

THE GOSPEL OF BELIEF - Studies in John's Gospel

Part forty-one - Sunday, March 9th, 2014, 6:00 p.m.

Teaching #1715 - Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church

HOW DEEP THE FATHER'S LOVE FOR US

John 10:1-21 - "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. [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. [10] The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. [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. [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." [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 immediate lesson of these involved verses is, in fact, profoundly simple. **Any claim, past or present, that promises improvement of life apart from deeper obedience to Christ Jesus is a lie.** And the second lesson in our Lord's words follows logically. **All who make such offers of improved life apart from deeper obedience to Christ are thieves and robbers and destroyers of life in disguise.**

There are many voices speaking into our lives. We have never been more **electronically connected** with the world around us than we are today. **Words - messages - come at us like never before.** We are rarely, if ever, out of touch. Just go for a walk and look for a person **not** wearing earbuds. We are all becoming **continuous listeners.** And Jesus is reminding us that not all words give truth and life. Any message or messenger pulling us from **Christ focused attention** is draining us of life and truth. We either remain **Christ-attentive** or we are **deceived and decaying inwardly.** This is the radical message of Jesus in our text.

It's important to keep the context of our text in mind. Jesus is still speaking to those blind, truth dodging Pharisees. We are still witnessing the crashing of belief and unbelief. We know from the last words in our present text that the **healing of the blind man** was still on the minds of many - **John 10:20-21** - "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 theme John is developing is the **division** that always forms around the witness of God the Son. John doesn't want the church swept off her feet in surprise or disappointment. It would be easy to expect that words and works of grace - like the offering of abundant life and the opening of the eyes of the blind - would be welcomed by all. John knows how **hurtful** it can feel when what we treasure as followers of Christ is ignored or mocked by those we may love and respect. We are being **braced** and **prepared** for the way the division of **light** and **darkness** can manifest itself in this world.

The call of Christ to our hearts is totally distinct from everything else that would speak into our lives. This world tunes in its own ideas of truth. The blurry, vague morality of postmodern relativism that treats all ideas like noodles in alphabet soup in the name of love meets no push-back with the darkness of our culture. There is no threat to the rule of self - no call to humble repentance - no need to open the heart to absolute revelation. But there is no such comfort in following Christ. They **killed** Jesus for what He **said.** His very **words** were not allowed to go unpunished. And this is the One to whom we disciples cling with unquestioned obedience and devotion.

Let's work our way through some of the big ideas in this text:

1) **JESUS IS THE GATEWAY TO KNOWING FATHER GOD AND THE SENDING POINT OF OUTREACH INTO OUR CULTURE**

John 10:1-3 - "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."

John mixes metaphors freely in making his point. Jesus is the *gate* that swings in two directions. He is the *Shepherd* who calls the sheep *into* the sheepfold (1) and leads them *out* (3). Jesus is the one who brings the sheep in *and* leads them out.

We should be grateful for this reminder that we are more than just people who have *come* to Christ. It is easy for this to become the church's *only* message. We call people to *accept* Christ - to *ask Jesus into their hearts* - to *come to Jesus*. All of which is fine, but hardly the end of the process. Jesus reminds all His followers that *following* doesn't end at conversion. If you've *come* to Jesus for real He will *send* you out into service for your new Master. The *sending* is included as part of the *coming*.

2) **THE CENTRAL DUTY OF FOLLOWING JESUS IS SUMMED UP IN LISTENING TO HIS VOICE**

John 10:4-5 - "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."

It is interesting to me that Jesus defines our relationship to Himself more in terms of the *ongoing process of listening* than merely a *one time conversion choice*. We are so inclined to link abundant life with the *one time conversion - being saved*. Jesus says the life He gives to the hungry soul only *begins* at a certain point. It *progresses and grows* by the attention we continuously aim in Christ's direction.

Notice how Jesus says His sheep *"know his voice"* (10:4). They can hear Him speak - they know what He has to *say* in the middle of all the other words in their ears. They have developed a *selective hearing* that puts the direction of Jesus over and above the other invitations and demands coming their way.

This idea of *listening to Jesus* is the inner core of this text. Everything hinges on the sheep *listening* to the shepherd. The idea needs stressing in today's church. We like to think we can *set our own terms for "believing" in Jesus*. Somehow we can actually convince ourselves that it's *what we say about Jesus* that's important. But that's only secondary. What's primary is the way we *listen* to Jesus. It's not what we say *about Him* that's primary. It's what He says *to us* that's primary.

We should have known this all along. It's the central message of Christianity. This is what the Apostle Paul meant in those famous words in **Romans 10:17** - "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." Whether we study Jesus or Paul, faith is forever tied to *listening* to the word of Christ.

But there's something else of equal importance in this text. Listening is defined in *two* ways. And both are equally important. Listening to our life-giving Shepherd, in Jesus' words, is defined by what we give our attention *to* and by what we turn our attention *from*.

Did you catch that emphasis? **John 10:4-5** - "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."

There's the *one* voice *they know* because they've attuned their hearts to it so continuously they are now familiar and oriented to it. And there are the other *many* voices that have grown foreign to them because they've trained themselves to be *intentionally unfamiliar with them*. In other words, they aren't *ashamed*, but rather *proud* to confess ignorance of these other voices and messages.

This too is a concept weighted in the Scriptures by repetition so we don't miss it - **Psalms 1:1-2** - "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; [2] but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night."

This is the exact idea repeated by Jesus. Following Jesus in a *life-giving way* demands ears that *take in what is Christ-like* and *filter out what is contrary*. The Psalmist, I hope you note, places the *filtering out before* the *taking in*. That's because the truth of Christ will never make any sense in a mind gummed up with the sludgy thinking and values of this age.

Jesus repeats this same idea in our text. Notice, sheep can't *know* both the voice of their Shepherd *and* the other voices trying to dominate their minds. They may be able to *hear* both voices for a while. But they can't *know* both voices - John 10:4-5 - "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." To *intimately know* their good Shepherd they must tune out all rivals.

Again, let me sum this point up as tightly as I can. Jesus is ruling out the possibility of me *claiming* to love and follow Jesus while *taking my directions* from another source. I can't *claim* the label "*Christian*" while not being *ruled by the words of Jesus in the New Testament*. I can't claim to follow Christ and be fascinated by the things He hates.

3) ANY PROMISES OF LIFE APART FROM OBEYING THE WORDS OF CHRIST WILL BE UNTRUE AND SELF-DESTRUCTIVE

John 10:6-13 - "This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. [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. [10] The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. [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."

There is so much here. The central interpretive point of these verses is Jesus' recognition He was not the first one to come with claims of truth and a better life. He talks plainly about all those who "*came before*" Him (8). But they all came with nothing but words. Jesus is the uniquely divine Son who came to "*lay down his life*" for the sheep (11).

But I'm drawn to the way Jesus says all the other claims were "*thieves and robbers*" (8). It seems a little stern. Is Jesus just being *insulting* to other leaders and teachers and promoters and advertisers and entertainers and professors and authors and actors and producers and singers?

Or is He doing something intentionally loving for His sheep - His followers? I think He's addressing our fallen instincts. I think Jesus is reminding us if we give attention to other voices - if we give them the place only a *dying, redeeming Good Shepherd* has earned - we will surely destroy our lives. Anyone but the Shepherd will *take* from our lives rather than *give* to them. That's what *robbers* do. They don't bring stuff *into* your house. They take stuff *out*. You always end up with less than you had.

Now, none of these other voices *tells* you in advance that they will *diminish* your life and joy. Perhaps they don't even *know* that's all they can do. But *Jesus, God the Son all-wise*, knows only His will and way carry life with them. And that *contrast* is made to shine in the way Jesus speaks to this crowd: 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 doubt very much that the thief mentioned here is *Satan*. The context would indicate that, on this occasion, the thief is the same as in verse 8 - "All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them." The thieves and robbers are those who speak in the opposite direction of the Good Shepherd.

This is the danger Paul penned in Colossians 2:8 - "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ."

I'm running out of time. Just take note of those last four words to guard your heart - "*...not according to Christ.*" Now examine your heart. What gets regular entrance to your mind that is "*not according to Christ?*" Note it well, because, however popular it may be in this world, or even among the careless in the church, that's going to destroy your soul. Or in Paul's words, it will "*take you captive.*"

4) IT'S NO MORE POSSIBLE FOR THE SON TO BE UNCARING ABOUT YOUR DEVOTION TO HIM THAN FOR THE FATHER TO BE INDIFFERENT TOWARD HIS SON

John 10:14-15 - "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."

When Jesus wants to speak of the way He knows His own the only comparison He can make is His own relationship with His heavenly Father. That thought is too big to take in. I mean, **verse 14** and **verse 15** shouldn't fit together. How can my relationship with Jesus ever be compared to Jesus' with His Father in heaven?

All I know is I'm grateful - grateful beyond measure - that Jesus receives all my feeble prayers and Bible study and faltering devotion as me actually **knowing** Him. I rest on this because there are times when I don't **feel** that I know Him that well. So there is obviously some kind of special unseen grace extended in the way Jesus **receives** my attempts to know Him because He actually dares to compare it with the way Father God knows Him. Amazing.

Then Jesus says He knows me - relates Himself to me - the way He knows His heavenly Father. That means He's as **committed** to me as the Father and the Son are committed to each other. The love of the Trinity overflows to all of Christ's feeble sheep. The love of Christ for you is not a **lesser** kind of love. It's a deep divine love.

5) **OUR SALVATION IS DEARER TO THE SON THAN HIS OWN LIFE**

John 10:16-21 - "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. [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." [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?"

There is a deep connection between the **other sheep** that the Son must bring also (16) and the fact that the Son **freely chooses to lay down His life (18)**. The laying down of His life is the **way** the Son will reach all these sheep. And He clearly says He didn't **have** to lay down His life. He did it, in some mysterious way, under his own **"authority" (18)**.

And what that means is the Son valued reaching those sheep **more** than He valued keeping His own life. We run out of words before such mystery. We can only bow in humility and gratitude.