



x

1 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." 6 This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

7 So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

19 There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. 20 Many of them said, "He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?" 21 Others said, "These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

The Division of the Shepherd

It never ceases to amaze me at how much people like Jesus. Other than constantly taking his name in vain, you never hear someone dissing Jesus. They really like him. There are three basic categories of response to Jesus. First, there are the genuine believers who understand Jesus and are enamored with him. Our goal is to worship him with our entire lives.

The second group of people are those who think they are believers. They like Jesus because he came to send them to Heaven. They don't turn their lives over to him but they would never say anything bad about Jesus. After all, he is Jesus.

And the last category are those who don't claim to be Christians but still like Jesus because he was a good guy. They see Jesus like an effective community organizer. He helped people. He was kind to people. He taught them to be nice to one another. These people don't dislike Jesus because they see him simply as a milquetoast, teddy bear, lovable kind of guy. There's really nothing to dislike about him, in their opinion.

They reason they all like Jesus is because they don't know Jesus. The real Jesus of history and of the Bible is nothing like the Jesus of their wild imagination. Their Jesus would never say something like this.

51 Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. 52 For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. 53 They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” (Luke 12:51-53)

The fact is that Jesus is divisive. Verse 19 says it plainly. *There was again a division among the Jews because of these words.* They were divided because of his words. Now understand that this was not a division on an intellectual level. They were divided about the very essence of Jesus' identity. Some thought he was demon possessed and insane while others held out the possibility that he was who he said he was.

This is what the average person is missing. They don't even have enough information about Jesus to dislike him. Can you imagine anyone today saying that Jesus was demon possessed or insane? I have never heard anything remotely like this because people are either too politically correct or else too ignorant to say such a thing—or both could be true.

But the Good Shepherd divides in more ways than one. The very nature of a sheep pen is divisive. Have you ever thought of it that way before? This is the Good Shepherd passage, not the sheep and the goats, but when you think about Jesus and sheep you can't help but think about the goats. Some people are sheep and some are goats. The sheep are permitted to enter the sheepfold but the rest cannot get through the gate. This means that the Good Shepherd is divisive.

What difference does this make? We'll get to the good part about being a sheep in a bit, but why is the division of the shepherd a good thing? First of all, it just has to be that way because if everyone was a sheep, it would degrade Christ's sacrifice. Christ's sacrifice is both the greatest gift and the greatest injustice all rolled into one. For God to take on human flesh and then be

brutally murdered is the most unfair and unjust act in human history. This transgression and mistreatment will never be equaled. And to think that someone could bypass the giver to get the gift of eternal life treats Christ's sacrifice as nothing. Division is part of God's love and justice. In order to have sheep there will be goats.

But you can use this in conversations with people. Once again we start with the idea that the vast majority of people do not have a full understanding of who Jesus is. This is why all of Tim Farrell's sermons are titled, *Who is Jesus?* But it's true. If even those of us within a Bible believing church have an incomplete picture of our Savior, how much more those who not yet know him.

So in your personal conversations with people, you could raise the issue of divisiveness. Now that sounds like I am saying that I want you to tell others that Jesus is not as great as you thought he was. That's the challenge with presenting a balanced viewpoint of anything. But it's kind of like a back door to the bad news of wrath and judgment. Take the Luke 12 passage for example. You could work this verse into a conversation with someone and ask them, "Did you know that Jesus came to divide the world?" What do you think about that? Notice that you have not started with the premise that they are going to hell. I am never opposed to the bad news that comes before the good news, but this may be a slightly softer way of sharing the bad news. Jesus came to divide us, father against son, mother against daughter. Ask them what they think about that. Or you could use the sheep fold passage here in John 10 and explain that not everyone get into the sheep fold. Jesus is divisive. Truth is divisive. The truth has always divided people and it will always divide people. Don't fear this division. Don't be ashamed of the truth.

The Gift of the Shepherd

Now that sounds a lot better than the division of the shepherd, would you agree? But remember that without division, there is no gift. Verses 7-10 speak of this amazing gift.

7 So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

The first description of the gift is the word saved. But even that simple word that we have heard a thousand times is not always understood by believers. We use this word all of the time. We say, "Hey did you hear that John got saved last week?" When we share our testimony we tell people that Jesus saved us when we were 12 years old or whenever it was. But when you see the word saved the key question is *what are we saved from?*

Even many pastors don't get this right. I find this especially true when you combine it with Jesus' promise of abundant life. *I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.* Haven't you heard gospel presentations where the main idea is to have an abundant life? Now believers do have abundant life, and we'll get to that in a moment, but when you lead with this idea, often the gospel presentation goes places you don't want it to go. In other words, there can be a strong overemphasis on having this wonderful abundant life to the point that Jesus, the Savior and giver

of this life, gets lost. Instead of an offer of new life it sounds more like an enhanced life, a more meaningful and fulfilled life.

The elders and their families had a nice retreat last week at a camp up north. Many of us helped lead the three worship sessions all weekend which made it more fun and meaningful. But we had an interesting thing happen with the speaker. The first real warning sign came in his second and final message when he put this Bible verse on the screen.

1 Thessalonians 5:23

I pray that God, who gives peace, will make you completely holy. And may your spirit, soul, and body be kept healthy and faultless until our Lord Jesus Christ returns.

Unless you know the verse you may not see anything wrong with it. Here's the same verse in the ESV.

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The first translation is the Contemporary English Version and the only significant difference is that it added the word 'healthy.' I have no idea why they added that word. It's not in the original language and it's not in any other translation that I could find. I thought the CEV might be a paraphrase but then I found this description.

The CEV is not a paraphrase; it is an accurate and faithful translation of the original manuscripts.¹

Uh, not it's not "an accurate and faithful translation of the original manuscripts." So this alone tells you that not all Bibles are created equally. By the way, even though I really like the ESV, the more I read it and especially as I memorize it, I find a lot of places where they seemed to have translated it more complicated than was necessary. Anyway, the point is that there is no one perfect translation but some are clearly better than others.

But the main point I am making is that this speaker intentionally picked out this translation just because it had the word 'healthy' in it. He had to go out of his way to choose it and put it in his talk. Karen and I were kind of shaking our heads and wondering what was up until he mentioned a Christian cult that he was learning from—Bethel Church in Redding, California. Now the speaker did not think it was a cult but I am convinced that it is. The quickest way to summarize it is in the extremes. It is extremely charismatic. It is extremely centered on the prosperity gospel. And just for good measure, it has a long list of extremely wacky and unbiblical ideas and practices. So here we are at a Christian camp listening to cultish teaching.

Now in defense of the camp itself, this was a speaker from an outside group and was in no way endorsed by the camp. And the funny thing is that for the past 3-4 months the elders have been studying this cult at our elder meetings because it is growing in popularity and influence. So we were utterly shocked that this elder retreat we were being spoon fed the very same cultish teaching that we had just been studying.

So what did we do? We stoned the speaker and set burned the chapel to the ground. ;-) What we did was to immediately gather all 31 of us together and asked them to meet back around the campfire for a talk. We told them exactly why the teaching was unbiblical. Even many of the teens recognized the false gospel and were able to articulate compelling reasons why it was wrong. So in the end, it really was an outstanding teachable moment. Never in my wildest dreams would I have planned for cultish beliefs to be taught at our elder retreat, but that was God's plan for us.

So a guy like that is the classic example of someone who greatly ruins Jesus' teaching on the abundant life. That is not the gospel. We are not saved so that we can be healthy and wealthy. So back to the question, what are we saved from? There are several answers to this question but one answer that is most accurate, in my opinion. You could say that we are saved from our sin and death, and that is true. You could say that we are saved from an eternity in hell, and that is also true. But even then you need to ask why anyone is sent to hell.

John the Baptist answered this question quite clearly.

The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him (John 3:35-36).

Those who do not believe in Jesus have the wrath of God remaining on them. Therefore, to be saved is ultimately to be saved from God's wrath. God's wrath is what sends people to hell and God's wrath is what we are saved from. We are forgiven of our sin by the blood of Christ which also satisfies the Father's wrath.

So those who enter through the gate are saved but they also are given abundant life. The topic of abundant life could be a whole sermon by itself. So far, we have established what it is not but not yet what it is. The word abundant in the original language means about what you think it would. It means extraordinary and overflowing. It means to have life in abundance, more than you need, a super abundance of a fulfilled life. Of course abundant life is tied up in eternal life. I would say that our abundant life is mostly our heavenly dwelling and not mostly this life. That's where the prosperity teachers get it wrong by trying to cram a perfectly healthy and wealthy life into this earthly existence. So the abundant life is mostly our eternal life but it's not only our eternal life. So the question is, do you have an abundant life right now?

Now don't get me wrong. I am not saying that health and wealth are wrong. They can be *part* of the abundant life but they are not the *essence* of the abundant life. As a matter of fact, do you know what I think keeps me from a more abundant life? My health and my wealth. Work this through with me for a minute. I think you would agree that the abundant life is mostly what happens to us in eternity. It's the abundance found in our eternal life. And what is it that makes our eternal life so abundant? It's not the fact that we live forever or any of the other benefits of heaven. What makes eternity so abundant is not what, but rather a who. Jesus is what will make heaven so grand so he must be the center of the abundant life in heaven.

Are you with me so far? So then what keeps me from experiencing the abundant life found in Christ here in this life? It's my health and wealth, and of course when I say wealth, I mean it in a relative sense. The poorest among us are insanely wealthy compared to the rest of the world. The comforts of this world interfere with my experience of Jesus. If I really don't need to pray for my daily bread, then how can I feel a sense of utter dependency on Christ? Now I am not asking for cancer and bankruptcy. I won't go that far, but I do believe that our relative comforts keep us from the abundance and the abundant life. But here's the crazy part. What do we tend to complain about the most? Our lack of money and our aches and pains. Our relative health and wealth keep us from experiencing the abundant life because we have too much of it but they also keep us from the abundant life because we feel like we have too little.

You can add anything you want into the definition of the abundant life but the foundation and the center of it all—both now and for all eternity—is Christ. So it's up to us to not allow our enjoyment of the gifts to diminish the giver. And it's up to us to be completely content with the gifts we do have instead of always thinking we need more. Jesus came that we may have life and have it abundantly. But if we don't have it, guess who is to blame?

The Possession of the Shepherd

Let me read verses 11 and 12 and see if you can see what the shepherd possesses.

11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees...

Did you see it? It's subtle but it's there. The hired hand does not own the sheep and therefore he flees at the first sign of trouble. So if the hired hand does not own the sheep then it follows that the Good Shepherd does. Jesus own us.

At the retreat last weekend one of the songs we sang was *In Christ Alone*. The last verse may be my favorite.

No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath

Can you finish the last line? Jesus commands my destiny. Does Jesus command your destiny? Here's the thing. Jesus commands your destiny whether or not you acknowledge the fact. Sheep are his. They belong to him. He owns us. If it were anyone else in all of human history, that would be human trafficking and hideous slavery. But since it is the Savior of the world who owns us, is the greatest possible kind of relationship.

The Voice of the Shepherd

But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

Do you remember that video I played for you in the first week in John chapter ten when the shepherd called his own sheep when no one else could? When Rod was in Norway last month he had the exact same experience! Several people could not call the sheep but they immediately followed their master's voice.

I noticed something interesting about this passage. Jesus said that his sheep *will* hear his voice and *will* follow him. There's no "might follow" him, but it's a definite "will follow." This is the definition of what it means to be a sheep, to be a genuine believer. We will hear and follow the shepherd's voice.

Rich Maurer
September 11, 2016

¹ <https://www.bible.com/versions/303-cevdcus06-contemporary-english-version>