

**John: The Word Became Flesh
The Good Shepherd
John 10:1-21**

Mission Fair next week

SWBI – one last chance! See Neal or David or Jeff

When you think of Jesus' days on earth, how do you envision him? Do you think of him as gentle and kind, or as serious and intent? Do you picture him feeding the masses or do you see him using a whip to drive out the moneychangers at the temple? Do you envision him debating with Pharisees or sitting on a hillside as he laughs and interacts easily with children? Maybe you see him raising Lazarus from the dead, or being beaten by Roman soldiers and nailed to a cross between two thieves, but you also know that death cannot hold him, and so you join the women or John and Peter at the tomb, and you share in their delight as you are told that Jesus has risen from the dead! As you know, Jesus is all this and much more.

If you are attending Grace Community Church for the first time, I will tell you that we have been in John's Gospel all year long and we begin chapter 10 today, where we will hear Jesus claim to be the good shepherd. Jesus as the good shepherd is one of the most endearing images believers hold in their hearts. When my wife, Linda, was diagnosed with a brain tumor, the first words out of her mouth were, "This did not take God by surprise." Rather than blaming him for allowing her to suffer and die much younger than any of us would have wanted, she rested in the care of her shepherd and pictured Jesus carrying her in his arms as a shepherd would carry a little lamb. I do not suppose I have ever seen faith in action more clearly, but even so, it was the faithfulness of the good shepherd who carried Linda in his arms and into his presence.

Today's text is John 10:1-21, but for our initial reading, this morning, we will just read one verse – John 10:10. It will be familiar to many of you, and hopefully, it will be a great comfort to all of us by the end of the message. So, if you would please stand for the reading of God's Word, I will read John 10:10:

John 10:10 – “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

I want to lay a few foundational principles for working through this text. These points will serve somewhat as the application to what we will discover in the text, so write them down if you like. First:

- 1. Context is crucial – this is as much a rebuke of the religious leaders as it is a word of comfort to the weary**

There is no break between John 9 and 10, and so this comes immediately after the blind man that Jesus healed challenged the religious leaders' rejection of Jesus. The result, as you remember, was that they excommunicated him from the synagogue, which meant they cut the man off from Jewish community life. In John 10, Jesus will indirectly accuse them of being terrible shepherds who prefer personal power and security over the care of the sheep. In this way he recalls many OT passages in which the bad shepherds were severely rebuked by God, but particularly Ezekiel 34, which you will study in home groups this week. Second:

- 2. There are mixed metaphors, so go with the flow rather than trying to craft a clever lesson**

In one place Jesus is the good shepherd who enters through the door and in another place he is the door itself, and even though you will understand his point, Jesus does not present a clear structure that allows you to say, “Here are the five things Jesus is saying.” If you

will go with the flow, however, you will likely be able to conclude, “Here are the five things Jesus was saying.” Third:

3. You will be confused and hurt if you make this about you

This may be the closest thing in John to the parables that are in the Synoptic Gospels. Your understanding of the parables will increase dramatically when you understand that God is the active agent in the parables and that they are about Jesus and about identifying who belongs to him and who does not rather than giving us wisdom for life. Are there lessons we can learn from the parables and from John 10? Yes, but Jesus’ parables are not Aesop’s fables. If you place yourself at the *center* of this account – well, just think about it. What kind of animals are sheep? Not very bright. When we follow our dreams or demand that Jesus be the good shepherd of our imaginations, sooner or later we will begin to question his leadership and care. Fourth:

4. Abundant life is deeply personal, and it is now, regardless of your circumstances

We will talk about this when we get to verse 10. Fifth:

5. There is no life without death – the good shepherd laid down his life for the sheep

When Adam and Eve sinned, they immediately began to die. This is the result of sin in the world, and the consequences of sin extend far beyond the grave. God can no more allow sin to go unpunished than you could allow a serial killer to live in your home with your knowledge. Oh, what blessing to know that Jesus laid down his life for the flock – he died so that we might live! Let’s get into the text, beginning with the first verse of chapter 10:

John 10:1 “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. 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” 6 This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

There are several different opinions about the sheepfold to which Jesus referred in the first verse. The best guess is that he was referencing a communal sheep pen where sheep from several different flocks were kept overnight. The pen was surrounded by a high stone wall to keep predators out, but there was an opening at the front. There was no door on the pen, so without some sort of protection, the sheep were vulnerable to wild animals. In the next section, we will see that there was protection in the form of a shepherd, so it makes sense when Jesus says that if someone does not enter by the door, he or she has no business being there. That person is a robber and a thief, seeking to do harm to the sheep.

In the morning when it was time for the sheep to graze, the shepherds would stand outside the sheepfold and call the sheep with their special call, and they would call their sheep by name – “Come Dolly and Fluffy, come Penelope.” If those were Mike Moneypenny’s sheep and I called his sheep by their names, they would know I am an imposter and would have nothing to do with me. But when Jesus calls, you will know his voice. Is this what so many see as they are dying and look up in great anticipation?

You see the connections, don’t you? Even though the religious leaders did not understand at first, it is clear to us now that Jesus

was saying that his true followers would know his voice and they would follow him rather than the legalistic religious leaders who did not have the best interest of the sheep at heart. Verse 7:

7 So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

Remember that open space at the entrance of the sheepfold? Jesus says in verses 7 and 9 that he is the door at the entrance of the sheepfold. At these communal pens, a shepherd would lie down in front of the entrance and keep out any predators, intent on killing or stealing the sheep. There was no other legitimate way into the sheepfold. This is another way of Jesus stating that salvation is found exclusively in him – the only way you get into heaven is *through* Jesus. A little later we are going to read that Jesus has sheep from other flocks who he will bring into the fold. This is far better news to we Gentiles than we often realize! Once Jesus brings us into his fold, we recognize his voice with a clarity that holds us fast to him. Those who truly know Jesus and follow his voice can discern when an imposter seeks to lead them down a path of destruction. Please do not follow the voice of another, even when everyone in your circles is encouraging you to follow the wrong shepherd who has a pleasant voice and imitates the Savior. The one who would take you away from Jesus means to harm you. Verse 10:

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” Are you glad there are challenges in life, or do you wish life would go exactly as you want it to – as soft and easy as sheep’s wool? Regardless of what we want, there are plenty of people who know what is beneath that soft wool and who want to ruin your life. The ultimate thief is Satan, who

wants to sink his claws deep into your flesh. In John 10, Satan was wearing the robes of the Pharisees who looked like the best people on the planet, but who refused to acknowledge their sin and believe that Jesus was sent from God as Messiah, the Son of God. It was all part of God's plan for them to reject Jesus, but it is sad that the good shepherd was standing in front of them and they rejected him out of hand. They killed him, in fact, so that they could continue to lead vulnerable sheep astray.

If we are the continual target of those who despise Jesus, what does the abundant life look like? There is no telling how much the prosperity gospel has affected us all. Though we may never seek to buy God's favor with money, even so, we tend to bargain with God all the time, and when things go badly for us, we wonder what we did wrong, or, worse, we question God's intentions.

So, then, what does the abundant life look like? Maybe we should think about the disciples when Jesus was arrested and crucified. They cowered in fear. But, after Jesus' resurrection and especially after Pentecost when they were given the gift of the Holy Spirit – the gift of God, himself, as Neal told us a few weeks ago – they were joyful and trusted God for everything in their lives, even though they were banned from the community and beaten and imprisoned. As Stephen was being put to death after preaching a powerful and direct message to exalt Jesus *and* expose the sins of the Pharisees, he saw Jesus standing in heaven at the Father's right hand, waiting for him in glory. Was that abundant life? Yes – it was, and, it is.

A handful of you remember Jimmie Jones who, for many years, was a pastor in Princeton, WV. Preacher Jimmie had a way of saying things that you would never forget. He told about someone he knew who once said, "This is a sin-filled world and there ain't nothing gonna ever go right no time no way no how." Poor grammar, but, by and large, accurate theology. We have done our best to eliminate

bad things in our lives, but we have failed, and we will fail. Abundant life transcends our circumstances. Troubles test our faith, but resting in the Word and persisting in prayer increases the gift of faith that God has given to us. Think of it – if our faith originates with God, only he can increase it, and so we should pursue the disciplines that he has designed to increase our faith. Abundant life is found only in Jesus, as we are told in the following verses:

11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

“I am the good shepherd.” In ancient times, you could often discern the true shepherds from the hired hands by how they would react when an animal sought to kill the sheep. You remember what David told Saul – he killed a lion and a bear, protecting his sheep. In so many ways, King David pointed us to Christ. But Jesus was not saying that he was willing to die so that his sheep would not be killed, but, rather, that he would die as a sacrifice for sin, although no one at the time would have understood his commitment, nor the eternal significance of the sacrificial act to which Jesus committed, in full submission to the Father’s plan for salvation. Verse 17:

17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 18 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.

In Neal Manning's sermon about the Holy Spirit, he spoke of the unity of the Trinity and God as one essence, but three persons with distinct roles. So, who raised Jesus from the dead – the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit? Yes! God raised Jesus from the dead! All three members took part in Jesus' resurrection. In verse 17, which echoes verse 15, Jesus says that the reason the Father loves him is because of his perfect obedience to the Father's plan to die a substitutionary death on behalf of his sheep. Once again, it is a marvelous plan that involves not only the death of one in place of the other, but an execution in the place of an offender who is now given life, both temporal and eternal. It is the Good Shepherd laying down his life for the sheep. How can this not be the best news for the troubled and the weary in this world? It has something to do with seeing eyes made blind and blind eyes made to see. When Jesus said these words, some approved and some did not. Verse 19:

19 There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. 20 Many of them said, "He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?" 21 Others said, "These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

The truth is, many will think you insane if you find Jesus' words to be God's truth, which would make him the only means of salvation. It will always be this way. Some will see Jesus as the good shepherd that he is, but most will say that it is crazy to think that a human being was God and died to take God's wrath against sin upon himself so that we can live. But those who know the Shepherd's voice will follow him and go in and out and find pasture. Do you have a personal relationship with the good shepherd? Far better to let people think what they will about you now and to hear his voice, both now and when it is your time to leave this world. Perhaps he is

calling your name, today, calling you into God's family through the acknowledgement of your sin and through belief that Jesus died in your place. Would you yield to the good shepherd and follow him as he calls you? Speak with the person who brought you this morning or speak with one of the people you have seen on the platform and ask them to tell you about Jesus.

We will close our time by reading the wonderful 23rd Psalm. As I read, picture Jesus leading you and providing for you and comforting you, as he calls you by name. Remember, abundant life is more a state of mind and being than it is a set of circumstances. Worship the Lord in your heart. Psalm 23:

Psalm 23:1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

3 He restores my soul.

**He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.**

**4 Even 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.**

**5 You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.**

**6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.**

