

Comments on John 10

The shepherd and flock themes employed in this chapter have their roots in the Law (cf. Gen. 49:24, Num. 27:15-18), but are later developed to a large extent in the Prophets (cf. Isa. 40:10-11, Isa. 56:9-12, Jer. 12:10, Jer. 17:16, Jer. 33:13-18, Ezek. 34, Micah 3, Micah 5:1-5a, Micah 7:14-20, Zech. 11, Zech. 13:7-9, also cp. Ps. 14, D&C 33:4). As these passages indicate, the religious leaders were called to act as shepherds to Israel who were likened to flocks of sheep. However, the leaders more frequently acted like thieves and robbers who gorged themselves on the flock.

Jesus is drawing on this Old Testament prophetic rhetoric in the present discourse. He is saying the present religious leaders of Judah are no better than the ancient religious leaders who exploited Israel for their personal benefit, and were condemned for it. In contrast, Jesus holds Himself up as the ideal example of what the religious leaders of Israel ought to be like.

This chapter can be read very specifically as Jesus' interpretation of, or commentary on, Ezek. 34:11-22.

The primary audience Jesus is addressing is the Pharisees from the end of the preceding chapter, cf. 9:40-41. Naturally, there were others present in such a public place, but the discourse in v. 1-18 is a result of the Pharisee's taunts. Jesus addresses them in response and contrasts them with Himself using imagery they were certainly familiar with.

¹ Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. ² But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. ⁴ And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. ⁵ And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. ⁶ This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.

⁷ Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. ⁹ I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that

they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

¹¹ I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. ¹² But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. ¹³ The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. ¹⁵ As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

¹⁷ Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. ¹⁸ No man taketh 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 commandment have I received of my Father.

¹⁹ There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. ²⁰ And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? ²¹ Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?

v1-21 This section of text close the Feast of Tabernacles narrative that began in ch. 8. Jesus comments on how bad the current religious leaders of Judah are (note the hostility and abuse the Pharisees heap on the healed blind man in the previous chapter), and how He must personally Shepherd them.

Verses 1-5 contain two parables, or one parable with two parts, which are then explained in v. 7-18. Verses 1-3a is the parable of the door, or gate, explained in v. 7-10. Verses 3b-5 is the parable of the good shepherd, explained in v. 11-18.

v1-3a Those who enter the sheepfold by any other way other than the door, or gate, are people who are out to commit some crime (v. 1), if they weren't they would use the gate. The one who enters the gate is the shepherd of the sheep (v. 2), there is no need for him to sneak in another any other way. The porter of the gate will open the gate to the shepherd (v. 3a).

The religious leaders of Israel are supposed to be watchmen among Israel, instead they are thieves and robbers (cf. Micah 3, Ezek. 34).

v3b-5c The shepherd of the sheep calls the sheep, they recognize his voice, and he leads them out to green pastures (v. 3). He goes before his sheep and they follow him because they know him (v. 4). They will not follow a stranger because they

do not know his voice, instead they will flee from him (v. 5).

The healed blind man from the previous chapter would be an example of one of the shepherd's sheep who doesn't follow the stranger's voice (i.e., the Pharisees), but instead heeds the voice of the shepherd (i.e., Jesus).

v3 Compare Mark 6:34.

"calleth his own sheep by name", in other words, He knows each sheep individually, cp. Luke 15:3-7.

"leadeth them out", cp. Num. 27:17, Isa. 55:4.

v6 Despite the frequent usage of the symbolism in the Scriptures, the Pharisees still don't grasp Jesus' message. So, he expounds upon the parables in more plain terms in v. 7-18.

Why don't they understand the message? The Old Testament Prophetic passages that condemn the bad shepherds condemn these contemporary Pharisees, and so they ignore it rather than confess they are sinners and repent. The result is spiritual blindness, a deliberate refusal to understand, cf. 9:40-41.

v7-10 Jesus interprets v. 1-3a when He states plainly that He is the gate (v. 7). He states that He is the gate which all of the thieves and robbers avoid (v. 8), and is the gate by which the sheep may find green pastures, representing the salvation of man (v. 9). The thieves are interested in selfish pursuits of stealing, killing, and destroying, but Jesus is come to selflessly grant life in abundance to the sheep (v. 10).

v10 "kill", in the discourse in 8:44 we hear the adversary is a murderer from the beginning, and so those who follow after him do his works. The Anchor Bible commentary states the Greek term "[thyein](#)" is not the usual word for "to kill" used elsewhere by John. They suggest it is a sly reference to sacrifices and therefore can be taken as an attack on the priests.

v11-18 Jesus interprets v. 3b-5c giving two reasons why He is the Good Shepherd: He lays down His life for the sheep (v. 11-13), He intimately knows all of the sheep (v. 14-16).

Jesus is the Good Shepherd because He gives his life for the sheep (v. 11). The hireling is only in it for the money, so he doesn't really care about the sheep when they are threatened

(v. 12-13).

Jesus is the Good Shepherd because He knows his sheep individually, and they know Him as well (v. 14) just as He knows the Father and the Father knows him (v. 15). Jesus knows all of his sheep, even those not of the present fold, all of them will be united into one fold (v. 16). And so the Father loves him because he lays down his life so that he may take it up again (v. 17), and in so doing bring salvation to his sheep as his Father has commanded him and granted him authority to do (v. 18).

v11-13 Compare Matt. 10:16, Acts 20:28-29.

v11 "good", the Greek term "[kalon](#)" is most literally translated to "ideal", and also has the meaning of "noble" and "model", cp. 1 Sam. 16:11-12.

"shepherd", the occupation of a shepherd was a lowly and humble one. There was no public recognition. It was solitary and difficult to care for helpless, hapless sheep who were under threat of predators.

v12 Compare Zech. 11:5.

v14-16 Compare Nahum 1:7, Isa. 40:11.

v14 Compare 6:37, 6:44, 6:65, 17:6-7.

v16 "one fold, and on shepherd", cp. 3:29, 8:47, 11:52, 18:37. See also 3 Ne. 15:21-23 for Jesus' comments on this verse among the Nephites. See also Ezek. 34:11-14 for background on the gathering of the scattered sheep by the shepherding Lord.

Jesus' statement make is clear His interests go well beyond the present situation at Jerusalem, where they are under Roman occupation. For the contemporary Jews, that is the primary preoccupation, but for Jesus the concerns are grand and eternal.

v18 "No man taketh it from me", this verse speaks of mortality invested with divinity. Jesus is without sin, and therefore the Fall of man (e.g., physical and spiritual death) has no hold on Him. Additionally, those who seek to kill Him can find no fault in Him and are constantly being thwarted. So, Jesus has complete control over His fate, unlike the rest of us, yet He chose to sacrifice His life for His people, so they would have

life like He does.

v19-21 recount previous incidents of division among the people (cp. 7:12, 7:25-27, 7:31, 7:40-41, 9:16) and accusations of madness and possession (cp. 7:20, 8:48). Despite the evidence given, the miracles and sermons, nothing has changed the hearts and minds of the people.

v21 "Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?", obviously referring to the events of the preceding chapter, but possibly also referring to Ps. 146:8. The fault finders are grasping at straws to excuse themselves, and so others point out to them they are doing so by rejecting their arguments with strong logic. However, the result is a morass of contention as the people are not penitent.

²² And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. ²³ And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch. ²⁴ Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. ²⁵ Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. ²⁶ But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: ²⁸ And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and my Father are one.

³¹ Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. ³² Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? ³³ The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. ³⁴ Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? ³⁵ If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; ³⁶ Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? ³⁷ If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. ³⁸ But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him. ³⁹ Therefore they sought again to take him: but he escaped out of their hand,

v22-39 takes place some two or three months later at the subsequent Feast of Dedication, a.k.a. Chanukah. However, the same subject of shepherd and sheep is addressed, so the text is

connected in theme while there is a transition in time.

Jesus is in the Temple for the observance of the Feast of Dedication (v. 22-23) when the Pharisees surround Him and insist He tell them plainly whether or not he claims to be messiah (v. 24). Jesus responds saying He has already answered that question and His Father's works, which he does, bear witness of the truth of His testimony (v. 25). But, since they are not His sheep they will not believe Him (v. 26), as His sheep hear Him, believe Him, and follow Him (v. 27).

Jesus says He gives His sheep eternal life, and none of them are taken from His hands (v. 28), because they are held in the Father's hands (v. 29). Jesus states this is achieved because of His unity with the Father (v. 30).

The Pharisees take up stones to pelt him with (v. 31), and Jesus asks them for which of the Father's works they are stoning Him (v. 32). They respond saying they are not stoning Him for good works, but for making himself God (v. 33). Jesus points out to them the Law says that they are gods (v. 34-35), and says He has claimed to be the Son of God (v. 36), not God as they accuse. Jesus then appeals to the works He does, which they just previously confessed they could not stone him for, and says that if He didn't do the works of the Father, then they shouldn't believe him (v. 37). If they don't believe Jesus' testimony concerning Himself as being the Son of God, then they should believe the works He does, as that proves the Father is with Him (v. 38).

Jesus' argument effectively disarms their accusation of blasphemy as He points out He hasn't blasphemed. And He hamstringing any possibility of their finding fault with His works because they admit they cannot stone him for any of them in v. 33. Jesus once again outwits them and escapes out of their hands (v. 39).

It is plain from the events the Pharisees are hostile from the outset and are looking for an excuse to attack him, cp. v. 39. The eagerness with which they take up stones despite the fact He has not blasphemed indicates what their real motives were the entire time: murder.

v24 "the Jews", we would assume these are Pharisees in specific and not Jews in general, given the preceding references in the chapter characterizing "the Jews" as being specifically the Pharisees, cf. 9:16-18. Recall all of Jesus' disciples and all

those praising Him at the triumphal entry are Jews. It is specifically the Pharisees aligned with the Sanhedrin who are adamantly against Him the entire time.

"round about him", a better translation would be "surround him", clearly insinuating their hostility.

v25 The works being a witness is a major theme in John's Gospel, cf. v. 21, 5:36, 9:30-32. The simple fact Jesus can perform extraordinary miracles, which fulfil Scriptural predictions, necessarily implies divine endorsement and support. Opposition against such then necessarily aligns one with the adversary.

v30-33 Jesus says He and His Father are one. He never says He Himself is God. The Pharisees are looking for an excuse to kill Him, and they go so far as to accuse him of blasphemy when He hasn't explicitly committed it. Jesus makes no such statement that He is God, His explicit statement appears after their accusation, and he identifies himself as "the Son of God" in v. 36. They are selecting the implications that put Jesus in peril to attack him.

v34-35 Jesus draws on passages from the Scriptures to point out their hypocrisy. First Jesus quotes Ps. 82:6 in v. 34 and then he paraphrases Exod. 7:1 and Exod. 21:6 and alludes to passages such as 2 Chron 19:6, Jer. 1:2, and Hosea 1:1 (also cp. Luke 3:2) in v. 35.

The Exodus references are the most important ones in this argument. They cast the person in the judgement seat as being "as God" to another, or vicariously representing God when exercising the Priesthood in judgement according to the Law. Also, it is entirely possible Ps. 82:6 is in fact a commentary on Exod. 7:1 and Exod. 21:6.

With these comments it almost seems Jesus is sidestepping the issue. We know Jesus is invested with all of the power of His Father and thus is God in the flesh, so why is Jesus apparently dodging the issue? Jesus has never identified himself as "God", rather he has constantly deferred to His Father as his source of doctrine and power. For example, see 5:18 and 5:30 where they seek to stone Jesus for making Himself equal with God, yet Jesus is constantly deferring to the Father. Jesus never announces himself equal with God, and so the

accusation is false. While Jesus has been invested with His Father's authority, it is still His Father's. And thus, in the sense of being dependent on the Father, Jesus is not equal to Him.

Furthermore, the Pharisees are falsely attributing a position to Jesus to contrive a capital offense against Him, and He must refute that false attribution or else it could be perceived as tacit approval.

v36 "whom the Father hath sanctified", cp. 6:69, 17:19.

⁴⁰ And went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there he abode. ⁴¹ And many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true. ⁴² And many believed on him there.

v40-42 Jesus leaves Jerusalem, where the people don't believe His works as He tells them they should in v. 37-38, and goes beyond Jordan where John Baptist formerly proselyted (v. 40). Many people there believe in Jesus' works and therefore Him, and remark that all of John Baptist's testimony concerning Jesus was true (v. 41-42).

John's intent is to contrast the unbelief of the Pharisees and rulers (i.e., Sanhedrin) at Jerusalem with the belief of the common countryside Jewish people. Also, since Jesus was not ready to die, He stays among believers, who aren't actively trying to kill Him, until the following Passover (cf. 11:55) when His time was ready.

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