

SERMON BY
REV W HUIZINGA
ON JOHN 10:9-11
IN PREPARATION FOR THE LORD'S SUPPER

LITURGY

Votum and Salutation
 Psalm 23:1
The Ten Words of the Covenant
 Psalm 23:2
Prayer for the Opening of God's Word
Thankoffering
 Psalm 23:3
Read - John 10:1-18
Text - John 10:9-11
Sermon

**THE GOOD SHEPHERD
GATHERS AND DEFENDS YOU.**

- 1. The Good Shepherd gathers you.***
- 2. The Good Shepherd defends you.***

Hymn 45
Pastoral Prayer
 Psalm 79:5
Benediction

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dan walked Rex, his pet German Shepherd. When Dan stops, Rex stops. When Dan walks, Rex walks right beside him. Rex does not walk ahead or behind but right beside Dan. When Dan says *sit*, Rex sits. When Dan fills the food bowl for Rex, Rex hungrily looks on, but makes no move, not until Dan gives the word. Rex does not listen to other voices in the same way. Strange voices cause him to bark, growl or snarl in warning. Rex does not listen to them except in anger and suspicion.

Well, Christians similarly listen to one voice, the voice of our Master, Jesus our Lord. Strange voices make them cautious or even suspicious. They recognise only the voice of their Good Shepherd. The voice of your Shepherd tells you He loves you, loves you so much that He laid down his life for you. What a wonderful Shepherd! You listen to no one else.

I preach to you the Word of our Saviour under this THEME:

THE GOOD SHEPHERD GATHERS AND DEFENDS YOU.

- 1. The Good Shepherd gathers you.***
- 2. The Good Shepherd defends you.***

1. The Good Shepherd gathers you.

In the OT rulers, leaders and especially the kings were called shepherds. They had to take care of the nation, even as a shepherd cares for his flock. Indeed, even today we describe our ministers as pastors or shepherds of the flock, the congregation, chosen by Jesus Christ to eternal life. So this title of Shepherd strikes a chord with us.

That God called himself Shepherd comes out clearly in well-known shepherd's Psalm 23 – *the LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want*. Here Jesus calls himself the legal, genuine Shepherd-King in contradistinction from the other leaders who will not accept Him and refuse to see in Jesus God's anointed One, their King and Saviour. The apostle John often records the run-ins between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. These confrontations most often concern the debate whether Jesus really is the Messiah, the promised One. Do you see in Jesus the One about whom the prophet Isaiah could prophesy:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me

To preach good tidings to the poor;

He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted,

To proclaim liberty to the captives,

And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,

*And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn (Isaiah 61:1-2)?*

Jesus is giving the joyful release and freedom of the Year of Jubilee. Jesus has just healed a man who was born blind. He released him from his prison of darkness. Never to see the trees, the sky and clouds, your loved ones! We who enjoy good eyesight just cannot imagine what that must be like. Now he sees! What joy! It is like the Year of Jubilee for him.

Yes, Jesus healed a man born blind. You read that in the chapter before.

But dark clouds hide the sunshine of Jesus' gospel in this passage. For why is this man blind? Many Jews thought that a specific sin must have caused this man to be born blind. Even Jesus' disciples asked who had sinned. Did this blind man or his parents sin, that he was born blind? They too thought specific sins caused this blindness. The Jewish leaders certainly looked down on this man, because as a blind person he was thus *born in sin!* They condemned him.

There is another important aspect to keep in mind. It was the Sabbath day. The Jewish leaders insisted on the strict rule of no work on the Sabbath, absolutely no work at all!

Jesus uses this day on which they remember and celebrate their freedom from Satan and slavery to free this blind man from darkness. The man is healed on the Sabbath. Would the church leaders accept it? Take your Bibles and read a few verses with me from **John 9**.

Therefore some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath'. Others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?' And there was a division among them (Verse 16). Any work, even healings, disqualified Jesus as the Messiah, according to the Jewish leaders, because He does not keep the Sabbath! He cannot be a prophet, a man from God. But the blind man tells them, He is a prophet (verse 17).

But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight (Verse 18). This blind man must never have been blind! They discredit the miracle. They ask his parents who corroborate their son's story. They are wary and suspicious because the Jewish leaders had agreed that if anyone confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, this person would be put out of the synagogue (verse 22).

So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, 'Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner' (Verse 24). Jesus is a sinner!

Then they reviled the healed man, and said, 'You are his

disciple, but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from (Verse 28-29). They do not know where Jesus came from! They do parade themselves as Moses' disciples! Yet Moses pointed ahead to Jesus! And God listens only to true worshippers.

They answered and said to him, You were completely born in sins, and are you lecturing us? And they cast him out (Verse 34). They refuse to accept the rebukes of this healed man. Instead, they decide to excommunicate him, to throw him out of the fellowship in the synagogue. This is official discipline! It does not correct sins, but it just eliminates somebody who bothers you. This is a mark of the false church and of false leaders.

So this passage certainly concerns the person and work of Jesus. Once more his identity as the Son of God, the Messiah, comes under question by the church leaders. In turn Jesus questions the validity of those church leaders, those so-called shepherds of Israel. Jesus in our text and reading passage calls them thieves and robbers. Strong language! One could also call them hirelings for the sheep do not belong to them. It is just a job and what do they care about the sheep?! If a person opposes them, *remove the person*, they say. *Throw such a headstrong sheep who does not know the law out of the synagogue*, according to these leaders. We read of that in John 9. It is no wonder that Jesus now refers to Himself as the true Shepherd of the flock.

Well, let's learn from what Jesus describes about himself. He claims to be the door of the sheep-pen.

You have to appreciate the purpose of this doorway of a sheep-pen. Usually a number of shepherds would bring their flocks of sheep and goats into one large enclosure, a large sheep-pen. It could hold the flocks of a half dozen or more shepherds. They built its walls out of stones from the surrounding fields. Of course, the gate or doorway needed to be strong. This convenience of one enclosure for all the flocks meant that only one person had to stay awake at night to guard the sheep. The other shepherds could catch a good night's sleep.

In the morning each shepherd came to the door or gate of the sheep-pen. The doorkeeper opened up to him, because the watchman knew the shepherds. The shepherd then called out his flock, one by one. He named each one. Yes, that might seem odd to you, but it is true. To us a woolly mob of sheep all look alike. But tend them for some weeks and you will start to notice the differences in character. The shepherd has a name for each one. He calls them out. They knew his voice and would obey him. They would not listen to other shepherds or other strangers.

So you see the importance of the gateway. Every sheep had to come in through that door at night and come out through that gate in the

morning. Every shepherd had to bring home his flock through this door at night, and come to this door to call out his sheep in the morning.

What would you think of a person who tried to jump up over the enclosure and so get into the sheepfold? He's a sneaky thief, we say. Maybe he is a sheep rustler. That is what Jesus calls the Jewish leaders who do not acknowledge Him as the door of the sheep-pen. Well, Jesus is the door of the sheepfold. If you want to get into the sheepfold or want to call out the sheep, you need to acknowledge Jesus. He is the door.

But the Jewish leaders did not want to acknowledge Jesus as the Shepherd appointed by God in heaven. Jesus is not a man of God, they say. They claim that Jesus does not keep the laws of Moses, especially the law about the Sabbaths. So the sticking point is: do they acknowledge Jesus as the door of the sheep-pen? No!

Accordingly, they treat all the sheep, who do follow Jesus, as sinners, law-breakers and have them expelled from the sheep-pen, from the synagogue. We read that in John 9:22

His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that Jesus was the Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue.

It should thus be clear why Jesus here calls himself the gate or the door of the sheep. Everyone needs to acknowledge him. The shepherds and the sheep have to come to this gate, this door. No one goes out or comes in except through this doorway. Jesus is the doorway. The Jewish shepherds refuse to accept Jesus as the door. Thus they are thieves and robbers who climb over the wall to the sheep.

In church history church leaders told the flock they needed to do good works besides believing in Jesus. Often such leaders found it very convenient to preach this need for good works, for indulgences, for example. It filled their coffers, paid for their offices, built their churches and cathedrals. They came only to steal and to enrich themselves. In the process they robbed the sheep of their full salvation in Jesus.

That is not according to the mission of Jesus. He came to give life, yes, life in abundance. This abundance of life comes through grace and not through the treasury of the church or through the saints or through your own godly efforts. Thus in church history such leaders did not really acknowledge Jesus as the door of the sheep-pen. Thus they proved to be robbers and destroyers.

Please let us remember this, shepherds of the flock of Jesus Christ. We must acknowledge Jesus as the door. We can only lead the sheep out and lead them in, if we accept Jesus as the door. If we try to operate like the Jewish shepherds, then we become thieves and robbers. If we think Jesus is not the Son of God, the Messiah, who has come to lay down his life for the sheep, then we will not come via the doorway, but climb over the wall. We are thieves! If we treat

the flock as our own and not the flock of Jesus, saved by his life-blood, then we too go wrong. We have not acknowledged Jesus as the Good Shepherd and as the door of the sheep-pen.

Why is Jesus so important?

"I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

Only by Jesus can you find salvation. Only by Jesus, the door, can you go out and come in safely, enjoying peace with God. Your Good Shepherd saves you. You find pasture with good, green grass, and rivers of clear water. You need not fear enemies. Your Shepherd saves you. The greatest salvation comes to you when Jesus stands in the breach and saves you from the wrath of God, saves you from the penalty of death and the curse of God. He grants you full salvation through his sacrifice on the cross. Jesus knows that. Already at this time He knew He would lay down his life for his sheep, for you. He has the authority as well as the power to lay down his life on Good Friday, and to take it back up on Easter morning.

The Lord's Supper signs and seals all this to you. See how central Jesus is to you!

Indeed, Jesus is the gate through whom we must go. The sheep in the enclosure all had to go in and out through that enclosure made of rock walls usually. For us to find life and salvation, we need to go through Jesus, and through Him alone. There is no other name under heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved!

Jesus made this clear to the Jews who had qualms about his person, about his claims. They must go in and out through Him. He is the gate. Jesus gathers his sheep. He gives them salvation, He feeds them.

Once more, why is Jesus so important? Why did Jesus insist very simply and without argument that the church shepherds need to acknowledge Him?

First of all, the sheep belong to Him. He is the Good Shepherd who owns the sheep. In this chapter we read that the Father *has given* these sheep to Jesus (verse 29). The Father has chosen them and given them to Jesus. Accordingly, they belong to Jesus. You see, Jesus is not a hireling who for a weekly fee takes care of someone else's sheep. Jesus owns the sheep.

*The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know **My** sheep, and am known by **My** own.*

There is an added reason. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who has laid down his life for his sheep (verse 11). He paid for you, his sheep, with his own life-blood. You belong to Him. He knows You. He knows all his own. Note how his salvation is very specific. It is a definite or particular redemption. Jesus knows all those whom the Father has given to Him. Later on in this chapter Jesus tells the Jewish shepherds:

...you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I

said to you. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. My Father, who has given them to Me..."

Jesus himself rejects these leaders, for they do not acknowledge Him. They do not belong to his sheep.

Jesus in the process also rejects the idea of universal atonement, as though all will be saved. No worries for anyone, for all are saved, according to this theory! This is wrong. Jesus knows his own sheep, all those whom the Father has given to Him. Others, such as these harsh Jewish leaders, did not belong to Him. Jesus as the Son of God knows this.

Yet Jesus calls out to these false leaders. Jesus indeed calls all men to repentance and to believe in Him. Jesus means it, seriously and sincerely. Jesus requires them to repent and to acknowledge Him in faith as the door of the sheep. We too must acknowledge Him as the door of salvation.

So Jesus has the right to stand there at the gate, to call the sheep out, to lead them out and to find them green pastures.

Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, we belong to Jesus. We all confess *with body and soul, both in life and death, I belong to Jesus. The Holy Spirit makes me willing and ready from now on to live for Him.*

Every shepherd who tends his sheep must acknowledge Him. He is the door, the gate. Only through Jesus will they find all they need. Jesus as our shepherd-king provides all the sheep's needs, all your needs. In the morning Jesus calls the sheep out of the sheep-fold. He is the gate through which they pass into green pastures.

Through this gate he leads them out to find green paddocks. Jesus supplies all they need. In real terms this refers to daily things as your food and drink, clothing and housing, but it specifically refers in the context of our text to spiritual guidance and protection. Yes, in the context we read how Jesus saves you. Through the life-blood of the shepherd-king, you, his sheep, are saved from the slaughter of God's judgment. And you, who are justified in the blood of Shepherd, are also led along the right paths, yes, in the paths of righteousness. Jesus teaches you to follow his commandments. By the strength of his Spirit the sheep earnestly strive to keep all the commandments of his shepherd-king. Jesus is everything to the sheep. "The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

2. The Good Shepherd defends you.

Shepherds should defend the sheep. David courageously defended his father's sheep from the attack of a bear and also of a lion. Now that did not happen very often, but it does illustrate that a shepherd needed to be brave. A hireling had no bond with the sheep. Why risk his life? The sheep did not belong to him. But the real Shepherd stood in the breach for his own flock.

Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, shepherds beat off wild animals and even robbers. Yet they expect to come out of the

encounter with a wild animal alive and healthy. They expected to save their animals as well. To lay down one's life for the sheep was very unusual. Do you risk your human life, created in the image of God, for an animal? You try your best to protect them and to ward off wild animals. But if your life is at stake, do you not back off. Indeed, not many shepherds needed risk their lives for their sheep. But Jesus did. For Jesus gathers and defends human beings, created in the image of God. Jesus, the Son of God, created you and created this world in which you live. Jesus loves his own creation. Jesus especially loves those whom the Father gave to Him. Jesus gathers and defends you by laying down his life for you! Jesus faced a very strong 'Enemy'. Was it the Devil? Oh yes, in a way the Devil was involved. This Diabolical Adversary combined forces with the Jewish shepherds, with Pilate and Herod and the lynching mob. They all wanted to get rid of Jesus. Jesus faced quite an awesome and powerful coalition of deadly enemies! Yet Jesus could easily have defeated them. Jesus is also brave. He does not succumb out of fear! Not at all!

No, there is a stronger 'Enemy'. Jesus knew it, knew it right away when He entered Gethsemane. His own Father forsook Him, turned his back to his only-begotten Son. The Father required that He drink the cup of death to the dregs. Jesus did, courageously, without flinching, faithfully fulfilling all what the Scriptures said of his sufferings and death. This was the hardest task Jesus performed. Facing the Father who commanded his Son to undergo the sentence of death and curse proved the hardest 'Enemy' for our Good Shepherd. But He valiantly stood in the breach for the sheep, right to the very bitter end.

The Lord's Supper pictures this ransom, this death sentence Jesus underwent. Later on in this chapter Jesus speaks about it more clearly.

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. "I and My Father are one (verses 25-30)."

The Good Shepherd laid down his life for you so that He can give you eternal life, abundance of life.

Jesus has fully paid for you. It means the Father is now your Father too. No one will snatch you out of the Father's hand. No enemy can withstand the Father who is greater and more powerful than all enemies. Jesus and his Father defend you.

The Father, who gives you to Jesus, who gives you an eternal salvation. Jesus pays the ransom price of his own lifeblood for you. You shall never perish.

What a sacrifice to pay! What loving care! No wonder you believers, the sheep of Jesus, willingly follow Him, willingly listen to his voice.

This means that you as the sheep must learn to recognise the voice of the real Master, the voice of the Good Shepherd. How do you do that? By reading and studying the Bible. In it you hear the voice of the Good Shepherd. Use the opportunities at home, in the church and at school to study the voice of your Good Shepherd. Then you will also recognise other voices, which contradict this voice of Jesus, as strange voices, even dangerous voices, which you must not obey. You have now heard your Shepherd's voice. Believe Him as the door of salvation for you. Acknowledge Jesus as the door or gate of the sheepfold. Remember how your Good Shepherd paid the ultimate price for you – He laid down his life for you. So come to the table of the Lord, to receive the signs and seals of his sacrifice for the sheep. See and taste that Jesus is the door through whom you can go to be saved and to find all you need for now and eternity. Amen.