

## Follow the Good Shepherd for Life!



**Listen to His voice. (vv.1-6)**



**Enter through the Gate. (vv.7-10)**

In the name of Jesus, our good and gentle Shepherd, dear sheep of His pasture:

One of the things that makes me glad to believe the Bible is that Jesus’ kindest, most winsome words were spoken to His enemies. John 7-11 chronicle the increasing animosity of the Jewish religious leaders toward Jesus as He testifies against their wickedness in order to lead them to repentance. By the time we reach our text in John 10, their self-righteous envy has reached a fever pitch. Several times they have tried to arrest Him. They have picked up stones to kill Him. Yet His time has not yet come. The unbelief of His enemies will only intensify as their hearts are hardened by God’s Word. But the hearts of all who repent and put their faith in Jesus as their Savior continue to be warmed and comforted by His soul-saving voice. Against this backdrop of extreme animosity, our Savior’s kindness and gentleness look all the more beautiful and inviting. Today He leads us to the rich pastures of His soul-saving Word. May He always help us to **Follow the Good Shepherd for Life!** First of all, it is vital that we...



**Listen to His voice. (vv.1-6)**

You would be suspicious too if you were a sheep rancher in the Dakota’s looking out your window at something like this. In the gathering dusk you see the sheep stirring in the pen. And there on the far side almost out of sight is someone climbing over your fence. Anyone who should be out there would come around through the gate where you could see him. Obviously, he’s up to no good. So you don’t hesitate. You grab your rifle on the way out the door before your wife can ask, “What’s up?” If you’ve been having problems with rustlers, the adrenalin is pounding in your ears to protect your flock.

You don’t have to be a rancher to appreciate Jesus’ parable. But only as a believer in Jesus can you possibly understand His point. This is not up for debate. *“I tell you the truth,”* Jesus says. Or more literally, *“Truly, truly I tell you, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a robber.”* A *“thief”* will steal by stealth; a *“robber”* uses force. Fence climbers do both. As the owner and faithful shepherd of the sheep, you would never enter any other way except by the gate. And once inside, the sheep would be glad to see you, or better, hear you.

Even if we were ranchers here in the West, we might not realize this about sheep. In America we generally drive the animals with very smart border collies nipping at their heels. But in the Near East, Palestinian, Israeli and Arab shepherds have another way. They talk to their sheep and then walk out ahead of them. Their sheep actually follow the sound of their voice. Mixed flocks in a single pen can be separated out by a good shepherd walking and talking inside until his sheep have gathered around him. As he leaves the fold, only his sheep will follow. They know his voice. And that’s another reason why our Good Shepherd is so concerned if someone jumps over His fence to get at His sheep.

The enemies of Jesus just didn’t get it. This figure of speech was hidden from them because they did not trust in Jesus as their Good Shepherd. But He wants to be sure we’re not in that group. For our own health and wellbeing, Jesus wants us to **Listen to His voice.** He will at times have to scold us for our wandering ways. Like natural sheep we’re all fence climbers trying to get out of His pasture because the grass looks so much greener on the other side. But once we get there, it’s too late. Our souls are thirsty from missing His Word. But without that water of life, without the sound of **His voice** we don’t have the strength to find our way back. So many voices are calling for our attention. In some ways they attract sheep like mud puddles in the road. And like foolish sheep, we stop to drink in every new idea that comes along. We feel fine but can’t sense the parasites attacking our souls from the bad water. Our foolish habits are like ruts we

wear into our lives. What a comfortable spot to lie down! But our wooly coat thick with filth and sin we've picked up from our worthless wandering ways is heavy on our back. And heavy wool on rolling sheep will turn them right over on their back in their favorite spot. We've gone so long seeking our own comfort with our money and our time that we don't realize how quickly we've rolled over. Now belly up to the sun, we don't have the strength to roll back onto our feet. Vultures, bears, coyotes, wolves – there are plenty of predators out there to join the roaring lion from hell that stalks our souls hour by hour. In this position, we are what is called a “cast sheep” – on our back, belly up, dead in a matter of hours. It happens every time we are drawn away from the Word of our Good Shepherd, every time we fail to **Listen to His voice**.

### **Enter through the Gate. (vv.7-10)**

Now do you understand what the Psalmist meant? *“Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.”* (Psalm 42:5f NIV) Cast down as sheep, deep in dark hurt and envy, in weakness we can best appreciate our Good Shepherd's care. He knows we cannot get up to come looking for Him. He knows our habitual sins and the foolish things we do on the spur of the moment. His great love and faithfulness come looking for us. When we have no other hope, then we are where we really need to be to put our hope in God alone. Then we can look forward to saying good things about how He searched for us and found us.

Over the rise He comes just out of our sight. But we can hear Him singing along the way. His voice sounds so good. His strong hands grasp us underneath and slick as whistle we're back on our feet again. If we've been there too long in the heat, He'll rub our belly with a special ointment to heal the sun burn. And if it's cold, a drop or two of brandy from His flask will make our tail wiggle with warmth. Maybe He sounds as if He's scolding, but back in His arms and over His shoulder, we're on our way home. And anything He says at this point is pure love to help us **Enter through the Gate**.

Back home our Good Shepherd does not climb the fence. He goes through the gate. In fact, Jesus teaches us a second parable with a slightly different picture: *“I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.”* This is another picture of His words in John 14:6: *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* We cannot find safety from our sin or from the horrendous difficulties of life and the terror of death unless we come to God through Jesus. By faith in His holy life and innocent death in our place we **Enter through the Gate** which is Jesus Christ Himself.

*“The thief,”* whether in the person of Satan or false teachers always tries to get into Christ's Church his own way instead of God's way through His holy Word. They promise everything earthbound people want for this life: a beautiful wife, a caring husband, a full checkbook and investments that never stop gaining. But its all a sham because literally Jesus says, *“The thief does not come except in order to steal and kill and destroy.”* Unless there is some personal gain, the enemy of our souls stays away. He's looking for weaknesses to exploit in order to destroy us and dishonor God. But Jesus' agenda is entirely the other way, absolutely in our favor: *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”* The overflowing abundant life of God's grace and mercy in Christ is more than a full checkbook or a balanced budget at church and at home. Having a *“full life”* God's way means having His strength to deal with heartaches, shortages and challenges that confront churches and families constantly this side of heaven. *“Abundant life”* is the enjoyment of God's blessings here in time and hereafter in eternity.

**Follow the Good Shepherd for Life and Enter through the Gate**, putting all your trust in Jesus as your Good Shepherd. Since Jesus tried so hard to get His enemies to **Listen to His voice** and win them over, we can rejoice that He sought and found us. We are the sheep of His pasture because He has given us the gift of faith to depend on Him. Hearing His voice, entering through His holy life and innocent death – here with our Good Shepherd we find life forever more. Let's stay home with Him. Amen.