

Jesus' Greatest Hits

The Good Shepherd

Part 24 - January 13, 2008

[VIDEO: LIVESTOCK TRUCK]

Ever had to hitch-hike? When someone finally offers a lift, there's that critical moment just before you get in, when you evaluate whether they've come to help ... or to harm! The journey to Heaven is like that. And eternal life depends on who is in that driver's seat. In the parable of *The Good Shepherd*, Jesus makes it clear that His sheep know His voice and are led safely into His Kingdom.

"I tell you the truth, 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. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. ... I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me — just as the Father knows me and I know the Father — and I lay down my life for the sheep. ... No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." - *John 10:1-10;14;18 NIV*



At the beginning of this parable, Jesus talks about a: sheep pen (*also known as a: sheepfold*). The type He describes is a *community* sheepfold; it had a gate, and a watchman, and the shepherds could "park" their flocks there for the night. This imagery was very familiar to Jesus' listeners.

I tell you the truth, 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. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. - *John 10:1-2 NIV*

This parable was an accusation against the Pharisees. Jesus had just healed a man who had been blind since birth ... but He healed him on a *Sabbath*. Therefore, the religious leaders condemned His actions — and labeled Him a sinner. (*John 9:13-23*) Then they

threatened to expel the blind man and his parents from the synagogue unless they denounced Jesus *and* this miracle! But, the man stood up to their religious intimidation and said:

“We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” [This man *knew* his Bible] To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out. - *John 9:31-34 NIV*

These men represent the “**thief**” and the “**robber**”. Jesus had entered through a “gate” of grace and mercy; but these religious intruders had “climbed” in with a cruel, condemning doctrine. They assaulted the flock and cheated them of grace and mercy.

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.” Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.” Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. - *John 9:35-38 NIV*

He knew the Word, sought the truth, and recognized the Messiah:

The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice (*10:3a*)

The “**watchman**” would be all the prophets of God; the greatest of which (according to Matthew 11:11), was John the Baptist who baptized Jesus into ministry, and introduced Him to the world. The “**gate**” would be the foretold, appointed way of the Messiah.



He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out (*10:3b*)

He doesn't call His “flock” by name; He calls His “**sheep**” by name.

He doesn't call a flock, He calls each sheep.

Ken Ekle and I were flown to Los Angeles for the “Project Greenlight” script-writing contest which was created by Ben Affleck and Matt Damon. We had a chance to meet them in a crowded room; and when I approached Matt to shake his hand he said: “Bruce! Where's Ken?”

It's hard to explain, but having someone that well-known, know my name, brought this weird sense of significance. He *knew* me! If you have a tendency to feel insignificant, remember: God, the creator and sustainer of this universe knows/calls you by name! I can only imagine entering Heaven, and approaching the Lord; as soon as He sees me He says: “Bruce! ... *Where's Ken?!*”

You may look around here and see a crowd, but to the Lord, every face has a story, every face is a child, every child has a name.



My grandma had three little black and white bulldogs. Now, to *you* they might've looked like three flat-nosed, skunk-faced, bat-eared triplets. But to grandma, they were: Lacy, Jo-Jo, and Tami. In Jesus' day, flocks were small, generally about 10-20 sheep. They were valued like pets, and they were given individual names (you know: Wooly, Fleecy, Puffy, Cotton-ball ... Steve).

Names usually corresponded to peculiar traits and temperament (i.e. Limpy, Careless, Stubborn). But here's the question: What do you suppose He's named you? Willful? Humble? Timid? ... Puffy?

Notice that He: "*leads* them out"

A tourist in Jerusalem noticed a shepherd walking behind his flock, driving them, prodding them, and whipping them. She pointed this out to her guide and said, "I thought shepherds led their sheep!" "Oh, yes, they do." He replied ... "That man is the butcher."

I can be driven by lust or pride, by a misguided desire for significance, by my own unchecked impulses, or the many cares and counter-values of my culture. The *enemy* is the one who pokes and prods and pushes! Jesus came to lead us into freedom, not drive us into submission!

His sheep follow him because they know His voice ... They will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice (10:4-5)

In a community sheepfold, the flocks mix together. But, when the watchman opens the gate and a shepherd calls out, his sheep recognize his distinct call and quickly separate from the crowd.



Experience has taught them to take refuge in that voice. It has led them, comforted them, and fed them. They only trust *that* voice. The other shepherds' voices actually frighten them.

- His voice means security and nourishment.

Q: Do you know and recognize His voice this way?

Q: Do you run *from* or *toward* those *other* voices?



There are times in our lives when God speaks to us, and we just don't realize it, because we don't recognize His voice. We can't follow Him without knowing His voice; and we can't know His voice without knowing His Word. He has given us His Word so that we can discern His voice among all the other competing voices that want to take us for a ride.

When I used to fly ... *in a plane ... as a pilot*, I trusted the control tower to guide me - and they trusted that I knew the instructions in the flight manual.

- He *equips* us with His Word, to speak to us with His Spirit.

I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me - just as the Father knows me and I know the Father (10:14-15a)

First: "I know my sheep" ... "just as the Father knows me". Second: "My sheep know me" ... "[just as] I know the Father". I get that He knows His sheep as the Father knows Him. But, I'm supposed to know Him the same way He knows the Father?! Wow.



Religion has just gone out the window, and been replaced with a deep, dear, intimate relationship. There is nothing about Jesus' nature or character that He did not reveal through His Word; nothing hidden; nothing held back. We can know Him as intimately as He knows the Father!

His hearers were having a little trouble with the analogy:

They did not understand what he was telling them (10:6)

So, he uses another analogy; this time, rather than a "community sheepfold" (pen), He uses a "country sheepfold" as the example.

I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture (10:9)



"Country sheepfolds" were usually made of rock walls, and were just big enough for one flock. And they were built with no gate. The shepherd would lie across the entrance at night, in order to protect his flock. Jesus says: "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved"

He's not only the "Good Shepherd" (the One sent to lead us *into* the Kingdom), but He alone is the One through which we must go.

Another dig on religious condemners, and all who *drain* life:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full (10:9)

Life to the "**full**" means life without end! Sins erased! Debts paid! Love lavished! Joy, peace, purpose, direction! He alone can offer genuine *security, freedom, and provision*:

He will come in and go out, and find pasture ... (10:9b)

There was a price for providing us with all of that. Under O.T. law, the sheep died for the sins of the shepherds, now the Good Shepherd freely dies for the sins of His sheep.

I lay down my life for the sheep. ... No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father. - *John 10:15b;18 NIV*

He came with a “**command**” “**from [the] Father**”: Draw off the “wolves” of sin and death and judgment. Take them onto yourself. And give Your life to destroy them. And with the command comes the authority: “I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again”

One door, and only one; yet, its sides are two.
Inside and outside; so, which side are you?

If *you* have chosen to enter through the door of grace and mercy, then joyfully read along with me:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. Yea, 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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever. - *Psalm 23 NIV*

The Lord can't be your shepherd until the shepherd is your Lord!

Let's see how well you've been listening; answer *true* or *false* when I ask the questions. In this passage, we've learned that:

1. Jesus is a good shepherd. (*Oops; He's "The" good shepherd!*)
2. Christ alone is the entrance and access to God's Kingdom.
3. The more I learn His Word, the less I'll discern His voice.
4. I can know Jesus as He knows the Father.