10 "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. **2** But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

Let's pray:
Lord Jesus,
we are so thankful that You are <u>not</u> a thief or a robber;
You are the **Good** Shepherd,
And we are thankful that You are <u>our</u> shepherd.

As Your sheep,
today, may we hear Your voice;
and recognise Your voice.
Help us to pay attention to what we hear,
that we may follow You.

Amen.

Today's Bible Reading: Some call it a "Parable", but it's not really a Parable. Some call it a "figure of speech" / "proverb"… In many ways, it's a metaphor; or an allegory, but it seems that the metaphors within this allegory, get mixed, and there are some double meanings.

Whatever it is, it's not a fixed and defined legal document. <u>It's an illustration</u>. And that's the beauty of the illustrations of Jesus: At the time, they spoke to a particular truth, but when

applied correctly, their principle and their application, is timeless (and no less challenging)…

Today's message is going to come under 5 headings.

1. The bad shepherds of old:

The image of being a shepherd of God's people, is not a new image – it's quite prominent within the Old Testament.

God is the shepherd of His people: Think of Psalm 23 "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want…"

And Prophets, Priests and Kings are referred to as Shepherds. Their role was to shepherd the people of God, on His behalf…

But the trouble is, they didn't always do a very good job… And so we read in Jeremiah 23

23 "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter
the sheep of my pasture!" declares YHWH.

2 Therefore thus says YHWH, the God of Israel,
concerning the shepherds who care for my people:
"You have scattered my flock and have driven them
away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I
will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares
YHWH. 3 Then I will gather the remnant of my flock
out of all the countries where I have driven them,

and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. 4 I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares YHWH.

And it goes on. And that prophecy, was looking forward to this moment, when Jesus would come as shepherd…

And so, from the Scriptures, the People of Israel were very familiar with the concept of "good shepherds and bad shepherds". The good shepherds, were God Himself, and the Godly leaders, who led Israel in Righteousness; and victory…

Then, there were the bad shepherds. The bad shepherds led them astray – they would scatter the flock, and in their godlessness, would take them further away from God…

We've just seen an example of bad shepherding in chapter 9. The blind man received his sight, and because he believed that Jesus was sent by God, the Religious Leaders cast him out – Bad shepherds – scattering the flock and driving them away. God's Own Son came into the world, and they decided that if anyone declares that He is the Christ, then they're getting kicked out of the Synagogue… Bad shepherds…

You see, between chapters 9 and 10, we have a chapter division here, but when the Gospel of John was written, there was no division.

Jesus has been talking to the Pharisees and condemning them for their self-inflicted spiritual blindness. And in chapter 10, he's still talking to them. It's the same conversation.

In Chapter 9, the blind man was healed (he could now see). **And** he received spiritual sight. He believed in Jesus, and he worshipped Jesus. But the Religious Leaders rejected Jesus, **and** they cast the blind man out.

That's what **Bad** shepherds do. They scatter the flock and drive them away…

And so, when we look at this reading within its context, it sheds a lot of light on what it's about. The Pharisees and the Religious Leaders, are not the shepherds they were meant to be.

2. Who Jesus is:

This is the major theme of John (BTW). We've been discovering all the way through, that the Gospel of John was written so that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, we may have life in his name.

In today's reading, there's 2 separate illustrations. In the first story, Jesus tells this story in the 3rd person. He speaks about "**the** shepherd" / "**the** door". But, the people didn't understand Him, so in the second illustration, He makes it personal. He says "I am the door of the sheep.". "**11** I am the good shepherd."…

Which seems strange, because we're told that the shepherd of the sheep, enters by the door. And so, Jesus is both the shepherd and the door…. But that's OK, because He is God (right). He can be 2 things at once. (In fact, next week, we're going to hear Jesus say, "30 I and the Father are one.").

Anyway: as "the door" and as "the shepherd", Jesus is contrasted with the Religious Leaders.

The Pharisees assumed for themselves, to be shepherds of God's people, but they weren't shepherds. In this story, they are the thieves and robbers. We know this, because a shepherd enters through the door – through Jesus Christ… But they hated Jesus – They wanted to kill Him…

The Good Shepherd, enters through the door – in other words, God opens the way for Jesus. When Jesus healed the blind man, He was doing something that only God can do (and the people recognised this). When the people heard Jesus speak, they recognised the voice of the shepherd.

You see, when Jesus spoke, there was a great division occurring: There were those who knew Jesus – There were those who recognised His voice (like the blind man); and there were those who rejected Jesus (like the Pharisees).

I've told you this story before, but I'm going to tell it again, because it makes me smile every time I remember it.

Back on the farm (depending on the season) we used to run somewhere between 2000-2500 sheep. And when we were doing sheep-work, we'd muster them into the yards.

And out of all of those sheep, there was one wether, who would walk away from the mob, and he'd walk right up to us, and lift up his chin, for us to scratch him on the chin…

Now, all we could do was assume that he must've been one of the orphan lambs we'd raised on a bottle, because even though we'd only see him a few times a year, every time he was in the yards, he'd come up to us again, to have another scratch under the chin.

And he was old. Because he was so friendly, we never put him in the killer paddock, and we'd never let someone like Daniel take him to the meatworks.

And because he was so much older than the other sheep, he looked different. The lanoline would form an extra dark hard coating, on the outside of his wool. So you could see he was older and darker than the rest of the sheep…..

I actually never knew how old he really was. He'd been a full-mouth since I was a kid, and he didn't stop coming into the yards until I was about 20.

*We just knew him as "the pet". **He** knew that he belonged to us, and **we** knew that he belonged. For some reason we just knew each other.*

Now, that's what I think about, when I read V3: The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

You see, the shepherds of old had a very different relationship with their sheep, than what we have with our sheep out here. If we want to move our sheep, we chase them (better still if you've got a good dog to chase them for you). But, a shepherd of old, would lead their sheep.

They would put their sheep in a pen overnight. Sometimes they'd have 2 or 3 different flocks (cared for by different shepherds) locked up together… And then in the morning, they'd open the gate, and the shepherd would say "Come on", and the sheep that were his, would follow him…

Those who know Jesus, follow Jesus, because they know Him… This is about relationship… *Out of those thousands of sheep in the yards, most of them would get as far away as possible… But the old pet would walk right up to us, because he knew us...*

Anyway, in this story, Jesus isn't only the Shepherd. He's also the door. The only way to be part of God's flock, is to come through Jesus… The only way to the Father, is through the Son.

There is no other way to be saved. The Lord Jesus Christ, is the Good Shepherd, who lays His life down for the sheep.

Jesus died, to atone for our sin. Jesus laid His life down – He willingly died, that we might be saved…

- In Chapter 7, they tried to kill Him;
- in Chapter 8, they tried to kill Him;
- at the end of this chapter they try to kill Him…

and each time, Jesus miraculously walks away… Nobody is able to **take** Jesus' life from Him. He is in control of this. He chose the time, when He did lay His life down, for the sake of the sheep.

He has the authority to lay His life down. And He has the authority to take it up again.

This is Good News, folks. It wasn't an accident that Jesus died. The Devil didn't momentarily get the upper hand. Jesus had the authority to lay His life down; **And** He had the authority to be raised from the dead.

And in this, Jesus distinguishes Himself from what He calls "a hired hand". A hired hand doesn't really care about the sheep – it's just a wage for him… But the one who owns the sheep, doesn't run away when he sees the wolf coming. And so, Jesus gave His own life, that we might live.

So Jesus is:

- "the door". He is the only way to the Father.
- "the Good Shepherd". He is:
  - in relationship with His sheep;
  - He Guards His sheep;

- He leads His sheep
- Saviour.

3. The united flock:

Back in the Old Testament, the people of Israel sinned. They turned away from God/followed other gods. And The Lord warned them. He warned them over and over again, that if they didn't turn away from worshipping idols, there would come a time of judgment.

In their hardness of heart, they ignored the warnings of the prophets, and eventually the Day of Judgment came. 723 years before Jesus was born, the Northern Kingdom of Israel was conquered by Assyria and taken into captivity. 130-odd years later, the Southern Kingdom of Judah was conquered by Babylon and taken into captivity.

After 70 years of exile, there began various stages of the bringing back of the people of Judah, but very few of the Northern Kingdom ever returned… And Jeremiah 23 that I read earlier, is looking forward to the day when God **will** gather His scattered ones.

I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold….
This is going to happen on the day of Jesus' return.

But get this: He gathers up more than the people of Israel…

Let's face it: most of us here are not Jewish – we're Gentiles. How is it, that we are numbered amongst the children of God? Well, we have a very good reason to praise God for V16, because we are the ones He is talking about when He said:

16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and **they** will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

You see:
There once was a time when there was a massive divide between the People of Israel and everybody else in the world… They were God's people. We were not.

But Jesus died on the cross, to make it possible for us to be His sheep too. I must bring them also, and **they** will listen to my voice.

As the Apostle Paul said:
Galatians 3:26-29 (ESV)
26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

We are brough into the fold.
You see, through faith, we Gentiles are no longer on the outside. There is now one flock, one shepherd. and we belong. Oh, what joy!

4. An abundance of life:

Many non-Christians, have a very warped view, of what Christianity is. They see Christianity as some kind kill-joy movement – some kind of rejection of the best that life has to offer…

There are even those, who know that:

- Jesus is the Son of God;
- He died for our sins;
- He rose again;
- He's coming back to judge the living and the dead…

They know all this, and yet they put off making a commitment to Christ, because they're afraid that they might miss out on something in life… – they'll do it later.

What a nonsense. Being a Disciple of Jesus, means an **abundance** of life… *I have never met a fair dinkum Christian/Disciple of Jesus, who has said, "Gee, I wish I'd left it another 10 years before I repented of sin and received Jesus as Lord"…*

It doesn't happen. Why? Because when you truly know Jesus,
life is so much:

- better
- bigger
- satisfying
- greater purpose…

But, let me correct something here. There are bad shepherds, disrupting and scattering the flock today. It's going to be our next heading, but we're not there yet. And some bad shepherds (false teachers), proclaim a message that appeals to the flesh, rather than the Spirit.

For some of these, John 10:10 is one of their favourite verses (that they like to twist). I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

So, Jesus is talking about an abundance <u>of</u> life, but some twist that message, and proclaim an abundance **in** life. Do you know the difference? What would you prefer???

False teachers proclaim a promise of riches/enjoyment/experiences/health/wealth/long-life.

Jesus promises us an abundance **of** life – life that is eternal.

To understand this abundance **of** life of V10, first we have to understand V9.
Jesus said:
9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

The shepherding of Jesus, is Him providing for His flock, to be, what we are created to be… This is our calling – to be His flock – the sheep of His pasture.

The abundance of life, is eternal life, but it's more than that. It's life (spiritual life) in all of its fulness now… And did you notice that this abundant life involves Him leading us out and leading us in… And, the whole time, we are following Him. That's what it means to be a Disciple of Jesus – to follow Him. He is our shepherd. The sheep follow the shepherd. We follow Jesus.

There will be times when He leads us in – times when we:

- gather together to worship;
- to pray;
- to fellowship together;
- to break bread together…

There are times when He leads us out – times to:

- serve in this world;
- our daily lives of working
- /learning/
- being citizens in this world.

He leads us out, and He leads us in.

- If He doesn't lead us out,
  how does the Good News of Jesus ever get out past the church?

- If He doesn't lead us in,
  how can we be the church that He has saved us to be?

For some, this is a concept they never achieve.

Some love it that Jesus has led them in, and they want to stay in. They don't want to be led out into the world. It's like they're fearful of being led out…

And so they:

- go to church on a Sunday;
- send their kids to a Christian school;
- sign up to a Christian gym;
- only read Christian books;
- sign up to Christian chat-rooms;
- work in a Christian business;
- All of their friends are Christians;

And they wish they could somehow have a Christian government…
Some lock themselves away in a convent or a Christian commune of some kind.

How will the light of Jesus ever shine in this dark world, if we never let Jesus lead us out? How will we ever experience an abundance of life, if we are not experiencing the Holy Spirit of God, empowering us to minister in the world that the Good Shepherd leads us out into???

But then again, there are others who are the exact opposite. They come to the conclusion that the shepherd has led them out, and they want to stay out.

You know the saying:
If I had a dollar for every time somebody said…

The number of people who have said: "You don't have to go to church to be a Christian." I can be a Christian on my own…

Really??? The Lord Jesus laid down His life, to bring us into His fold… In the Scriptures, we are **never** given an image of a sheep on its own, being a good thing… The shepherd does not lead individual sheep. He leads the flock…

Any of you who know sheep, know that when a sheep segregates itself from the flock, it's usually because it's diseased; fly-blown; or about to die…

And when it comes to being a Disciple of Jesus, a person who claims to be a Christian, but segregates themselves from the flock, it mightn't be apparent to them, but to others, it's a sure sign that they are either spiritually sick; fly-blown with sin; and on the verge of spiritual death…

That may sound "harsh", but it's true.

Hebrews 10:24–25 (ESV)
24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 talk about how **together,** we are the body of Christ, and if any one of us is missing, the whole body is deficient….

Going to church, does not make one a Christian, any more than going to hospital makes you a surgeon… But according to God's word, genuine Disciples of Jesus:

- meet together;
- fellowship together;
- worship together;
- serve together;
- commune together;
- break bread together;
- reconcile together,

to be the church that Christ has saved us to be…

5. Good and bad shepherds today:

The role of a Pastor/Elder/Teacher, is to be shepherds of God's flock.

A good shepherd enters through the door – they are a genuine, faithful disciple of Jesus… A Good shepherd will care for the flock on God's behalf.

1 Peter 5:1–4 (ESV)
5 So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed:
2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful

gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

You see, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the chief shepherd. And He has appointed Shepherds under Him, to shepherd God's flock… And so today's reading, sounds a valid warning for us today… Do not be misled by a bad shepherd…

I see 3 dangers, evident in Jesus' story…

The first danger is the thief or the robber… They come in and try to take control of the sheep and lead the sheep away… They are not genuine – they do not enter through the door. These are false teachers… They're in it for their own gain. They may crave money; power; fame… They do not care for the sheep. Their aim is to kill and destroy.

The second danger is the Wolf… Now, biblically, the wolf in sheep's clothing, is the false teachers who try to lead the flock away, but their concern is not for the flock – they also, want to kill and destroy.

Then there's the hired hand…

I used to be part of a denominational church, and it didn't sit well with me, that the ministry was seen as a profession… Pastors/ministers/elders, it is not a job/profession – it is a calling…

Pastors and ministers are members of the body, the same as everybody else are members of the body. Our role is different, but it's not a profession… You see, when a danger is present, a hired hand runs away. Someone who's in it for the money, deserts the flock.

So, there's 3 dangers:

- The thief
- The wolf
- The hired hand.

But the sheep will not follow them. The sheep will **not** be misled. Why?
Because they know the voice of their shepherd.

If the message being proclaimed is a message that lacks grace and scatters the flock and drives them away because they don't meet our rules,,, that's not the voice of the chief shepherd…

Likewise, if the message is of "Come as you are and stay as you are", That's not the voice of the chief shepherd either.

And as we touched on before, if the message is something that appeals to the temporary fleshly nature – if the message is about seeking an abundance of worldly stuff, that's not the voice of our shepherd…

Why are so many people misled to following false teachers/bad shepherds today??? I'll tell you why. It's because we don't know the voice of our good shepherd…

The beauty of Jesus' stories, is they are timeless… They are just as relevant for us today, as what it was for the blind man who had just been kicked out by the Religious Leaders…

The message is clear: The blessing, is to know Jesus.

- knowing the voice of Jesus;
- following Jesus;
- Following Him in/out;
- Life;
- Eternal life;
- experiencing an abundance of life, that can only come as we follow Him (as the flock)
  - Coming in / meeting together;
  - Going out / serving together…

In our wealthy culture, it seems the thing people crave most is life. The "wellness industry" is booming. So many can afford to focus on their physical life (length of life; Quality of life; experiences in life), and spend up big, to maximise it.

In Christ, life, is what we have an abundance of… Not physical, temporary stuff, but Spiritual life / Eternal life. And it all comes, from knowing Jesus, and following Jesus.

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus,
we know You as the Good Shepherd,
but we haven't always followed You
like we should.

Help us to know you better.
Strengthen our relationship with You,
that we would easily recognise Your voice.

Help us to follow You,
and to not be distracted
by any with the appearance of a shepherd,
but are false,
and leading your flock astray.

Lead us out,
into mission in this world.

And lead us in,
to joyous fellowship in Your Holy church –
the community of Christ.

May we as your flock,
follow You,
and experience the abundance of life
You so freely give.

in Jesus' Name,
Amen.