

St. John 10:1-10

Dear Friends in Christ,

While looking through a file back in February, I came across the draft of a sermon I think I preached around 36 years ago - 1981. I think. In the sermon, I stated, "Consider all the new cult groups and religions floating around today. Jesus would say these...are practicing thievery. They're robbing people of true peace of mind and everlasting happiness." There were some people here who were not real happy with me. I do understand. I really do. The desire to make everything acceptable - everything but what Scriptures teach - the desire is a very powerful force.

After that, I listed some examples of the **pop movements** of the day: Reverend Ike, Dr. Moon, *Transcendental Meditation*, *EST*, *I Found it*. And now I have to add to the list such as *Promise Keepers*, *What Would Jesus Do*, *The Prayer of Jabez*, *The Purpose Driven Life*, *Your Best Life Now*, the Contemporary Worship Movement, just to mention some of the more prominent ones of the present and recent past. It's a long, long line, friends.

Also, back in February, I saw a commercial for a new, innovative cell phone technology. The commercial noted that nothing had changed in cell phone technology for 10 whole years. Imagine that! We've been living with 10 year old plus cell phone dinosaurs! We have become extremely shallow, horribly distracted by things that "glitter" and that offer little if anything, to the quality of life, and we have become incapable of any real process of thinking through things. No doubt the new phones will further help "others" examine your life style, your financial dealings and your travel plans. Isn't that exciting?!?

Somebody's got our number, as the saying goes - and it's not simply the people of this world. There's a bigger part of the picture. Scriptures say it this way: "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Eph. 6:12) The forces of hell!

I'm going to spend a few minutes examining . . .

THE ABUNDANT LIFE

I. This Is for Sheep.

"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. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. (vv. 1-2)

Fairly simple, isn't it? There is a "door" to the sheepfold. A door. A way in. A way out. Only the shepherd has access to the door. The watchman, that is, the keeper of the door, knows the identity of the shepherd and opens the door for him. Anyone else who tries to climb in by another way is up to no good. Jesus said, "that man is a thief and robber."

In fact, Jesus goes on to say . . .

To him (the shepherd) the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. (vv. 3-5)

We are the sheep, the ones who know Jesus' voice, the ones He has called. We're the sheep. The vulnerable. The helpless. And the Shepherd, our Lord Jesus, comes for us. Again, "he calls them by name and leads them out...he goes before them...the sheep will follow...for they know his voice." David describes what happens as we follow: "The Lord is my Shepherd...he makes me lie down (gives me rest)...He leads me...He restores me." (Ps. 23:1-3) He comes for that which suffers pain and guilt as the result of transgressions, sins, iniquities - reflecting on the strange places we have been - wondering why - wishing we had not.

Listen again: "He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." It's the faith the Holy Spirit has worked in us to know Jesus as Lord and Sin Payment. He knows us by name. He knew our names before the creation of the world. He knew us and called us to be His forever and ever through faith in Christ.

II. Who Know the Way.

So Jesus again said to them, "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 listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy." (vv. 7-10a)

So you're asking, "How can Jesus be both the door and the Shepherd Who leads His sheep. Well, Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (Jn. 14:6) Jesus is both, at the same time, Shepherd and Door. In these verses He points to those who claim His name but were and are thieves who come "only to steal and kill and destroy."

P. E. Kretzmann spoke to this moment in time with these very powerful words:

False teachers...will not come with the pure Gospel...but will make use of schemes and stratagems to deceive the sheep and inveigle them [that is, persuade them by deception and flattery] into listening to them." (P. E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary on the Bible*, New Testament, Vol. I., p. 467)

Dr. Martin Luther spoke to this moment in time with these very powerful words:

Now the Gospel is so tender and precious, it cannot endure any addition or extra doctrines...the opponents want them, therefore they are thieves and murderers...they are called thieves for this reason, since they steal in secretly, and come with fair speeches, as St. Paul says in Rom. 16:18, with a great show, and also with true sheep's clothing, pretend to have special faithfulness and love for the souls...(Ibid., p. 467)

You know as well as I that at this moment the Gospel has mostly been set aside for marketing designs that grab people. I recall for you a local church letter from 17 years ago that described the contemporary approach this way: "This new thought-wave focuses on more effective ways to offer a life-changing connection with Jesus Christ to the generation born after 1945." ***Focuses on more effective ways???*** More than the pure, unadulterated inspired, inerrant, authoritative Word of God; the Scriptures??? More than what Paul says, "the gospel...is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..."??? These new designs are not simply bad. They're demonic! They are the dreams and schemes of thieves!

III. For Abundant Life.

But with Jesus there is no dream or scheme. With Jesus there is no magic formula for your fantastic, incredible, fun-filled life. However He does make a promise. Some of you won't like it, but He does make a promise for life here: "In the world you will have tribulation." (16:33) In the world. This world. Trib-u-la-tion. But there is also this promise: "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." (Jn. 10:10b) And that, you see, connects to another promise: "But take heart; I have overcome the world." (Jn. 16:33b)

Faith in Christ gives us the Abundant Life. It's not of this world. There is no abundant life in this world. The Abundant Life Jesus gives is connected to this promise: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me shall never die." (Jn. 11:25-26) The Good Shepherd leads us through this "valley of the shadow of death." (Ps. 23:4) As Isaiah says,

"But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities... All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned - every one - to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Is. 53:5-6)

And if you believe that - if you trust that Christ is your Good Shepherd Whose suffering and death has paid for every sin, then you have abundant life. Eternal life. As David says, "Surely goodness and mercy (God's goodness and mercy that sees us through the hard and miserable times) shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (Ps. 23:6) That's where we want to be, isn't it?

In all seriousness, if all we had were Bibles and could offer Baptism and the Lord's Supper, the All Purpose room as our only meeting place (without the kitchen, of course) and, let's say no organ or piano or any other musical instrument (we would have to sing a capella; the choir would have to sing a capella) - if that's all we had - Bibles, Baptism, the Supper - and a place to meet would you still be here?

What is the worth of the Word of God in your life; the only place on this earth that directs you to The Abundant Life; the Word - Jesus.

So, how would your life, apart from the Word, work?

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

May 7, 2017

St. John 10:1-10: ***“The Abundant Life”***

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II. Who Know the Way.

III. For Abundant Life.

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