

The Good Shepherd

John 10:1-14

I know that in my preaching, I don't use a lot of illustrations. I know that I should use more, in order to make my points more clear and more easily understood. But that is often hard for me, as I would tend to see things and explain them more logically, and rationally. With words. And verbal descriptions.

Words are good. But words are often more clearly explained with pictures. Images. Illustrations. And Jesus was a master of illustrations. There is no better example of that greatness than our text this morning, which makes it easy for me to use that same illustration as I preach. "I am the door," Jesus says. And even more familiarly, "I am the good shepherd."

Jesus gives us a contrast as well. He refers to thieves and a robbers. And he speaks of a stranger, and a hired hand. Those are the dangers we need to look out for, spiritual dangers that can threaten our very lives. And it is Jesus' simple but comprehensive illustrations that teach us about those dangers, and they teach us about the very central truths of the gospel itself.

So what is the gospel all about? Ultimately, life. And salvation, which means moving from death to life. Death was God's curse upon mankind because of sin, the wages of sin is death. And everyone who lives will die. And face judgment. So how can you gain life? How can you gain salvation? How can you be saved? How can you obtain eternal life?

Let me answer all those questions with an illustration. A door. You can life by entering through a door. You gain eternal life by going through a door. Just like you entered this building this morning—you walked through a door. So, our first illustration. A

door. Specifically,

I. THE DOOR TO SALVATION.

So how can you be saved? Easy answer, you go through the door.

v.9

Then, v.7

The point is pretty simple, but very profound. There is only one door.

A. There is only one way to be saved.

In verse 1 there is a contrast, between the door and "some other way." And all those other ways are connected with thieves and robbers. In other words, they are a cheat. They are fake. They are no doors at all. They offer no legitimate way to be saved.

You can't climb up over the fence in order to be saved. In fact, there is nothing you can do to be saved. There is no amount of effort on your part that will be sufficient to enter—you have to enter through the door.

So being religious isn't enough, whatever that religion might be, whether it is one of any number of recognized, organized religions today, or just a personal experience or spiritual interest. It's not enough. Doing good works is not enough. Obeying the law is not enough. Self-help or self-improvement is not enough. Not to be saved. You have to enter that room through the door.

This is the message of the gospel,

Acts 4:10 "...let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man

stands here before you whole. 11 This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ 12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Or again with Peter’s preaching,

Acts 10:36 “The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all— 37 that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. 39 And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. 40 Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, 41 not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. 42 And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. 43 To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.”

Jesus’ own words,

John 14:6 “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

There is one door. Only one door to salvation. His name is Jesus.

1 Tim. 2:5 “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.”

So says Jesus, “I am the door of the sheep,” verse 7. And,

v.9

Notice how salvation is described and defined. The one who is saved “will go in and out and find pasture.” In other words, life! For a sheep, the pasture meant life. Food to sustain life. And a place to live.

B. There is only one way to have life.

1 John 5:11 “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.”

Then, as we read in verse 10, it is life “more abundantly.” Not just mere life. Not just the bare subsistence of life. But meaningful life. Abundant life. Life in its fullness. Having more than is really necessary, having a surplus or an overthrow.

Think again of those familiar words of,

Ps. 23:1 “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside the still waters.”

That’s life! That’s the idea of having life more abundantly. And that’s the promise and hope of the gospel—life! The fullness of life. Green pastures. Still waters.

Do you want that life? Do you want to enter into that experience of life? Then walk through the door. Jesus is the door.

Acts 16:31 “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.”

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will have life!

Next, then, the dangers.

II. SPIRITUAL DANGERS.

A. The first danger: A thief.

v.1

That illustration wasn't understood by the Jews who were listening to him, so he explained what he meant just a bit.

v.7-8

At the very least, that would refer to the misused Old Testament system of the Judaizers, who thought that you could enter the kingdom of God by observing and keep the OT ceremonial system of laws. Self-righteousness. An external form of religion. That's the way to life.

But Jesus said no. That system of religion take the part of a thief and a robber, it steals from you the truth of the gospel, a gospel that was veiled in the OT to those who didn't believe. If you use the law in order to gain an entrance into heaven, then you have fallen victim to thieves and robbers. Your life has been stolen away from you.

With disastrous, deadly results,

v.10a

So it is today, those who proclaim a religion of law keeping are stealing the truth of life from you. Those who proclaim that you can gain life any way other than through faith in Jesus are robbing you of the riches of the gospel. And they do it in order to kill you and destroy you. Indeed, its a matter of life and death!

The second danger Jesus identifies as that of a stranger.

B. The second danger: A stranger.

In other words, unable to lead the sheep, because the sheep stay away. The sheep are fearful of the stranger, rightfully so.

v.5-6

Indeed, the false shepherds are extremely dangerous, and they ought to be feared! Then,

C. The third danger: A hired hand.

Again, these are all illustrations. So a hired hand, a hireling, is very different from the shepherd because he doesn't actually care about the sheep at all. He cares about his own safety, so when danger comes, rather than protecting the sheep, he protects himself.

v.12-13

In one sense, that's perfectly understandable. When I was a teenager and into college, I worked as a toll collector on an interstate highway, and there was often a lot of money in the cash register. One summer I worked the night shift at a small exit off the highway, and I was the only one there. I had a two way radio with immediate connection to the state police, but otherwise I was alone. Thankfully, I was never in danger and I was never threatened. But I can tell you what I would have done if someone wanted to steal the money I had collected. I would give it to them!

I'm just a hired hand, just an employee.

Now if one of my children were threatened, that would be a different matter altogether! Or if I was a shepherd watching over my sheep, that would be different too!

So Jesus is comparing himself to all the other false shepherds, pointing out just how dangerous they really are. And

yet such shepherds have always existed among God's people, Old Testament and New. They continue to plague the church today, shepherds interested in their own welfare far more than they devote themselves to the welfare of God's people. And the church suffers greatly because of it. Hired hands. Professional men building a successful career. Men driven by self-centered and self-seeking ambition. Ambition for money and material success. Ambition for power, the exercise of authority, and the quest for prestige. Self-interest among the shepherds of God's church are a horrible thing and they pose a grave danger.

False shepherds face a great judgment.

Ez. 34:2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, "Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds: 'Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? 3 You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. 4 The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. 5 So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered. 6 My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one was seeking or searching for them."

Here's the warning,

Ez. 34:9 "...therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the Lord! 10 Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand; I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them."

But Jesus is different. Completely and entirely different. Jesus is,

III. THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

Ezekiel continues,

Ez. 34:11 "For thus says the Lord God: "Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. 12 As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. 13 And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. 14 I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. 15 I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down," says the Lord God. 16 "I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick."

Jesus doesn't break in to steal like the thief, climbing over the wall to get to his sheep. He goes in the door. He is the door.

v.2

So what do we have before us to learn about this good shepherd? Notice the contrast especially with the stranger.

A. The good shepherd is known to the sheep.

We are the sheep. We who are believers. Christians. And this is a great place to start. We know the good shepherd, and we follow him. That's really a definition of a Christian, isn't it? We follow Jesus. That's what life is all about. That's what salvation is all about. That's what eternal life is all about. We follow Jesus. We hear his voice, and we follow him!

v.3-4

So who are the true sheep?

v.27

And the reward is plain,

v.28

So, do you know Jesus? Do you know the good shepherd? That's the ultimate question, isn't it? That's the question that determines life or death. Do you know the good shepherd?

Peter describes true believers this way,

1 Peter 2:25 "For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

I stress this to make it personal. Salvation is not just a set of facts that you memorize. It's not just the willingness to take your place here in church on Sunday morning. No, it's a personal connection, a personal relationship. You know Jesus. You know the good shepherd.

So here is the proclamation of the gospel in the words of Isaiah I read earlier,

Is. 40:9 "O Zion, You who bring good tidings, Get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, You who bring good tidings, Lift up your voice with strength, Lift it up, be not afraid; Say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" 10 Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand, And His arm shall rule for Him; Behold, His reward is with Him, And His work before Him. 11 He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom, And gently lead those who are with young."

I proclaim him to you today so that you will be able to know him.

Rom. 10:14 "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!"

As I preach that gospel to you, I present to you Jesus, the good shepherd, so that you might know him. And knowing him, that you might have life in his name.

John 20:31 "...these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

There is something even more important than you as the sheep knowing the good shepherd, and that is that he would know you! And he does.

B. The good shepherd knows his sheep by name.

This is a precious, precious thought. This is where all our good theology about salvation becomes personal, and heartwarming. Here is what really defines Jesus—the good shepherd knows his sheep. By name.

v.3

v.14

I know them. I know my sheep.

The Bible defines the situation like this. There are a group of sheep whom God has identified, those he identifies as his sheep. And he gives them, the sheep, to Jesus. And Jesus saves them, the sheep.

John 10:7 “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand.”

One more thing about the good shepherd. Remember the hired hand, who wouldn't protect the sheep. Jesus isn't a hired hand, and he doesn't flee when his sheep are in danger. Instead,

C. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

v.11

v.15 “I lay down My life for the sheep.”

Notice that this willingness to lay down his life was connected to his personal knowledge of his sheep. Jesus specifically says, “I lay down my life for the sheep.” Not for all men, indiscriminately, but for my sheep, those whom the father gives to me. I will lay down my life as the satisfaction of God's perfect justice for their sins. I will lay down my life to satisfy the wrath of God's justice and condemnation, for my sheep!

So Jesus died for the sins of his people, his elect people, his sheep, that defined number of people whom the Father had chosen in love before the foundation of the world. They are the ones of whom Jesus said,

John 6:37 “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.”

If you think that Jesus died for all men equally, then logically you have to conclude that he paid the penalty for sins for all men equally, for his death was a satisfaction of the demands of that justice. And if Jesus paid the penalty for the sins for all men equally, then God would not be just in sending unbelievers to hell,

for that would be double jeopardy. And if he did send some to hell, some for whom Christ had died, then Christ would have died in vain.

Let me say it another way. Jesus actually accomplished something when he died upon the cross. He accomplished the work of our salvation. He accomplished what we call propitiation--he satisfied the demands of God's wrath, so that the promise can be given to us, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Jesus didn't die merely as a good example. He didn't die merely to offer salvation to everyone. He died to accomplish the salvation of those whom the father had given him, those whom he knew by name. Those who would love him and serve him. Those who will be glorified and live together for all eternity in heaven.

The good shepherd laid down his life for the sheep.

Is. 53:5 “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

So, do you know that Jesus? Do you know Jesus, the good shepherd? Will you hear his voice this morning, even as I preach to you? He offers life, he offers salvation. Life to the full, full of meaning and significance. Life more abundantly. But there is only one way, only one door. Come to Jesus, in faith and repentance. Come to Jesus, “the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls,” in whom there is life.