
Last week in *verses 1-10* we discovered that the devil's entire objective for your life is to lie to you, steal the life that Jesus said would be yours, and ultimately to kill you—he will shipwreck your faith at a minimum and do everything in his power to absolutely destroy your life. We have to understand that this is his entire intention toward you and he is busy at this task 24/7. If you leave yourself unguarded even for a moment he starts pummeling you with his lies. If you are not clothed in the armor of God he will attempt to wreak havoc even while you sleep.

We all know this to be true; we have all experienced the pain of listening to his voice. How is it then that even after we have studied this and have been taken through many painful experiences, why do we live as if we are so unaware of the work of the devil in our life? How is it even possible that we conduct ourselves with such a casual attitude toward this fierce battle that is always ensuing around our life? Why do we so easily jump and indulge our flesh and our earthly wisdom seemingly unaware of the enemy's incessant scheming to destroy our lives? How is it even possible that we are still so gullible to the obvious?

We seem to have no problem identifying the work of the enemy in the lives of our brothers and sisters in the Lord, but when it comes to our own life it's as if some critical switch just gets shut down. Honestly, I am not so sure I understand it. When we burn our hands on a stove, we learn quickly to always check and if we sense any heat or see any red; we take precautions. We all learn that if we stay out in the sun without protection we will get seriously burned so we take precautions. We know that even though we can't see viruses, when we see someone sick we do not want to touch them or even breathe the same air.

All of these are learned behaviors and they become almost second nature because pain is a very good teacher. But when it comes to the work of the enemy

in our lives, more often than not we act as if we are totally newbies and have no idea of the extent to which we are hated.

There has never been a time where the indulgence of our fleshly desires—even our religious desires—ever did us right. The enemy has always taken it and horribly twisted us and corrupted everything. First, when the temporary pleasure wears off he wraps us up in guilt and feelings of failure and condemnation; he tells us we will never get it right. Then he starts to steal away even the pleasure from the act (we just don't get from our indulgence what we used to) and he tells us that we need more—more flesh, more religion, more intelligence, more understanding, more stimulation and so on. He keeps pushing and pushing and pushing.

1 Peter 5:8 tells us to be alert and watch out for the enemy prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Like a watchman in a tower, we are to maintain a constant state of readiness. Our mind is to be clear and not clouded by our own passions, desires, biases and judgments. In the same way that the enemy prowls back and forth and watches us searching for our every weakness, we are to be always aware of his intentions toward our life and how he is trying to trap us. To accomplish this, we cannot be lulled into believing that what is happening around us in the physical world, or in our relational and emotional world is our true reality; there is a whole other existence or realm that drives our lives.

Ephesians 6:12

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

This is our true battle. We have to stop being so easily caught off guard acting as if this world, and all that we are going through, is what really matters. We need to be focused on the kingdom of God and what He is doing and how He wants His will played out in and through our lives—that is what really matters.

A few weeks ago when we studied *Chapter 8:37-59* we went over many Biblical descriptions of the devil and how he works. I have posted that excerpt on the blog at pathwayfellowship.org. I encourage you go and study the scriptures and get very familiar with the nature and character of the enemy so you can understand how serious you have to take this truth.

Our battle, our reality, is with a fierce unseen enemy who hates us; therefore, to us this truth has to become an issue of faith—we have to be willing to believe it to be true all the time and live as if it is true all the time. Just imagine if you could see the battle that is constantly raging around your soul, I doubt you would ever again easily indulge yourself with the “me” thinking that it’s no big deal or that no one knows or is impacted but you. If you could see what those evil forces were doing you would know that it is always a big deal and there is always an impact even if you can’t see it. At all times there are massive dark demonic forces that are either fighting over you or planning how to get you, and I am sure if the Lord ever let us see what they look like we would totally freak.

I find it interesting that the Lord does not give us any actual description of the devil or his minions and He only speaks to us in metaphors using images like the snake, a dragon, and a lion to convey the devils character and nature. Knowing what he looks like does not matter; we don’t need to see him to fight we just need to be alert as to how he works and vigilant so we do not get caught in his deceit. Remember Paul’s instruction in *2 Corinthians 5:7*, we are to walk by faith and not by sight. This means that we are to filter all our decisions for this life based on the

intangible unseen realities which the scripture makes clear to us and not by our physical surroundings or circumstances for they only tell us part of the story.

The follow on to *1 Peter 5:8* is in *verse 9*, “but resist him in your faith.” That is why our real battle in this life—the battle against unseen forces—must become to us an issue of applying our faith—actively believing the truth. We must be alert and we must be ready. However, the only way to stand firm against the enemy is if you are protected by the shepherd. You must be either tucked away in the sheepfold or following the shepherd to pasture.

Last week we discovered a very important truth, Jesus is the *gate* to the sheepfold. In other words, he controls all that happens to the life of a believer. When we enter in through the gate—when we trust ourselves to Jesus for salvation—our lives are in His hands and He is personally in charge of ensuring our safety. The implication of this truth is staggering: this means that nothing, absolutely nothing, can come against a believer unless in His wisdom He allows it.

This is a critical issue of faith and living in this truth is vital to our fight against the enemy. Now, some of you might be sitting there getting a little upset for how much Jesus has allowed to come through that gate. But just like we have to, by faith, be fully aware and convinced of the enemy’s nature and character, we also have to, by faith, be fully aware of the Lord’s nature and character. It is only when we understand His intentions toward us we can start to learn to rest and trust ourselves completely to Him.

John 10:11

I am the good shepherd.

Jesus once again invokes the powerful “I Am” statement and in so doing He is communicating to us that He always has been good, He is even now good, and will always be the good shepherd. Thus, we can trust ourselves to Him even when He decides to let things through the gate that we would otherwise want nothing to do with. So let’s think about this phrase: I am good. The Greek word used here is *kalos* and it means that Jesus is intrinsically good, valuable, fair and beautiful. Nothing but goodness and beauty can be ascribed to Jesus. Good is what He is and always has been.

The word *kalos* is distinct from the word *agathos* which is used when talking about the good effect of something: as in a good teaching or good works. This word *kalos* is referring to Jesus very nature and because His nature is good, then all that He does derives from His intrinsic goodness. This means that no matter what He chooses to let through that gate, no matter He allows in our lives, appoints for our lives, or does through our lives, it is innately good. It may not feel good, it may not seem good from our perspective or the perspective of others, we may not even be able to make any sense of it, but we can trust that it is good.

This sounds ok in theory, but there are a couple of questions that come to mind: 1) what is “good” (how is it defined), and 2) how are we to understand this phrase about Jesus being the good shepherd. To answer these questions, especially in light of what Jesus’ immediate audience would have understood, we need to turn to the Old Testament.

Many of those in Israel were shepherds; in fact, if you trace their roots you will find that it was their national profession. So they had a lot of familiarity with the role and task of a shepherd. But make no mistake; in using the role of a shepherd as a metaphor Jesus was once again making a bold point about the illegitimacy of the religious leaders and His innate legitimacy. Notice that Jesus did not say He is

a good shepherd, but “*the*” good shepherd. In so doing, He made a direct correlation between Himself and the good shepherd of *Ezekiel 34*. In this passage God makes a clear distinction between the corrupt shepherds of Israel (the religious leaders) and the good shepherd, which God said that He would send to the nation. Let’s read that passage so we can understand the full potency of this comparison and the power of this little 5-word phrase: I am the good shepherd.

Ezekiel 34:1-4

Then this message came to me from the Lord: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds, the leaders of Israel. Give them this message from the Sovereign Lord: What sorrow awaits you shepherds who feed yourselves instead of your flocks. Shouldn't shepherds feed their sheep? You drink the milk, wear the wool, and butcher the best animals, but you let your flocks starve. You have not taken care of the weak. You have not tended the sick or bound up the injured. You have not gone looking for those who have wandered away and are lost. Instead, you have ruled them with harshness and cruelty.

Isn't this a perfect picture of how we saw these religious leaders deal with the woman they “caught” in adultery, the man who was healed at the pool of Bethesda, and most recently how they treated the man who had been born blind but was made to see? They harassed him, accused him, slandered him, judged him and even kicked him out of the Temple and exiled him for some period of time. These guys do not care about God, the work of God or the people of God. They care only about their position, their honor, their social status, and the money they make (and if you remember our study early on in Chapter 1 the priesthood made these guys

extremely wealthy). They do not even care that they have obtained their position, honor, and wealth through fear, intimidation, and cooperation with the foreign invaders. They just love their power and they will do anything to keep it.

Ezekiel 34:5-10

So my sheep have been scattered without a shepherd, and they are easy prey for any wild animal. They have wandered through all the mountains and all the hills, across the face of the earth, yet no one has gone to search for them. "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: As surely as I live, says the Sovereign Lord, you abandoned my flock and left them to be attacked by every wild animal. And though you were my shepherds, you didn't search for my sheep when they were lost. You took care of yourselves and left the sheep to starve.

Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I now consider these shepherds my enemies, and I will hold them responsible for what has happened to my flock. I will take away their right to feed the flock, and I will stop them from feeding themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths; the sheep will no longer be their prey.

We should notice a couple of things about this verse. First, it is clear that God gave these shepherds their assignment—remember Jesus is the gatekeeper—and He gave them room to do their job. These guys did not come around and take the sheep away from the Lord; they were given the job. Secondly, He is the one who has the ultimate authority and the power to take away their authority and remove them from their positions of power. It is His to manage and His to control. This

truth alone should give you great comfort: your good shepherd is the one with phenomenal cosmic power; no one can bend His arm to their own will.

Next, notice that because these shepherds failed to do their job, the sheep were vulnerable to the attack of all types of wild animals, which I believe to be a reference to the devil and his minions who are manically focused on destroying the lives of the sheep. He comes as a dragon, a snake, and a lion and hunts down the sheep who are wondering around not protected by their shepherds.

But then there is an interesting transition He makes in *verse 10* between the sheep being vulnerable to wild animals and to their being in the mouths of these shepherds and becoming their prey. These religious leaders take care only of their interests and their needs and in order to protect their role and their power they have to bite into these sheep to maintain their rule, control and order. They no longer feed or tend to the sheep and they don't even go after those who are lost; they take little to no responsibility for the lives of those given to their charge. As a result, they have turned from being guardians of the sheep to enemies of both the sheep and of God. Many of you know what this is like. You have felt the bite of these wicked shepherds and still have some nasty scars. The good news is that God is aware of everything and He promises that He will deliver the sheep from the mouths of these shepherds for the sheep belong to God, they are His flock.

Let's apply this to our here and now. Many of you have been raised up by God to help shepherd this flock; and I believe that many more of you will soon be given assignments as well to care for others in this body. I say that because we have all been called to care for others in the body; thus, we are all shepherds. Some of you may have many sheep to care for and others may only have one or two, but regardless of the numbers the job is the same and each of us must be busy about caring for the sheep which the Lord has assigned to our care. As Jesus said in *John*

9:4 “All of us must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us.” Therefore, whatever you do please do not take your assignment(s) casually. It should be clear by this passage in *Ezekiel* that God takes caring for the sheep (or as He told some of you, building this temple) very seriously. It is near and dear to His heart.

That is why we do not have the luxury of just taking care of ourselves, our needs, our desires, and focusing on our pleasures, and all our stuff that we have going on inside; we must also be focused on those that God has given to our care. I know that sometimes it is very hard especially when those God has given to you just want to wander and seem to not take you or God very serious. But understand that is the way of sheep and it is the way you were as well.

God has done an intense work in many of you to prepare you to care for others, but don't forget about the care that you needed. Caring for someone is hard work and you cannot think that it is going to be easy. You cannot think that the easy formulas which you have learned in the religion of Christianity are ever going to work—after all, they didn't with you. Throwing verses at a person, giving them a Bible study to do, is not caring; you have to be willing to get your hands very dirty. There is feeding, milking, searching for good pastures, sheering, birthing, constantly keeping guard to ensure no wild animals can ravage, and so on. It is a very busy and involved job. Actually, to do this right it becomes more of a lifestyle than a job; people have to become your passion and shepherding needs to become second nature to you as it is God's passion.

Recently, our Gatekeeper allowed the enemy some room to come into our flock and attack from within and try and disrupt relationships. Some of that is still happening. But I believe this was very purposeful and totally under the Lord's covering. I believe He was using, and is still using, the enemy as a training tool for the job He has assigned to us. In His wisdom He has allowed these attacks to give

each of us an opportunity to step up, to deny ourselves, to be strong, to care about the needs of others over our own, and to fight for those who are weaker. The good news is that is exactly what I have seen happen. I have seen you grow. What the enemy meant for destruction, God used for “good.”

At first, we did not seem to be ready for the attacks. God warned us that they were coming but still we were not ready. Suddenly, this person’s feelings were hurt, then the next, and the next, and the next and suddenly everyone was feeling this same pain of not being loved, not being cared for, and not being uniquely valued. But it was not long before this person stepped up in that person’s life, and then another and another and another. Soon, the focus was shifting from the “me” to what the other person was going through and feeling. As a result, God started to make His presence known in a very intimate and personal way and we all were touched by His love through another. Sure, we all had to make the decision to set aside our needs, our hurts, and care for others; and at times we felt that it was not fair. But God has been glorified as you have worked through the emotions and subjected them to His Word and pushed forward to love those in your life. I believe that collectively we are stronger than we have ever been. I believe in this round of training we have pleased the Lord.

Next, we get to a clear definition of what Jesus meant when He said that He was the good shepherd.

Ezekiel 34:11-16

"For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search and find my sheep. I will be like a shepherd looking for his scattered flock. I will find my sheep and rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on that dark

and cloudy day. I will bring them back home to their own land of Israel from among the peoples and nations. I will feed them on the mountains of Israel and by the rivers and in all the places where people live. Yes, I will give them good pastureland on the high hills of Israel. There they will lie down in pleasant places and feed in the lush pastures of the hills. I myself will tend my sheep and give them a place to lie down in peace, says the Sovereign Lord. I will search for my lost ones who strayed away, and I will bring them safely home again. I will bandage the injured and strengthen the weak.

Wow this is amazing. This passage should help us understand, through His actions, why Jesus is intrinsically good, valuable, fair and beautiful. God Himself will: *Search* for us, *find* us, *rescue* us, bring us *safely* home to a lush land, *feed* us, *water* us, and give us *rest*. He will *tend* to our needs so that we do not have to worry but we can finally *lie down in peace*, absolutely unafraid of anything. Thus, we can let go of our control over our lives and our need to protect ourselves for we are in His care. We can just lie down and rest peacefully. He will *bandage* all of the wounds He allowed into our lives—all those wounds that were necessary in order to draw us to Him—so that instead of being weak we can *be strong*.

When Jesus said: “I am the good shepherd” it is these attributes and activities that would have come to the minds of those who were listening to Jesus. They would have made an instant connection with this passage in *Ezekiel*. They would have also understood this statement to be another claim by Jesus of divinity, for it is only God Himself who can bring about all this goodness on behalf of His people. Thus, when Jesus claims to be “*the*” good shepherd, He claims to be God.

Because Jesus is “the” good shepherd He asks you to trust your life to Him and let go of everything that does not come from His hands. He wants you to relinquish your life to His rescue. He wants you to come into His sheepfold and follow Him wherever He leads. He wants you to lie down and rest. He wants you to be so thoroughly convinced that you are safe in His hands that you are willing to be absolutely vulnerable to His plans and purposes for your life.

Remember, we are charged to walk by faith and not by sight; therefore, we must believe all of this to be true about Jesus and let this truth be *authoritative* over our feelings, our fears, and even our rational mind. He is our good shepherd; we must know it to be true and then live as if it is true.

Maybe you are tired of where God has had you, I know I am. Maybe you are so weak right now you don't think you can withstand any further difficulties. Maybe life has been so ugly to you that you are just frustrated with the manner in which God has directed your life. All of that may be your experience, but if, by faith, you are willing to believe that He is your good shepherd, regardless of what you see, think, and feel, you will find rest in the midst of even the most brutal parts of life. But as with every part of our Christian experience, we only experience the promises of God when we are willing to let Him be God over our lives.

It took me many years to come to grips with Jesus' goodness and the methods He uses to shepherd my life. For example, when He first let loose the storm in my life, for the first couple of years I was convinced that He just enjoyed being mean and hurting me. I could not see beyond my immediate pain and my spiritual eyes were darkened by self interest. I knew He was training me, I knew He was molding me, I knew he was working out His plans for my life, but I did not see the value of His methods and my head was filled with so many other “better” ways that He could have dealt with me. It is only now, looking back on this painful journey, that

I can see God's goodness not only in His methods, but in His entire intention for my life. Go figure, I find that I can now actually rejoice in what I have suffered. I know that every wound that He allowed in my life was necessary for me to not only trust Him with my life but to experience Him so intimately that I can actually experience His rest, His peace, and even His joy. I have learned that Jesus is my good shepherd; and, although I may still moan and groan about the "what" and the "how," no circumstances can convince me otherwise.

Ezekiel 34:16-24

But I will destroy those who are fat and powerful. I will feed them, yes—feed them justice! "And as for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign Lord says to his people: I will judge between one animal of the flock and another, separating the sheep from the goats. Isn't it enough for you to keep the best of the pastures for yourselves? Must you also trample down the rest? Isn't it enough for you to drink clear water for yourselves? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? Why must my flock eat what you have trampled down and drink water you have fouled?

"Therefore, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will surely judge between the fat sheep and the scrawny sheep. For you fat sheep pushed and butted and crowded my sick and hungry flock until you scattered them to distant lands. So I will rescue my flock, and they will no longer be abused. I will judge between one animal of the flock and another. And I will set over them one shepherd, my servant David. He will feed them and be a shepherd to them. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David will be a prince among my people. I, the Lord, have spoken!

You get the feeling that the Father takes the shepherding of His people very serious? He may allow you to go through some serious pain, but He will not let the abuses go on forever. He will not only bring judgment on those who act like sheep but are really goats but also on those sheep who have taken advantage of others within the fold. Goats are unbelievers and every church has those who operate within the community who look like a sheep, act like a sheep, talk like a sheep but who have never been made new, have never been born again as a sheep, have never become a child of God. God will separate those goats out from amongst the sheep.

But He will also judge believers who essentially live out of their old man and take advantage of other Christians. Those believers who fully avail themselves of the blessings that God has brought into their lives but do little to nothing to care for those who are weaker than they are or to care for those who have not been “blessed” in the same capacity. However, as “the” good shepherd even His judgment will be good, for His judgment will ultimately be used to train these sheep to behave like their good shepherd.

Romans 8:28-30

And we know that God *causes all things* to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

In the life of a believer, God's judgment (or His discipline) is always used for good: to conform us into the image of His Son. Being like Jesus is our ultimate destiny—that is our ultimate goodness. He will allow whatever He needs to come through the gate in order to accomplish this purpose and get His sheep to live as sheep safely following their One shepherd.

We have all been given a very important task: that of caring for others. But we must first learn to be ok being His sheep or else we will never know how to be a good shepherd. This is why it is so important that we stop clinging to our *old sinful nature* which listens to the voice of the enemy and follows its own wisdom and feelings about how things “must” be. We must yield to the truth and to His control over our lives. We must let His Word become *authoritative* and not just suggestive for that is the only way we will experience the safety, the rest, the peace, and the healing that He says is to be ours. He is “the” good shepherd and He loves you. So stop your striving, stop your wandering, stop being lazy and forgoing your assignments, and stop biting those who have been given to your care.

Let's look at the end of that passage in *Ezekiel* again. In the context of end time prophecy, there is quite a bit of controversy over this verse. But I believe that God was just using the reference to David as a type, or a metaphor, for Jesus. Ezekiel is writing people who had been ravaged first by their own kings and subsequently by the kings of foreign oppressors. Yet, every one of them remembered the stories of the glory days of King David when God was in the midst of His people and the nation of Israel was strong and protected by God Himself. Thus, I believe the Father used this metaphor to give them HOPE: He will send the One from the tribe of Judah, the Messiah, who will be the ultimate good shepherd and like David, His rule will be truly good and glorious. In Him they will find their safety, their

protection, their provision, their healing, and more—beyond what they could ever think or hope—for God Himself will rule in their hearts and they will be like Him. This promise was fulfilled in Jesus and is to be realized in our lives.

What a powerful and wonderful HOPE; not the hope of wishes, but the HOPE of assurance. This HOPE is for you and for me and can be our daily reality if we are willing, by faith, to believe that He is our good shepherd.

Let's Pray.