

# Who Do You Listen To?

## John 10:1-10 (Easter 4)

*“Amen, Amen, I tell you: Anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the door, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. The doorkeeper opens the door for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own sheep, he walks ahead of them. The sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will never follow a stranger, but will run away from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus used this illustration in speaking to the people, but they did not understand what he was telling them. So Jesus said again, “Amen, Amen, I tell you: I am the door for the sheep. All who came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. Whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. “A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”*

When you turn on the news at night or open up your Facebook feed you get flooded with so many voices. Some voices are louder than others concerning the severity of this deadly virus and what to do since it's here. There are so many varying thoughts about what we should or shouldn't be doing to prevent its spread. People disagree about whether the state should be opened up completely so that more people can go back to work or should the safer at home remain extended preventing further spread. With so many voices, so much out there it's hard to sort out fact from fiction, fake news from real news, truth from opinion, and right from wrong. With so many different viewpoints and so much information out there, who do you listen to?

The same can be said not just about this pandemic, but also when it comes to salvation and life. There are so many voices speaking and your heart is flooded with the influence of many religions, many philosophies, many subtle thoughts, and teachings contrary to God's Word. All of these are voices attempting to weaken the sheep's connection to the shepherd. Their ultimate purpose is to snatch God's people away from Jesus and away from the safety of life that we have in him who is our Risen Savior. So we find ourselves asking the same question. Who do you listen to? It is in this famous picture of sheep and shepherd that we hear Jesus today, he answers that question for us.

Jesus begins this famous chapter with a parable that really sets the table for the entire chapter of which we are focusing especially on ten verses. In this parable he sets down the basic principle about sheep, shepherds, thieves, and robbers. He talks about the sheep-pen, a walled enclosure designed to protect the sheep during the night. The walls were often high enough to keep the sheep in and the wild animals out.

While the shepherd uses the door or the gate, the thieves and robbers ignore the door trying to come in another way. Thieves and robbers sound like the same thing. They both have the intent of stealing, but it's the way they go about it which makes them different and yet no less dangerous. Thieves are the ones who tried to steal something quietly without really being noticed. They are sneaky and quick. Robbers were the ones who stole things by force and violence. There is nothing sneaky or quiet about them. They are bold and a strong force on the weak. Who would the sheep listen to? It wasn't the thieves and robbers. They would run away from these strangers. They would listen to the voice of the shepherd. They know that voice as he calls them each by name and leads them out to pasture.

In Jesus' parable, the sheep are God's people and he of course is the shepherd. Later in the chapter, he makes that famous statement. “I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me.” (John 10:14) But who are the thieves and robbers in the lives of the sheep and how do they attempt to snatch sheep away from the Shepherd and the safety of life in him?

Jesus' audience no doubt included a crowd of different people, but his words were primarily meant for the Pharisees. Yet they didn't understand a word he said, though they claimed to be the ones who saw everything. How sad, for they were the thieves and robbers who tried to steal and destroy the sheep. They tried to steal God's people by fear and intimidation. They robbed the people of the sure hope of forgiveness and life through their numerous and burdensome laws. They were the false shepherds condemned so vigorously in all of Scripture. It's no wonder Jesus again and again warned the people not to follow such "shepherds" who were nothing more than thieves and robbers.

Certainly there are many false teachers and teachings around today. They are tools of the prowling lion Satan himself trying to steal the sheep. And there are many who listen to their voices, but if it isn't the voice of the Shepherd then those voices are the call of thieves and robbers. They are like thieves working quietly with words that aren't always clearly false and harmful unless you listen very closely. They can subtly over time weaken and erode our faith connection to Jesus by melding his voice with their own thoughts. They are like robbers who teach things that are clearly contrary to what Jesus says with the intent of stealing us from the safety and security of life that we have in our Risen Good Shepherd.

Like the sheep who run away from the strangers, we as sheep of the Good Shepherd do all that we can to distance ourselves from these voices which drown out the Shepherd's voice. We don't want these voices to have influence on our lives. Instead as the sheep listen for the shepherd's voice. Recognizing that voice, they follow him. As Jesus calls us each one of us through his Word and through faithful proclaimers of that Word, we are hearing his voice and follow him. So hearing and following Jesus, he leads us through the door to life.

King David wrote in Psalm 23, **"The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing. He causes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name sake."** (vs. 1-3) Isn't this what Jesus, our Good Shepherd, does for us as we follow him through the door, the gate to life. The door or the gate of the sheep pen was the way into safety and the way out to be led to the pastures. As we hear our shepherd's voice, he leads us into faith nourishing pastures and back again into the safety of life. And the doors he leads the sheep through, is none other than himself. **"So Jesus said again, 'Amen, Amen, I tell you: I am the door for the sheep. All who came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. Whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.'"** (vs 7-9)

In today's world, one religion is accepted as just as good as the next. It doesn't really matter what you believe. They are all different paths to the same heaven. Jesus states just the opposite. It is only through Jesus and his atoning work as our Good Shepherd that the "sheep" are nourished and safe from sin. Jesus makes it plain that he is the only Savior, he is the only door to life and salvation. He is not just one in a series of many doors of which to choose from. Salvation is only through faith in the Risen Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd who laid his life for sheep that loved to wander and stray into sin. Without him people are still lost in sin, but with him there is life in heaven. In fact that is why Jesus, the Good Shepherd came.

Jesus came into the world to be the door, the gate to heaven so that the sheep have eternal life and safety from sin and death through him. **"A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."** (vs. 10) The voices of thieves and robbers may speak the reassuring words of a shepherd. They may even come dressed like real shepherds, but in the end they only destroy the precious souls when people listen to their voices.

In contrast Jesus comes to give life. That is why he laid down his life for the sheep, for you and I. That is what he guarantees to us through his triumphant resurrection. Through his work as our Good Shepherd, Jesus gives real life which forgives sins, frees people from guilt, removes the fear and worries of everyday life and a life that ultimately lasts for all eternity in heaven. Jesus gives us the abundance of grace, of joy, and of peace. Jesus is the life-giver in every sense of the word. He still calls us to come follow him and be nourished in the pastures where he leads us.

My friends, there is so much out there that we could listen to, so much that Satan uses in his attempts to steal the sheep from the Shepherd, to take us from our living Lord Jesus. Just watch television or open your Facebook feed and it's there jumping over the fence enticing you to follow. Yet sheep do not follow the stranger. They follow the familiar voice of the shepherd.

Every time we hear Jesus speak to us through his Word and through faithful proclaimers of that Word, his voice becomes more familiar to us. The more we recognize that voice, the better we know what isn't his voice. Only then can we know when something we hear is the voice of thieves and robbers. The more we listen to Jesus' voice and follow that voice, the more we are nourished with the best pastures for our faith. Following Jesus, our Good Shepherd leads us through himself as the door into the safety of the sheep pen. We rest securely with the assurance of life in abundance. Amen