

## “Eternal Life Gives Us the Best Life”

### *John 10:1-21*

The miraculous healing of the blind man in Ch. 9 is a great story because we see not only that Jesus improved his life physically, He also gave him hope, purpose and a confidence he didn't have before. This healing actually covers Ch.'s 9 and 10 for his healing is the center of this firestorm between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. In this healing Jesus smashed the wrong assumption everyone had towards sin. Where did that assumption come from? The religious leaders. They taught everyone with physical maladies were 'sinners' and God was punishing them. Even the 12 disciples thought so when they asked Jesus whose sin caused this man's blindness.

When Jesus gives sight to the blind man, He intentionally did this on a Sabbath. Because the religious leaders felt Jesus 'worked' by healing him they accused him of breaking the Law and labelling him a sinner. The healed blind man is caught in the middle and he must decide whether Jesus is a sinner or the Messiah. As well, all the people were divided over Jesus in vv.20-21.

The accusation that Jesus was a sinner meant that Jesus broke the oral laws – the traditions of the elders which were their wrong translation and application of the Mosaic Law. Jesus was labelled a 'sinner' because He didn't line up with the religious' authorities' definition of righteousness. So they seek to discredit Jesus by labelling Him a sinner or demon -possessed. The irony in all this is that the religious leaders never show any joy or praise God that Jesus made this man's life better. And in two key places in John 10 Jesus reminds us that His purpose is to give us a joy-filled purposeful life; the best life.

*<sup>10</sup> I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

*<sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.*

Eternal life is a gift from God that we receive at the moment we place our trust in Jesus Christ, the Son of God who paid the price for our sins. This new life means we get God's presence in us now. And according to Jesus here in John 10 (and many other places) that's a done deal. God's hand secures us. No one can snatch us out of God's hand – including ourselves. If eternal life is something we get now, then God wants us to have the best life possible. We saw that eternal life gives us true purpose in John 17, as we join God in mission to reveal Him to those He gives us so we can fill the world more with his glory. We saw last week that having eternal life now helps us see people differently. As unique creations of God in need of finding God and hope and peace.

And here we see how eternal life gives us joy and confidence in God who keeps us saved and Jesus the Good Shepherd who meets our needs and satisfies us. But like the healed blind man, we still live in a sin-marred world where we hear Jesus' words but we also hear the words of those who oppose Jesus seeking to discredit Him and in so doing seek to steal our joy. This is the image Jesus presents us with in Ch. 10 with His analogy of Himself as the Gate and the Shepherd.

The Old Testament is full of the shepherd metaphor for spiritual leadership of Israel. In Ezekiel 34 God tells Ezekiel to rebuke the spiritual leaders of Israel who failed to look after God's flock. Listen to what he says:

The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them:

*'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? <sup>3</sup> You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. <sup>4</sup> You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. ...*

*<sup>10</sup> This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them.*

*<sup>11</sup> "For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. <sup>12</sup> As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. <sup>13</sup> I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. <sup>14</sup> I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. <sup>15</sup> I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. <sup>16</sup> I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.*

*<sup>17</sup> "As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats. <sup>22</sup> I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another. <sup>23</sup> I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. <sup>24</sup> I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.*

Since David was long gone by the time of Ezekiel, God was speaking of his descendent, the Son of David, the Messiah. Jesus was not hiding who He claimed to be, especially when He says 'I am'. And the good Shepherd is in contrast with these bad shepherds who were trying to rob this man (and Israel) of their joy. So we must ...

## **Beware of the Joy-Robbers** **(10:1-2)**

Israel's religious leaders were just charged by Jesus of being spiritually blind (9:41). He continues to show them for who they are in ch. 10. "*I tell you the truth/Verily, verily*" is a statement that says what I'm about to say is true in comparison to what you've been led to believe. Jesus is going to use familiar shepherd and sheep imagery to teach spiritual lessons. He is talking to both His disciples and the religious leaders of the day. He says, 'Just because there are men in the sheep pen doesn't mean they are true shepherds'. They may be standing with the sheep but . . .

### ***They reject God's ways (v.1a, 2)***

*"The man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber."*

A sheep pen has only one entrance/exit. Jesus was saying these religious leaders did not come in through the true way. They rejected Jesus as Messiah. John would write in his first letter the acid test to knowing whether someone had accepted God or rejected God:

*"This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God."* (1 John 4:2-3)

Those who claim to be a voice for God but reject that Jesus is the only way to God are deceptive shepherds; false messengers. They may have sheep around them – followers – but they didn't get in through the only entrance way. They snuck in. Many deceptive shepherds continue in churches and groups misleading sheep because people don't check on them or if they do, they brush them off. But God has told us the way, He has already made that judgment. It's up to us to accept it or reject it.

Deceptive shepherds can be identified by . . .

### ***Their intentions [which] are selfish (vv.1b, 12-13)***

Thieves and robbers break in to get something for themselves. Deceptive shepherds tip themselves off because everything has to focus on them. Their way is right and everyone else is wrong. This of course is nothing new. In Jesus' day you had the Pharisees and Sadducees – both of whom claimed to be the true leaders of Israel yet differed on many things. Then you had the zealots who said, 'No, follow us! We'll kill the Romans and make things right for Israel. Our way is right. Then there were the Essenes – devout followers of God who believed retreating into the wilderness by yourselves and avoiding the uncleanness of Rome was the answer. What they all had in common was they all claimed to be God's voice yet they all rejected Jesus as Messiah and true Saviour of the world.

Beware of those who claim they have cornered the market on spirituality, that only their way is right and everyone else is wrong. Jesus warns us to ...

### ***Flee from them (vv.5-8)***

Sheep are smart enough that when they hear a voice contrary to their master, they do not respond. The word for 'run away' is where we get our English word for fugitive. Fugitives are always on the run. Jesus said be always on the run away from deceptive shepherds. When they come your way with their smooth 'you don't really need Jesus or the church' talk, flee. Have nothing to do with them. They are deceptive voices.

How can we make sure we don't follow the wrong shepherds?

## **Listen to the True Shepherd (10:3-4, 9-11, 14-18)**

Jesus Christ was sent by God to tell us that He is the way to God by faith and that His death is sufficient to pay the price for our sins if we will accept it. Therefore, we must listen to Him if we want to enjoy the life He wants us to have. How do we know we can trust Jesus?

### ***He knows us (v.3)***

*“He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out.”* How does a good shepherd know His sheep? He spends time with them. He examines each one individually. He gives them names. He knows them.

Jesus knows everything there is to know about you and I – even things no one else knows! He knows us intimately. He loves us. He knows what’s best for us. He knows whether we’re listening to Him or not. He knows whether we’re following Him or not.

A good shepherd knows what’s best for His sheep so . . .

### ***He calls us to follow Him (v.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.”*

We’ll only be able to follow Jesus if we’re listening to His voice daily. How will we make important decisions in our life? By listening to Jesus everyday in the Word, in prayer through fellowshiping with His people and discerning His work in our lives through life’s circumstances. If God is sovereign and in control of our lives, then let’s be listening to Him in everything that goes on around us. He wants us to follow him, therefore He speaks to us in a number of ways that always agrees with Scripture. Pray that He would show you.

*This is the confidence that we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, He hears us. [1 John 5:14]*

Why else should we follow Jesus and listen for Him?

### ***He will satisfy your needs (vv.9-10)***

*“I am the gate. Whoever enters through Me will be saved.”*

There were 2 types of sheep pens. Your own sheep pen on your farm had a gate that let the sheep in or out. You may have a hired hand watching them for you while they were in there. The other type of pen was when you went out with your sheep during the dry seasons. Shepherds could be gone for months so that they could meet the needs of their sheep. When they travelled, they would make their own pens with rocks. The walls were high enough so that the sheep could not jump or climb over them. Many shepherds travelled together for safety and they all put their sheep in the pen. Each one would come in and call their sheep with a unique call that the sheep would recognize.

In these outdoor stone pens, the gate was just an opening that the shepherds would take turns sitting there, keeping watch. No one came in or out except through the shepherd. This is what Jesus is saying here. If you want to be saved from your sins you have to go through me. There is no other way. But it doesn’t end there. Like sheep, Jesus is here to provide for our needs. We who enter through Jesus go in and out to find pasture. The 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm is how David describes the ways God met his needs. Leads him beside quiet waters and green pastures, restoring his soul. He watches over him in dangers. He heals him when he is hurt – anointing my head with oil. He summarized his life with God now and in eternity. *“Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the lord forever.”*

***We have to risk going out!*** ... if we want to find the quiet waters and green pastures in order to have our souls restored. And too many of us are unwilling to risk that. We’re happy to be saved but

we're not willing to risk experiencing God's best for us because that means doing things we've never tried. Going places we've never been. Being involved with people we don't know well. Leaving our homes and comfort zones.

The illustration Jesus gives is of a shepherd travelling around with his sheep. Moving them from temporary shelter to temporary shelter. Every time the sheep get in that shelter they don't want to go out again. 'Again? I already did this once before. You mean we have to try something new again?' Why? Because if we don't risk going out again, we won't experience God's promises of blessing, we won't see God working the way He wants to and we won't grow spiritually the way God designed us to. Instead we will be more tempted to follow the subtle voice of the thief who comes to rob us of joy.

Look at v.10 here: "*The thief comes to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.*"

Jesus wants us to listen to His voice, to follow Him by obeying His Word so that we can be satisfied. Solomon said God has set eternity in our hearts – in other words, we're wired to only be satisfied by eternal things not temporal things. We enjoy the temporal because we acknowledge them as gifts from God, but God is the source of our satisfaction not things.

Jesus continues the shepherd imagery in vv.11-18 by calling Himself the Good Shepherd. The word here for "good" is the word John already used it in ch. 2 where Jesus changed the water into wine. The comment was made to the host that he saved the "good wine" for later on. "Good" means that which is a better quality than what you've ever had before. Jesus is the "Good Shepherd" because He is far more beautiful and much better than what Israel had experienced. Why would you settle for an inferior shepherd when Jesus is the Best Shepherd ...?

### ***He sacrifices Himself for you (v.11, 14-18)***

Four times Jesus says here I will lay down my life. This is intentional. This is a predetermined choice to sacrifice Himself for us. This is more than – if the sheep are in danger I'll be willing to risk my life. This is a pre-determined choice to put the needs of the sheep before His.

We have a mixed response from the people in vv.19-21. Some say He's demon-possessed. Others say He can't be. How could He heal a man who was blind from birth? We too must decide whether we're going to follow Jesus or not. And if we have, will we continue to listen to Him in order to experience the best life, eternal life? The question we should ask ourselves is

## **Which One is Influencing Us More? (10:19-21)**

The opposing voices are still around today. If you have not placed your faith in Jesus Christ, do so today. Most people follow themselves. Many say 'Well this is what I think'. But what is their thinking based on? Knowledge from God? No. False shepherds. People who don't believe Jesus is The only Way to God. Choose Him and you will find true satisfaction in this life and in His house forever.

For those of us who know Jesus, however, how much are we listening to Him? Whose voice is influencing us or our children more? Believers or non-believers? We spend most of our day with mostly unsaved employers, fellow workers, teachers, classmates, coaches and maybe even unsaved family. Many of whom are nice people but their attitudes and ideas are not godly and we may be

unaware are influencing us more than we think. The more we listen to their voices the less likely we'll experience the best life; 'eternal life', the way we should be. If you're a parent, how are you preparing against and counter balancing the worldly influences your children are being exposed to with Jesus' voice?

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. And the Good Shepherd will take us to unfamiliar and even risky places of dark valleys on route to the green pastures and quiet waters; synonyms for the best life, eternal life enjoying God's constant presence. Are there areas in your life that you are not trusting God with? How much more could you be enjoying the eternal life you claim you have, by risking going out more often listening to the Shepherd's voice as He takes you to places of blessing only He can see that we can't yet?

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