

## Light, Love, Life ~ The Gospel of John

### Chapters 10-12

It has dawned on me that, three weeks into this series, I have not done a good job of connecting the Gospel of John with our overall theme for the year of Becoming. Thankfully chapter 10 lends itself well to making that connection. We want to Become people who hear and heed the voice of our Good Shepherd.

In this chapter we encounter two more “*I am...*” statements from Jesus: “*I am the gate...*” (10:7), and “*I am the good shepherd.*” (10:11) In both cases, metaphorically, His people are construed as sheep. I’m not sure how much you know about sheep, but they are some of the dumbest animals. In case you doubt that, check this out...

<https://memes.com/m/can-anyone-be-more-dumb-than-this-sheep-1pWyw61eRj>

One of the earliest memories I have is of a little picture displayed at my babysitter’s house. My babysitter’s family were the ones who led my parents and me to Jesus. This was the placard...



Interestingly, the metaphor of God’s people as sheep is a frequent one throughout Scripture, as is the depiction of leaders as shepherds. Many of the well-known people of the Bible were shepherds: Abraham (as well as Isaac and Jacob), Moses, David. The beloved Psalm 23 begins with, “*The Lord is my shepherd...*”. The thing about sheep is that they cannot make it on their own...they are dependent upon a shepherd, so it’s a fitting metaphor.

Talk of sheep and shepherds was easily understood by those Jesus was speaking to. As a people they understood themselves to be God’s “sheep”, as these lines from a couple of Psalms demonstrate, “*Then we Your people, the sheep of Your pasture, will praise you forever;*” (79:13) and “*Know that the Lord is God. It is He who made us, and we are His; we are His people, the sheep of His pasture.*” (100:3)

Important to the context of John 10, the Old Testament prophets took the “shepherds” of Israel (religious leaders) to task frequently for not shepherding God’s people well. (To clarify, the understanding was—and still is—that God is the Chief Shepherd and leaders are under-shepherds serving on His behalf.) A prime example is Ezekiel 34 (I recommend reading it, as you will notice an immediate connection to John 10). In that passage God judges the shepherds of Israel (again, religious leaders) and then states that He will be the good shepherd of His people. This was likely the passage Jesus had in mind when He stated, “*I am the good shepherd.*”

Keep in mind that Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees (John 10:1-21 is a continuation of chapter 9). They would have been well acquainted with the Ezekiel 34 passage. Jesus basically makes them out to be the bad shepherds of Israel that Ezekiel was referring to, while Jesus takes upon Himself the role of God as Shepherd.

And what’s the primary difference between a good shepherd and a bad one (or a hired hand)? A good shepherd is willing to lay down his life for the sheep while a bad shepherd/hired hand simply looks out for himself. Or, to say it another way, the good shepherd is motivated by love and care for the sheep. He wants to see the sheep flourish and be healthy or, as Jesus says, “*..to have life to the full.*” (10:10)

Sheep pens were enclosed areas that technically didn’t have a gate. Rather, they had a narrow opening for the sheep to go in and out of, and a good shepherd would sit or lay across that opening, functioning as the gate, thereby protecting the sheep.

Other interesting imagery in this passage is of thieves, robbers, and wolves. These were various ways of describing unfaithful and abusive religious leaders and possibly false messiahs (of which there were plenty) as well.

Four times in this passage Jesus mentions that sheep know/listen to the voice of their shepherd. The implication for us is “*Do we know, hear, heed, the voice of Jesus in our lives?*” (I anticipate some discussion questions around this.:)

As was par for the course, the listeners were divided over Jesus (10:19-21). As a point of reference, at this point John concludes Jesus’ time at the Feast of Tabernacles that began in chapter 7 and picks up the action a couple of months later at the Feast of Dedication, also known as the Festival of Lights (though we probably know it as Hanukkah). This was an eight-day festival in December. This festival is not found in the Old Testament and was not a required celebration by Mosaic law. The details of Hanukkah are found in 1 & 2 Maccabees, which is in the Apocrypha. Basically it celebrates the Maccabean revolt against Antiochus IV Epihanes and the Selucid empire which occurred in 166-160 BC, whereby Jerusalem was recovered and the Temple rededicated (hence the Feast of Dedication).

While in the temple area, the Jews (probably, more narrowly, the religious leaders) corner Jesus and exhort Him to tell them plainly if He is the Christ (10:24). Jesus replied, “*I did tell you, but you did not believe.*” (10:25) It is probably safe to assume that these people were the same people to whom He had spoken earlier in chapter 10 (albeit about two months prior) about

sheep and shepherds, as Jesus goes back to that, “...*you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to My voice; I know them and they follow Me.*” (10:26-27)

They wanted Jesus to speak plainly, so He obliged, “*I and the Father are One.*” (10:31). They responded by picking up stones to kill Him. Hmm, this has to make us wonder why they wanted to know if He was the Christ or not? Apparently they were hoping He would say no. But then they would have a different issue/question on their hands: What’s the meaning and purpose of all these miracles? To paraphrase Jesus, “*What is the evidence telling you?*” But they could not be reasoned with. They simply didn’t WANT to believe. (Remember the important role our wants/desires play in our lives?)

Since they were intent on killing Jesus, He left Jerusalem. Even though He went out into the wilderness, “...*many people came to Him...and in that place many believed in Jesus.*” (10:41-42)

In chapter 11 we get to see one of the most intimate glimpses into Jesus in all of Scripture. While we are familiar with the idea that He had 12 disciples who followed Him around throughout His ministry, we might be less familiar with households of followers who supported Him and the 12 by offering hospitality and friendship. Here in chapter 11 we encounter one such family, a brother and two sisters: Lazarus, Mary, and Martha.

They lived in Bethany, which was less than two miles from Jerusalem (remember that the leaders in Jerusalem were set on killing Jesus). Word was sent to Jesus in the wilderness that Lazarus was sick. Jesus doesn’t seem overly concerned about this. In fact He confidently states, “*This sickness will not end in death...*” (11:4) and then goes on to make a deep theological statement, “...*[the sickness] is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.*” Did you catch it? God is glorified through the Son, and the Son is glorified through the Father. That’s a lot of mutual glorification going on. Jesus then delays a couple of days before heading to Bethany...which the disciples remind Him may not be a great idea since there was a recent attempt on His life in that area.

Remember, Jesus’ timing is always perfect. All signs point to Jesus knowing exactly what He was going to do and how this was going to all play out. It is worth noting that Thomas (who unfortunately is better known for his doubting) was the one who displayed dedication by stating, “*Let us also go, that we may die with Him.*” (11:16) Thomas seems to understand the cost and vocalizes a willingness to pay it. We should allow this to balance out the portrayal of him as “doubting Thomas”.

You may recall Mary and Martha from our study of Luke last year. In chapter 10 of Luke we’re introduced to these two sisters who were hosting Jesus. Well, Martha was “hosting” (cooking, preparing, etc.)...and getting quite frustrated that Mary wasn’t helping. Mary, meanwhile, was sitting at the feet of Jesus, taking in His teaching. Here in John 11, we see their personality attributes again...Martha is the one who initially goes out to greet Jesus, while Mary continues to sit reflectively at home. Martha the doer; Mary the contemplative. Interestingly, they both have the same response to Jesus, “*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*”

(11:21, 32) This statement is full of disappointment and confidence all mixed together. Confidence that Jesus could have saved Lazarus; disappointment that He had not been there to do so.

To Martha Jesus states His intention, "*Your brother will rise again.*" (11:23) But Martha assumes He's just speaking a theological platitude. Martha correctly understood theology regarding resurrection (as did most Jews at that time...which is still the correct theology that we hold), that at the last day the dead will rise.

Perhaps now is a good time to remind us that our ultimate end is not some existence in a disembodied heaven. Rather, we will be raised with new, physical bodies, and heaven and earth will be one. In other words, we're not going anywhere. But HERE will be changed dramatically. Once again, our friends at the Bible Project are helpful and have a video for that...

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/heaven-and-earth/>

Now, generally speaking, when someone is in the throes of grief it is not the time to give them a theological lesson. But Jesus gets a pass...one, He's God, so He can do what He wants...and two, He was about to raise Lazarus, so any seeming insensitivity will soon be dispelled.

We now see the fifth "*I am...*" statement from Jesus: "*I am the resurrection and the life...*" (11:25) Resurrection is more than an idea, more than a theological doctrine, more than a future event...resurrection is a Person. This is simply consistent with what has already been established...that Jesus is the source of Life (1:3-4; 5:21, 24-26). This is SO important for us to remember. Frequently I ask people to tell me about their relationship with Jesus, and in response I hear about their experience with organized religion. NO!!! Religion doesn't save us or give us life. Jesus does. Notice that when Jesus asked Martha, "*Do you believe this?*" (11:26) He wasn't asking her if she believed a doctrine; rather, He was asking her if she believed in Him.

This question to Martha elicited a confession from her that is on par with Simon Peter's great confession, "*I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.*" (11:27)

The conversation with Jesus must have done something in Martha because she immediately ran home to get Mary. When Mary arrived where Jesus was and He saw her weeping, along with the tag-a-long comforters also weeping, "*...He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.*" (11:33)

Let's get a little geeky here and look into the Greek of this statement because we lose a little bit in English translations. "*Deeply moved*" can also be translated "groan", but of real interest is that it carries an angry connotation. "*Troubled*" can also be translated as "disturbed, agitated, stirred up". It is tempting to think of Jesus as rather stoic (which probably comes from movie portrayals of Jesus more than from Scripture). This passage definitely describes Jesus as being emotional...but perhaps not in the way we tend to think. Yes, Jesus wept (11:35...shortest verse in the Bible) but likely not out of sadness at the death of Lazarus. (He knew He was going to raise Lazarus momentarily.) It seems that Jesus' emotional experience was a combination of anger and sadness, though the sadness was probably more about the hearts of the people. Many

of the “comforters” were likely people who didn’t believe in Him or looked at Him suspiciously. I use quotes around “comforters” because it was considered pious to grieve with others...which could lead to people “comforting” more for show than support. This, too, could explain Jesus’ exasperation.

In verse 38 we see the same statement, “*Jesus, once more deeply moved...*” as He arrived at the tomb. At this point I picture Jesus as stone-faced, intense, and resolute...as we might expect someone to be as they meet an enemy in battle. In this case, the enemy is death itself. Essentially, Jesus commanded death to release its victim...and death obeyed. This can give us great comfort that after we pass, when Jesus calls our name, death will comply and we will be raised to life again.

Just for laughs, please allow me to share the King James Version of Martha’s initial resistance about taking the stone away from Lazarus’ tomb, “*Lord, by this time he stinketh.*” (11:39)...sorry, couldn’t resist...my inner 5th grade boy is coming out. 😊

In His prayer to His Father prior to raising Lazarus, Jesus sums up the purposes of all His signs and miracles, “*...that they may BELIEVE that you sent Me.*” (8:42, emphasis added) And that’s exactly what happened...for some, “*Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in Him.*” (8:45) Sadly, even seeing signs and wonders wasn’t enough for some to believe in Him, “*But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.*” (8:46) Like a bunch of tattletales.

The contrast between a good shepherd and bad shepherds (or hired hands or wolves) discussed in chapter 10 is on display in the closing section of this chapter. The Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council (the supposed shepherds of Israel) demonstrate that they cared nothing about the sheep (people). Instead their concern/priority was their own place and station, “*If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.*” (11:48) And there it is...their true heart and agenda. Notice that they are at cross-purposes with God in that they didn’t want people to believe in Jesus.

This chapter closes with yet another Jewish holiday on the horizon...Passover. There was much anticipation on all sides as to whether Jesus would show up...and what would happen if He did.

In chapter 12 we see a very tender scene of Mary anointing Jesus’ feet with expensive perfume. When we compare the various gospel accounts of this scene (Matthew 26, Mark 14) we get a fuller picture. The host of this dinner in Jesus’ honor was a man known as Simon the Leper. Only John names Mary as the one who anointed Jesus’ feet. And only John specifically names Judas as the one voicing objection to this extravagant gesture of love, which we can categorically call an expression of worship.

This brings up an interesting and important question: How should money and resources be used to facilitate worship? There are many valid forms and expressions of worship. Anointing Jesus for burial is a unique, and not replicable, form of worship. Ministering to the poor is an ever-present form of worship. Granted, in this particular case, Judas wasn’t actually concerned

for the poor. In today's vernacular we would say Judas was "virtue signaling"...wanting to appear more virtuous than he actually was.

But that doesn't take away the legitimacy of the challenge of figuring out how best to use resources for godly purposes. Congregations wrestle with this question regularly. This passage raises the question but doesn't aid much in answering the question because this was a very unique situation. Prayerful discernment by wise and mature people is the process. And we trust that the Spirit will lead us to the best use of funds in our specific time, place, and situation.

Part of what makes answering this question so challenging is that there is no shortage of opinions on how money should be used/spent. So who gets to make that call? Figuring this stuff out is just one of the many challenges that go into a community/family of faith functioning together in a healthy way.

John takes us from one setting of worship to another. But before we move on to the Triumphal Entry as it has become known, let's not miss that the chief priests were looking to undo what God had done. God/Jesus raised Lazarus to life, and now the chief priests wanted to kill Lazarus because he served as evidence of Jesus. (12:10-11) Oh the irony is thick. The whole point of a priest is to represent God to the people and the people to God. But here these guys were wanting to kill people (Jesus and Lazarus). Talk about missing the mark/point!

Back to worship...whereas Mary's act of worship was personal (though done with others around), the Triumphal Entry was a communal act of worship. Both personal, private, individual worship and corporate/communal, public worship are important. But as Jesus said to "Samantha" (the Samaritan woman in chapter 4), true worship is done in spirit and truth. Now I'll let you in on a personal bent of mine. I think personal/private worship is what fuels healthy public/communal worship. Worshiping in spirit and in truth is easier, I think, on a personal level. There's no one around for us to be tempted to impress or to care what they think. It's easier to be raw, honest, and less inhibited. And when we gather together for worship with a bunch of people who worship on their own, then the communal worship is powerful and beautiful (and likely more sincere). Let's face it, Mary's act of worship was authentic. The crowd on Palm Sunday? I have my questions. How many of the people from the crowd shouting "Hosanna" were shouting "Crucify Him!" later in the week? I don't know. But as Soren Kierkegaard said, "*The crowd is untruth.*"

All four gospel accounts describe the Triumphal Entry (Matthew 21, Mark 11, Luke 19) or Palm Sunday as we like to call it. We're familiar with this story so I won't say much about it, other than to note that the people's positive reception of Jesus was based on their hope that He was their long-awaited Messiah. Which, of course, He was...but they didn't quite catch the fact that His kingship wasn't going to be what they expected, symbolized by Him coming in on a donkey instead of a stallion, which a more worldly, militaristically-minded king would do.

I appreciate how John, as one of Jesus' disciples, honestly and humbly admits that, "*At first His disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about Him and that they had done these things to Him.*" (12:16).

The next section can be a little confusing. Apparently some Greeks (i.e. non-Jews) had also come to Jerusalem to observe Passover. They had clearly heard of Jesus and approached Philip with a request to meet Jesus. Philip roped Andrew into going to Jesus with him with the request. Now here's the puzzling part. Did Jesus answer, or even acknowledge, the request?

On the surface it appears that Jesus did not. But we need to look closer, pay a little more attention to some details, to see what's going on. Notice verse 19 where the Pharisees in exasperation exclaim, "*Look how the whole world has gone after Him!*" On one level this was hyperbole, but the fact that immediately after this comment John includes the detail that some Greeks were wanting to see Jesus demonstrates that the draw of Jesus was getting quite large. Also keep in mind that back in chapter 10 in the Good Shepherd discourse Jesus mentioned, "*I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also.*" (10:16) This can be understood as Jesus stating that what He was up to would include more than just Jews.

On the surface it appears that Jesus' reply to Philip and Andrew goes off in another direction entirely. But notice verse 23 and verse 32; "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*" and "*...when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to Myself.*" (emphasis added) Remember Jesus came to bring glory to the Father by saving the world. And now the world, represented by these Greeks, was coming to Him. To paraphrase Jesus, "*It's all happening according to plan.*", even if no one outside of Jesus, the Father, and the Spirit understood the plan. Additionally, being "glorified" wasn't about being a popular celebrity who everyone wants to see. It was about dying for the sins of the world and also a way of replicating Himself, as a seed does when it dies. So we don't know if the Greeks got their wish. But Philip and Andrew, along with an overhearing crowd, got quite a lesson.

Jesus said, "*Whoever serves me must follow Me...*" (12:26) The way we follow Jesus is by taking on His teachings and His way...which leads to forsaking our own life (our plans/agenda, our learned ways of operating, etc.) so that we can embrace the life He has for us. This is what "belief" in Jesus means...actually doing what He teaches. (This point comes through in all four gospel accounts.)

It all boils down to what we actually want/desire. It is very telling that John describes even some leaders "believed" in Jesus but were unwilling to confess that publicly out of fear of the consequences. As John states it, "*...for they loved praise from people more than praise from God.*" (12:43) As we've been saying all year now, what we really want really matters. Do we really want a life of increasing faithfulness to Jesus and continued progress in His way of life? And are we willing to face the consequences that come along with that?

### Possible Discussion Questions

- How do you feel about being likened to a dumb animal (a sheep)? What lessons might we take away from that?

- How do you train yourself to hear the voice of Jesus (the Good Shepherd)? How have you cultivated a listening ear? (Hint: that’s what spiritual practices are for.)
- Describe a time when you “heard the voice” of Jesus. How did you know it was Jesus and not just your own inner thoughts? What did following the voice of your shepherd lead to? (Please don’t be intimidated by this question. Remember, there is a very mystical aspect to our faith.)
- Describe some good religious leaders you’ve had in your life and some bad ones. At the core, what was the difference?
- Initially, Martha and Mary were disappointed in Jesus (“...if you had been here...”). When was a time when you were disappointed by Jesus?
- If someone asked you, “What does it mean to believe in Jesus?”, how would you answer?
- What is something that causes you to let out an angry, exasperated groan?
- How in touch are you with your emotions? What is your practice for paying attention to your emotions? With whom do you share your deepest emotions? When you think of Jesus, how do you imagine His emotional temperament?
- Let’s talk about worship. Giving money to support “the Lord’s work” is a form of worship. How that money is used is also a form of worship (or ought to be). Many forms of worship cost nothing at all (financially). Others can be quite costly. In your experience of being part of the Church what do you think/feel about how money is used? If it were up to you, what would be done differently?
- (I suppose the presumption here is that we all understand what worship is. Shameless plug: our next series after John is a series on worship...it’s like we plan this stuff out 😊 )
- How do you use your money and resources to worship?
- How would you describe the difference between your personal/private worship and your communal experience of worship? What are the highs and lows of each?
- Whose opinion of you really matters? (Or, who do you fear having a low opinion of you?) How has caring about their opinion served you? (positively, negatively...how so?)

### Soul Training Exercise

Read:                    John chapters 13-16

Memorize:            John 13:34-35



