Our Great Shepherd
John 10:1-5

As we come to this chapter, this chapter in a gospel full of amazing chapters and passages is one of the most beloved chapters for believers in all of the Bible. And the reason why is that it depicts Jesus as our great Shepherd. He is the one who cares and protects and loves his sheep. And we realize the need of this duty and delight of the shepherd because sheep are some of the most helpless animals on planet earth. They cannot protect themselves or feed themselves or clean themselves. They cannot survive on their own. They need a shepherd - a protector and one that would care for them. And this is why shepherds became such an illustration in the ancient world maybe of a king or ruler who care and have power over the people. It was an easy illustration because people knew of the need of shepherds.

In fact one of the greatest emotive passages that we have in all of the Scripture is in Isaiah 40:10-11, "**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.**" God's arms are often a metaphor for his strength and power. God is omnipotent. He is all powerful. He rules with his strength. But here is that tender picture of our shepherd king gathering his lambs in his arms. It is his loving and caring and protection of his little ones. There is a gentleness and love the way that he handles each one of us. This is Christ's personal relationship with each one of us.

And you think that this chapter would be easy for us to understand, or interpret but there are a wide variety of interpretations of this chapter that Jesus is talking about the church or heaven or whatever. But the reason why there is such confusion about the exact nature of Jesus' teaching and care for us here is that we miss the context. So often this passage is taught in isolation. There is no "after these things," or "then Jesus went here and taught," somehow indicating that this is a new section. But there is no such indicators. Remember, the chapter designations were not in the original writing of the gospel but added later for study purposes. So chapter 10 flows right out of chapter 9, and this blind man that Jesus sought, and the ungodly and abusive attitude of the religious leaders toward this man. And Jesus opening his eyes spiritually, while condemning the Pharisees as blind guides. It has to be interpreted in light of what has just taken place. And we will hopefully see the significance as we walk through the passage.

And the main focus of this passage is on Jesus. And one of the ways that God changes us is through recognizing to a greater degree who Jesus is, and how Jesus relates to us. And the more that we see that the more we love him and cherish him and trust in him. And that last word "trust" is significant. Because that is what we have a hard time doing - trusting Christ. Yes, he is my Saviour, but in our everyday living, with the frustrations and temptations and trials of life he just does not seem that important. We hear people say many times that you just have to trust in Jesus. But who is this Jesus that we are trusting in? How does he relate to me? What does it really mean when I say that he is my shepherd? What does that provide for me as I live as one of his sheep in this fallen world? So often Jesus never enters our everyday lives and difficulties because we never see him as the Great Shepherd of our souls, and what

that truly means for us. So often we do not even see ourselves as sheep, we are weak and needy but he is everything that we need in a shepherd. So tonight I want us to see three realities about Jesus being our Great Shepherd, and hopefully learn to trust him and why we need to trust him.

1. The first way we see Jesus as the Great Shepherd is he enters by the door. Vv1-3a.

I believe many times when we study the parables and metaphors or illustrations of Jesus we get lost in the details. We say, this stands for this or this stands for that, and we end up missing the main message. And the main message here is the great care that Jesus has for his people, especially over the religious leaders who were to care for the people of God. But Jesus entering in through the main door was significant because he talks about thieves and robbers who come in another way.

And in the ancient world, every town or large village would have have a sheep pen. It had high walls made of stone that was not easy to climb. There was only one door, and it was usually guarded by a gate keeper who would only let shepherds of the sheep enter in. There were many times many different folds that mixed together. When the shepherd came he would call the sheep each by name or a nick-name that he had given them. They would hear his voice and they would come to him. And it would only be his sheep. Other sheep would not follow a stranger's voice. And that is the background to the story that would have been easily understood as Jesus told it.

So look at verse 1 here, "**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.**" Now the question, and here is where interpretation comes in, who is the thief and the robber? And in the context, of the blind man and the Pharisees and how they treated him where they threw him out of the Temple and Judaism, it is the Pharisees. The sheep pen here is Judaism or the people of God. And Judaism emphasized the need of God's grace. Sacrifice was all over the daily ritual. But the Pharisees tried to come a different way and take control, and that was through their law-keeping. And you can see that so clearly when they should have been celebrating the great grace given to this man in the restoring of his sight, they hate him for it. They point to themselves as the shepherds of God's people.

Ezekiel 34 talks about the ruthlessness of the false shepherds of Israel and the outcome of their ministry in Ezekiel 34:1-5, "**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.**"

It is amazing that Jesus gave his strongest condemnation to the Pharisees because of how they led the people of God as these false shepherds. And it is amazing because the moment you point our error, even serious theological error that is being

taught to God's people by a false teacher that you are many times looked upon as divisive. Jesus cared enough about the sheep that he warns his people that there are false shepherds that will alter the message and seek to devour the people. They will seek to make themselves fat off their heresies. And if you cannot see that today then something is wrong.

But look at the contrast with Jesus here, "**But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens.**" Now this is easy to understand in once sense. The gatekeeper was responsible to open the gate only to the true shepherd. But here in this passage who is the gatekeeper and what is the door? Well, think of what the sheep pen is. It is true and godly Judaism. And here Jesus does not come of his own will but the will of his Father. He comes and fulfills all of the prophesies and even all of the laws of the Old Testament Scripture. He does not come around or over the fence, but through the Word of God already given.

The Scriptures indicate that the great Shepherd will come. And unlike the false shepherds he will not only fulfill prophecy and fulfill the Law but in doing so - love the sheep and provide for the sheep. You cannot separate one from the other. In that same passage over in Ezekiel, God prophesies about the coming of the true Shepherd of our souls. Ezekiel 34:22-24, "**I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and 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. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.**" The Shepherd David is none other than the One prophesied to come through the line of David - our Jehovah King, our Shepherd - Jesus Christ.

Let me ask you if your thoughts ever rise this high about Christ? Do you ever see him as the One who came to Shepherd our souls? And if he cares and will never leave us or forsake us what can man do to us; what have we to fear in this life? There are times, many times, daily times where we come face to face with how weak and powerless we are. There are many that will try even to lead us astray. But there is a truly shepherd to our souls and he has entered into our lives to care for us.

2. Another way that we see Jesus is our Great Shepherd is that he calls his own. V.3.

This is such a life changing truth, and it should change us daily. We often think through all the difficulties that we are going through and we cannot imagine that God really cares for us, or at least we have a sneaking suspicion that he might not. I don't know how many times I have been ask the question in one form or another: how can this be for his glory and my good? And the midst of that questioning, we are really saying that if I was God I could love his sheep better than God can. We might not state it like that, but that is the whole attitude. And if you suspect Jesus is somehow unable to help or that he does not really love you, then it is hard to trust him. And how about you? Are you trusting God's love for you - even in your trials and suffering and heartaches? Maybe a better question is: how can I trust Jesus in the situations and circumstances that I find myself in? And that is even a better question.

The answer is thinking and preaching to yourself a message that you already know. Look at what Jesus says here, "**The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his**

own sheep by name and leads them out." Listen to that verse! Jesus calls to the sheep and they hear his voice. They recognize the voice of the Son of God - our great Shepherd King. And again, why are we believers in Jesus Christ? Why did we believe? And the answer is because he called us, and this calling was very personal. He called us by name. He knows us or has chosen to know us. And this calling of Jesus is different from the general call that he gives all sinners. And that calling and offer is a legitimate calling and offer. Here is the calling and offer of Jesus in John 6:35, "**Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.**" Jesus is the bread of life. Whoever you may be if you come and believe on Jesus you will have life. The search for life is over. It is a legitimate and heart-felt offer to all. But right after that offer he says in John 6:37, "**All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.**" We have been given by the Father to the Son and when the Son calls his sheep they will come. There will be a response.

Jesus sees Peter and Andrew casting their nets and in Matthew 4:19-20, "**And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.' Immediately they left their nets and followed him.**" And what did they do when he called them? They responded to the voice of the Saviour King and followed. Matthew, a notorious and hated tax collector who lived such a profitable life at the expense of others. And we read in Matthew 9:9, "**As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he rose and followed him.**" It is an effective call to salvation. One that is loving and caring and effective in what it intends. We hear and realize the voice of Christ through the gospel and we respond because of his effective call..

And if you ever doubt the love of God because of what you are going through, start preaching about what you know about Jesus and his relationship with you. He came from the glory of heaven to die for you who is undeserving of that love. You are a sinner and were an enemy of God. He gives you what you do not deserve. And then he just does not have the gospel preached to you, but he calls you effectively to himself, and notice he calls you by name. This is not just an offer of salvation but this is a particular salvation for a particular people who Jesus Christ knows personally. And Jesus Christ has proven his love for you. It is an objective reality.

And if he has proven it so wonderfully and bountifully, don't you think he can be trusted in lesser things and situations in your life that he is truly up to your good and his glory? He specially knows you and has a unique plan for your life that is different than anyone else. He loves you as a caring and great shepherd. This is the one who has called you to Himself. Preach to yourself what you already know. Paul does this in one of the ecstatic and glorious passages in all of Scripture in Romans 8 that nothing will separate us from God. He says in 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?**" He argues from the greater to the lesser. If God has granted me and met my greatest need in my life which is my salvation then how will he not give me the grace and the resources to go through whatever he has called me to go through? He calls us and knows us personally and is involved personally in the care and nurture of his sheep. No one ever cared for us like Jesus. Realize he calls and know you by name.

3. We see Jesus as our great Shepherd in that he leads us. Vv. 3-4

Think of the last ten to fifteen years of your life. And think of all the changing events of your life. There is no way that you could have written your own story that you would be sitting here tonight listening to me preach this message. Your life has taken so many twists and turns. I am amazed at God's grace. I never could have imagined when I was sixteen that my life would look like it does today, with all the good and bad, with all the beauty and ugliness, with all the triumphs and defeats. And what that indicates is that there is someone else that has been writing my story. There has been someone else that has been leading the way. All through my Christian life I see the imprint of Jesus Christ leading the way. It is stunning.

The way that this passage is many times taught is that it emphasizes the sheep. The true sheep hear the voice of the Saviour. We need to believe on him and become sheep. True sheep not only hear but they follow the voice of their Saviour. And all that is true, but that is not the main meaning or the emphasis of the passage. The main emphasis of the passage is the glory of the true and great shepherd. And it is this shepherd who leads his sheep. Look at these two verses and if you are his sheep, see yourself in these verses, "**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.**" Notice that he brings all his own out and then he goes before them. One of the most important responsibilities of a shepherd was to go before the sheep - to lead the sheep. He was to make sure there were no predators or impediments in the path. He was to lead them to green pastures and places where they could water. He led the sheep.

And the sheep would follow. Now why would they follow the shepherd? Because he was their shepherd. Look at verse 5, "**A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.**" We look at all the false philosophies and misrepresentations of Jesus out there and we ask the question - why have I not gone astray? Why have I not abandoned Jesus for another voice or another shepherd? And the reason why is we are his sheep. We follow our shepherd. We are forever united to him.

This is a very fearful world. There are so many uncertainties in the here and now. We worry and are filled with anxieties as we hear the news. But do you realize that you have a great Shepherd of your soul that has all authority and sovereignty? Do you realize that he is the one leading you? Do you realize our calling in life is not profound. It is simply to know him, trust him, and follow our Shepherd King. This is the one who entered by the door, who did what no one else could do in fulfilling the Law of God. This is the one who provided for our redemption and that calls us personally to himself. And this is our Sovereign Lord who is leading us. He is our great Shepherd. We are his sheep. Let us follow him. He can be trusted!