

INTRODUCTION

It's interesting that we have different names for groups of animals. Some of them are familiar. We talk about a herd of cows, a pack of wolves, and a school of fish. Those are terms we well know. But the collective terms for other animal groups are less known. For instance, a group of geese is called a gaggle, but a group of crows is called a murder, and a group of falcons is called a cast.

A group of whales is called a pod, but a group of stingrays is called a fever, and a group of jellyfish are called a smack. A group of hyenas are called a cackle, and a group of giraffes is called a tower. A group of pandas is called an embarrassment. A group of lions is called a pride but a group of leopards is called a leap, and a group of jaguars is called a shadow. A group of porcupines is called a prickle and a group of skunks is called a stench. A group of frogs is called an army, but a group of toads is called a knot. But my two favorites are these: a group of rhinoceroses is called a crash, and a group of hippopotamuses is called a bloat.

Here in John 10, Jesus has a lot to say about sheep. In modern times, a group of sheep may be called a flock or a herd. But in the Bible, the word flock is used over 200 times. There are seven "I am" statements Jesus makes in John. We've already seen two of them. Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life" and "I am the light of the world." In this passage we come to the third claim. Jesus says, "I am the gate." And we're going to see that Jesus is the only gate to Heaven.

John 10:1-10: "Truly I tell you, anyone who doesn't enter the sheep pen by the gate but climbs in some other way is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought all his own outside, he goes ahead of them. The sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will never follow a stranger; instead they will run away from him, because they don't know the voice of strangers." Jesus gave them this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

Jesus said again, "Truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep didn't listen to them. I am the gate. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance."

Most of us have a limited knowledge about sheep. But we should seek to know about sheep because in the Bible, we are compared to them. The Bible says in Psalm 100 that "we are his people, the sheep of his pasture."

If you want to learn about sheep, you should talk to a shepherd. Phillip Keller was born in Kenya where his parents were missionaries. He observed Masai shepherds there and then spent years as a shepherd in British Columbia. He applied his understanding of sheep to the 23rd Psalm. One of the best books I have ever read was his book, *A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23*. I'll be

quoting him some in this message. There are two ways we relate to Jesus, who is our Good Shepherd.

I. JESUS IS THE SHEPHERD WHO CALLS OUT HIS SHEEP.

Jesus said, "The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." (John 10:3) In order to understand what Jesus is teaching, you need to picture two different sheep pens. This first picture is that of a large community sheep pen where multiple shepherds would leave their sheep overnight. In Israel, archeologists have uncovered the remains of the walls of many of these sheep pens that were large enough for a hundred or more sheep to be kept.

Each community sheep pen would have a gatekeeper who was hired to keep the gate closed while the shepherd left his sheep there to buy supplies. Then when the shepherd would return, the gatekeeper would open the door to let him in. Then two things would happen. He would call out to his sheep, and then he would lead them out of the community sheep pen. Only his sheep would recognize his voice and follow him out into the greener pastures up in the hills. There are two spiritual lessons we can learn from this.

A. He calls His sheep by name.

Now, of the hundred or more sheep in the community pen, only about twenty or so would make up a flock for the shepherd. But he would call them by their names, "Hey, Papa Jo, come on. Let's go, Black Ear. Come on Stripe. Here we go Short-tail! Come here, Fluffy." The Shepherd knows each of his sheep personally, and calls them each by their names.

The amazing lesson we learn from this is that our Good Shepherd deals with each one of us individually. Have you noticed all the personal encounters Jesus had in our study? He was one-on-one with Nicodemus. He spoke to the woman at the well. He spoke to the paralyzed man at the Pool of Bethesda. He dealt personally with the man who was blind from birth. Jesus redeems individuals, not groups.

Once he was walking through Jericho and he looked up and saw a little man out on a limb and he said, "Zacchaeus, we're going to your house for dinner." And Jesus knows your name and He knows your needs. I'm so glad that the 23rd Psalm doesn't say, "The Lord is OUR shepherd." It says, "the Lord is MY Shepherd." There is a shepherd who knows you and HE has called you by your name.

B. His sheep recognize his voice and follow Him.

For any of us who have ever had pets, we shouldn't be surprised that sheep recognize the voice of their shepherd. We don't have a dog now, but for many years we had a Schnauzer named Betsy. She not only recognized our voices; she understood the different tone of our voices. We could say, "Betsy do you want to play?" And she would start jumping around ready to fetch something. On the other hand, she would sometimes misbehave. She might chew up something

or leave a deposit in the wrong place. All we had to do was to say, "Betsy, what is this?" And she would shrink in shame and start to crawl off. Animals and their owners have a special way of communicating.

In the same way, the shepherd's voice would be recognized by His sheep. Do you belong to Jesus' flock? If so, you will be listening for His voice, and you'll recognize His voice. Are your ears tuned to recognize the voice of Jesus when He calls? That's why Jesus often said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." We've all got ears ... but sometimes we are listening to the thousands of other voices instead of listening for the voice of our shepherd.

Sometimes we fill our ears with so much static and noise, that we can't be still and know that He is God. We have so many other voices competing for our attention that we can't hear the still, small voice of God.

The Shepherd is calling us out from the community sheep pen. The sheep pen represents the world. This is a picture of Jesus calling us and leading us out of the world. Phillip Keller writes about how these community sheep pens were permanent, so they were actually so unhealthy that sheep couldn't survive there for more than a short time. Keller writes, "The enclosure where the sheep were kept was an appalling area. There was a continual build-up of dirt, debris, and dung. Not a blade of grass survived the continual tramping of a thousand hooves. And as the seasons passed, the sheepfold would accumulate more and more filth. The odors would be atrocious after rain and flies would swarm in the heat of summer. A good shepherd was always up early to fling open the gate and lead the sheep out into green pastures. He will not allow his flock to linger in the community corral an hour longer than is necessary."

This is a powerful analogy of how we all live in a dirty, smelly world that is littered with the filth of immorality and violence. Our Shepherd Jesus calls us out to live a different kind of life. The Bible word for church is *ekklesia*, which means "called out ones." So this first image of the Shepherd is an image of salvation. Jesus calls by name to come out from the world to follow Him. But there is another powerful picture here as well.

II. JESUS IS THE SOURCE OF EMOTIONAL SECURITY.

Not only does the Good Shepherd lead us out from the world, but then Jesus leads us into green pastures where He takes care of us, His sheep. This is a different picture than the large community sheep pen. We know from history and archeology that out in the grassy hills, there would be many smaller sheepfolds where a Shepherd would lead his sheep. These smaller enclosures would only hold about twenty sheep. The Shepherd would lead his sheep into these walls for their safety and security. Then he would sit down in the entrance, and literally become the door of the sheepfold. So, with that picture in mind, Jesus said, "I am the gate. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture." (John 10:9) If a sheep went in or out, it had to go through the shepherd. He was literally the gate of the sheepfold. Once Jesus calls us out from the world for salvation, He becomes the gate for our personal security.

Why do you think the Bible compares us to sheep? God could have chosen another animal, but we are most often called sheep. I think it's for two reasons. First sheep are some of the most helpless creatures. And second, sheep are some of the dumbest creatures in God's kingdom. Have you ever seen a trained sheep show at the circus?

The Shepherd Phillip Keller wrote, "Sheep are among the most helpless and dumbest of all livestock. They often hammer and batter each other. They will often run in panic from the least threat of an unknown danger. I have seen an entire flock rush away in blind fear simply because one of them was startled by rabbit bursting out from beneath the bush. But on the other hand, in a peculiar manner, they will sometimes stand still and stare blankly when threatened. When a predator approaches, they will huddle up in a tight, frightened knot watching dumbly while one of the flock is torn to pieces by a wolf or a bear."

So because we are like sheep, there are at least three things we find in Jesus.

A. We find refuge in Jesus.

The Shepherd was there to protect the sheep from predators. He would literally place his body in the gateway to protect the sheep. There is so much fear in the world today. We have North Korea and Iran threatening the security of the world. After 9/11, our government created the Homeland Security Agency. We have the NSA, the National Security Agency and the TSA, The Transportation Safety Agency. But even with 47,000 TSA agents, people still struggle with fear and insecurity. The only true security you will find is when you are in relationship with the Good Shepherd.

In Psalm 23:4 we hear David singing, "Even when I go through the darkest valley, I fear no danger, for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4) The Bible doesn't say we will be spared from the darkest valley; instead it says when we walk through experiences of life that create fear, we won't be afraid. And the reason is because we have a Shepherd. And He has the tools to protect us and to comfort us. A Shepherd has a rod and a staff, those are two different tools.

A shepherd would have a rod, a short club with a hard, rounded end. He used it for two purposes. First, if a lamb strayed from the flock and didn't return when he called, he would toss the rod at them to get their attention. He wouldn't throw it hard, just enough to warn them to get back in line. And God uses his rod of correction on us in the same way sometimes.

The rod could be thrown with great force to protect the flock from a wolf or coyote. There were even lions in Israel during the time of Jesus.

The staff was a long walking stick that might have a crook at the top like a question mark. It was used to direct the sheep to stay in line. But sometimes the shepherd would use it to rescue a lamb if it was caught in a bush or had fallen in the water. He could also use the crook to draw a lamb close to him so he could examine it for disease or any injury. Sheep aren't affectionate animals like dogs and cats. They shy away from people. So the crook could draw a lamb into

close contact with the shepherd. So the Good Shepherd draws us close to His heart with His staff. We find refuge in Jesus.

B. We find refreshment in Jesus.

The Psalmist also says that the Shepherd leads us into green pastures and makes us lie down. A good shepherd is always leading his sheep to find nourishment. According to Phillip Keller, the only time when sheep will lie down is when they have a full belly.

Even so, our Good Shepherd leads us to find nourishment, and then when He feeds us, He makes us lie down. We find refreshment and rest in Jesus. In Proverbs, Solomon promises rest and refreshment when you seek God's Wisdom. The Bible says, "When you lie down, you will not be afraid; you will lie down, and your sleep will be pleasant." (Proverbs 3:24)

How's your sleep? Is it pleasant, as the Bible says? Or do you catch yourself tossing and turning and worrying about things? A.J. Cronin, a Christian doctor, did an exhaustive study about worry a few years ago. From interviewing thousands of people he determined that 60% of what people worry about never happen. Another 30% of the things that people worry about has already happened in the past. Of the remaining 10% of issues, 7% had to do with worry about things over which you have no control, like the weather. Dr. Cronin said that only about 3% of the things people worry about are legitimate concerns. And his prescription was for you to turn that negative energy of worry into a positive problem-solving effort to address those situations.

It's like the little poem I learned decades ago about worry. "For every evil under the sun; either there is a cure, or there is none. If there be one, seek 'til you find it; If there be none, never mind it!"

Worry doesn't remove the sorrow of tomorrow; it only robs the joy from today. So when you have trouble sleeping, stop counting sheep. Instead, try talking the Shepherd. He is your refuge and your refreshment.

C. We find renewal in Jesus.

John 10:10 has always been one of my favorite verses in the Bible. It's one of those summary verses like John 3:16. There is enough truth in John 10:10 for you to live on your entire life. Let's look at it again. Jesus said, "A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance." (John 10:10)

We have an enemy called Satan and we can see the fingerprints of his evil actions all throughout the world. He came to kill, steal, and destroy. So whenever you see death, destruction, and deceit, you know that Satan has been at work through people.

But the great contrast of this verse is that Jesus said that He has come to give us life, but not just life, He promises us life in superabundance. Everyone has physical life, the word is *bios*. We get our word biology from that. But Jesus promises another kind of life, *zoa*. And even though

we get our word zoology from that, we really don't have a good English translation for abundant life. It's a quality of life that is above and beyond normal living.

Years ago when Cindy and I were in Alabama we were flying out of the Birmingham Airport on a Sunday night to attend a meeting the Southern Baptist Convention. I don't remember the destination, just that the flight was going to be several hours long. We had church services on Sunday night so Cindy and I arrived at the airport in our church clothes. I was wearing a suit and tie, and she was dressed in her Sunday finest.

As we were in the gate area waiting to board, a gate agent came over to us and said, "Excuse me, Mr. Dykes. We are overbooked in the economy section of the flight, so I would like to upgrade you and Mrs. Dykes into first class for this flight. Would that be okay?" That was the first upgrade we ever received and after a long day of ministry, that first class upgrade made the flight so much more enjoyable.

So most of us understand what an upgrade is. That's when you arrive at the car rental counter and instead of the Toyota Corolla you reserved, they inform you that they are out of that model and will upgrade you to a Cadillac. Or it's when you arrive at the hotel and the front desk upgrades you to a suite.

Abundant life in Jesus is a life upgrade. There's life, and then there's abundant life. It's an upgrade in attitude. It's an upgrade in outlook. It's an upgrade in joy. It is an upgrade from merely existing to really, really, living. And that is only found in Jesus.

CONCLUSION

When you find abundant life in Jesus, it doesn't just affect how you live when you're at church. It changes you. And you become someone who gives and speaks abundant life to others. I've preached thousands of sermons on God's grace. But just one sermon of grace that you act out in your daily life goes farther in convincing people about Jesus than ten thousand sermons.

One of the most powerful expressions of the Gospel happened this week in Dallas. Brandt Jean, who was the brother of the man that Amber Guyger shot. On the stand he said, "I forgive you." He asked permission of the judge to hug her. That's the behavior of a man who is living an upgraded life. Only those who understand grace can appreciate that. Brandt told Amber, "I think giving your life to Christ would be the best thing that Botham would want for you."

Then just before Amber was taken out of the courtroom to begin serving her prison time, the District Court Judge, Tammy Kemp, demonstrated that she is living the upgraded life as well. She hugged Amber and gave her one of her Bibles. She said, "You can have mine. I have three or four more at home. This is the one I use every day. This is your job for the next month." Then she opened the Bible and said, "It says right here. John 3:16. And this is where you start. 'For God so loved the world.'"

Both Brandt Jean and Judge Kemp are now facing criticism for their actions. People who don't understand grace ask, “How could he forgive her?” Other people are calling for the judge to be punished for her action. But both of those people were just demonstrating that they are living the upgraded life—abundant living is a life that is full of grace and shows grace to others.

Jesus said, “I am the gate. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved.”

There is only one door to Heaven and His name is Jesus. When you enter through that gate you will experience an upgraded life—abundant living.

OUTLINE

I. JESUS IS THE SHEPHERD WHO CALLS OUT HIS SHEEP.

Jesus said, "The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." *John 10:3*

- A. He calls His sheep by name.
- B. His sheep recognize his voice and follow Him.

II. JESUS IS THE SOURCE OF EMOTIONAL SECURITY.

Jesus said, "I am the gate. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture." *John 10:9*

A. We find refuge in Jesus.

"Even when I go through the darkest valley, I fear no danger, for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me." *Psalms 23:4*

B. We find refreshment in Jesus.

"When you lie down, you will not be afraid; you will lie down, and your sleep will be pleasant." *Proverbs 3:24*

C. We find renewal in Jesus.

Jesus said, "A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance." *John 10:10*

— MESSAGE DISCLAIMER —

These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations and/or use material that is not under copyright. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material stimulate your own Spirit-driven preparation—*it is never intended as a substitute for your own study of Scripture.*

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, it is good scholarship (not to mention the right thing to do) to cite the source. If you are teaching, you may simply preface your remarks by saying something like: **“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”** This simple citation also applies to any work you may publish, too, as I routinely publish my material in books that are protected by copyright.

This careful effort on your part may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you. I trust you will find that additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners.

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



David O. Dykes, Pastor
Green Acres Baptist Church
Tyler, Texas