

**John 10:1-21**

Hope Lutheran Church and School of Idaho Falls, Idaho

Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 26, 2026

Pastor Robert Carabotta

In the name of Jesus, the good shepherd. Amen.

One of the most endearing psalms for every occasion in life is the Twenty-Third Psalm. Most people have heard it, and I suspect that it is beautiful in any language.

Even those who cannot recall ever having heard it before drift into a state of reminiscence when they DO hear it. The Twenty-Third Psalm states:

The LORD *is* my shepherd;

I shall not want.

<sup>2</sup> He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside the still waters.

<sup>3</sup> He restores my soul;

He leads me in the paths of righteousness

For His name's sake.

<sup>4</sup> Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil;

For You *are* with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

<sup>5</sup>You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You anoint my head with oil;

My cup runs over.

<sup>6</sup>Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

All the days of my life;

And I will dwell in the house of the LORD

Forever.

What many are not aware of is that Psalm 23 is the believer's prayer, the believer's confession of faith in **JESUS**, the Christ. THIS we find out from the very words of Jesus himself, written down in John's Gospel, chapter ten. No one ever spoke this way of Himself with such conviction and authority as did Jesus Christ. No one ever speaks this way of Himself with such conviction and authority as does Christ Jesus, and thereby He is telling us that He is exactly what Psalm 23 and His own words say He is. In those words, recorded in John, chapter 10, Jesus is also speaking of US who by God's grace have faith in Him and who are baptized into Him, calling us His **sheep**. Jesus says,

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does NOT enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, THAT man is a thief and a robber.<sup>2</sup> But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup>To HIM the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear HIS voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup>When he has brought out all his own, he goes BEFORE them, and the sheep follow HIM, for they know HIS voice. <sup>5</sup>A stranger they will NOT follow, but they will flee from him, for they do NOT KNOW the voice of strangers.”

With these words, Jesus is saying that He is the shepherd and we are His sheep.

During World War I, some Turkish soldiers tried to steal a flock of sheep from a hillside near Jerusalem. The shepherd, who had been sleeping, suddenly awakened to see his sheep being driven off on the other side of the ravine. He could not hope to recapture his flock by force single-handedly, but suddenly he had a thought. Standing up on HIS side of the ravine, he put his hands around his mouth and gave his own peculiar call, which he used each day to gather his sheep to him. The sheep heard the familiar sound. For a moment they listened, and then, hearing it again, they turned and rushed down one side of the ravine and up the other toward their shepherd. It was quite impossible for the soldiers to stop the animals. The shepherd was away with them to a place of safety before the

soldiers could make up their minds to pursue them---and all because his sheep knew their master's voice.<sup>1</sup>

“But wouldn't it be better,” we might ask, “to be more open-minded, to listen to the voices and messages of teachers who speak ideas and beliefs which are ALTERNATIVE ideas and beliefs than what Jesus says?” That is a question we hear often put to into our ears, especially through social media and in places of higher academia. But it is more than a question: It is a suggestion that we as members of the human race should be tolerant, but MORE than tolerant as we are told that we should be open-minded, and more than open-minded, as many tell us to accept these alternative voices, ideas, beliefs and practices, which are contrary to what the Lord Jesus says and away from the pathway of His steps.

The answer of our Lord Jesus to that question and suggestion of HYPER-tolerance into acceptance of ideas and beliefs contrary to what Jesus says is --- “No.” As often as we hear the mantra of the world taking the words of our Lord Jesus out of context and saying, “judge not, lest you be judged,” still with His own words Jesus judges all of those who speak contrary to His words, calling them thieves, robbers and strangers. He says,

---

<sup>1</sup> *1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, edited by Michael P. Green, Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 1989, illustration 1535.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, **he who does NOT enter** the sheepfold **by the door** [and Jesus calls Himself the DOOR of the sheep] **but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.**<sup>2</sup> But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep....<sup>3</sup> ... The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out....<sup>5</sup> **A stranger** they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do NOT KNOW the voice of strangers....

The power and the impact and the blunt consequence of these words are astounding! Jesus goes on to say,

<sup>7</sup> ... “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. <sup>8</sup> **All who came before me are thieves and robbers,** but the sheep did NOT listen to THEM. <sup>9</sup> **I** am the door. If anyone enters by **ME**, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> **The thief** comes **only** to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. <sup>11</sup> **I AM the good shepherd.** The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

With these words from Jesus, He takes down ALL who presume to compete for ultimate allegiance against Him.

It is heartbreaking to know that the spiritual robbery of stealing souls away from the Lord Jesus by teaching false ideas to them is something which happens

all too often, even sometimes within Christian churches, the very place where one should be hearing ONLY the Word of God, the voice of Jesus. Those faithful believers within Christian churches who have gone before us in following the voice of Jesus, they have seen false teachers arise from within their churches, and they had to discipline their ears away from listening to such lying teachers.

But what about within our time? Does this happen in our time? Sadly, it does. Tony Campolo was a preacher who taught the Bible well enough, some decades ago. But over the years he entertained alternative views about foundational teachings of the Bible, including the entire Bible being God's Word, its teaching on sexuality, and other foundational teachings. Eventually, he became a leader in a movement called Red Letter Christians, a progressive Christianity.

His son, **Bart** Campolo, learned this progressivism from his dad. At 15 years-old he recited a sinner's prayer, which is considered a means of conversion in many churches. He followed in his dad's footsteps in ministry, but he says that over 30 years of being **in** ministry he experienced a lot of confusion. Seeing poverty, he could **not** understand why God did **not** directly intervene to alleviate such poverty. He says,

“I passed through every stage of heresy [that is, false teaching]. It starts out when sovereignty [the sovereignty of God] goes, then biblical authority goes; then I’m a Universalist; now I’m marrying gay people. Pretty soon I don’t actually believe Jesus actually rose from the dead in a bodily way.... The supernaturalism in my faith was dialed so far down you could barely notice it.... It’s an infinite progression,” he says, so that now he preaches that “nobody can go to hell; everybody will be saved.”

Bart Campolo is someone who grew up in an increasingly liberalized Christian home, whose father gradually backed away from the absolutes of God’s Word, and this led Bart into unbelief. Bart Campolo

described the process of abandoning Christian beliefs as almost addictive--- once you start, you don’t know how or where to stop.<sup>2</sup>

Calling the process of abandoning the faith “progressive” is deceitful, for it is actually a REGRESSION into darkness; it is heresy, as even Bart Campolo himself has called it.

---

<sup>2</sup>Anne Reed, “‘Progressive Christianity’ led to unbelief for son of controversial author, pastor,” AFA Journal, May 2018, pgs. 24-25.

But have you ever been so tempted to listen to and to follow the teachings of those whom you knew were contradicting the Word of the Lord? Have you ever actually walked away from the Word of God and away from the fellowship of God's church for the more exciting-sounding destructive thrills of your peers OR of the people you wished to impress, or to experience "the thrills, and the chills and the pills that kill" as John Cougar Mellencamp<sup>3</sup> calls them? It's so much easier, we sometimes think, just to change one's beliefs away from the Bible in order to accommodate the beliefs of what is popular so as to avoid being persecuted for taking the words of Jesus for what they actually say.

But trading the words of Christ, the good shepherd, for those other ideas comes at a cost and a loss so great that the one who does such a thing loses his own soul. And such were some of US. And such was I. In the last year-and-a-half of my undergraduate studies at a truly Christian university, where the professors were devout believers in Jesus and campus life was that of prayer and the reading and study of God's Word as the truth, but it was there that my PRIDE in becoming so smart, led me away from the faith. Like all heretics of times past and present think of themselves, my intelligence was astounding! Note the sarcasm, but such was what I thought of myself. I believed that I understood the Bible better than

---

<sup>3</sup> From Mellencamp's song "Ain't That America."

those who took it at face value, that I could find in it some permission to do what God's Commandments condemn. Even when I heard a sermon like this one at that time, I would, in the secrecy of my own mind, simply dismiss it, and the preacher never even knew that I disbelieved it. PRIDE, that chief of sins that convinces the sinner that he doesn't need the heavenly shepherd whose Word is absolute. During that season of wandering willfully away from the Lord, anyone who urged me to turn back to faith in the plain words of Scripture I simply judged as being unenlightened simpletons.

Tony and Bart Campolo are two in a long line of those who once believed and then wandered in pride away from the voice of the good shepherd, Christ Jesus. We must pray that the Lord would grant to them repentance, a turning away from the strange voices of false teachings and toward the voice of Jesus speaking clearly the words of God, the Bible, as they are written, even as God in His grace granted repentance to **ME**.

The good news is that history is ALSO filled with the experiences and souls of those whom God in His grace and by the power of the Holy Spirit has returned to the pierced side of Christ Jesus, cleansing them again in the blood of Jesus to confess Him and to follow Him in true faith in His powerful, healing words. Jesus says,

<sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.... <sup>17</sup> For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No 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.”

The Lord Jesus Christ is the only One who laid down His life in ransom and rescue for us sinners and the whole world, to save us, to save you and me, from all of our evil and guilt, to make us His own. The proof that this, our salvation in the blood and death of Jesus, is sure and certain is that Jesus rose from the dead, just as He **promised** He would do. He is RISEN! [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*] This Jesus of Nazareth is Lord and Christ, the only Son of God, who rules over all things and beside whom there is no other, and having risen from the dead, He always lives, and therefore it is His voice alone which we will believe and follow. HIS voice is the voice which speaks from heaven and which leads us to heaven, imparting into us eternal life with God. Amen.