



SERMON TITLE: Good Shepherd. Best Life.

DATE: March 8, 2020

SCRIPTURE: John 10:1-21

PASTOR: Matt Densky

"These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his own biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

(The break in our Bibles between chapter 9 and chapter 10 is not present in John's mind as he's writing his Gospel and therefore we should see a seamless thought from one to the other. Jesus begins chapter 10 as a response to the Pharisees in chapter 9 who have outcast the formerly blind man and especially to the Pharisees who are asking Jesus, "Are we also blind?" (9:40). Jesus' introduction of the shepherding metaphor seems to be his response to the spiritually blind, power hungry, toxically religious Pharisees who are not shepherding God's people well at all.)

A few months ago I was on a trip in the Canadian wilderness. No map, no real trails, just territory in the Rocky Mountains of Alberta. I consider myself a seasoned outdoorsman and am extremely familiar with hiking and mountainous terrain, but oftentimes risk reveals just how much you don't know. For all my experience in the East Coast mountains, I have only been in the Rockies three times. On one particular night my guide and I were attempting to hike out, locate the car, and make it back to base camp. We had done a formidable amount of hiking that day and from the top of one particularly steep mountain were able to scope out the best exit strategy for the evening. Everything seemed so simple from the top. But as night fell, a storm descended. Ominous clouds rolled in quickly as well as strong wind, creaking trees, and a disorienting darkness. As we attempted to find our way, there were times I was completely turned around. Sometimes the thought of how far away from home I was would creep into my head. Or sometimes I would think through hypotheticals like, "What happens if something happened to my guide right now? How would I get him out of here?" Or I would wonder what lies through the darkness that my flashlight can't discern. We had been seeking signs of grizzlies and cougars all week, not to mention the wolves howling near our tent every night. It's amazing how when the right circumstances combine, fear begins to blossom and you begin to focus more on the "what ifs" rather than the "what is". As we bushwhacked through the forest that night I was whole-heartedly leaning into my guide for safety and direction. Repeatedly I would look at him, his body language or expressions to see if he was confused or worried. But time and time again his resolve and ease would merit more trust until eventually we were out.

You don't have to be navigating the wilderness to have the same emotions. Oftentimes life feels like a wilderness without much direction or safety. Circumstances can change all around us drawing our focus to fears and stirring our emotions to helplessness. What do we do in these moments? Who do we turn to? Is there a way to avoid them altogether? Does Jesus offer anything to this?

SECTION 1: JOHN 10:1-6

Nowhere in these verses does Jesus designate himself (yet) as the good shepherd he is talking about, but since he does later in the passage we can assume the description of the shepherd in these verses applies to Jesus as well.

In response to the Pharisees who claim knowledge about God and claim "sight" Jesus reveals that they are actually the blind ones (spiritually) (John 9:39-41). To illustrate his point Jesus will use a metaphor of shepherding. In verses 1-6 Jesus describes a communal sheep pen of sorts, or some sort of holding area for a flock. There is one way in and only the shepherd is permitted through the front door. Others, who desire the sheep but are not good shepherds have had to find some sort of alternative way in, but Jesus designates them as robbers and thieves. They are strangers to the sheep.

The shepherd, alternatively, has every right to be there. He comes in through the front door in plain view and what's more, the sheep know who he is because they recognize his voice. They hear him call their names and they trust him. The shepherd leads them out and goes before them.

1. The Pharisees had gotten off track over the years and were no longer shepherding God's people well.
2. Jesus knows us intimately and calls us by name.
3. Jesus goes before us and guides us.

SECTION 2: JOHN 10:7-10

Jesus designates himself as the door itself of the sheep pen which might seem a little odd. We might have expected him to jump right to being the shepherd, but instead says he's the door. In rural Israel there would be small enclosures in the hills and mountains. When a shepherd would take his sheep out to pasture for days at a time he would use these enclosures to securely place his sheep during the night time when predators would lurk about. These enclosures would be a nearly complete circle with a small gap between the points of the ring. Once all the sheep were in and accounted for the shepherd would then lay in the gap and become the very door to the enclosure. No sheep could wander off and no predator could get in without the shepherd allowing it to be so.

Jesus then goes on to compare the agenda of the thieves and robbers with his own. They come to kill, steal, and destroy, but Jesus gives life.

1. Jesus protects us and keeps us safe from those who would seek to destroy us.
2. Jesus offers the best life possible.
3. Jesus provides for us by leading us to pastures

SECTION 3: JOHN 10:11-21

Jesus now clarifies what he's been alluding to all along. "I am the good shepherd." Four times in this passage Jesus says that the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, alluding to his death on the cross. So how does the good shepherd give us the best life possible? Through his sacrifice. But Jesus doesn't *just* lay down his life. He also takes it up again, alluding to the resurrection. It is because of this statement that the conclusion of Jesus' teaching here lands on him being insane or demon possessed. I mean, imagine hearing this in real life. Some guy who's already in dispute is calling you sheep, calling himself shepherd, says that he will die because he chooses to, but will also come back to life because he chooses to. I think a few of us might also be scratching our heads at this and maybe even conclude something similar, "this guy is crazy."

Jesus also in this passage gives insight into one of the greatest mysteries of the work and plan of God. He says that there are sheep from a different flock that he must also bring in, referring to Gentiles and the work of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Jesus goes on to say that once grafted in, there are not two flocks, but one. We are one people, one family of God.

1. Jesus began this passage as a response and correction to the pharisees. Jesus loves the Pharisees and therefore a good shepherd will correct his sheep by bringing them back.
2. Jesus is the good shepherd who will both die for his sheep and come back from death forever
3. Jesus is making a new flock of sheep which includes Gentiles.

CONCLUSION

How do we navigate this life? How do we have an abundant life? Proximity. A closeness with Jesus. This is only possible through believing in him as the good shepherd and following him closely as he guides, protects, provides, and corrects.

Discussion Starters:

1. What was something that stood out to you from Matt's message? What is something you'll remember even if you didn't take notes?
2. What are some characteristics of sheep that describe them well?
3. How do these relate to you as the "sheep" of God's flock?
4. Why is it important for the sheep to know the shepherd's voice? What can happen to the sheep if they do not recognize/follow the shepherd's voice?
5. What does it mean for Jesus to be the door? What does verse 9 say for the one who enters and exits through Jesus?
6. Have you structured your life in a way in which you are finding safety in Jesus and provision through Jesus? Is he your door?

7. What is the agenda of the thief in verse 10? What is the agenda of Jesus? How do these two differ and how have you seen both of these play out in life?
8. Even though Jesus is bringing in sheep from other folds (Gentiles) how many flocks are described at the end of verse 16?
9. Is unity among the other sheep, no matter how different they are, a priority for you the way it is for Jesus?
10. How do we need to respond to the good shepherd as his sheep? Are there ways in which we need to follow him more closely? Do we know what his voice sounds like through being near? Are there times we don't trust? Do we give into the temptation that we can find greener pastures on our own? Whatever it may be, how do you need to respond to the shepherd this week?

*Next Step: Maybe for you this week a next step would look as simple as praying this prayer daily, "Jesus where you lead me, I will follow."