

The Shepherd's Voice

(John 10:1-18 April 3, 2016)

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**John
10:1-18**

When I was a young pastor – I read many, many books on leadership to gain insight into how to lead a church.

One that caught my attention at one time was *Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun* by Wess Roberts – I suspect it was the title that attracted me.

The book is filled with what he termed – *Attilaisms* – Attila's wisdom on how to lead your Huns.

It became a *New York Times* bestseller. And amazingly enough it does have some fair counsel about leadership in the world.

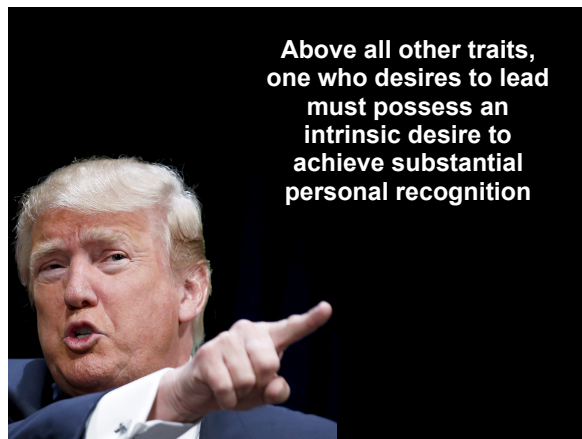
But as I read the book I found myself asking one question – Would I like to be one of Attila's Huns?

And the answer kept coming back as – Not a hope!

Why? Because Attila was such a selfish, self-oriented, self-absorbed leader.

It was all about him – not his Huns.

The very first Attilaism in the book – the one from which all the others flowed was this:



Above all other traits, one who desires to lead must possess an intrinsic desire to achieve substantial personal recognition.

Substantial personal recognition – the secret sauce of leadership!

This is the mark of the vast majority of those who desire to lead us in this world.

If this is what you want for a leader – then this is what you will get.

But is this what makes a leader great – let alone good?

I have one sermon to preach before I leave for long service – and I know it is a week after Easter – but the themes of Easter – the cross and the empty tomb are always such an encouragement to me.

So I decided to preach on what is actually one of my favourite Easter passages – the Good Shepherd.

I suspect this is not a passage that usually screams Easter to you – but it should because what makes Jesus a good shepherd is that He lays down His life for the sheep.

Here is what our passage declares:



His sheep hear His voice and know that Jesus is both the message and means of their salvation

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To see how this fleshes out – turn with me to John 10.

Before we look at this passage – we need to see how it fits into the larger context.

The Good Shepherd passage is wedged right in the middle of the miracle of the healing of the man born blind.

We read of this miracle in chapter 9 – but if you look down to John 10:19-20 – there we see that they are still talking about the healing of the blind man – so the Good Shepherd passage is intrinsically tied to the healing of the man born blind.

What is going on?

Chapter 9 opens with Jesus and the disciples passing by a man born blind. And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.”

Jesus then stops – declares – I am the Light of the world – and spits on some dirt to make mud – places it on the eyes of the blind man – who is told to go and wash in the pool of Siloam – and then the miracle occurs – he sees.

The neighbours can’t believe it. This guy looks like the blind beggar – but it can’t be him – *this* guy can see.

So they take him to the Pharisees.

The Pharisees – the leaders of Israel – rejoice:

Hallelujah – one of our sheep was blind – but now he can see!

We can only imagine how horrific your life was – blind – outcast – begging – now you are healed – praise the Lord!

Yeah but that wasn't what happened.

When the man was taken to the Pharisees, they could care less about him.

They said – the One who healed you is clearly not from God – because He healed you on the Sabbath.

Instead of rejoicing that this blind man can see – they are concerned about their understanding of the Law – and who the people see as the real shepherds of Israel. Jesus is a threat to their authority and leadership.

From this point on in chapter 9 there is division – even among the Pharisees.

Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "Yeah but How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?"

Two sides form – those who say Jesus is of God and those who deny it.

The man who had been blind chooses his side – he declares that Jesus is a prophet.

Then the leaders hauled his parents in and questioned them – under threat of being put out of the synagogue.

They questioned the man who had been blind once again.

Are you a disciple of Jesus or Moses? We are with Moses – the Sabbath keeper. We are the real leaders of Israel.

The man replied – all I know is this – I was blind and He allowed me to see. If He wasn't from God, He couldn't open my eyes.

These compassionate shepherds responded – "Really! You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out of the synagogue.

They said – you have chosen your side – so get out!

They believed that to cast someone out is to shut them off from the way of finding a right standing before God.

Just get your head around this. Why was this man cast out – cut off from what they believed was the way of salvation?

Because Jesus healed him and he declared – anyone who can heal the blind has to be from God.

But, when Jesus heard that they had cast him out, he found him and he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.

Then notice these words of Jesus. “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.”

Jesus’ words separate all mankind into two groups – those who hear His words and believe them – and those who hear them and reject them.

The clash here is over who who has the words of eternal life? Who will lead the sheep to the waters of heaven?

Now we are ready for this morning’s passage.

It is a continuation of chapter 9. The man who was blind is there – the Pharisees are there – there is tension over Jesus’ teachings and now the Lord says this. John 10:1-11:

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to 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 comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd.

One of the curses of the way God chose to put me together is that I am incredibly literal – and I expect everyone else to be as well.

But, this caused me immense problems when I became a Christian – because I soon realised that the way Jesus often taught was not always literal.

I read verses 1 and 2 and my mind reasons like this: If I can work out what the door is – then I only need to see who entered by that door – and then I will know who the shepherd is.

But what is the door?

In verse 6 – those listening to Jesus are also struggling and don’t understand what Jesus is saying so tells them.

He says – **I am the door of the sheep!**

Great! So then who is the shepherd?

But then Jesus messes me up because in verse 11 He says – **I am the good shepherd!**

So, Jesus is *both* the door – **and** the shepherd who enters by the door.

That messes someone like me up.

And it gets worse because verse 9 also tells us we are to enter through the door – but we know that we are not the shepherd.

At this point, all you metaphoric thinkers are saying – I don't see what your problem is – makes perfect sense to me.

All you literal thinkers are saying – I share your pain brother – I thought it was only me that struggled.

Passages like this used to do my head in.

Finally, I had to realise that because there are so many facets to Jesus – He regularly mixes His metaphors to give a full orb'd view of who He is and why He came.

He is the **way** of salvation – *but* also the **truth** that leads to salvation – *and* also the **life** that comes from salvation.

He is the **word** who tells us of salvation and the **word** who actually brings salvation.

He is the **message** and the **means**.

What is going on here?

Jesus is telling us very clearly that He is **both** the *door* and the *shepherd*.

It becomes a little clearer when we realise that Jesus is using *door* in terms of God's true method of salvation.

There is a door that God intends to lead those who enter to heaven.

The Old Testament tells us very clearly that God will send a Saviour – a way – a door to heaven.

Then the book of John begins with these words:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through ... *Jesus Christ*.

Jesus is the door – the way of salvation – that the people of God were waiting for.

And in case we miss this, we are then told Jesus is the One of whom Moses spoke.

He is the serpent lifted up in the desert.

If you believed Moses, you would have believed Jesus.

Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus' day.

The point being – Abraham, Moses, the entire Old Testament declared that the true way of salvation – the door to heaven – is Jesus.

This means that those who teach a salvation by works or Law or any other door – they are thieves and robbers – they are false shepherds – even if they have fancy titles and sit in big chairs and sound very authentic.

It should surprise no one that there are false shepherds – pointing people to a false door.

Again and again in the Old Testament the people of God are pictured as sheep.

But many passages also say that false shepherds will arise claiming authority over God's sheep. We see this in Isaiah and Jeremiah and Zechariah.

But perhaps the clearest statement is in Ezekiel 34:

Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, ... Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them.

... I will rescue my sheep from their mouths ... I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. ... I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep ... And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ... I will make with them a covenant of peace ... so that they may dwell securely ... You are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord God.

False shepherds will arrive who will care only about themselves. But because God is a loving Father, He will send the Messiah – the Son of David to be the true shepherd of His people and to save them.

And anyone who denies that Jesus is the true and only way of salvation – they are false shepherds – they are thieves and robbers.

So, with that background we can understand more of what Jesus means when He claims that He is **both**:

The message of salvation – The door

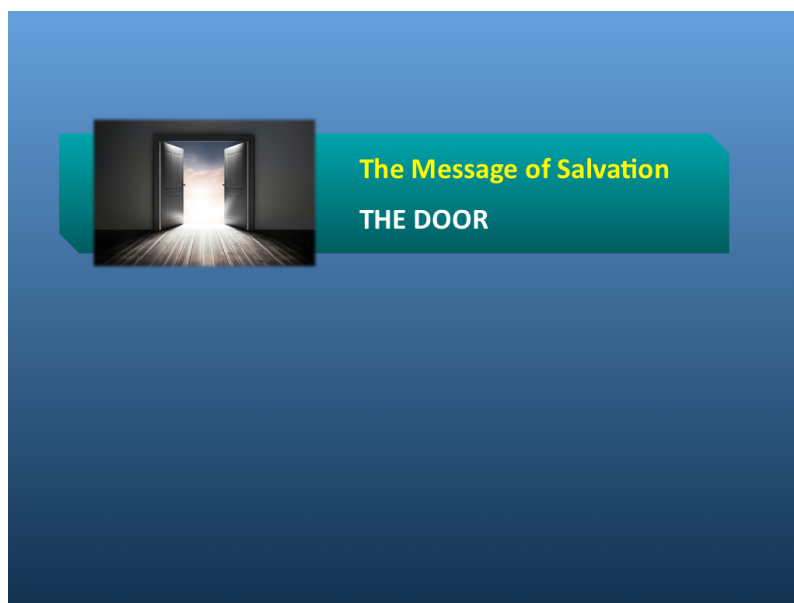
And:

The means of salvation – The Good Shepherd

What makes Him the *door*? – He tells the true way of salvation to His sheep.

What makes Him the *Good Shepherd*? – He lays down His life to save His sheep.

Let's look at these claims. First that Jesus is:



The message of salvation – The door

Here is the tragedy – When you read the Old Testament – God's plan of salvation was clearly laid out right from the Garden of Eden.

All men are sinners. No one can meet God's standard. No one is righteous – not even one.

So right from the beginning, God promised to send a Messiah – a Saviour – to do what we can't – save us from sin.

He told us so much about this coming Saviour. He would be in the line of David. Born to a virgin. Born in Bethlehem.

He told us how to identify Him – the Miracles of Messiah.

God made it clear – wait for Messiah – He is the only way of salvation.

But over the centuries the leaders of the Jews began to say that the Law – the tool God sent to show us we need a Saviour – that the Law itself could save.

And they believed that the right to mediate God's salvation – through the Law and the sacrifices and the Temple – belonged to them.

They were the true shepherds.

So when Jesus arrived and began to preach – repent for the Kingdom of God has drawn near – they said – what do you mean – **we** have the keys to door the Kingdom?

We don't need you – we have Moses and the Law.

And they threatened that anyone who listened to Jesus would lose their salvation.

I have told you this story before. Many years ago I was witnessing to a friend who was also a doctor. She came from a very strict Irish Catholic family.

As I shared the gospel with her, the truth began to touch her heart. But one day she just refused to meet with me or talk about the gospel.

I found her and asked her what the problem was. She told me that her parents organised a Jesuit priest to come and talk to her. This priest told her that the keys to the kingdom belonged to the Catholic Church and that he had the authority to tell her that if she continued to meet with me she would be locked out the kingdom for ever.

In a sense, that is what was going on with the Pharisees. In effect they were claiming to be the door to salvation.

They lock the man born blind out the synagogue. They excluded him from what they taught was the only means of salvation.

But, in contrast to every other claim of salvation – Jesus says – **I am the door**. If anyone enters by **me**, he **will** be saved

This is a clear and deliberate claim that there is *one* and only one way to eternal life. There is no way to heaven apart from Jesus.

Later, in John 14:6 Jesus declared:

I am **the** way, and **the** truth, and **the** life; **no one** comes to the Father **but through Me**.

There is no other message, no other Saviour, no other Law, no other philosophy – no other way for anyone to be saved.

It is Jesus or hell. That is the choice.

This is so crucial because if anyone enters through the true door – they find pasture – they find life and life in abundance.

This is primarily talking about eternal life – heaven – but the abundant, full, rich life starts now.

Marriage, family, work, living – there is no part of life that is not richer and more abundant with Jesus as your shepherd.

But there is a *second* claim Jesus makes. He says that He is:



The means of salvation – The Good Shepherd

How do you know that Jesus is the Good Shepherd?

You look at the cross. That is why this is an Easter message. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for His sheep.

Verses 11-18:

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

I am the Good Shepherd.

I suspect that of every title of Jesus – Rock, Lamb of God, Second Adam, Light of the World, King of the Jews – I suspect – Good Shepherd – is most people's favourite.

It brings pictures to mind of us as a sheep with Jesus as our shepherd.

We are foolish, lost sheep – and He is the Good Shepherd who will do anything even lay down His life for us.

Sheep are incredibly vulnerable. It is not just that they are in danger from any stray dog, any thief or any cliff – they are such foolish animals they can break a leg just walking in a straight line from pasture to pasture.

And if they are attacked, they are poorly equipped to deal with the dangers of this world. They don't have talons, or claws or fangs.

We are like sheep. We go astray so easily. We find ourselves in danger so often.

We succumb to sin. We toy with paths that lead us to danger and away from pasture. We are vulnerable to the world, the flesh and the devil.

But the one incredible blessing that sheep do have is that they have shepherds.

Shepherds guide them to pasture and water. Shepherds carry them if they break a leg. Shepherds fight off the wolf and the bear and the thief. Shepherds are the protectors, providers and carers for the sheep.

A shepherd knows his sheep and cares for them. A shepherd leads the sheep to green pastures. A shepherd would be loath to lose even one sheep. A shepherd will spend nights in the wilderness protecting the sheep. A shepherd is up all night helping an ewe give birth. A shepherd sacrifices for his sheep.

And for the Christian – Jesus is *our* good shepherd.

He fights for us, He protects us, He guides us, He carries us, He binds us up, He loves us.

So the image of Jesus as the great shepherd of the sheep is a powerful one.

But what makes this not just powerful – but shows the real heart of Jesus is when Jesus says – I lay down My life for the sheep.

But, let's be realistic here. As much as shepherds care for sheep – there are limits to how far a shepherd will go in protecting his sheep.

He will risk his life plucking them from a cliff or fighting off a wolf. But no shepherd willingly lays down his life for a mere sheep.

I was trying to find some analogy in my life.

I don't have a flock of sheep – I have one older dog – Max – who I am really fond of. Max is awesome – but let's face it he is just a dog.

If I came home and my house was ablaze – if I thought my wife or one of my children were in there – I would go in after them – no matter what.

But what if they were all out of the house? What if it was just Max in there?

If the fire was bad but not ablaze – I would like to think I would try and save him – even with my wife screaming – Craig – he's **just** a dog!

But, I wouldn't take any undue risks with my life – sorry Max.

Yet the difference between Jesus and us is *far* grater than me to Max.

Jesus – who is God – who owes us nothing.

We are sinners – rejecting Him – failing Him – insignificant nobodies.

However, Jesus wouldn't like me saying – insignificant nobodies – because to Him we are precious. We are the sheep of His pasture. We are His children. We are the apple of His eye.

What makes Jesus the **good** shepherd is He *willingly* choses to lay down His life for His sheep – for us.

I can understand a shepherd risking His life for a sheep.

But I struggle to understand why God even cares about us – let alone comes down to minister to us – and as for God laying down His life for me – that is just totally beyond my ability to wrap my head around it.

But He does it and as verse 16 says – He does it for a larger flock:

And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

Jesus came not just for the Jews – but for us – for the Gentiles – He came to make us one flock. And He makes us one by giving His life for us.

What this means is this. We all have a choice to make. Who do we want as our shepherd – worldly leaders who steal and kill and destroy – or Jesus who lays down His life for the sheep?

The Pharisees didn't care about the blind man. They didn't care that the greatest thing in his life happened – he can see.

They just cared that people might think Jesus was more special than them.

They are a hired hand who flees when the wolf appears.

These kind of leaders are everywhere.

In contrast – who cared about the blind man? Jesus – the Good Shepherd.

There is only one person who will never let you down – never fail you – always put Himself out for you – Jesus.

A chapter I have returned to again and again is Romans 8. And the verse that catches me every time I read it is this. Romans 8:32:

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

God who could give us the very universe – chose to give us the greatest gift of all – the life of His Son. That is the extent of His love for us.

He is our Good Shepherd. To save His sheep – He had to lay down His life. So that makes us precious.

When the wolves come – when the thieves come – when the dangers rise up – how could we ever think He will not protect us? If He died for us – He will protect us.

He **will** provide our needs. He **will** lead us to pasture. He **will** protect us. He **will** fill our lives with goodness and mercy. **He loves us!**

Considering these truths, there is a part of me that wonders – why doesn't everyone on the face of this planet want to be His sheep?

I saw this week that people lined up down the block to put a deposit on a Tesla that won't be ready for two years.

Why aren't people hammering on the doors to churches saying – I want to be His sheep?

The answer comes in verses 3-4:

The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

Only His sheep hear His voice and follow Him.

There is an element of mystery here.

Two brothers – twins – same IQ, same upbringing, same environment – both hear the call of Jesus to follow Him – one says – Yes Lord – the other says – No way!

Or even more to the point I think of myself.

For about eight or nine months I heard the same gospel – it made no sense to me.

Then one evening I read the Bible – I heard the same words of Jesus again – but this time I responded.

Why?

Because the Spirit of God changed my heart to make me want to be His sheep – so when He called – this time I heard the voice of my Shepherd.

Listen to how Jesus describes this in verses 26-30:

You do not believe because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.

Those who do not follow are not His sheep.

Those who follow are His sheep.

John Piper says of verse 26:

We believe because we are God's chosen sheep, not vice versa.

The sheep hear His voice.

I can give you all the theology in the world about election and predestination and free will – the bottom line is – His sheep hear His voice and **know** – this is truth – this is my shepherd.

The Spirit of Jesus enters a man or woman and changes their heart – opens their eyes and ears – and then when the voice of Jesus calls – they respond.

I love the way Thomas Goodwin described how this occurs:

There is a light that cometh, and overpowereth a man's soul and assureth him that God is his, and he is God's, and that God loved him from everlasting ... It is a light beyond the light of ordinary faith ... the next thing to heaven: you have no more, you can have no more until you come hither ... It is faith elevated and raised up above its ordinary rate, it is electing love of God brought home to the soul.¹

There is a light that cometh, and overpowereth a man's soul and assureth him that God is his, and he is God's. ... It is a light beyond the light of ordinary faith.

That is the voice of Jesus.

¹ Quoted in Tony Sargent, *The Sacred Anointing*, (Wheaton, Crossway Books, 1994), p. 45.

He declares the true way of salvation to His sheep.

He has the words of eternal life.

Is Jesus your Shepherd?

Have you heard His voice?

You have a choice this morning – we all do. Jesus or the false shepherds.

The Great Shepherd – who gave up heaven to have nowhere to lie His head, who was persecuted and finally killed for you. He was not in it for personal gain. He was in it for you.

Or – the false shepherds come to steal and to kill and to destroy. Ezekiel 34 tells us false shepherds are in it for what they can get.

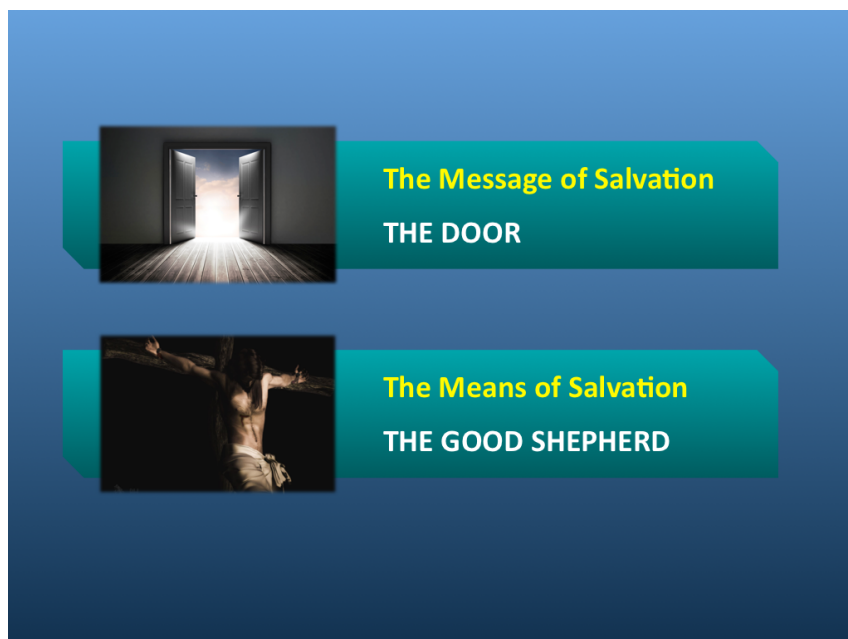
What is my job as a pastor?

Every message, every facet of our ministry, every part of our lives is geared to presenting this choice and urging you to choose the true door – the true shepherd.

In a sense we are door keepers with one simple message:

This way to Jesus – enter and be saved.

Sometimes I wonder if you get tired of hearing the basics of the gospel week in and week out – and then I remember – that is my job whether you like it or not – in season and out of season.



Jesus is the *door* and the *Good Shepherd*.

Perhaps there are some here today who want Jesus – to be their Good Shepherd.

If you want those pastures and that abundant life.

If you want to be led by One who loves you enough to lay down His life for you.

Then heed His voice.

Go through the door.

Trust Him and live.

Join His flock.

In closing I want all of us to realise that there are two ways – and only two ways we can live this life.

First, you can reject Christ as your shepherd. Listen to how your life will be:

The Lord is not my shepherd, I am forever in terrible want.
He is not there to make me lie me down in green pastures, He is not there to lead me beside quiet waters,
He doesn't restore my soul. He doesn't guide me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

While I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear evil constantly, for He is not with me; His rod and His staff are not there to comfort me.
My table is barren in the presence of my enemies. He does not anoint my head with oil; my cup is empty.
Surely evil and hatred will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell outside the house of the Lord forever.

Or you can heed the voice of the Great Shepherd and join His flock:

The Lord is my shepherd,

Just let that wash over you. Years ago I heard a series of sermons on each word – including – *the* and *is*. This is an awesome truth.

I shall not want.

He who owns the cattle on a thousand hills will provide our needs. He will give us what we need.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside quiet waters.

He gives us the very best that this world has to offer. Green pastures, quiet waters.

You want abundant life – follow the Shepherd.

He restores my soul;

Does your soul need a little restoration? He gives us spiritual well-being. He forgives us. He makes the sinner whole.

He guides me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.

He shows us how to live in this world. He gently leads us in His ways.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for He is with me;

He helps us overcome the trials and obstacles of this world. He is with us in the darkest of times. And when we reach the end of our days – he takes us through that dark valley. There is nothing left for us to fear in this world.

His rod and His staff, they comfort me.

He fights the battles for us. He directs us. He comforts us.

He prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
He has anointed my head with oil;
My cup overflows.

He has given us every blessing in this life.

And the result is that:

Surely goodness and loving kindness will follow me all the days of my life.

And finally,

I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

How good is that?

Donald Trump and Attila the Hun are human leaders with human frailties.

Your Elders are human shepherds with human frailties.

But Jesus is God. He is the Good Shepherd. He will never fail you or forsake you.

There is no one else who loves us like Jesus.

Let me close by reading the benediction from Hebrews 13:20–21:

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,
the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip

you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.