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# John 10

John 10.<sup>1-5, 11-15, 27-30</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup>But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup>To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. <sup>4</sup>And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. <sup>5</sup>And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

<sup>11</sup>I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup>But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. <sup>13</sup>The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

<sup>14</sup>I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. <sup>15</sup>As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.

<sup>27</sup>My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: <sup>28</sup>and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup>My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. <sup>30</sup>I and my Father are a one.

We cannot complain about Jesus calling himself “the good shepherd.” It is gratifying and lovely imagery. However, the title can allow the casual reader to inadvertently diminish the role that Jesus plays in our lives through misunderstanding. We could think of a “good” shepherd as someone who is a really, really good and conscientious tender and herder of sheep. In Jesus’ case, the absolute best, most caring and conscientious and capable shepherd to ever live. But Jesus is more than this. Much, much more.

This something more is made clear in the course of Jesus’ parable. First, Jesus says that the shepherd “calleth *his own sheep* by name.” Later, in mentioning hired shepherds “whose own the sheep are not,” Jesus admits that they will not be as protective or conscientious as “the good shepherd.” The employees will not know the sheep as the owner does. This is not meant to demean the hired hands. They may be very, very good at what they do. But they do not own the sheep. Jesus, on the other hand, is the owner. He is not simply “the good *shepherd*.” He is “the good *owner*.” Not as touchingly poetic imagery as that of the “shepherd,” but closer to the truth of Jesus’ character and his relationship to us.

I don’t know about you, but I feel better about being watched over by the owner than by the employee. No matter how concerned the employee may be for my welfare, the concern will never match that of the owner. No matter how skilled the employee, he has limited abilities and resources regardless of his desire or even claims that it be otherwise. On the other hand, there is no doubt in my mind about the owner’s interest in my present safety and future development. And there is no doubt in my mind about the resources that the owner can bring to bear in my benefit.

Given the nature of mortals, it is little wonder that the Psalmist concluded that “vain is the help of man,”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 60.<sup>11</sup>

or that Isaiah counseled, “Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?”<sup>2</sup> Little wonder that Nephi committed himself to a course in which “I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh,”<sup>3</sup> or that Paul warned, “let no man glory in men.”<sup>4</sup> Even sheep herders with the best of intentions are as likely as not to abandon us to the wolves; indeed, too often turning wolfish themselves.

Given the nature of God, it is even less wonder that Moroni should declare that “relying *alone* upon the merits of Christ” was the only safe and wise counsel and course for sheep to pursue,<sup>5</sup> or that the Psalmist should remind us that it is “through God [that] we shall do valiantly;”<sup>6</sup> for “his name alone is excellent.”<sup>7</sup>

Jesus was not whistling dixie when he assured his listeners that only he could “give unto them eternal life” or that “they shall never perish” with him as their shepherd/ owner. He spoke truly when he assured them that while others would certainly lose sheep to wolves and strangers and thieves and robbers, only he was caring and powerful enough to keep the sheep safe and keep dangerous forces from plucking sheep out of his hand. Indeed, Jesus offers this almost too-good-to-be-true promise,

“I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.”<sup>8</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 22, 2024)*

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<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 2.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 2 Nephi 4.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 3.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See Moroni 6.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See Psalm 60.<sup>11-12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 148.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> John 6.<sup>38-39</sup>

John 10.<sup>14, 27-29</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

<sup>27</sup>My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: <sup>28</sup>and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup>My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

Maybe being “plucked” from Jesus’ watchful care, protection, and deliverance doesn’t exactly send chills up our backs. But the Greek word translated, “plucked,” means “to steal,” “to capture,” “to seize,” “to take by force.” I am sure all of us would object strongly to being “captured” and “taken by force” by anyone or anything.

This language suggests that there are powerful and hostile forces arrayed against us. These forces are thieves. These forces aim to steal us from Jesus and make us theirs. They aim to subjugate. As the thief is a force in the sheep’s life that is beyond its ability to resist, there are forces too powerful for us to stand against. We thus require a “good” shepherd.

The “good” shepherd is certainly interested in, observant of, and devoted to his sheep. The image of a “good” shepherd is lovely. But it takes more than “loveliness,” more than “interestedness” or “observance,” and more than “devotion” to protect us from the hostile forces that would thief our souls. It requires power. And this is exactly what “good” shepherd means.

In addition to being “lovely” or “appealing,” the “good” (Grk., *kalós*) shepherd is “powerful,” “strong,” “serviceable,” “capable.” He is more than capable and powerful enough to protect us from the hostile forces arrayed against us. Indeed, he is “above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, he “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.”<sup>2</sup>

Now that’s capable. That’s power. That’s the sort of “good shepherd” we have and need.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 22, 2024)*

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 1.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 3.<sup>20</sup>