

The Greatest Shepherd

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[0 : 00] So, Jesus opened the eyes of the blind man to see him, the Son of Man. This man who once was blind but now see, believes in and confess that Jesus is Lord in verse 38, and he worshiped Jesus.

This man's journey from physical blindness to seeing symbolized his transition from spiritual darkness to finding the light, the light of the world, Jesus.

The works of God in this man provide a powerful contrast that highlights a deep problem of people who are not aligned themselves with Jesus.

Many people claim they can see but still live in spiritual darkness and do not see the depth of their problem. So, Jesus said plainly in verse 39, For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.

It is Jesus' ministry to bring illumination and judgment. Jesus is still doing his work today. On one hand, his work is to illuminate, is an illumination of reception.

[1 : 15] For those willing to hold to him, they might see him. On the other hand, he lays out the judgment or rejection of those who claim they can see or know their way to God, but reject Jesus.

People who claim they can see or know their way to God are often very religious. They are quick to see and even expose their thoughts in others and have a very strong opinion of how others should behave, but see no thoughts in themselves.

They are sheathed to point out how others are not aligned themselves with their law, but they are blinded by their religiousosity and very busy for freeing religious activities.

Jesus addressed the parable about the sheep pen to the Pharisee, the religious elite in Jesus' time. Knowing that this parable addressed to a group of highly religious people, are you less interested because you think, I'm not religious?

Sometimes when I read the Bible and see that Jesus is saying things to the Pharisee, and I'm not a Pharisee, maybe I can skip that paragraph. Recently, the staff has been going through a book by Dr. Kim Keller called Santa Church, and there's a list to define a religious person.

[2 : 38] I find the list very helpful for my self-reflection and wonder how much you align with these indicators as a religious person. Do you think that I obey, therefore I am accepted?

Is the fear and insecurity what motivates you to do whatever you are doing? Do you obey God to get things from him? When circumstances in your life go wrong, are you angry at God or yourself because you believe that anyone good deserves a comfortable life?

Do you find it essential to think of and present yourself as a good person? And do you get upset or devastated when you are criticized? When your good person's self-image is threatened, will you occupy yourself to destroy those threats at all costs?

Do you pray mainly to control circumstances? And does your prayer life consist primarily of petitions and only heats up when you are in need? Do you feel more confident when you live up to your standard, but are prone to be proud and sympathetic to people who fail?

However, when you are not living up to your standards, do you feel humble and not confident, thinking of yourself as a failure? These questions are a helpful and confronting reminder for me because I can see that I am religious in many ways.

[4 : 14] Religious persons tend to bolster their sense of worth by convincing themselves that they are better than other people, which leads them to exclude and condemn others. Their self-worth ties in with their performance.

And Jesus often speaks against this kind of behavior in his teaching. Jesus adjusts this parable of the sheep pen to the Pharisee, but not exclusive to the Pharisee.

A parable or figure of speech often has layers of meanings, and with the deepest meaning, not easy to understand unless it is explained. A straightforward reading of the parable in chapter 10, verse 1 to 5, tells us about the relationship between the shepherd and his sheep.

The shepherd enters through the sheep pen through the gates legitimately and calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. The sheep listen to his voice, and when he brought them out, all of his own, he went ahead of them, and his sheep follows him because they know his voice.

This description is a language of intimacy between the shepherd and the sheep. The sheep is not easily found in modern-day sheep farming, where dogs and motorbikes drove the sheep in mass production.

[5 : 35] The true shepherd that Jesus speaks of here takes excellent care of their sheep by proximity, keeping them close inside day and night, going ahead of them to lead them during the day to their nourishment, and guide them by the gatekeeper overnight.

The shepherd knows his sheep intimately. From what the Pharisees have done to the man born blind in chapter 9, they are obviously not the true and good shepherd that is in the parable.

Also, by their own nature, they are not going to identify themselves as a thief or robber either. They do not understand how the parable is related to them, so Jesus went further in verse 7.

Therefore, Jesus says again, to highlight two aspects of the parable, the gate and the shepherd. Jesus breaks down what he is saying to highlight that fundamentally.

It's not about them that he is talking about. The parable is directed at Jesus himself, the true and good shepherd of God's sheep. He told them in verse 7 to 10, Jesus is the only way to be saved and have the life that God intended for his creation.

[7 : 08] As he reiterates in chapter 14, verse 6, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Last week in chapter 8, verse 31, Jesus said, If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

Jesus is the truth. When you know Jesus, he brings you to the Father. Jesus restored our relationship with our Creator, our Father. Jesus will set you free to worship God and enjoy life.

The parable in chapter 10 is written for me and you. If you think that you can see your way to God by your obedience. When you seek to be right with God through your morality and religion, you are not seeking God for your salvation.

What you are doing is you are using God as a means to achieve your salvation. I passed the half a century mark a few years back, and I am going to be 55 in a couple of years.

[8 : 15] I confess publicly to be a Christian over 40 years ago. John 10.10. I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

It's one of the first of the Bible that I memorized and go to in the last 30 years or so. My dad and his brothers have been running a family business in Hong Kong since the early 70s.

And they were about to branch out to the U.S. and European market in the early 80s. And one of my uncle and family will go to New York, and another family will go to L.A.

So there was a big family gathering, and all the children were asked what they wanted to do when they grew up. Most of my cousins would say, I would help my dad to run business and be successful businessmen.

A couple of my cousins also say, oh, I like to study, so I become excellent in academic achievement. And I told everyone in that meeting that I want to be an evangelist, a minister.

[9 : 15] Whoa. It sounds admirable. It seems like I would have the calling to serve God from when I was very, very young as a teen. But the reason I say that at that meeting was to embarrass my parents.

It was more like a payback because I was resentful that my dad put all his time and energy into the business. And speaking highly of my cousin and never take interest in me as a person.

I asked God many times in my life about the promise that he gave me in John 10.10. You say you have come that I may have life and have it to the full. So why do I often feel so empty and unloved?

Why do I have to work so hard for acceptance and recognition from my parents? The two people who are on earth should have unconditionally loved me, towards me, and know me best.

It's only about five to ten years ago that I realized the life that Jesus promised was not one for me to earn. My salvation is a gift of God.

[10 : 20] It happens because of his grace. It's nothing to do with me. I was robbed of God's joy because I was not listening to Jesus. I was not going through Jesus to be saved.

I was striving to save myself all these times. The abundant life that Jesus promised was for him to give because he is the greatest shepherd.

Only Jesus can get us to the Father. Only through him that we will come in and go out and find pasture. And from a lesser to greater understanding, we get life through him because he is a gate.

And he can give abundant life because he is the good shepherd that lays down his life for his sheep. Jesus mentioned five times that he lays down his life for his sheep between verse 11 to 18.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep knows me just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.

[11 : 28] And I lay down my life for the sheep. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down from my own accord.

I have authority to lay it down and authority to get up again. This command I received from my Father. It is a distinguishing characteristic of the good shepherd that he is ruling to lay down his life for the sheep.

Jesus repeated this characteristic many times to show that it is the central theme of his teaching. And I have missed this crucial point for such a long time.

We think our obedience is the key to God's acceptance. Our obedience to Jesus' teaching is essential as we follow Jesus. It is a fallacy and a fantasy if someone say they are a Christian, a follower of Christ, but do not hold to his teaching.

But obedience is not our tool to save ourselves or earn favor with God. Jesus fulfilled all the commands of his Father so that Father's love for us is always secure.

[12 : 42] God's love for us is as secure as Father's love for Jesus because he laid down his life for the sheep. Knowing fully well what sheep are like.

Sheeps are not adorable or likable. I encourage you in a holiday to go to a farm and do some visits and look at the sheep pen. And when you spend some time with sheep, you discover sheep are smelly and often wandering around.

They have no sense of danger and repeatedly put themselves in situations that they should not be in. I read this recently. It says no one could know us better than Jesus.

He knows every time we have hated, everything we have contemplated, and the feel we have articulated. And he loves us anyway.

No one has been with us longer than Jesus, who with the Father needed us together in the room of our mother. No one has been truer to us than Jesus, telling us what we did not want to hear, always true to the truth.

[13 : 50] No one has shown more commitment to our good than Jesus, who traveled further to redeem us, suffered more indignity, and drew more significant pain, make better promise, and in every way show himself, and in every way show himself worthy of all we have and are.

Oh, how he loves us. We owe no one more than what we owe Jesus. We can have no suspicion about the motive or intention of Jesus.

We cannot distrust him. We cannot resent him. The love we have for Jesus ought to be the nearest thing that is to crystal clear purity in this murky world.

We live in a world of uncertainty, but we can be sure about Jesus. When the people questioned Jesus whether he was the Messiah back in verse 24, he answered, My sheep, listen to my voice.

I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.

[15 : 08] No one will snatch Jesus out of his hand because Jesus holds firmly to us. It's like holding on a pen. And because no one can snatch Jesus' follower out of the Father's hand, Jesus and Father keep us hand in hand into eternal life, and no one can snatch us out of that.

Jesus' body and blood brought our life, and his body and blood bear us up on the journey to the land where he is king.

Jesus is our Messiah. Jesus is our shepherd. He is our friend. He is the only one who can save us because he is the Son of God. Jesus declared in verse 30 that I and the Father are one.

And the people pick up stone to stone him because he is claiming to be God. But there is Jesus' true identity. Jesus and the Father are one because Jesus is the Son of God.

Jesus, the good shepherd, has come to bind up the broken, bring back the scatter, and return the lost sheep to the flock of God.

[16 : 25] To leverage his love on us while satisfying his divine justice, Jesus took our punishment upon himself so that we may eternally be part of his flock.

Only the Son of God can achieve this substitution. Jesus, the promised Messiah, the Son of God, came to care for the sheep and lead them back to God.

His great concern for the sheep was in his willingness to do what was best for them. And like the people merely hired for the job, the true shepherd would act in the best interest of the flock, despite the risk.

Because he owned the sheep, he leads them. He would never abandon them and runs away because he cares about everything for the sheep.

Like sheep, everyone of us has wandered away from our Creator. We think we know better and we can see our way to God, but we often rebel against his right to rule over us, even after we have started to follow him.

[17 : 35] Every human deserves the full punishment of God's law required for our waywardness, which is death. But God has decided to express his glory by rescuing those who neither deserve rescue nor can bring themselves to salvation, to safety.

All that is required of anyone who he loves is that we turn to Jesus from sin, to listen to his voice and follow him.

Jesus' word in this teaching should be repeated again and again in our hearts and in our mind. 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 knew his voice. Whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture.

I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish.

[18 : 43] No one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. The abundant life is the eternal life that Christ gives to all who hold to his teaching and put their trust in him.

Eternal life is a present possession of all believers to be enjoyed and developed forever. Its main feature is not in the duration of time, but the blessedness and heavenliness of the character of the sheep.

How do we respond to God? Will we submit to him like the man born blind or faintly try to stone him like the Jews in Jesus' time?

Will we believe what he says or try to arrest him for it? The correct response to God's salvation spoken by Jesus is faith and trust, praise and worship and thanks and celebration.

Perhaps you would like to respond to God in this way, but your sin makes you think God will never receive you. Or maybe it caused you to struggle with assurance about your salvation.

[20 : 05] We must look away from ourselves and look to God the Father and God the Son. The Father, Son, and the Spirit is one who saves.

The Father is all-wise and all-powerful. The Son is all-convincing and all-satisfying. The Father and Son have the power to save us.

The Spirit will work the fruits of the true salvation into our life as we bear God's name. God's name is at stake in our salvation and our eternal life.

Christ as Son cares more about glorifying and honoring his Father's name than any of us. With Christ being our greatest shepherd, we are saved. Prophets 8, verse 35 to 36 says, For those who find me find life and receive favor from the Lord, but those who fail to find me harm themselves.

All who hate me love death. If you love life, look for and take hold of Jesus, and you may have life and have it abundantly.