

The Security of the Shepherd's Flock

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John 10.7 - 42

Last week I gave attention to Jesus' progressive disclosure of Himself. He described Himself as, "**I AM the Door**" and "**I AM the Good Shepherd**." In contrast to the false shepherds of Israel who focused on their own self-interests and cared little for the sheep, Jesus was motivated by the needs of the sheep and their safety. His relationship with His sheep is characterized by intimacy. They know His voice and distinguish His voice from that of strangers. The shepherd's flock listen for His voice and they follow Him as He leads them.

Today I turn our attention to a key feature of the relationship of the flock to their Shepherd – it is secure. That security is implicit in the safety they experience when in the larger sheepfold pictured in the first 6 verses of John 10. It was a community sheepfold where shepherds brought their flocks in the evening. It had a single gate which the gatekeeper opened to let the sheep in and he watched over the flock throughout the night. The sheepfold was a place of safety for it had high walls for protection.

The security enjoyed by the sheep is also evident in the smaller type of sheepfold envisioned in verses 7 to 9. It often consisted of a cave and the shepherd brought the sheep into it and then he became the gate by lying across the opening into the cave. He protected them from danger. However, the shepherd also protected them throughout the day as he found pasture for them and watched for danger.

A key theme in John 10 is **The Security of the Shepherd's Flock**. Let me begin by addressing,

The Price of Their Security

It is very clear from John 10 that there is an intimate relationship between Jesus and His flock. Just as a physical shepherd calls his sheep out of the sheepfold by name, the *Good Shepherd* knows the name of each one in His flock (10.3). His flock is not comprised of nameless followers He is disinterested in, but ones He knows personally and to whom He has given a new name. In His letter to the Church at Pergamum Jesus said of those who remained steadfast in the face of persecution and held tightly to their faith in Him, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and **I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.**" (Revelation 2:17, ESV). Those trusting in Jesus are given a new name, a name written in heaven. Most people do not rise to prominence; most people live and die and are known to only a handful of family and friends. Even those who do attain a position of stature or succeed with some notable achievement, it is not long before they too are forgotten in the pages of history. But those who hear the voice of the Shepherd and believe in Him will never be forgotten by the Shepherd. He knows their name!

The secure relationship people have with Jesus, their Shepherd, began by trusting Him and His words of eternal life. He is the *Door*; He is the only way to become part of His flock. Jesus said, "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture." (John 10:9, ESV). Those who enter are saved from their sins and the punishment they deserve for

those sins. The penalty for sin is death. “For the wages of sin is death,” (Romans 6:23a, ESV). However, Jesus offers an escape from facing that penalty for our sins. Romans 6.23 goes on to describe His offer: “the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The only thing one needs to do to escape punishment and receive the gift of eternal life is found in John 6:29, “Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.’”

While salvation, the foundation for a person’s security, is free to us, it wasn’t free. The penalty for our sins couldn’t be dismissed or ignored; someone had to be punished for our sin. In the most unfair exchange in all of history, Jesus became our substitute – our sins were placed upon Him, while His righteousness is placed upon us.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV) ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Some conclude Jesus became the victim of an out-of-control mob motivated by religious jealousy and hatred, but when examining Scripture, we discover the crucifixion and death of Jesus unfolded to fulfill God’s plan of redemption. Jesus had a very specific mission to complete as the Good Shepherd, a mission He drew attention to in John 10:11 (ESV) “I am the good shepherd. **The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.**” (See also 10.15). Laying down His life for His sheep was not something Jesus did under compulsion, but voluntarily.

John 10:17–18 (ESV) ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

Our world is increasingly characterized by self-interest and self-focus; hence, someone volunteering to be declared guilty of the sins of others and then to receive the penalty they deserved, is more than a bit out of synch. It is something we need to reflect on and allow to sink in! It is what is referred to as the *substitutionary atonement* – Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. It is the reason why Jesus left the glories of heaven and came to earth where He clothed Himself with humanity for the very purpose of *laying down His life* as he died on the cross for our sins. Paul, when talking about the love of God said this of the greatest gift God has given us, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32, ESV).

1 John 4:10 (ESV) “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

Romans 3:23–25 (ESV) ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

The word *propitiation* is a theological term which embodies the sacrifice Jesus paid on the cross to satisfy the wrath of God for the sins committed against Him. It is very apparent that while joining the flock of the *Good Shepherd* is free for all who accept His invitation to believe, it was not free – it cost a great deal. Jesus bore the punishment we deserve. It should also be noted that those who ignore Jesus’ invitation will be left to pay the penalty for their own sins. While those who believe in Jesus have a secure relationship with the *Good Shepherd*.

The Threats to Their Security

Foundational to the security of the Shepherd's flock is a personal relationship with Him. It is a relationship which He invites everyone to join. Jesus appealed to the skeptical listeners He addressed on the occasion described in John 10 to assess Who He claimed to be and what He had done and would do. He didn't want them to miss the greatest and most significant opportunity ever offered.

John 10:37–38 (ESV) ³⁷If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; ³⁸but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.

Investigate the claims of Jesus Christ and examine the works He did to authenticate those claims. The authenticity of the life of Jesus Christ has more historical support for it than any other person from that period of history. Examine the evidence for His physical resurrection from the dead – the pinnacle event validating His claims.

Jesus offers genuine and lasting security to all who believe in Him. Security is a quality that is a bit frayed these days. A growing number of people are very tentative in describing themselves as having a great sense of security. I'm not referring to security from threats of harm or violence, but security in the very depth of a person's being. Security that flows from a secure relationship with the Good Shepherd! The perception of what that means is influenced by world events and people's experiences. For example, it is now more than two years since the Covid pandemic began and we personally began to deal with it. Without question, the past two years have eroded the confidence of many people, and many remain anxious and deeply concerned about the future.

Throughout the past decades there has been a steady erosion of a sense of security on so many fronts. During the late 1960's there was dramatic escalation of aircraft hijackings and the face of aviation began to change with the introduction of airport security. As the years passed that has increased, particularly after the 9-11 attacks. Another turning point on the security front was the first energy crisis triggered by the *Yom Kippur War* in October 1973 in Israel and the ensuing OPEC oil embargo. It was the first-time fuel prices reached unprecedented levels and people lined up at the pumps to fill their vehicles. I remember those years and the sense of unrest it produced. Undoubtedly some of the events and the unrest they generated made me much more receptive to the long-term solution Jesus offers.

In the following years the economy faltered and interest rates reached unimaginable levels. In our Church in Lethbridge as interest rates reached around 20%, one month we paid \$10,000 in interest on our loans. And as the economy faced stiff headwinds, companies did the unthinkable by downsizing and right-sizing and employees were laid off from what they thought were life-time jobs. The past 50 years have also been marked by a great deal of upheaval in families. Many factors contributed to the failure of so many marriages over the past decades, but one result has been an erosion of security for spouses entering marriages and for children who are victims of divorce. There are other events that have undermined the overall sense of security people experience. Today we see examples of unrest in our society and the extent to which people will go to express it. And as we look abroad, the picture is much grimmer. We grieve for the people of Ukraine as the security they once knew will never return.

Recently I listened to a video which an acquaintance of mine from decades ago posted on-line. Actually, I only listened to 9 minutes of the 18-minute rant by an individual about the *New World Order* and the global cabal which in his opinion is in control of the world's financial affairs and is pursuing global control. According to the man in the video, one of the few world leaders who recognizes the threat posed by this New World Order and financial cabal is Vladimir Putin. In his estimation Putin has invaded Ukraine to address that threat. It is safe to conclude that this man in the video is not alone in his assessment of world conditions. Many of his claims are clearly false, like there is no one in the White House since Joe Biden became president, a claim I have heard others make, or that the USA Capital insurrection was all staged. And most dismiss the claim that Putin is the one who has it all figured out.

But there may be some truth to the allegations about global financial control and a *New World Order*. The Bible makes it clear that in the end times there will be a one-world government, which will certainly include financial control, so to learn there are active undercurrents in the world's governments and financial structures is neither shocking nor revelatory – God has told us it will happen – just like *wars and rumors of wars* (Matt 24.6 Mark 13.7). The Book of Revelation provides an overview of events which will unfold in the last days. Many of us believe those days may not be very far away. The rising stature of China and their dismissal of human rights and the hostile aggression of Russia may very well be a prelude. Hence, while we should be on the alert, there is no cause for panic, but we must be prepared!

The most important part of that preparation is a relationship with the Good Shepherd. For any who haven't yet turned to Jesus Christ for salvation, don't wait another day! This is not intended to be a superficial relationship that provides backup in case of emergency, but a vital day-day-day relationship where we actively walk by faith and seek to please the Lord. Notice the depth of the relationship apparent in John 10:14–15 (ESV) “¹⁴I am the good shepherd. **I know my own and my own know me,** ¹⁵**just as the Father knows me and I know the Father;** and I lay down my life for the sheep.” The relationship between Jesus Christ and His Father is the template for the relationship between Jesus Christ and His flock. It is a relationship that will reach its apex in the New Heaven and New Earth. Some days God may seem a bit distant – particularly when we grow discouraged and face disappointment, but He has not withdrawn, it is only our perception. “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.” (James 4:8a, ESV).

We must also recognize the absolute security of our relationship with our Shepherd and refuse to allow it to be shaped by world events and life experiences. Jesus promises those who hear His voice & follow Him a secure hope for the future.

The Promise of Their Security

Notice what Jesus says to His flock – to those who walk with Him:

John 10:28–29 (ESV) ²⁸I give them eternal life, and **they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.** ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and **no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.**

The word translated *snatch*, means *gain control over, seize, plunder, carry off, take away by force*. It is reasonable to conclude that those whom Jesus has given eternal life are safe with Him. He will not allow thieves and robbers to snatch away – they are secure with Him. Romans 8 provides an extended commentary on the security God extends to His children. Romans 8 begins with the grand declaration, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ

Jesus.” (Romans 8:1, ESV). They need not fear the judgement day because Jesus Christ has paid the price for their sins. In the meantime, they need not fear that any accusation will be brought by their enemy that will be beyond the scope of Christ’s forgiveness. In his campaign against Christians, satan accuses them before God and he seeks to persuade followers of Christ that their sins are too horrible to be forgiven. One day satan, the accuser of the brethren, will be called to account. “And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for **the accuser of our brothers** has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.’” (Rev 12:10, ESV).

In Romans 8, Paul addressed followers of Christ who may be overcome by adversity or hardship and grow discouraged and think God has abandoned them. Having told them that the suffering of the present age is not worth comparing with the glory that awaits them (Rom 8.18), he pointed out that the Holy Spirit has been given to help them in their weakness (8.26). Sometimes we can be so weighed down we don’t even know how to pray, and on those occasions, the Holy Spirit will intercede for us (8.26-27). Paul added that for those who love God, no matter what they might encounter, God’s desire and design is that good might come from it (8.28). Rather than adversity succeeding in undermining one’s walk with the Lord, something satan wishes, that it might do just the opposite and further God’s purpose.

In the final 9 verses of Romans 8 Paul uses a series of rhetorical questions to point out nothing can separate one of God’s children from Him and His love for them. He began by noting that if God is for us, who could possibly succeed against us (8.31). And lest, when we face adversity, we interpret that to mean God has abandoned us, He reminds us that His Son went to the cross for us, so we must expect we too will face hardship and difficulty in fulfilling the Lord’s will (8.32). Followers of Christ will not avoid hardship – it will happen. Paul reminds us that it is God who justified us; He made us alive in Christ. He did so knowing all of our sins and shortcomings; we are unable to conceal anything from Him (8.33-34). The efficacy of Christ’s death on the cross was verified when Jesus was bodily resurrected from the dead and He is now seated at God’s right hand from where He intercedes for us (8.34). Wow! Christ is interceding for each of His children right now!

Paul then considered every possible threat we might face, none of which can successfully separate the person who trusts in Jesus Christ for his or her salvation from the love of God.

Romans 8:35 (ESV) ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

In every one of the situations that can be imagined, God’s children are more than conquerors, not in their own strength, but in the strength of God Himself (8.37). Paul concluded with all encompassing assurance that nothing in the universe will succeed in separating followers of Christ from the love of God.

Romans 8:38–39 (ESV) ³⁸For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul expanded on the words of Jesus when Jesus said no one will be able to snatch the sheep of His flock out of His hand (John 10.27-28). Those whom Jesus Christ has saved will in fact persevere to the end – they will walk with Him!

It is necessary to add a footnote to Christ's promise of security to His flock. There are those who misinterpret this as a promise to those who at one time expressed some form of a profession of faith but never lived it out in a meaningful manner. Some have said, "There is not enough evidence to convict them of being Christians." This promise provides no assurance to the person who does not actively trust and believe. Not only in John 10, but throughout John's Gospel, faith in Christ is always presented as active on-going faith, not as some temporal, superficial decision which has been ignored. It is faith which looks back to a decision made in the past to follow the Lord and which has directed a path of walking with the Lord and looks forward to a celebration of completion in heaven. Following Jesus' announcement that He was the *Bread of Life*, many who had previously identified as His disciples, turned back and no longer walked with Him when they realized being a true disciple of Jesus meant complete surrender to Him (John 6.66). They, along with others, are pictured in Jesus' *Parable of the Sower* who sowed seed on the hard path, on rocky ground, among thorns, and in good soil (Matt 13.3-8, 18-23). While the seed sown on rocky ground, sprouted, it nevertheless withered away quickly. The seed sown among the thorns also sprouted, but it pictured those who are diverted from walking with the Lord by the lure of the world. Only the seed sown in good soil produced a harvest. Sadly, many who hear the Gospel, some of whom initially receive it with joy, quickly fall away.

When people whole-heartedly and genuinely embrace Jesus Christ as their Savior they are born-again, they are made a new creation, they are made spiritually alive. That transformation is impossible to hide; it will not only shape the character of a few days, weeks, or months, but a lifetime as they continue to believe, continue to listen to the voice of their Shepherd and continue to follow Him. Jesus promise of security is to those who persevere in their belief in Jesus Christ as their Savior and walk with Him. No one will succeed in snatching them out of His hand.

May you be encouraged as you listen to the following song. I couldn't decide which rendition to choose, so I included both.

He Will Hold Me Fast - Keith & Kristyn Getty

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=936BapRFHaQ&ab_channel=GettyMusicVEVO

He Will Hold Me Fast (Live) – Selah

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unLkmJJPEXk&ab_channel=TheSelahVideos