

## Jesus' Parables in Chronological Order

### Parable #20 — Matthew 18:12-14 — Lost Sheep

<sup>12</sup> “What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? <sup>13</sup> And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. <sup>14</sup> In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.

### Parable #21 — John 10:1-18 — Shepherd and His Flock

<sup>1</sup> “I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup> The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. <sup>3</sup> The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” <sup>6</sup> Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

<sup>7</sup> Therefore Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup> I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

<sup>11</sup> “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. <sup>13</sup> The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

<sup>14</sup> “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—<sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. <sup>17</sup> The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

Parable #20 — Matthew 18:12-14 — Lost Sheep

1. To what lengths would you go to recover a missing wallet? Your mother's lost diamond ring? An important irreplaceable document? A winning lottery ticket? Your missing child?
2. Bible commentators are divided about the meaning of the parable of the lost sheep. Some think the flock represents Christian believers and the lost sheep refers to a weak believer who has slid backward and strayed from his belief in Jesus. Others think that those who belong to Christ are eternally secure and cannot wander so far as to get lost. They think the lost sheep refer to the unredeemed of Israel (in Jesus' day) who characteristically hadn't listened and were prone to wandering far away. Today, the lost sheep would be a nominal Christian who behaves in a way inconsistent with that of a child of God. What do you think?
3. Does it change your image of God to see him as a caring shepherd searching frantically for one lost individual? How does this jell with the image of God as a judge to whom we must give account? (Hebrews 4:13)

Parable #21 — John 10:1-18 — Shepherd and His Flock

1. What kind of relationship do sheep have with their shepherd? (10:2-4)
2. To whom did Jesus say the sheep would not listen? (10:5, 10:8) Who did Jesus say was the thief? (10:1) Who does the stranger or thief represent today?
3. In this parable, Jesus describes himself as both the gate (10:7) and the shepherd (10:11, 10:14). Which image do you like better?
4. Gates can be used to keep some things in and some out. Which side of the gate that Jesus described are you on? (Be careful answering this.) (10:9) How has Jesus been a gate in your life?
5. What does a hired hand do for the sheep? (10:12) What was Jesus willing to do for his sheep? (10:11, 10:15, 10:17) What does it mean when Jesus repeats something three times?
6. How are we like sheep? What tempts people to follow a stranger (or thief)? Why?
7. In what ways has Jesus been your shepherd? How can we better hear his voice?

## John 10:1-6 - The Sheep, the Shepherd, and Sheep Robbers

Verses 1-5 are in the form of a parable. Scholars debate whether this is a single parable once told by Jesus, or several parables told by Jesus combined here by the gospel writer. It is likely here that Jesus was drawing upon Ezekiel 34 in his metaphorical use of sheep language. Ezekiel described Israel as God's flock and the rulers (kings) as the shepherds. Rather than feeding the sheep, the rulers alternately ignore the flock and actually prey upon them instead of protecting them. As a result the flock is scattered and devoured by the wild animals. The false shepherds will be removed from their position of leadership and God will again be the shepherd of his people. He will gather them and lead them to good pasture. He will appoint a shepherd over them from David's line and bring peace to the flock. Ezekiel 34 is a startlingly clear description of the way Jesus portrayed himself as the good shepherd.

Verses 1-3a describe the proper way to approach the sheep—through the door or gate of the sheepfold. Anyone who approaches another way has evil intentions. Verses 3b-5 focus more on the close relationship between the sheep and the shepherd. The shepherd knows his sheep and calls his own sheep by name. They follow at the sound of his voice. Sheep will not follow a stranger.

Verses 1-5 reflect common practices and understanding of shepherding in Palestine at that time. When not out in the open the sheep were kept in an enclosure made of stone walls. The size varied considerably. But all had an entrance where the shepherd took the sheep in and out. Obviously anyone who entered the pen by climbing over the wall rather than by the entrance was up to no good.

The sheep did learn the shepherd's voice. In the summer the sheep were taken into the rural areas to graze far away from home. There several flocks would be bedded down at night in a large fold built with stone walls. In the morning each shepherd called for his sheep and the flocks separated from each other simply by recognition of and response to the voice of their own shepherd. The shepherd would then lead the flock to the grazing area he had selected for that day.

Who was the audience for this parable (or parables)? The flow of the gospel suggests that the Jewish leaders of chapter 9 form that audience. Jesus is accusing those Jewish religious leaders of being false shepherds. They are the thieves and robbers mentioned in verse 1. He is the shepherd whose voice the sheep follow. They are the strangers—the rustlers who care nothing for the sheep but only for the profit they can make for themselves from the sheep.

Why did they not understand it? Simply because of their own hard heartedness. They refuse to allow the parable to expose their own sinfulness and need of God. When reading the parables, indeed all the teaching, of Jesus, we need to be asking, "What does this reveal about me?" "Do I need to be different?" "What does God want to do in changing my attitudes, thoughts, and life?"

## John 10:7-18 - Jesus' Application of the Parable(s)

Verses 7-18 arise from the same arena of life described in verses 1-5, but they develop their own direction and meaning. Jesus describes himself in verses 7-10 as the gate (or door) for the sheep and as the good shepherd in verses 11-18. Verses 1-5 provide the environment or atmosphere for understanding Jesus' descriptions of himself. The focus on Jesus' identity in John 10:22-42 also implies that the purpose of verses 1-18 is understanding who Jesus is.

There are two different applications of the gate metaphor in verses 7-10. Verse 8 interprets Jesus as the gate by which the shepherd comes to the sheep. The thieves and robbers did not come through Jesus, the door, to get at the sheep. The fact that they used other means proves that they are imposters. If Jesus is the door by which the authentic shepherd comes to the sheep then Jesus is not the shepherd at this point, but God is. Verses 7-8 seem to be saying that Jesus is the door by which God comes to shepherd us. This view assumes the background of Ezekiel 34 where God is the shepherd of Israel. This is a beautiful picture of the Incarnation. It is God who comes to care for us through Jesus.

The door metaphor is then turned around in verses 9-10. Here Jesus is the door by which the sheep go out to find pasture, salvation, and life. There is no other way by which the sheep can find these benefits. If they do not come through Christ, they will not find life and salvation. If they follow the thief they will find death and destruction. This is another beautiful picture of Jesus. It clearly teaches that he is the only way for salvation. Verse 10 concludes this section with a statement of Jesus' purpose. I came in order that they might have life and that they might have it in abundance.

Raymond Brown points out that the pasture of verse 9 leads to life in verse 10. John has already described Jesus as the source of living water (water of life) and as the bread of life. Now, within the metaphor of sheep, Jesus provides the pasture of life. And that pasture is abundant; it provides all that is needed and fully satisfies. Jesus is not just the only way by which salvation and life can be obtained. The life that he provides is totally sufficient and satisfying.

Verses 11-18 change the metaphor from Jesus as the door to Jesus as the shepherd. These verses are also built around parallel statements by Jesus, "I am the good shepherd," in verses 11 and 14. Several new thoughts or developments, not implied in verses 1-5, appear. The most significant new thought is the theme of the shepherd laying down his life for the sheep (verses 11b and 15b), and the indirect application of this to Jesus in verses 17b and 18. The risky responsibility of the shepherd is not the only conflict-oriented material in the passage. The contrast between the genuine shepherd and the imposter appears in terms of response to impending danger. The imposter flees before the wolf; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. These verses also introduce the concept of other sheep and other folds.

The imposter in verses 12-13 is the hireling as opposed to the thief of the preceding verses. The hireling is not attempting to harm or steal the sheep. In fact,

the hireling's motive is good. He is a protector, one who cares for the sheep. However, the point of mentioning the hireling is to show the contrasting levels of commitment. When push comes to shove, the hireling is more interested in protecting himself than the sheep. In contrast, the good shepherd, Jesus, has no concern above caring for and protecting the sheep.

Thus verses 11-13 speak both of Jesus' character as the Good Shepherd and of the care that the church receives as His flock. Sheep are not created for autonomy. They cannot survive running their own lives by themselves. Neither can the church nor individual believers. Genuine faith or trust in Christ only exists as we are confident that the Shepherd is more concerned for us than for his own welfare. Verses 9-10 suggest that his care includes salvation, nurture, and abundant life. These benefits are not just one-time, past benefits of the death of Christ, but the ongoing, present blessings and concern of the risen Lord.

The repetition of "I am the good shepherd," in verse 14 marks the next step in the development of the text. Verses 14-15 focus on the relationship of the shepherd and the sheep. I know my own and my own know me. Verses 11-13 had focused on care and dependence, but verses 14-15 center on intimacy. The care of a shepherd for his sheep may be tender and loving, but the metaphor lacks a personal dimension for most of us. The intimacy of Jesus' care for us and for his church is not simply that of a shepherd for sheep but the same kind of intimate relationship shared by Christ and the Father.

The intimate relationship of Christ and his followers that is portrayed here also advances beyond the sheep/shepherd metaphor by its mutual character. The double repetition of "know" emphasizes the mutuality involved. "I know my own and my own know me." "The Father knows me and I know the Father." If sheep of the shepherd were the only metaphor for the church, it would be too easy to view all the responsibility and energy in the relationship between Christ and us as flowing from the shepherd to the sheep. The introduction of mutual personal relationship means that we bear significant responsibility also. We dare not simply absorb the care of the Good Shepherd directed toward us; we must share in His concerns and participate in His mission.

Verse 16 turns suddenly to what appears to be an entirely new concept—other sheep, another fold. This is a clear reference to God's concern for the Gentiles (already expressed in the Old Testament) and to the Gentile mission of the church. In the context of the mutuality of the relationship between Christ and us there is only one conclusion that can be drawn. People who share intimacy with Christ will bring the other sheep and make it possible for those not of this fold to heed his voice. When we are in mutual relationship with Christ we pursue his agenda of one flock, one shepherd.

Verses 17-18 appear disconnected from the sheep/shepherd metaphor that has been at the center of chapter 10 thus far. However, they are a reflection on the meaning of Jesus, as good shepherd, laying down his life for the sheep and so they belong with verses 11-16. Several new ideas enter the passage in these verses.

Verse 17 specifically mentions love for the first time. The statement that the

Father loves Jesus “because” the Son is laying down his life does not mean that Jesus earns the Father’s love by his sacrificial death. Rather, the laying down of Jesus’ life for the sheep is the “act which expresses the perfect accord between them.” The mutual relationship of intimacy between Jesus and the Father points to a shared purpose as well as to love. The love of Christ for us, the love of the Father for Jesus, and the laying down of Christ's life are inextricably linked.

The other theme explicitly introduced in verses 17-18 is the Resurrection. The resurrection is an expression of the will and love of the Father, as the closing phrase of verse 18 makes clear. It is also linked to seeking the other sheep. The Gentile mission of the church did not develop until after the Resurrection. These verses function in a predictive way in John’s gospel. They also make it clear that teaching about the good shepherd is part of our on-going task between Jesus’ resurrection and ours.

Some of the above material is by Roger Hahn on the web page of The Voice Institute:  
<http://crivoice.org/biblestudy/bbjohn13.html>

For even more, see the discussion by Bob Deffinbaugh on the Bible.org page at  
[http://www.bible.org/page.php?page\\_id=2370](http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=2370)

Also see the *Oxford Bible Commentary* edited by John Barton and John Muddiman, Oxford University Press, 2001.

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