
Over the past couple of weeks we have focused on two pivotal truths from **John 10**. First of all, Jesus is the gate of the sheepfold. When we enter in, when we trust our lives to Him, then nothing can come against us or come into our life that He has not allowed. And since He is the good shepherd, the one who is intrinsically good, whatever He allows is good and has been allowed for the purpose of conforming us into the image of His Son.

Now I know that many of us have been stumbling over truly believing these verses apply practically to our lives. This often happens because at any given time our view of Jesus is too small, too limited, and too human. We seem to think that He is not really in control of our lives or that He has something other than goodness planned for us and so out of irrational fear we go running off into our own pastures trying to figure out life for ourselves. We attempt to be our own shepherd. Then when things go bad, we start praying and begging God to fix our lives. In His mercy He often intervenes desiring that this time maybe we will let Him be our good shepherd. Sometimes we let Him have that role for just a bit, but as soon as we get itchy, anxious, uncomfortable, or don't like where we think He is leading us, we once again wander and try to do it our own way. Unfortunately, for many of us this cycle just repeats and repeats and we never experience the peace of just lying down in His pasture trusting ourselves to Him.

As the good shepherd, he promises that he 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 we can **lie down in peace**. He will **bandage** all our wounds so we can **be strong**. He will be for us everything that we need; which is why Jesus said that He is the I Am.

I have to ask you, why do you worry so much about what will happen to your life today, tomorrow, or what has happened yesterday? The list of worries can go

on and on and I could never even assemble a list that is anywhere close to being comprehensive. So I will spare you the examples. But if Jesus is your good shepherd, then it is His job to lead you; it is His job to guide your paths. He is the one who has full responsibility for all parts of your life.

Psalm 111:7 says that “All He does is just and good.” All, everything He does, without exception, is good. *Psalm 138:8* says: “the Lord will work out His plans for my life—for your faithful love, O Lord, endures forever. *Psalm 139:3-6* says: “You chart the path ahead of me and tell me where to stop and rest. Every moment you know where I am. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord. You both precede and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to know. *Psalm 37:23-24* says: “the steps of the godly are directed by the Lord. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble, they will not fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand. And *Psalm 25:9-10; 12* says: “He leads the humble in what is right, teaching them his way. The Lord leads with unfailing love and faithfulness all those who keep his covenant and obey his decrees....Who are those who fear the Lord? He will show them the path they should choose.”

Do you understand, as a sheep belonging to the one true shepherd, He is always there and always busy in your life. There is no reason to run from Him. There is no possibility that you can ever do a better job of leading and guiding your life than He can. These are powerful promises that you are to wrap around you like a warm blanket. They are to be your “happy place” that constantly gives you hope—the hope of absolute confidence and assurance—the hope of faith.

Psalm 91:4

He will shield you with His wings. He will shelter you with His feathers. His faithful promises are your armor and protection.

For me, I find that it is always good to step back and remember that it was Jesus who was directly responsible for creating all things seen and unseen, natural and supernatural, and He is the one who continues to hold all things together (*Colossians 1:15-20*). This means His power and His ability is immense and beyond my comprehension. And who else is better to care for me and love me than the one who created me and knows everything about me. Besides, He deliberately created me to be the object of His unbelievable love and affection and that is despite the fact that He knew I would rebel and act as if I did not even know Him. The thought of it all is astonishing.

John 10:11

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep.

In addition to the fact that He created me to love me, I also try and remember that Jesus came to me and helped me when I was least deserving. Sin and death had a choke hold on my life and there was no escape.

Romans 5:6-11

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person,

though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.

The good shepherd gave up His life for mine so that I could experience a wonderful new relationship with God. That is how important I am to Him and that is how important you are to Him. If He would do this for me, if He would do this for you, why would we not want to surrender *absolute* control of ourselves to Him and let Him to be our shepherd? Sometimes, I swear, I think we must be mad. It makes no sense that we continue to try and shepherd our own lives. But still, time after time, we hold on and act like we are not as dumb as we really are. Can you imagine? A sheep, who has absolutely no way to protect itself (no fangs, claws or sharp horns, just soft fluffy wool covering nice juicy meat), out wandering in the wild thinking that he has it all under control. I can see the wolves laughing and waiting for the perfect time to go for the kill.

In addition to laying down His life for us, He continues to meticulously care for us and is *ever* interceding on our behalf with the Father (***Romans 8:34***). He is always about the business of caring for us—He has to or we would always be in some kind of trouble. It is no coincidence that Jesus chose sheep with which to compare us. Do you realize that of all livestock, sheep require the most constant attention and care? It is in their nature to be stubborn, to wander, and to be timid,

fearful, and stupid. And what is with the whole mob mentality? Their instincts drive them to just do whatever everyone else is doing—even if its march right into danger. When they are in that mob mode they have no independent thought they just move with the crowd. And even though the parallel to our lives is embarrassing, imagine that Jesus still know us by name, calls us, make us His own, and delights in continually caring for us.

How amazing it is to me that for so long I refused to rest in His care because I refused to believe the intrinsic goodness of Jesus and His love for me. When I stop to think of all He has done for me and how I have resisted Him, I get a little sheepish (ha). He is good! All that He has for me, and all that He has for you, is goodness.

John 10:12-13

"A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep.

Again, we cannot miss the point that Jesus has been continually making with regard to the shepherds of Israel (the religious leaders) who have not cared for the sheep but have taken advantage of their positions of responsibility and who have taken instead of given. In *Ezekiel 34:3* the Lord said that the shepherds took the milk, wore the wool, and butchered the best animals for food. They took and took but they never cared enough to keep the sheep safe.

I hope you went back and studied *Ezekiel 34* on your own as a follow up to last week's study. If not, I would encourage you to please go and study that passage for the text also applies to our lives. The hired hand, the person who is in ministry because it is a job, a career, it's an obligation or duty—what Christians are supposed to do, or just because that is what someone encouraged them to do somewhere along the line, will not have the same heart toward those that God has given to their care as does a shepherd that has the Lord's heart.

As a result, when the enemy attacks and things get really ugly, they don't want to get messy, they don't want to get hurt, they don't want their life disturbed, they don't want their routine, their privacy or their fun disturbed, and they leave the sheep exposed and vulnerable to attack. They don't go and fight for them. Maybe they are afraid and do not think it is worth it or maybe they just don't want the stress. But whatever is going on in their psyche or emotions their hearts are not aligned with the heart of the Father.

I remember when I was a senior in high school I had this youth pastor who was "Mr. Fun" and always kept us going with activities but never really taught us all that much. I went to him for advice as I was getting ready to graduate and just wanted to talk to him about finding God's will, specifically with regard to where I should go to college. He just gave me the standard youth pastor answer and told me I should consider going to Bible College and get a job in the ministry. I remember thinking that the way he approached the whole topic was totally backwards. It was more about having a career and a paycheck than it was about the will of God. I told him I would pray about it; and, I did, and had no peace at all about taking that route.

Then as I looked beyond the "fun" and watched the decisions he made and how he "cared" for people it started to become apparent to me that this was just his job.

So often it seemed he did things out of obligation and not out of sacrificing his life for the kids that God sent his way. He avoided anyone to whom he could not give (and who would not receive) a standard Christian cliché type of answer. He seemed to always keep things on the surface level; and, although it took me a while, I finally realized that he did that because he really did not have any true answers (ones that he knew would work) and he was afraid of being exposed. He did not want us to find out that His god was not “working” for him thus he really did not have anything substantive to give us. So instead of jumping in, investing, caring, and loving those in desperate need, he kept a safe distance. My heart still gets sad when I think of some of the kids in our youth group who were so messed up and left to essentially fend for themselves. Many of them have just faded away into the masses of those that had a Christian experience but never really experienced God.

Jesus is “the” good shepherd; but through Him we can be “a” good shepherd. He wants to live His life through us in order that we might care for, and desire, the people that God gives us. I keep making that qualification—that God gives us—because a good shepherd knows those who are his and is diligent to be about the Lord’s business. A good shepherd does not ignore his own sheep setting his intentions and desires on others that have not been assigned to him. I have seen this happen so many times. God gives a person someone to shepherd and care for and they moan and groan not liking that assignment; and, instead, they want to be involved in someone else’s life. When that happens, everyone gets hurt.

A good shepherd seeks the Lord’s wisdom to know what duties are required at any given time: feeding, sheering, herding, resting, and, so on. We need the wisdom of the Father to complete our tasks according to His perfect timing. And like Him, there will be times when we are required to sacrifice our life for another:

our pride, ego, needs, desires, comfort, sleep, right to get angry, right of revenge, and whatever else might be required. However, we can only do this, with freedom and joy in our hearts, if we trust ourselves to “*the*” one good shepherd who loves us and will care for our needs. We have to know, believe, and live fully convinced that He has our back and will provide for us. For when we are fully convinced that He loves us and has our lives in His hands, then we are safe to lay down our lives for another—there is simply no risk. And, when we give up our life for another—choose to prioritize someone over ourselves—in any area of our life, we are walking as “*the*” good shepherd walked.

This is a hard one. Most of us still have a good supply of selfishness sitting in our being such that we still struggle with our willingness to give up ourselves unless it is convenient or helps us look good. But it breaks my heart that there is still not enough sacrificial love that freely flows. I do not say this to give you a guilt trip, because if you go out and try and sacrifice for those in your life you will eventually fail or become filled with bitterness. This kind of sacrificial love is a direct fruit of walking in the Spirit of God and is not something that you go do. It will be something that will be naturally flowing from your life if you are in a place of dependence upon the true shepherd. So it is more of an indicator that you truly believe God has your back than it is a task to go fulfill.

John 10:14-15

"I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep.

What a beautiful verse. He knows us and He likens it to the depth of knowledge that exists between Him and His Father. The Father knows the Son perfectly and that is how Jesus knows each of us. *He is the gate*: nothing can happen to us that He does not allow; *He is “the” good shepherd*: all that He allows into our lives is intrinsically good. He cares for us, has sacrificed His life for us on the cross and continues that sacrifice forward as He continually intercedes for us. *He knows us*: He knows who we are, what we need, how we are wired, and how every little thing impacts us. Remember, *Psalms 139:4*, He even knows what we are going to say before we say it. This kind of knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to know.

With this perfect knowledge, He perfectly knows what He needs to allow into our lives so we can freely die to the “me” and He can freely live in and through our lives. What a beautiful reality; God just loves us so much. Sometimes when I am studying I get so embarrassed at how ridiculous I am when I don’t let these truths drive my very existence every waking moment of my life. Imagine if we were to really let these verses sink deep within our being, and spread out like these aggressive roots in tender soil, we would become absolutely convinced that He is our I am, that He is our beginning and end, our alpha and omega; that He is our everything! He always lives up to His promises and His love never fails. We would also come to see why everything that does not derive from the divine, from Jesus Himself, is absolutely worthless and dangerous to our lives.

John 10:16-18

I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.

"The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded."

Verse 16 is very interesting and communicates to us some powerful messages, the mystery of the gospel of Christ. The Jews and Gentiles will be one in Christ. Jesus says that He has other sheep. In the Greek, the word "other" means other of a different kind as opposed to another of the same kind. He will bring others (Gentiles) that are not of this sheepfold into the sheepfold of faith. In writing to the Gentiles, Peter said it this way: "you were once not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received the mercy of God" (*1 Peter 2:10*). You have to understand that this was such a radical concept. In Ephesians, Paul says it was a mystery that was in the Word but never really understood. In fact, no one ever fathomed that God would freely give Himself for the pagan Gentiles. But today it has flip flopped and too often in the Western church we forget that God has plans to complete the gathering of His church and it will be comprised of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation—Jews and Gentiles alike. It will be a beautiful perfect gathering.

Notice it says that they (the Gentiles) will listen to His voice – which Jesus said in *verse 4* is the verifiable sign that someone belongs to the Lord. Then He says that they will be one flock and Jesus uses the Greek word "*mia*" which means they will collectively be considered as one. They will belong to one another and no longer be different. But then He says that this flock will have one shepherd. Here Jesus uses a different Greek word, "*heis*," which has numerical meaning. In other words, He is the only one; there is no other who will lead this collective flock.

Verses 16 and 17 are some of the two most anti-anti-Semitic verses in the Bible. Not only are Jews and Gentiles going to be reconciled into one flock, but these verses state clearly that contrary to popular belief, the Father is the one who is responsible for the death of Jesus. For centuries the Jews have been persecuted by Christians as being Jesus killers; those responsible for His crucifixion. But that is so far from the truth. The Father used both the Jews and the Gentiles (the Romans) to be the instruments through which the Lord's death was effected; but the Jews and the Gentiles were not the cause. The father gave Jesus the command and Jesus voluntarily obeyed. This truth totally emphasizes the point that Jesus has made over and over again: He is God; thus, no mere man—Jew or Gentile—could take His life. He has the authority, for it has been granted to Him by the Father, and He chose on His own to lay it down. He chose to love us more than He loved His own life and this was very pleasing to the Father.

What I find very important here is the consistency of this text with what Jesus has told us over and over again. In **John 3:34; 4:4, 27, 34; 5:19, 30, 36; 6:38, 57; 7:8, 16; 8: 26, 28, 40, 55; and 9:4** Jesus said that He only does what the Father tells Him to do and He does absolutely *nothing* without first consulting His Father. He was given the authority by the Father to lay His life down and to raise it up again. In fact, everything Jesus did was always subject to the sovereignty of God—even His death and resurrection. Thus, we must always be clear on this fact: Jesus was neither the victim nor the perpetrator of the Passover plot; He was the fulfiller of the eternal will of the Father.

This is to be the same way that we are to live and get on in our life. Everything that we do must come from above. We are to seek to follow our shepherd where ever He leads and do nothing on our own. All that we do is to come from His authority and His leading in our life. The Father desires us to *always* be in perfect

submission to Jesus in the same way that Jesus was *always* in perfect submission to the Father.

John 10:19-21

When he said these things, the people were again divided in their opinions about him. Some said, "He's demon possessed and out of his mind. Why listen to a man like that?" Others said, "This doesn't sound like a man possessed by a demon! Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

Well we are back to the silly thoughts and opinions about Jesus. But before we just dismiss these statements and these people as either being the ones who are out of their mind or who are ridiculous for still stammering back and forth and not committing to following Him, what about us? We may not say these words out loud and reveal the fears and doubt that reside within our hearts; but our equivocation about who Jesus really is to us is all too obvious. People can read our lives as easily as we have just read this passage. It is clear in far too many places of our life we do not believe that He is good and that He has our life in His hands. I encourage you tonight to stop equivocating and start believing—start betting your life on the truth. He knows you, He loves you, He is the guardian of your soul, and He only has good intentions toward you. It is time to give up, give in, and commit your life to the Lord in its entirety.

In closing, I want to read to you a little devotional from the famous preacher Charles Spurgeon. He speaks on ***Matthew 12:20*** but it is just another way to explain our sheepish behavior and the Lord's marvelous love.

Matthew 12:20

"A battered reed He will not break off, and a smoldering wick He will not put out, until He leads justice to victory."

What is weaker than the bruised reed or the smoking flax? A *reed* that groweth in the fen or marsh, let but the wild duck light upon it, and it snaps; let but the foot of man brush against it, and it is bruised and broken; every wind that flits across the river moves it to and fro. You can conceive of nothing more frail or brittle, or whose existence is more in jeopardy, than a bruised reed. Then look at the smoking flax— what is it? It has a spark within it, it is true, but it is almost smothered; an infant's breath might blow it out; nothing has a more precarious existence than its flame.

Weak things are here described, yet Jesus says of them, "The smoking flax I will not quench; the bruised reed I will not break." Some of God's children are made strong to do mighty works for Him; God has His Samsons here and there who can pull up Gaza's gates, and carry them to the top of the hill; He has a few mighties who are lion-like men, but the majority of His people are a timid, trembling race. They are like starlings, frightened at every passer by; a little fearful flock. If temptation comes, they are taken like birds in a snare; if trial threatens, they are ready to faint; their frail skiff is tossed up and down by every wave, they are drifted along like a sea bird on the crest of the billows—weak things, without strength, without wisdom, without foresight. Yet, weak as they are, and *because* they are so weak, they have this promise made specially to them.

Herein is grace and graciousness! Herein is love and lovingkindness! How it opens to us the compassion of Jesus—so gentle, tender, considerate! We need

never shrink back from *His* touch. We need never fear a harsh word from *Him*; though He might well chide us for our weakness, He rebuketh not. Bruised reeds shall have no blows from Him, and the smoking flax no damping frowns.

Let's Pray.