



#### JOHN 10:1-21 (PART 1)

***“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. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. 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. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize his voice.”***

(verses 1-5)

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Access. That’s the word that comes to mind here. That’s the function of a gate – it provides entrance and exit. So the shepherd is one who has ready, open access

into direct contact with the sheep. In the image, he's in the pen with the sheep, walking among them.

Interestingly, the thief is there, too, because he's hopped the fence. But, entering fully into the illustration, one can imagine the unsettledness of the sheep as this stranger drops down into their midst. He's got physical access, but the sheep retreat from his presence, sensing danger. Indeed, as he seeks to lull and soothe them with his voice, they retreat further. Instinctively they sense the malevolent intent – he's got physical access, but he's there to harm: to steal and kill and destroy (verse 10).

The shepherd's access is different. His very presence calms and soothes. His voice turns heads, sparks interest, stokes confidence, cheers hearts and builds expectancy. The shepherd is here! Do sheep feel joy? If so, these sheep do!

Regardless, it's clear that they pay attention. With the shepherd in their midst, they listen for his voice. They're ready to respond, wanting to follow his lead. He deepens their attentiveness by calling each one by name, each head craning further in his direction as they are individually drawn into his circle. And then they're ready – ready to follow. So he leads them out into green pastures, by quiet waters, along paths of his guidance. His presence and his voice give confidence, so the sheep don't hesitate. They follow closely.

It's a powerful picture of the Christian life. Our Lord cares to be with us, moment by moment. His heart is intent on leading and guiding us in his ways. Psalm 23 furthers the image by reminding us of what we well know, that the shepherd's presence doesn't keep us from experiencing the valley of the shadow of death. Those difficult stretches of the path will be there, likely more often than we'd choose. But his empowering presence, symbolized by rod and staff, comforts and strengthens us right through to the end. Indeed, even in the midst of enemy territory, there is a banqueting table of his rich provision, with anointing oil and overflowing cup to boot.

The underlying confidence in all of this is that our Lord speaks to us. I've known this to be true, but have spent years yearning to hear his voice more distinctly and clearly. What I've discovered is that my own expectations of "distinctly and clearly" weren't necessarily what he had in mind. While I was waiting on my expectations, he was giving insights from scripture, and dropping fresh ideas into my deliberations, and speaking through trusted friends, and opening doors of

opportunity, and revealing new understandings as I prayed. He's always speaking. He's the Good Shepherd. I simply want to be one of those sheep that perks up attentively at each and every echo of his voice.

So, dear Lord – speak. This sheep is listening.

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*Dear Lord, with Samuel I say, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.' Waken my ear to listen like one being taught. You have opened my ears. I give thanks. I won't draw back – I choose to follow your lead. Amen.*

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Reflect:

Pause to allow this illustration to capture your mind. Jesus, your Shepherd, is alongside you right now. He will speak throughout your day. Take time to give heartfelt, confident thanks for that reality. Then, step into the day, attentive to all of the ways he chooses to speak. Keep track. Follow.