

John 9:39-10:5

Introduction

Last week, we left off with the simple confession and worship of the man who had been born *blind*, but who now *sees*. Remember that after he had been “put out” (*ekballo*) of the synagogue, Jesus found him and asked him if he believed in the Son of Man.

- John 9:36–38 — He answered, “Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?” Jesus said to him, “You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you.” And he said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped Him.

This happened later on, in a more private setting when “the Jews” were no longer present. When we pick up this morning in verse 39, the theme of blindness and sight is still the same, but Jesus suddenly has a very different audience. The Pharisees are back again while the man who was born blind has disappeared from the picture.¹

I. John 9:39 — And Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, in order that those who do not see may see, and in order that those who see may become blind.”

Jesus doesn’t say that He came into this world to judge the world *Himself*.

- John 3:17 — God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

What Jesus *is* saying is that His coming into this world does result—and is *intended* to result—in a kind of default judgment whereby people are revealed or exposed according to their true nature and consequently divided into two groups—the *seeing* and the *blind*—*based entirely upon their response to Jesus*. The coming of Jesus into the world, and specifically into the Jewish world, results by default in a sifting and a winnowing and a separating. Before His coming, both true believers and religious hypocrites could be (and were) legitimate members of the covenant and the covenant community. But Jesus came in order that those who belonged to each of these two groups might be clearly revealed and therefore that a clear separation might be made between them (that they no longer be mingled together in the same covenant people).

“For judgment I came into this world,” Jesus says, “in order that those who do not see may see, and in order that those who see may become blind.” “Those who do not see” are those who’ve

¹ When Jesus introduces the theme of the shepherd and the sheep in chapter ten, there’s no break with the words that He’s just spoken to the Pharisees at the end of chapter nine (vv. 39-41). The audience is the same. Chapter ten isn’t the start of something new, but the continuation of the discourse that begins at the end of chapter nine. Should 9:39-41 be located the end of chapter nine (the healing of the man born blind) or at the beginning of chapter ten (Jesus’ discourse on the good shepherd)? Later on in chapter ten, John will say that “a division occurred again among the Jews because of these words. Many of them were saying, ‘He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?’ Others were saying, ‘These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?’” (Jn. 10:19-21). The things Jesus says about the shepherd and the sheep are sandwiched between reminders of the blind man who received his sight. The account of the man born blind and Jesus’ discourse on the good shepherd are intimately connected, and so it’s important that we’re consciously reading them together.

acknowledged that they don't see; they've acknowledged their blindness and are therefore trusting in God's promise of a redeemer (cf. 9:30-33). Jesus came into the world so that these people might "see" Him (cf. 9:37) and so that by their believing response to Him, they might be *revealed* as those who *do* see and who have been forgiven (cf. 9:38). They confess that they don't see in order that they might be those who do truly see.

On the other hand, "those who see" are those who self-confidently claim that they see (based on their knowledge of the Scriptures and their religious practice) and so fail to recognize their blindness. Jesus came into the world so that by their rejection of Him the blindness of these people would be *exposed* and so that in thus being exposed they would no longer be mingled together in the same covenant community with those who truly see and have been forgiven.

Jesus didn't come into the world to judge the world (as He will when He returns), but to save the world. And yet the judgment has still already begun precisely because of His coming into the world.

➤ John 3:19–21 — "This is the judgment [John says] that the Light has come into the world... everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been worked in God."

II. John 9:40 — Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, "We are not blind too, are we?"

What did Jesus say?—"For judgment I came into this world, in order that those who do not see *may see*." The Pharisees ought to be confessing their blindness—so that they might *not* be blind, but see! But it's inconceivable to them that they should be blind and so it's impossible for them to confess their blindness or *want* to regain their sight. The "sight" that they have is the worst kind of blindness. And so by their own incredulous words, they're proving the truth of Jesus' words: "For judgment I came into this world... in order that those who see may become blind."

"We are not blind too, are we?" The Pharisees *are* blind. But in the sense of a blindness that they confess and that drives them to humility and faith in God, they're the opposite of blind.

III. John 9:41 — Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin [because having acknowledged your blindness you would see and be forgiven]; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

The Pharisees are the religious leaders and rulers of the people who even sit in "the seat of Moses" (cf. Mat. 23:2). And yet the coming of Jesus has brought judgment upon them – the judgment of being sifted from the wheat and finding themselves—based upon their response to Jesus—about to be *put out* of God's covenant people. It's not ultimately the man born blind who is "put out" (9:34), but the Pharisees. It's not the previously blind beggar who is spiritually blind; it's the Pharisees who are blind, *because they say*, "We see."

What do we say? Do we say, “we see” with any shred of self-confidence, or do we only and always confess our native blindness and cry out to God for the sight that He alone gives? Are we like the religious leaders and Pharisees? Or are we like the man who was born, in more ways than one, *a blind beggar*? What is the judgment, that is the coming of Christ into this world, revealing about us today? Praise God!—By His grace we are those who do see and who have come to Him who alone gives us sight.

How can the religious leaders and rulers of the people be the ones “put out” of the covenant people? This still seems to them impossible. What right does Jesus have to be speaking like this? Jesus continues in chapter ten:

IV. John 10:1–2 — “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the² shepherd of the sheep.”

This imagery of the shepherd and the sheep doesn’t suddenly come from out of nowhere. In the Old Testament there’s a sense in which any ruler or leader of any people is by default a shepherd of that people (cf. Jer. 6:3; 12:10; 25:34–36; Mic. 5:5–6) – which means that the Pharisees were, at least in name, Israel’s shepherds. This gives us more insight into why they were so incredulous that Jesus should say they were blind and guilty sinners. How can the shepherds be separated out from the sheep like the chaff being separated from the wheat? Jesus answers: Not everyone who happens to be in the fold with the sheep is a “*true*” shepherd of the sheep. The “fold” was a walled enclosure attached to a house or standing independently in the fields with a single door or opening through which the sheep could pass in and out. The sheep would be kept in this enclosure at night for protection from predators and during inclement weather for protection from the elements. Anyone who enters this fold not by the door but by climbing in over the wall obviously isn’t the “true” shepherd of the sheep, but a thief and a robber. The Pharisees, Jesus is saying, are not genuine shepherds; they’re impostors – they’re thieves and robbers pretending to be shepherds.

The Shepherd in the Old Testament

Jesus doesn’t use this imagery of the shepherd and the sheep only because it’s a good illustration. Jesus uses this imagery because of how it’s rooted so deeply in the Old Testament Scriptures and because of how it leads us ultimately to Him as yet another revelation of who He is.

From the very beginning of Israel’s existence as a nation the people were pictured as sheep in need of a shepherd. The Psalmist celebrates:

➤ Psalm 77:20 — You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

The prophet Isaiah writes:

➤ Isaiah 63:11 — Then he remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people. Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock?

² The definite predicate precedes the verb and therefore lacks the article (see Morris).

Moses prayed, when he knew he was about to be “gathered to [his] people” (Num. 27:13):

Numbers 27:16–17 — Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep that have no shepherd.

Moses and Joshua were both shepherds of God’s flock. So were the judges who came after Joshua. God speaks of “the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel” (2 Sam. 7:7). But there’s a sense in which this motif of the shepherd can only fully come into its own in one who can claim the *kingship*. God Himself—who the Psalmist identifies as the “Shepherd of Israel” (Ps. 80:1; cf. 74:1; 79:13; 100:3; Mic. 7:14)—is also King over His people. It’s the Lord’s sovereign kingship that undergirds all our knowledge of Him as our Shepherd. So we read in Psalm chapter 80:

- Psalm 80:1–2 — Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up your might and come to save us!

There’s a real danger of being overly “*sentimental*” about this imagery of the shepherd, and yet at the same time the reality that the King and sovereign ruler of the universe *is* our Shepherd is filled with unspeakable comforts.

- Psalm 28:8–9 (cf. 95:3–7) — The LORD is the **strength** of his people; he is the **saving refuge** of his anointed. Oh, **save** your people and bless your heritage! Be their shepherd and carry them forever.

Do you see in these verses the image of the almighty King and sovereign Lord of all tending and carrying His sheep?

God’s people experienced His royal shepherding *through* shepherds that He *appointed* such as Moses, and Joshua, and the judges. But since the best and truest shepherd is always a king, we’re not surprised to read in Psalm 78:

- Psalm 78:70–72 (cf. 2 Sam. 5:2) — He chose David his servant and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the nursing ewes he brought him to shepherd Jacob his people, Israel his inheritance. With upright heart he shepherded them and guided them with his skillful hand.
- 2 Samuel 5:2 — The LORD said to [David], “You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince [king under Me] over Israel.”

Once again, the motif of the shepherd is caught up into the motif of kingship. The one can never be properly understood apart from the other. God Himself is the royal Shepherd of His flock, who rules and tends them by the hands of a royal shepherd that He appoints—namely, David.

All kings are shepherds, but not all kings are “good” or “faithful” or “true” shepherds. Time and time again this is emphasized in the prophets.

- Isaiah 56:11 — They are shepherds who have no understanding; they have all turned to their own way, each to his own gain, one and all.
- Jeremiah 23:1–2 (cf. 2:8; 10:21; 50:6) — “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!” declares the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: “You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the LORD.”
- Zechariah 11:17 (cf. 11:15-16) — Woe to my worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock!
- Zechariah 10:2–3 (cf. 11:3-5) — The people wander like sheep; they are afflicted for lack of a shepherd. My anger is hot against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders; for the LORD of hosts cares for his flock, the house of Judah.
- Ezekiel 34:1–10 — The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, 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. So they were scattered, because **there was no shepherd**, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them. Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: As I live, declares the Lord GOD... Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand... I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

In the end, because the shepherds were so worthless (because “there was no [good] shepherd”) God took the kingship away from the shepherds and the throne in Jerusalem sat empty. The people of Israel were left as “sheep without a shepherd” (cf. Num. 27:17; Mat. 9:36). There were other lesser shepherds that came and went, but God’s people never forgot that only the king could be their “true” shepherd. Even though the throne in Jerusalem sat empty, God hadn’t completely abandoned His flock. He foretold a day when the sheep would be gathered again. On the one hand, He said that *He Himself* would come to search out His sheep and care for them.

- Isaiah 40:10–11 (cf. Jer. 31:10) — Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.
- Ezekiel 34:11–16 — Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep,

and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

God said on the one hand that *He Himself* would come to search out His sheep and care for them. But we know from the Old Testament that God shepherds His people *through* human shepherds that He appoints over His sheep. So God says on the other hand:

- Ezekiel 34:23–24 (cf. 37:24) — I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them.
- Jeremiah 23:3–6 (cf. 3:15) — I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the LORD. Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: “The LORD is our righteousness.”
- Micah 5:2–5 (cf. Mat. 2:6) — But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth [from Bethlehem] is from long ago, from the days of old [when God first covenanted with David; 2 Sam. 7].³ Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace.

It’s against this expansive backdrop that we’re meant to hear *all* of Jesus’ words in John chapter ten, beginning here with verses 1-2:

V. John 10:1–2 — “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.”

The current shepherds of Israel—the Pharisees—weren’t true shepherds at all; they were thieves and robbers who had climbed up some other way.

Who is the “true” shepherd of the sheep? Throughout history there were many faithful shepherds, but all of these shepherds—especially as they came to be focused in the royal line of David—were shadows and types of that final, royal shepherd whom God would raise up one day and set over His people. In the meantime, while David’s throne sat empty, the lesser shepherds were to lead and tend the flock always with an eye to the coming of the King – the one who would “stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.” The Pharisees were worthless shepherds because they failed utterly in this

³ See Waltke; Davis; Shepherd; Cf. Neh. 12:46; Ps. 77:11; Isa. 63:9, 11; Amos 9:11; Mic. 7:14; Mal. 3:4.

task. They were blind guides leading the blind (Mat. 15:14). They were thieves and robbers who had climbed into the fold some other way. “But he who enters by the door,” Jesus says, “is the [true] shepherd of the sheep.”

Who is the “true” shepherd of the sheep? In implicating the Pharisees as thieves and robbers, Jesus also implies that the true shepherd of the sheep, “whose coming forth is from long ago, from the days of old,” is already here. He goes on to say in verses 3-5:

VI. John 10:3-5 — “To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.”

Notice how the shepherd calls “*his own*” sheep. The shepherd has a call—or else it’s more the sound of his voice when he calls—that only his own sheep recognize and respond to and no others. The bigger sheepfolds that were out in the fields might hold more than one flock. So when a shepherd came for his flock, the doorkeeper would open to him, and he would call for “his own” sheep. I think this explains Jesus’ words in verse four: “When he *puts forth* (*ekballo*; cf. 6:37; 9:34) all *his own*.” The idea seems to be: “When he has *separated out* all *his own*, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice – because they’re *his* sheep. In Jesus’ parable, the shepherd even calls out each of his own sheep individually by name.

When we read this in the light of a royal shepherd-king and his *human* sheep there’s such an intimate, mutual “knowing,” here, that it ought to thrill us in the very deepest part of our souls. The shepherd doesn’t have to convince the sheep that he’s “true.” The sheep instinctively recognize and know his voice and so they follow him even while they flee from every other voice because every other voice is strange to them. I believe Jesus is picturing the sheepfold of Old Covenant Israel (Judaism; cf. 10:16; Carson). If the Pharisees are thieves and robbers who’ve climbed up some other way, Jesus is the shepherd who comes to that sheepfold of the Old Covenant people and enters by the door and calls *His own* sheep by name and leads them “out.” Jesus doesn’t have to convince *His own* sheep in the sheepfold of Old Covenant Israel that He’s “true.” These sheep instinctively recognize and know his voice and so they follow him even while they flee from every other voice because every other voice is strange to them. And so we’re reminded again of the man who was born blind:

➤ John 9:35-38 — Jesus heard that [the Pharisees; the “shepherds” of Old Covenant Israel] had put him out (*ekballo*), and *finding* him, He said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered, “Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?” Jesus said to him, “You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you.” And he said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped Him.

If the Pharisees are thieves and robbers who climbed up some other way and if Jesus is the true Shepherd who enters by the door, then who is the man who was born blind? Worthless shepherds had abused this man and “put him out” (*ekballo*; 9:34), but Jesus takes this same language and uses it to show that it was actually *He* who was “putting forth” (*ekballo*) “*His own*” sheep –

seeking him out and “finding” him and calling him by name. “I am the good shepherd,” Jesus will say in verse 14, “and I know My own and My own know Me.”

Conclusion

We’ve only just introduced this wonderful theme this morning. We’ll come back to it next week, but right now let’s be glad—with a faithful and obedient kind of gladness—that we are “the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand” and that as His own sheep we have heard and known His voice calling us by name (cf. Ps. 95:7-8). Let’s be glad—with a faithful and obedient kind of gladness—that the one “whose coming forth is from long ago, from the days of old” is here now and that He has stood up to shepherd us—*His* flock—“in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.” And finally, let’s be truly glad—with a faithful and obedient kind of gladness—to know that we dwell secure, because He is our peace (cf. Mic. 5:2-5).