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Christ's Sheep Hear His Voice

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Sermon Text: John 10

Scripture Reading: Psalm 95

There are certain portions of Scripture that really present the gospel in its entirety and seem to me to be especially clear and powerful. This 10th chapter of John's Gospel is just such a Scripture. All of our doctrine must concur with everything Christ says here, and it seems to me that many professing Christians approach it with a sort of pick and choose mentality. That is, they quickly embrace the idea that Christ is the Good Shepherd, but end up rejecting things that the Good Shepherd teaches us here!

The Old Testament Promise of the Good Shepherd

When Christ comes on the scene announcing Himself to be the Good Shepherd, He was not randomly picking this image of Himself. The Jews certainly should have known that such a title was loaded with all kinds of Old Testament promises. For example:

Psalms 23:1-6 A Psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. (2) He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. (3) He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (4) Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (5) You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. (6) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

LORD here is Yahweh. When Jesus announces Himself as the Good Shepherd of God's flock, He is plainly saying that HE is the LORD!

Psalms 80:1 To the choirmaster: according to Lilies. A Testimony. Of Asaph, a Psalm. Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth.

Here is one of the clearest and most powerful passages saying the same thing –

Isaiah 40:9-11 Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" (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. (11) 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.

Once again we see that for Christ to present Himself as THE Good Shepherd is for Him to announce that He is the Lord, the Messiah.

Contrast the Good Shepherd With Evil Shepherds

When Christ came into this world, His people were oppressed by evil shepherds. The scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees. The Temple was corrupted. Its worship was obnoxious and loathsome to God. This is why Christ immediately cleansed the temple when He came to Jerusalem, and ultimately announced that the temple would be destroyed because the true temple had come – Christ Himself and His church.

So the people of God were oppressed by false shepherds. And so it was also in the days of Ezekiel long before. Listen now as I read from Ezekiel 34 and especially notice how the coming of the true Shepherd is linked with the beginning of the New Creation and the end of the Curse.

Ezekiel 34:7-31 "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: (8) As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, **since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep,** (9) therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: (10) Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep

at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep.

No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them. (11) "For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, **I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.** (12) **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.** (13) **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. (14) **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.

(15) **I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep,** and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. (16) **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.

(17) "**As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats.** (18) Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture; and to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet? (19) And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have muddied with your feet? (20) "Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: **Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep.** (21) Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, (22) I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. **And I will judge between sheep and sheep.**

(23) **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.** (24) And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

(25) "**I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land,** so that they

may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. (26) And I will make them and the places all around my hill a blessing, and **I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing.** (27) **And the trees of the field shall yield their fruit,** and the earth shall yield its increase, and they shall be secure in their land. And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke, and deliver them from the hand of those who enslaved them.

(28) **They shall no more be a prey to the nations, nor shall the beasts of the land devour them.** They shall dwell securely, and none shall make them afraid. (29) And I will provide for them renowned plantations so that they shall **no more be consumed with hunger in the land**, and no longer suffer the reproach of the nations. (30) And they shall know that I am the LORD their God with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Lord GOD.

(31) And you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord GOD."

Christ is announcing then here in John 10 that HE is the promised One of whom Ezekiel was speaking. He is the Lord come to shepherd his people, to save them, to feed them and protect

them, to remove the curse from their land that is the result of sin. Notice the curse language:

- Wild beasts
- Lack of rain – drought
- Barren crops
- Enemies preying upon them
- Famine

Where have we seen these curses before? Well, when the Lord brought Israel into Canaan, He announced His blessing to them for obedience to Him, and His curse upon them if they rejected his law. You can read all about that in Deuteronomy 27 where the Lord even gave them a very powerful visual image of blessing and curse through the symbolism of the leaders announcing God's blessing from Mount Gerizim and God's curse from Mount Ebal.

So all of this and more is the background behind Christ's presentation of Himself as the Good Shepherd. He has come to gather His people. To deliver them from the curse, to rescue them from false shepherds, and even to sort out false sheep from true sheep. Listen then to John chapter 10. Notice that just as in the Old Testament Good Shepherd passages, Christ begins here with the exposure of the false shepherds -

John 10:1-31 "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. (2) But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. (3) To him the gatekeeper opens. **The sheep hear his voice**, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. (4) When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, **and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.** (5) **A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.**"

(6) This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. (7) So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. (8) **All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.** (9) I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. (10) **The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.**

(11) I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (12) 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. (13) He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. (14) **I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,** (15) **just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.**

(16) **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.**

(17) For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. (18) 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."

(19) There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. (20) Many of them said, "He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?" (21) Others said, "These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

(22) At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, (23) and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. (24) So the

Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." (25) Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, (26) **but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep.** (27) **My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.** (28) **I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.** (29) **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.** (30) I and the Father are one." (31) The Jews picked up stones again to stone him.

Let's just comment on a few of the main themes here.

The Theme of the false Shepherds

It is vital for us to make careful note that Jesus BEGINS with a rebuke and exposure of the false shepherds who abuse the Lord's people. And He continues to expose them right on through this entire discourse. After all, this is the very reason God's flock NEEDS the Good Shepherd. They have been abused, falsely taught (not fed) and abandoned as prey for wolves.

It is extremely and sadly common that most professing Christians seem to

choose to remain oblivious to the presence of false shepherds. As the next point reveals, this calls into question whether they are Christ's sheep at all.

Christ's True Sheep Hear His Voice and Refuse to Follow a Stranger

We see this in our pets, right? Many times the dog or cat that readily runs up to us and sits in our lap *flees* when a stranger comes around. They know us. They do not know the stranger. And so it is with Christ's true people.

The sheep hear His voice and follow Him...a stranger they will not follow but will flee from him. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.

I continue to find these facts incredibly important and yet so many people who claim to be Christians are very reluctant to consider the obvious implications. Listen to a few:

- If a person is really a Christian, has been born again, is indwelt and led by Christ's Spirit, they WILL have the ability to recognize Christ's voice (His truth, His Word).

Listen to John say it –

1 John 4:4-6 Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. (5) They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. (6) We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

The world, the unsaved, the lost, those in Satan's grip, listen to false shepherds because the message of the false shepherd is the philosophy and message of this evil world system. It is the wisdom of this world in contrast to the wisdom of God and those who follow it consider the wisdom of God to be foolishness, wanting no part of it.

In contrast, when the Good Shepherd or His genuine undershepherds come along, *whoever truly knows God listens to them, while false sheep refuse to listen.*

Every Christian then has the ability to discern the Spirit of truth from the spirit of error. We might get deceived for a while, but eventually we realize error and reject it.

Do you see how Scripture presents the thing to us as "either/or." "Well, yes, I know that fellow is a real fan of Joel Osteen, but I just know he is a real

Christian and after all, who am I to judge?" No, such a person is not a Christian, not a member of Christ's flock, and we know because he is following the voice of a false shepherd, not the voice of Christ.

This ALSO means great encouragement to us. Though they may be few in number, Christ's real sheep ARE going to hear His voice and those who (as we will see in a moment) really are being called by Him to salvation WILL have ears to hear the gospel.

(14) I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, (15) just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Christ's Other Sheep

(16) 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.

Here, Christ tells the Jews that the true Israel, the true flock of God, *is much, much wider than just the physical descendants of Abraham.* Those detested *Gentiles* also have among them God's elect.

Christ is speaking here of the Great Commission, really. His voice is going to be sent out to the ends of the earth because *He has sheep at the ends of the earth who WILL listen and hear His voice and come and follow Him!*

Matthew 28:19-20 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

WE live at the edge of the world when you consider where the physical land of Israel is. WE are some of those sheep Jesus was speaking of so long ago and so far away. We are not Jews by birth, but we are made into the children of Abraham and thus members of God's flock by faith in Christ. His voice has come to us and by His Spirit we were given ears to hear and recognize it. We repented, we turned around, we believed the gospel and trusted Christ alone as the only remedy for our sin – all and only because the Lord chose us as His sheep.

Let's close with one final important observation from the final words of Jesus in this passage –

(16) 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.

There will be one flock, one shepherd.

How many "people of God" are there? The large sector of contemporary evangelicals give this answer – "two." Right?

That is to say, many churches and Bible colleges and seminaries teach that God has two peoples – Jews and the Church. You see it played out even today when people trek over to Israel and follow every detail in the news about Israel, claiming that the focal point of God's entire dealing with humanity is fundamentally about the Jewish people. Oil prices rise and someone is pulling out a verse from the Old Testament, claiming that this is a fulfillment of prophecy! That sort of thing, you see. Just think of what you would think of Christ and Christianity if you were a Palestinian and you hear people who claim to be Christians announcing that God is for the Jews no matter what, and against you!

This is the result of what we believe is a mishandling of Scripture, particularly a mishandling of the Old Testament. It results from a failure to rightly apply Scriptures like these –

Romans 2:28-29 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. (29) But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

Romans 4:9-17 Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. (10) How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. (11) He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, (12) and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. (13) For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. (14) For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. (15) For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no

transgression. (16) That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, (17) as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

And again –

Ephesians 3:6-7 This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (7) Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

And once more –

Ephesians 2:13-22 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (14) For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility (15) by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, (16) and

might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. (17) And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. (18) For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. (19) So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, (20) built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, (21) in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. (22) In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Apart from understanding that there is ONE flock of God in Christ, a clear understanding of Scripture and of God's wonderful plan of redemption is going to be simply impossible.