people.

And by the way, this rebuke found in Ezekiel would not have escaped these Pharisees whom Jesus speaks to, as it is inferred that they have relinquished their responsibility to shepherd the people of God.

And what this does is to place Jesus, once again, in a position of being the very God and Savior who comes to rescue His people as the Great Shepherd.

But the imagery in our text suggests that Jesus, who is the Great Shepherd, can and will place faithful under-shepherds in charge to protect His flock. These are the ones in verse three who call the sheep and lead them out because the sheep trust them. But above all, it is Jesus who is trusted by His sheep.

JOH 10:3 The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

Now, as we said earlier, the watchman was a person put in place by the shepherd who was trusted and faithful to the task of protecting the flock. It was his duty to make sure that only the shepherd of the sheep took those sheep out of the sheep pen.

In light of Jesus being the Great Shepherd we might ask the question, who is the watchman being portrayed in verse three?

Remember, that the watchman would encourage the flock to come to the shepherd as the gate was opened. If Jesus is the shepherd seeking to come for His flock then we have two answers to the question, who is the watchman?

The first answer would be the one chosen by God to herald the entrance of the shepherd. This would be the one who stood at the gate if you will, and announced to the flock of Israel the coming of the shepherd.

Well, we know who that is. It's the one who fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah.

ISA 40:3 A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.

This was John the Baptist whom the Pharisees addressed, recognizing his ministry as one of messenger and forerunner of the one to come.

JOH 1:22-23 Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" 23 John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"

And so, in a broad sense, John the Baptist was the watchman or gatekeeper who announced the coming of the shepherd to his flock Israel. But in a greater sense the one who keeps the flock safe and protected is God Himself who announces and watches at the gate.

Well, if Jesus Christ is the Great Shepherd coming to the watchman or gatekeeper to get His sheep, who is ultimately the watchman? Well, we know the answer to that as well. It is the One who is commissioned to point all people to the Shepherd. It is the One who is able to open the ears of the sheep so that they can hear the voice of the Shepherd.

This watchman, this protector and comforter and guide is none other than God the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who brings us into the presence of the Shepherd. It is the Holy Spirit who desires to see the Shepherd's sheep be fed and watered and strengthened and encouraged as they spend time with the Shepherd.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to exalt the name of Christ who lays down His life for the sheep. Nothing pleases the Holy Spirit more than to see the sheep well fed and reproducing as they in turn bear witness of the Great Shepherd.

It is the Holy Spirit who leads us into the sheep pen and promises us that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ our Shepherd.

EPH 1:13-14 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession - to the praise of his glory.

It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to follow our Shepherd, Christ Jesus, in such a way where we hear the voice of our Shepherd and follow where He leads.

JOH 10:3 The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

Sometimes we get the idea that salvation is some sort of shotgun approach whereby God closes His eyes and hopes He hits someone who will hear the message. Instead, what we see here is that our Great Shepherd knows us by name. In fact, we are told that He knew us by name before the creation of the world.

EPH 1:4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

Our Lord knew us before the first atomic particle was created by Him and made part of the physical universe we live in today. In other words, from eternity past, our Lord has purposed that you and I would live in fellowship with Him forever in Christ.

He calls us by name and He leads us out. In the case of Israel, He led them out from under the law which was put in place by the Lord as a tutor and a watchman in one sense, until the Shepherd would finally come for them and redeem them from their sin.

In our case, be we Gentiles or Jews under one Shepherd, He has led us out from under the bondage of our sin and has brought us to Himself. And yet, what is so sad in many cases today is that much of the flock of Christ are being led by shepherds that don't model the Great Shepherd.

While it is true that God has given His flock those people who are gifted in areas, through which the body of Christ is built up for works of service as they advance the Kingdom of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ, much of what passes for the "church" is anemic at best and heretical at worst.

Of course, Peter has warned of such a situation which he addresses for the church in these last days.

2 Peter 2:1-3 ^{NAU} But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. ² Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; ³ and in *their* greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

This is all part of the falling away from the faith in these latter days that Paul addresses.

^{NAU} **1 Timothy 4:1** But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,

And of course this progresses to what is called the apostasy before the return of Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:2-5 ² [do] not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³ Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come unless the apostasy comes first*, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. ⁵ Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?

The flock has been fleeced over the centuries by individuals and institutions disguised as the “church” that was meant to equip the saints to go out into the world, but has, in many cases become an end in itself to perpetuate itself, not doing the real work of making mature disciples who are given the responsibility to think biblically for themselves, like the Bereans, who by the way were not “members” of any local church, but were individuals who happened to be part of a local synagogue which, for the most part, was not sympathetic to Paul’s teachings on the Messiah and His salvation.

The modern expression of the local church is often equated with that steeple-topped building or slick marketing strategy that

translates into a corporate structure that more resembles a wanna-be-empire than the living stones that make up the body of Christ in a local setting.

I know that many will argue that being under the “protection” or the “covering” of a local body with local leaders is necessarily what every believer must seek out and submit to, but this is the exact same mindset of the Pharisees who demanded conformity and allegiance upon penalty of excommunication.

To suggest that being in a local body with corrupt or bad teachers and leaders is better than not being part of any body at all is simply not sound reasoning.

From a three part article written by Bojidar Marinov, entitled, *“And In One Holy Local Church”: The Ghettoization of Protestantism*, he addresses a number of issues raised by modern day ecclesiologists who debunk the “lone ranger” Christian as always being out of accord with the word of God when he says this:

“lone rangers” have been usually busy trying to repair the damage done by the ecclesiastics—and among those “lone rangers” one can mention a number of names like R.J. Rushdoony, Arthur Pink, Leonard Ravenhill, etc. Believing that “lone rangers” are by default dangerous to the Church while institutional churchmen are by default faithful Christians doesn’t reveal a sound Christian mind; it only reveals an amazing blindness to the covenant realities of our age.

Marinov then mentions a number of lone rangers in the Scriptures as being those men who left the “church” of their day, for various reasons; men like Moses in the desert for 40 years after leaving Egypt for defending fellow Jews, Elijah in the wilderness fed by Ravens and accused by King Ahab of being a “troubler of Israel” (IKings 18:17).

The apostle Paul, whose letters encourage the healthy advancement of the local body never submitted to any leader or religious system that found those leaders assuming a role or a teaching that was out of accord with God’s word and he found himself on several occasions confronting such leaders or systems as the lone ranger in the room. Paul confronting Peter and the Jews in the early church, come to mind.

I'm not suggesting that Christians should not seek out other Christians to find a place for fellowship, growth and worship of Christ, but in these last days it is imperative to have the kind of discernment that enables believers to hear the voice of our Shepherd amidst the noise of "shepherds" who may not be calling with the same message.

Quoting J.C. RYLE Marinov writes this: "*The particular branches of the Church are not infallible. Any one of them may err. Many of them have fallen foully, or have been swept away. Where is the Church of Ephesus at this day? Where is the Church of Sardis at the present time? Where is Augustine's Church of Hippo in Africa? Where is Cyprian's Church of Carthage? They are all gone! Not a vestige of any of them is left! Shall we then be content to err — merely because the Church errs? Will our company be any excuse for our error? Will our erring in company with the Church remove our responsibility for our own souls? Surely it is a thousand times better for a man to stand alone and be saved — than to err in company with the Church, and be lost! It is better to "prove all things" — and go to Heaven; than to say, "I dare not think for myself" — and go to Hell!"*

Surely something to think about, but I digress as Jesus continues to address the Jews.

JOH 10:4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

Notice that following and hearing the voice of the Shepherd go hand in hand. One thing this shows us is that our ability to hear the voice of the Great Shepherd is commensurate to Him giving us ears to hear.

In fact, Jesus points this very thing out to the Pharisees as He shows them that the reason they will not follow the Lord is because they refuse to hear what the Lord says.

JOH 8:43-47 ***Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say.*** 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45 Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! 46 Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? 47 He who

belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

You and I in Christ are able to hear the voice of our Great Shepherd because we belong to Him. And we belong to Him because He has sought us out and has brought us to Himself as He has given us eyes to see and ears to hear.

And so, in a very real sense we know the voice of our Savior. Have you ever wondered why you feel ashamed when you do something which is out of accord with God's desire for your life? Part of it has to do with the voice of our Lord speaking to your heart. You hear Him as His word is inscribed on your heart.

And praise God, in most of those cases, after we hear the Lord and sense that we are grieving Him, we turn from our path and get back on the path where the Lord is leading us as we follow Him once again.

But unless we are willing to seek the voice of the Lord we will be inclined to listen to strange voices. The closer we get to our Shepherd, the more we hear His voice, and the more we respond to His voice, the less likely we will ever follow after a stranger.

This is what Jesus meant in our text.

JOH 10:5 But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."

What our Lord is saying here is that when the sheep learn to trust their shepherd and when they grow confident in his loving care of them they will always be suspect of a stranger who has not proved himself in their presence.

And by this analogy Jesus means to teach that there is such a close union between sheep and shepherd that the sheep will always prefer to follow wherever their shepherd leads. But again, this presumes that the sheep are hearing the voice of their shepherd. And so, when it comes to sheep in the animal world this analogy will always work.

But Jesus doesn't mean to suggest that sheep in the spiritual world are not prone to wander. Sheep in the animal world only have one nature. Their nature is to follow. Sheep however, in the spiritual world have a nature, albeit a new nature, that often competes with the flesh.

And so what happens is that the flock of Christ can and often times do, choose not to listen and follow the Great Shepherd. And this is why it is so important to make that conscious choice to seek the things above and to be in the word of God, because it is through the word that we can hear the voice of Christ.

And as we listen to His voice and are encouraged by His voice we will be open to follow where He leads and grow in this relationship that we have with our Great Shepherd. This is precisely what Peter tells us in his first epistle.

1PE 2:2-3 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, 3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

We need to listen to the Lord, but we also need to follow where He leads. To say we listen to our Shepherd and yet not follow Him is the equivalent of what James says in his letter to the church.

JAM 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

We want to be “doer” sheep. We want to be sheep who reproduce as we live this life out in this world in the power of the Spirit to the glory of God. We want to be sheep who hear and listen to our Great Shepherd and whose only desire is to be led out into green pastures to commune with our God.

We are gathered together this morning to do that very thing. Jesus has led us out into such pastures to listen to Him, to feed on Him, to commune with Him. And once we have been fed and nourished on His word and have had the opportunity to personally hear from Him, He tells us to go.

Go out into all the world with the greatest news this world has ever heard. And pray that the Lord will open the ears of the deaf and they too may hear the voice of the Great Shepherd and live.

We know that many will stop their ears just as these Pharisees.

JOH 10:6 Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

But, despite their inability to hear Jesus at this time our Lord didn't stop telling them of their need for the Shepherd who can lead them to life. So, too, should we ever give this good news away. To God be the glory!