

## John 10:1-10

When my brother Bob was just a little one, my grandmother and mother took him with them to go shopping at what was then Dahlkemper's Department Store in Harborcreek. They were looking for something, I have no idea what, but they became so absorbed in whatever it was they weren't paying attention to Bob. He, of course, being a curious and active kid, got bored standing there with them and went for a walk. Pretty soon he was lost, and my mom and grandma realized he was missing. They of course panicked. And started calling out his name. They decided to check to see if he had gone to the car, but continued calling his name as they left the store. Through all the noise Bob heard my mom's voice, he knew it well, and he came back to her, following the sound of her voice. Soon they were reunited without any incident.

Think of all the voices we hear today: those on the radio, the TV, maybe you listen to audiobooks like I do. You hear the voices of your family. Maybe you even hear the voices of your neighbors, coworkers, or students. Which of these voices are you drawn to? The ones with whom you are most familiar.

Jesus tells us he's a good shepherd. Shepherds may not mean much to us these days, but in the time of Jesus they were very important. Sheep were a highly valued commodity, mentioned over 500 times in the Bible. They were the most common sacrificial animal in the temple, and God's people were often referred to as sheep. The shepherding life wasn't one that was popular. Often the lowest thought of people were put out with the sheep because they were unwanted or unable to live with the rest of the people in the community. But as you most likely remember, shepherds were the first to hear of the news of Jesus' birth, and they were the first to tell people about Jesus as they returned to their flocks that night.

So why does Jesus say that he's a good shepherd? Because Jesus watches over his flock, (those who follow him), protects his flock, saves his flock, and in doing all this Jesus gives abundant life. An abundant life is not life with all the amenities of a 5 star hotel, an abundant life is one that is lived fully in the sense of having a deep relationship with God which leads to deep relationships with people. An abundant life is a life that does not end with life on earth but continues once our mortal bodies have breathed their last breath.

We need to be careful who we follow in this life. There are many who would like to lead us astray, saying that it isn't important to follow Jesus. Yet Jesus tells us in this passage that person is a thief and a bandit. That person is the one who works against the goodness of God, the one who wants to steal our souls for himself, in other words Satan. Those of us who know God's word, who follow Jesus, know the difference between the words of Satan and the words of God because we study God's word and have it in our hearts. Just as sheep learn to recognize the voice of their shepherd, we learn to recognize the voice of Jesus.

Then Jesus tells his disciples that he is the gate. In the time of Jesus there were two types of sheep folds. There were the ones we think of out in the hill country and there were the ones that were built on the back of specific houses in town. Those in town folds were like a stone fence that arched away from the house and were controlled by the homeowner. The shepherds would bring their sheep in from the fields and the gatekeeper, the homeowner, would charge them to keep their sheep in his fold. There they would be safe from predators, most likely before going to market.

When they were out in the field the sheep fold was a rock fence without a door. All the shepherds would bring their sheep into the stone fence and a shepherd would lay in front of the

opening, acting as a human gate to keep out wolves and other predators. Jesus said that he does this, in that he saves us from our sins. He actually was telling the disciples that the pharisees and Sadducees could not save them with their overbearing, human created laws, but that they would be saved by simply the grace of God through Jesus' death and resurrection, which had not happened yet, but Jesus knew was going to take place in the near future.

So the gate, at night, functions to keep the sheep safe. In the morning the gate allows the sheep to go out into the fields to find nourishment. This allows the sheep to flourish, thrive and live. Jesus is dedicated to those whom he calls his own, to those who acknowledge he is God's son who came into the world and lived as a human being, who continues to live in the heavenly realm with God.

What proof do we have of Jesus having lived on earth? Well, of course we have the biblical accounts of the gospels. They tell us, in their own way, to their own audiences, that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Messiah. But is there any further proof that Jesus lived, anything more than the biblical accounts of his life?

Yes, there is. According to Habermas, the author of *The Historical Jesus*, there are over a dozen non-Christian sources from ancient history that mention Jesus. Habermas states that Jesus may even be one of the most mentioned figures of the ancient world. (Habermas, G.R., Pg 66 *The historical Jesus* College press publishing company Joplin). The Hebrew book of doctrine, the Talmud, itself mentions Jesus. Although it claims that Jesus practiced sorcery, that in itself is a statement that Jesus lived. (The Babylonian Talmud, ed. I. Epstein (London: The Soncino Press, 1935). A Jewish historian, Josephus, who was alive when some of the people who followed Jesus were still alive, stated that Jesus is the brother of James; and Tacitus, a Roman historian referred to a Christ who was condemned to death by the procurator Pontius Pilate. (Rausch, D. 1973 *The Historical Jesus: A Current Perspective*).

Jesus had more influence on human history than any other person history has recorded. He came to turn humanity back to God. To take our focus off of ourselves and return it to God. Is there any proof that Jesus is God's son? Only in the Bible. But Christianity is the only religion whose God reaches out to humans in grace. By having faith in Jesus Christ—who obeyed the Law perfectly for us-- , and accepting His work on our behalf, we are justified and made righteous. What an amazing shepherd. One who knows our name. And like my brother Bob recognized my mother's voice, we recognize the call of the Good Shepherd.

All glory be to God