

Easter 4
Shepherd Sunday
May 7, 2017

“Life to the Full with Jesus as Your Shepherd”

JOHN 10:1-10

Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them. ⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Domestic sheep thrive in large numbers throughout the world even though they are not able to protect themselves or find food and water on their own. Not so the bighorn sheep that inhabit the heights of the Rocky Mountains. These majestic mountain sheep are able to climb the highest heights to escape the bears and mountain lions and wolves. They find food and water on their own. They can survive the coldest winters. Yet, domestic sheep far outnumber the wild sheep because of one all important factor: they depend on a shepherd for their survival.

The Bible often uses this illustration of sheep dependent on a shepherd to show us how important it is for us to be dependent on Jesus to survive in this life and for all eternity. In this tenth chapter of John, Jesus speaks about himself as the good shepherd who gives his life for the sheep. In the words we just heard he describes how he is the gate for the sheep and how the sheep have life to the full when they depend on him. You have come to depend on Jesus as your Shepherd. You have life to the full in him. Let’s take a closer look at these verses and see how we have life to the full with Jesus as our shepherd.

“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.” Jesus is speaking these words to some very religious people who have criticized him for healing a blind man on the Sabbath Day. What always amazes us about Jesus is how much time and effort he puts in to reaching out to the religious leaders who wanted nothing to do with him. But then that should not surprise us. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who wants even his worst enemies to come to him and be dependent on him for their survival from the judgment to come.

See the faithful shepherd bring his sheep into a sheep pen to keep them safe at night. The

sheep pen is made of stones and wood. It has a gate where the sheep enter at night. It is not just the wild animals that want to get to the sheep at night. It is the robbers and thieves who will steal a sheep if the shepherd does not carefully guard the sheep who are in the sheep pen.

The Pharisees knew Jesus was talking about them. They were destroying people by teaching them they could be accepted by God on the basis of how well they performed certain religious ceremonies such as not working on the Sabbath day. In another place Jesus called them blind guides who were leading people astray. He called them cups that looked clean on the outside but were dirty on the inside. They wanted the people to depend on their false teaching to be saved. They did not want them to depend on Jesus as their Good Shepherd.

It breaks my heart to see how many people are being misled by false teachers who want to steal them away from depending on Jesus for their survival. There is in Texas a church that claims to be Christian with over 45,000 worshipping every Sunday. Their web page has this slogan or mission statement, "Finding the champion in you." That's what the false teachers taught at the time of Jesus. I was reading these verses to Molly Webb this past week. As I was talking about these false teachers who take people away from Jesus, two Jehovah Witnesses came to the door. Their New World Translation totally changes the words of Jesus where he says, "I am the Good Shepherd." They purposely mistranslate the words to say, "I am a very fine shepherd."

Jesus is not just a very fine shepherd. He is the Good Shepherd. He says in verse 2. **"The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep."** See the Shepherd guarding the gate of the sheep pen. He will not fall asleep at night. He loves the sheep. He has given his life to make them his very own. From the right hand of his Father He raises up people like you and me to warn others against the robbers and thieves who want to break in and take them away from their true loving Shepherd. Oh, how we wish Jesus had assigned angels this important task in these last days. But he calls us to guard people and protect them from false teachers. The only tool we have for this is the correct and true teaching of God's Word.

The sheep love to listen to the voice of their shepherd speaking to them. Jesus said, "The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." Shepherds brought their flocks of sheep into one sheep pen. When it came time to go out of the sheep pen in the morning, each shepherd would call out the names of the sheep. Ho Blacky! Ho Brownny! Ho Steve. Ho Jim! Ho Ilene." Oh, how the sheep love to hear the shepherd calling out their name personally. The risen Lord Jesus who sits at the right hand of his heavenly Father is your Shepherd and he knows you personally. He knows you even better than you know yourself.

Dear Christian, you know the voice of your Shepherd. Later in this chapter Jesus says, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." The true Shepherd's voice will always tell you the truth about yourself. The true Shepherd leads you to confess in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "We all like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way." The true Shepherd knows that each of us has an evil heart corrupted by sin that always wants to find its own way that is contrary to God's Word. In Ezekiel 34 the true Shepherd says, "My sheep have wandered over all the mountains and on every high

hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched for them." The true Shepherd tells you the truth about yourself when he says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"

The voice of your Shepherd calls you to come to him and depend on him to save you. It calls on you to give up all hope of rescuing yourself. That's the voice you have come to know and love. That voice has called you to follow him with these words, "God's so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." The voice of your Shepherd speaks to you through Isaiah 53 when it says, "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

You never get enough of hearing the voice of Jesus your Shepherd. I recall Luella Bestul saying, "The more you come to know about Jesus the more you want to know about him." Jesus says, **"When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice."** It's another day. A cup of coffee is brewing. A bowl of cereal as milk poured over it. It's a another day for the Shepherd to lead and go ahead of you as you follow him. What pleasant green pastures will he provide for you today? What refreshing cool waters will he find this time? How will he show you more of his goodness and mercy that will follow you every day of your life here on this earth? Jesus always has a full and abundant life waiting for you, just for you.

Because you know the voice of your Shepherd, you don't want to listen to the voice of stranger that calls out to you. **"But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."** Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them." A voice calls out "Find the champion in you." A voice calls out "Jesus is not Lord and God from all eternity." A voice calls out "You need to add your works to what Christ has done for you to make it real and genuine." The sheep hear these voices calling out in these last days and they want nothing to do with the stranger's voice. They will run away from it. What is worse robbing banks and killing people or teaching God's Word incorrectly?

There is no way for sheep to be rescued without Jesus as their Shepherd. Jesus makes this exclusive claim for himself when he calls himself the gate for the sheep. **"Therefore Jesus said again, 'Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture.'"** Jesus does not say, "I am one of the gates for the sheep." No he says, "I am the gate for the sheep." In our gospel reading for today we heard Jesus say to his disciples the night before he died, "I am the way, the truth and the life." In the book of Acts we hear Christians called, "The Way" because of their exclusive claims Jesus was the only way to be saved. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed, "My Father, if is possible let this cup be taken from me, not my will but yours be done." There was no other way to rescue people.

Notice Jesus also says, "They will come in and go out, and find pasture." Every day the shepherd would take his sheep from the sheep pen and lead them out to pasture. The shepherd knows where the best pastures are with most nutritious grasses. He knows where sheep can eat to their full and then lie down near quiet refreshing cool waters.

Jesus has risen from the dead. He is at the right hand of his heavenly Father. He is micromanaging the lives of his sheep who follow him throughout the world. Life is sure exciting even before the Lord calls us home to heaven. Who knows what green pastures he has planned for you this week as he allows you to feed to your full in his goodness and mercy that is there for you.

Jesus says, **"I have come that they may have life and have it to the full."** The 23rd Psalm says, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." That Old English word "want" means I lack nothing. Some years ago while I was traveling for the mission board, I had to rent a car in Chicago. Because I was a preferred customer with Avis you simply stepped up to the counter and they gave you your keys without even filling out any paperwork. The three girls behind the counter were so busy talking I had to clear my throat to get their attention. The one girl apologized and said, "We were so busy talking about the huge lottery that we ignored you." The she said nicely, "You can still get a ticket. It's not too late." I said nothing, and she said, "Don't you play the lottery?" I said "No." She asked, "Why not?" I responded, "Because I am already perfectly happy the way I am and if I won that would destroy my happiness." The she said, "What land do you come from, I would like to go there someday." I wish I had the presence to say, "I come from the land of the Shepherd." With Jesus you have life and you have it to the full." That's a wonderful place to be. Amen.