

March 18, 2012

# *Living Out The Gospel In Real Life*

## *I Am the Good Shepherd*

John 10:1 – 11

The entire entire chapter preceding this one is a story of Jesus healing a man who was blind from birth. And it tells the story of this man's encounter with Jesus that ends with his eyes opened, his faith awakened and his heart filled with worship. The essence of this man's existence was that he was born blind – not for any reason other than to display the glory of God when the Son of God came into his life. Jesus came to this man – he wasn't looking for Jesus – but Jesus was looking for him. And his story really is our own story. Oh we may have thought we were looking for Christ, but the reality is, if He had not searched us out first, we would not have looked for Him at all. The condition of every man without Christ is as a blind beggar beside the road looking for handouts. But in His mercy, Jesus seeks us out even before we have any thought of looking for Him. And He comes to us and opens our eyes to see and our minds to understand and our hearts to believe.

The contrast in this chapter is that group that thought they knew God – the Pharisees. These guys were all the time trying to squash the Lord's ministry and run Him out of town because they were certain that they knew God and this guy was just messing everything up. And in this story, they end up excommunicating the guy Jesus healed and condemning themselves in the process. But Jesus finds the man He healed, no doubt a little unsettled by his being unsynagogued so abruptly, and give him and those Pharisees who stayed around to hear, the explanation for this whole affair. *And Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind."* John 9:39 Jesus is not contradicting Himself when He told Nicodemus earlier: *"For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."* John 3:17 When He says that He did not come to judge in chapter 3, He was saying that condemnation was not His goal in His first coming – salvation was. And when He says 'For judgment I came into the world...' here in chapter 9, He was saying that when He does come and save people, a real judgment happens as unbelief and rebellion are exposed and people are confirmed in their faith or confirmed in their refusal to believe. **The end of unbelief is permanent blindness.**

Jesus did not come to condemn but to save. ***In fact the end of the gospel is worship.*** That's what happens with the blind man in verse 38. But the truth of the gospel exposes the condition of the heart; it exposes people's unwillingness to embrace the truth and be saved, and they stand judged already and condemned by their refusal to worship Jesus. The ministry of Jesus, in fact, the proclamation of the gospel, will inevitably reveal and confirm the blindness and unbelief that ultimately condemns. So on the one hand, the light of the gospel cuts through the blindness of the heart, and those who are blind will see. *so that those who do not see may see.* But on the other hand, the same light confirms the unbelieving blindness of those who reject Him. *and that those who see may become blind.* That is, those who have eyesight, who can read the word of God, who can think and reason and understand, who listen to the message and think they are alright, but who will not admit that they are blind and need healing, will not admit their sin and their desperate need to be born again – they become blind. The more they resist the truth, the harder and deeper their blindness becomes.

And those unbelieving Jews heard this and understood at least that Jesus was making a statement about them: *Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, "We are not blind too, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."* John 9:40-41 And I believe that this is the point Jesus was making: Unless we understand that without Christ we are all like that blind beggar who needed Jesus to heal His blindness, take away his sins and lead him to faith; then we are like those Pharisees who have no sense that they need healing and think that they see clearly.

And from verse 41 of chapter 9 to verse 1 of chapter 10 – there is no transition. Imagine your Bible for a moment without the chapter headings and division – what we have is Jesus telling the Pharisees in verse 41 that because they think they can see without being touched by the Son of God's hand – that they can come to God on their own merits – their blindness remains – they are still in their sins. And then He goes right into the next sentence: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber."* John 10:1

What He's done is change the metaphor. Now He moves into talking about shepherds and sheep and thieves and robbers. But He is still engaged in the same discussion, and although He changes the metaphor, He is still making the point that as long as we think we're okay – we're not. He is telling them plainly that they are thieves and robbers, not sheep. They professed to be followers of God and teachers of the truth, but here Jesus highlights the difference between false shepherds and real shepherds. False shepherds exploit the flock for personal gain and to advance themselves. But real shepherds care for the flock. Real shepherds know their sheep – real shepherds come in through the door, not over the wall. These guys had climbed over the wall to get to God – they tried to come to Him by some other means than through the Shepherd. In fact they rejected the Shepherd, and they rejected anyone who welcomed Him.

*“But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.”* This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them. John 10:2-6 In Palestine at this time, in every village there was a large enclosure called a sheepfold, which was the common property of all the shepherds. The sheepfold was protected by a high wall and had a single entrance. When the shepherds brought their flocks in at night, they were all put into the sheepfold where they were guarded by the doorkeeper through the night. In the morning, all the shepherds came and gave a whistle or a call that only their sheep would respond to and led them out to pasture for the day.

Using this metaphor of sheep and shepherds, Jesus is teaching us something very profound about who we are and who He is. First of all, as the Good Shepherd, **He knows us** – He knows His sheep. He calls His own – that means He knows them. The first thing about a good shepherd is that he knows his sheep. Doug McMillan, a preacher and author of the book, ***The Lord Our Shepherd***, had been a shepherd himself for many years before he went into the ministry. One day he was with another shepherd friend on a train as they passed by a flock of sheep that they saw out the window. Now his friend had just sold some of his lambs to the owner of that flock and as they went by Doug McMillan's friend said, 'Look, there are four of my lambs in that flock'. And McMillan said, "It didn't even occur to me to ask him, 'How do you know those sheep?'" He knew them because he was a shepherd. He knew them just by looking at them.

Shepherds know their sheep in a way that would amaze outsiders. McMillan said it was critical that when the sheep were in the pasture, that he would be in a position where he could see every individual sheep. He would position himself on a high point where he could make eye contact with each one, and when danger threatened, he would know where each one was and what they were doing so he could protect them. In fact McMillan claimed that a shepherd had to know his sheep far more comprehensively and completely than say those who owned cattle or horses. And the question is why? Why does a shepherd have to know his sheep in a way that owners of other animals do not? And the answer is not a complement. The reason a shepherd needs to know his sheep so well is that of all the animals they are the most helpless and stupid. Did you know that sheep are the only domesticated animal that cannot go wild? Cats, dogs, birds, horses, pigs, even cows if you set them loose in the world they'll get thin, they'll get smart, and they'll get by. Sheep? Sheep get eaten. When you set other animals loose, they either run off singing 'Born Free' or they run home. Sheep do neither.

McMillan puts it this way: '**Sheep are very stupid animals. Sheep follow each other and lose their direction in ways that cats and dogs do not, and even when you find them it is very difficult to round them up. Lost sheep run to and fro in a panic**'. Because sheep are stupid. And sheep are the most helpless of animals. For any animal, there are four survival stances: fight, flight, posture, and submit. So how does the sheep stack up? They can't fight: Sheep have neither offensive nor defensive weapons. No fangs, no claws, no shell, no spray, nothing. What about flight? For starters, they're slow. Their eyesight is just as poor as their hearing. They have little strength, less stamina, and no sense of direction. Best of all, they have an over-active startle reflex, and they don't blend into *anything*. So even if they could run, they can't hide. Dogs bark, cats hiss, rattlesnakes rattle... Sheep baaa. Baaa! That's the barnyard equivalent of "Please don't eat me, please don't eat me, please don't eat me!" Dogs raise their hackles, cats arch their back, rattlesnakes coil and lift their head to make themselves appear larger. What can sheep do?

Sheep know one trick and one trick only. They flock. We used to think flocking was complex behavior, but we know now that flocking is very simple. All you need is a hundred tiny brains, each big enough to hold two rules. 1. If you see a sheep, get closer. 2. If they run, you run. Here's how it works. Here's the herd. Over here is Little Joe Sheep. Joe sees a wolf. Startle reflex kicks in and he starts to run. No one wants to get left behind, so they all start to run. Notice that the entire flock is running, and the only one who knows why is Joe, and Joe is probably already dead. They keep running until they get tired, the wolf stops to eat Joe, and they live to baa another day. That's it. That's their entire survival strategy. Please don't eat me. Eat Joe. He's tasty. Run awaaaay!

So what should this say to us? That our Shepherd knows us? Jesus is telling us that spiritually we are sheep – utterly helpless, utterly unself-sufficient. **He knows that we are completely dependent.** He says, '*I know you*'. We like to think we're different – but we are all the same – utterly helpless and dependent. First of all ***we are dependent in our understanding.*** We are continually overestimating or underestimating just what we are capable of. And as a result we are constantly making bad choices – constantly making wrong decisions. I like the illustration Tim Keller uses. Your present self, looking at your past self, say ten years ago, thinks your past self was a fool. Your present self looks back at your past self and says, 'Back then I was an idiot, I needed guidance – I needed some to tell me what to do. I was so naïve, I didn't understand. But now I know'. So your present self always thinks of your past self as a jerk. But the problem is, your future self will think of your present self as a jerk. Ten years from now your future self will look back on your present self and say, 'Back then I was an idiot, I needed guidance – I needed some to tell me what to do. I was so naïve, I didn't understand. But now I know'.

But you know what that means? This is what Jesus is illustrating here. ***It means you are always a jerk – but you always think you are just getting over it.*** That is the essence of sheepness. McMillian says that the thing about sheep is, not only do they get easily panicked and lost, but when you show up they simply run in circles, scream and shout. They don't run into the arms of the shepherd – they just scatter – you have to take them down. Fortunately they come equipped with about 8 pounds of Velcro all over their body, so you can grab them pretty much anywhere and drag them to the ground and stop their useless panic. That's us. We are always jerks but we always think we're getting over it. We are always thinking we've arrived. In understanding, we always need a shepherd – we're helplessly dependent – and we don't know it – which makes us dependent

Not only are we utterly dependent in the area of our understanding – ***we are utterly dependent in how we see ourselves.*** Our self-image. We like to say, 'It shouldn't matter what others think of you – it only matters what you think of you'. The problem is, we can only get an accurate self-image from outside. It would be like someone saying, 'I'm a singer/songwriter. I've written and sung hundreds of songs. Of course everyone who hears them thinks they're awful – not one single person has ever said they like them – in fact they all have said they hate my songs. But it doesn't matter what they say. I know I'm a great singer/songwriter.' Would you say that's someone with a great self-image? Sure, but that is also someone who has a very feeble hold on reality. The reality is that we cannot bless ourselves – we cannot get an accurate self-image just because we keep saying to ourselves 'I'm a great singer. I'm beautiful. I'm smart'. That has to come from somewhere else. It has to come from someone else. You cannot name yourself.

And so we try and get our self-image from our friends, our job, our spouse, our children – and it's always insufficient. It is always inadequate. Because we are sheep, we will always be comprehensively and completely dependent upon some shepherd – upon someone else. Someone from the outside has got to name you. Someone from the outside has got to tell you you're beautiful – someone else has to tell you you've got talent. Your whole being is going to rest on someone's evaluation of you – whether it's the critics, or your parents, or your spouse. You're a sheep – I'm a sheep – that's how we are. The problem is we allow the wrong people and circumstances to name us and we end up even more lost than before. Psychologically, emotionally, spiritually we are sheep. That is why we need a Shepherd. That's why we need Him to name us.

Did you notice - '*...the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name...*' He calls them by name. Here Jesus breaks the boundaries of the metaphor. Typically, a shepherd would come to the fold in the morning and give a whistle or a call that his sheep would recognize and he would lead them out. What shepherds never did was give each one a name. But here Jesus says that He calls each one of His sheep by name! A name signifies status and significance. It identifies you as an individual with worth and value. It tells not only others who you are but it informs you of your significance and worth. What we need is for our Shepherd to name us. And when Christ calls us to follow Him, when we respond to His call, He gives us a new name.

Have you noticed in the Bible when the reality of who God is breaks in on a person – they get a new name? They get a whole new self image? Abram believed God and God named him Abraham. Abram means 'Exalted Father' but Abraham means 'The Father of a multitude'. Jacob wrestled with God and God named him Israel. Jacob meant 'Deceiver' but Israel means 'He who wrestles with God' or 'He who takes hold of God'. Simon comes to Jesus and Jesus names him Peter. Simon meant 'Reed' but Peter means 'Rock'. When we come to Christ we get a new name, a new distinctive, a new mission. We will never have an adequate self-image on our own. **We need Jesus to name us.** The only healthy self-image comes from Him.

The Shepherd knows his sheep. That means finally that **He knows us to the bottom of our little black sheep hearts.** He knows us like no one else can know us. Remember Nathaniel in chapter 1? As Nathaniel was meeting Jesus for the first time Jesus says, 'I know you – behold an Israelite in whom is no guile'. Remember the woman at the well in chapter 4? Jesus told her 'I know all about you – I know that you've had five husbands and you aren't married to the man you are living with now - I know you'. And He comes to us and says, 'I know you – I know all the deepest secrets of your life – I know all the stupid moves you've made – and I know all the stupid moves you're going to make in the future. I've seen beneath the surface of your life – I know the essence of your sheepness – I know you to the bottom'.

Be honest with yourself. If anyone knew the thoughts that went through your head in the course of a day – you'd be friendless by nightfall. And yet here we have a Shepherd who knows us – knows His sheep to the bottom – all the stupid, sinful things they've ever done or thought or said – and all the stupid, sinful things they're going to think and say and do – and He says, 'I lay down My Life for my sheep'. Listen, I'll be real honest – and anyone who has ever had occasion to stand in a pulpit would tell you the same thing: If you knew what went through my head during the week sometimes you'd never listen to another message. But you know that is true of yourself. We all know that if anyone knew us all the way to the bottom they would turn on us in a second. And yet the King of the universe says to us - 'I know you, I know My sheep – and I take your place'.

Our Shepherd not only knows us to the bottom, but He says that **He lays down His life for us.** First of all He knows us to the bottom of our sheepness – **the doctrine of sin.** Then He says, 'I will lay down my life for you' – **the doctrine of substitutionary atonement.** *"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.* John 10:11 Right after the strongest picture He can draw of our utter stupidity and helplessness, comes the strongest statement of our value to Him. He says, '**The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep**'. It doesn't translate well into English, but what Jesus says is, 'I lay down My life **in the place of** My sheep'. These are the two things about sheep – not only are they incredibly stupid – they are incredibly valuable. In that ancient world, the shepherds didn't keep their money in a bank and raise sheep – the sheep were the bank. Everything was valuable about the sheep – pound for pound they were the most valuable animal a man could own.

Listen to what Jesus says, *So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.* John 10:7 -10 Thieves and robbers are after valuables – therefore the sheep must be valuable. And that is just what Jesus is saying. They are so valuable that He lays down His life for them. Thieves and robbers come to steal and kill and destroy – but the Shepherd comes to lay down His life for the sheep because they are valuable to Him. The Bible tells us in many places that not only is Christ our inheritance – we are His inheritance, His treasure, and He was willing to die for us. This is pretty amazing. Jesus is saying 'I value My sheep so much that I become the sacrificial Lamb for them. I am willing to empty Myself, give up My rightful place and glory, and be made a sheep, as Philippians tells us, to save you'.

Again Jesus goes way beyond the metaphor here because as much as you might love your sheep or any animal, there really is a limit to the sacrifice you would be willing to make. I do love the animals we own in my own way, but if they fell into a vat of boiling oil, I might weep and wail and carry on – but I wouldn't jump in after them. And neither would my wife or daughters and they are real animal lovers. Now there are many reasons that Jesus died on the cross – the holiness of God, the justice of God – John Piper wrote a book outlining fifty reasons why Jesus died – but that isn't what this text highlights. This text emphasizes that Jesus went to the cross to demonstrate His great love for His sheep. He knows us to the bottom of our little black sheep hearts and yet He loves us enough to die for us. That is the gospel.

So what does this mean? Let me give you two things to go away with. First, if He is our Shepherd – **we must follow Him completely.** There is no area of our lives that are off limit to Him. As your Shepherd, He leads you in and out, He finds pasture for you and provides protection. Sheep are comprehensively dependent upon their shepherd. Left to themselves they die. You cannot say, 'Shepherd me here but don't shepherd me there'. Sometimes we are willing for Him to take control of some of the areas of our lives but not others. 'Lead me – feed me – protect me – but stay out this area – don't tell me how to spend my money or my time – don't intrude on my plans and dreams and ambitions'. His being a Shepherd and our being sheep mean that all our lives are bound up in His – His will, His way, His plans.

We not only must follow Him completely but **we must follow Him unconditionally.** Remember how Doug McMillan described lost sheep? '**...even when you find them it is very difficult to round them up. Lost sheep run to and fro in a panic.** And then he goes on to describe what you have to do. **'When you find it, you must seize it, throw it to the ground, tie its forelegs and its hind legs and put it on your shoulders and carry it back home.'** We've all probably seen that sweet picture of Jesus with a gentle smiling lamb on His shoulders – the lost one He left the ninety and nine to rescue. And it looks cute and cuddly and at peace. And the story in Luke tells us that the shepherd brings it home rejoicing. But what it doesn't show is what Jesus had to do. Do you realize what He did? He finds the lost sheep, grabs it, throws it to the ground, stunning it, ties up its legs so it can't run away, throws it over his shoulders and brings it home.

And here is what Jesus is saying to you. He is saying that over and over again you are going to think that you are getting treatment that is too rough. You are going to find yourself saying, 'Look at the things that are happening to me – everything seems to be going sideways – if I had a Shepherd this would never happen to me'. But you're a sheep, your understanding is limited. So often what the Shepherd has to do to the sheep, to rescue it, to save its life – the sheep doesn't understand. 'What's going on? I can't move. I've been hurt. Why did he hit me like that? Why did he throw me down? What's my shepherd doing to me? I know some of you are in this place right now. But Jesus is saying, 'You not only have to follow Me completely, but you have to follow Me unconditionally. You have to trust Me that everything that comes into your life I have ordained for your good and My glory. You have to follow Me unconditionally even when things don't look so good. Listen to Me, obey Me, trust Me, stay with Me – listen to the voice you know – My voice – all the other voices are robbers and thieves intent on your destruction – but I'm your Shepherd and I will take you in and out and give you all you need. I have saved you to give you life that is really life – abundant and overflowing. I am the Good Shepherd'.

*Our gracious God and Good Shepherd,  
Come and work repentance in our souls – show us the sin that keeps us from You so that we may hate it and leave it. Grant us to see what black little sheep hearts we have and the hope that is in Jesus. Melt our hearts by the majesty and mercy of God. Teach us to behold our Savior, His ability to save, His arms outstretched, His heart big for us. May we rest in His power and His love, may we commit our souls to Him without reserve, bear His image, obey His voice, pursue His pleasure and be for all eternity a monument to the power of His grace and love. Make us willing to be saved in His way, trusting nothing in ourselves but only in Jesus. Grant that we would not only receive Him but follow Him completely and trust Him unconditionally. Help us to delight in God through our great Shepherd and spread His joy through the gospel to all people we pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.*