

The Good Shepherd
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Eastertide Sunday Two 2022
Text: John 10:17-18

In my devotions I came to John 10 and, of course, Jesus' teaching on the Good Shepherd. The first thing I noticed is that vv. 1-6 covered the topic but **they did not understand** His allegory, or figure of speech. I believe that we are to take this "they" to refer to the Pharisees. So Jesus proceeds to explain Himself to the Pharisees a second way (vv.7-15). Thereafter, He expands on the nature of His sheepfold—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.** (v.16) This assertion seems to answer an earlier scornful question (John 7:35) of the Jews, **Will He go to the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?** Just as the Lord encouraged Paul, **I have much people in this city** (Acts 18:10, meaning Corinth); the Lord has many "sheep." Jesus then says, **For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 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 of my Father.** (vv.17-18). This is a very clear allusion to His death and resurrection; it fits with Peter's assertion in Acts 2:23-4 **this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death because it was not possible for Him to be held by it.**

The very next verse accentuates **again a division among the Jews because of these words** (v.19) **Many of them said, "He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to Him?" Others said, "These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"** (vv. 21-22) Exodus 4:11 reads: **The Lord said to him (Moses), "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes *him* mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? God owns that He is in charge of such things! But, later in Psalms (146:7-8), God declares that He, not a demon, opens the eyes of the blind:**

**7 Who executes justice for the oppressed;
Who gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets the prisoners free.**

**8 The Lord opens the eyes of the blind;
The Lord raises up those who are bowed down;
The Lord loves the righteous;**

The implication of this is that the demonic attribution is a flat out contradiction of Scripture and, not to be overlooked, a claim to divinity all in one! And that is no trifle, or coincidence.

Please note the emphasis on blindness. We are still in the controversy of Jesus' Sabbath healing of the man born blind which begins in Chapter 9:1ff:

As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. 2 And His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "*It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but *it* was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.* 4 We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5 While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world."

As He passed by strikes us as rather mundane, matter of fact. The disciples' tone is casual were they concerned at all if the man overheard their discussion? **He saw a man blind from birth** is an astonishingly difficult condition to heal—something people believed that only God could do! How does one "see" a **man blind from birth** and not just another blind man? The discursive, wide-ranging conversation demolishes a folk proverb which ran thus: affliction was seen as a result sin—of either individual or parental culpability. Blindness was a curse in Jewish society; but we already know from the revelation of Exodus 4:11 that blindness is a condition—except when men are struck with blindness such as in the incident of gang rape in the Lot narrative. And while blindness is a metaphor for spiritual blindness; here we are dealing with something literal and real. . . a case as it were.

Jesus' take is both compassionate and hopeful pressing towards redemption: the man is blind **that the works of God might be displayed in him**. It was a blessing *intended to be enacted* at this point in time, on this very occasion. It is one of the **works of him who sent me . . . as long as I am in the world; I am the light of the world**, one of an uncountable number. (v.5) To prove this, Jesus heals, or delivers him, brings him out of both his natural and spiritual darkness. The first was his condition from birth, but the latter is the common condition of fallen man, metaphorically speaking. We are all born in need of enlightenment which is a twin to being born-again. If you are born-again, you are saved and if you are saved, by the grace and mercy of God, you are claimed as one of His sheep—one for whom He died to liberate you from sin . . . and to bring you home!

This blind man, a sheep, was an afflicted and oppressed man. Afflicted by congenital blindness, he is thus viewed as a form of human refuse—someone to be despised as well as pitied. However, in the twisted theology of his day (he must have sinned, or his parents did: *it was obvious, the man was blind*). Socially oppressed, being so degraded in the eyes of all who saw him seeking alms. Oppressed by parents too timid to defend him. Perhaps they were so guilty and defeated by that guilt, they had no courage in the cupboard, no further mercy to dispense. The religious leaders really had no time for him, he was dismissed. Refuse beside the road of life, stinking humanity in a smelly place, a piece of human litter as they actually said, **conceived in utter sin**. Perhaps, then, he was conceived out of wedlock and everyone knew his background (a conjecture). But they had neither love, nor place for him; it was beneath their dignity to associate with such trash. He lived off alms, was notoriously poor—had no wealth that they, the scribes and Pharisees, could steal, or abscond with. Maybe he was only useful to them as an occasion to show benevolence, a display to bolster their reputation.

Beggars were the homeless in that day—some were carried to their stations, others guided by cane, walled streets and, perhaps, a friendly voice here and there. These matters made up his “prison walls;” he knew little beyond those walls until he saw the Messiah—at first, seeing unaware; then worshipping openly with true sight. I unite this episode with the Jericho healing of Bartimaeus who, when he regained his sight, arose and followed Jesus, i.e. chose a life of worship.

This blind man’s healing is an act of justice—a divine rescue disguised as restoration? Just as God feeds the hungry, sets prisoners free . . . he opens the eyes of the blind. All objects of cruel oppression, those who are bowed down, or marginalized—sojourners, aliens, widows and the fatherless. “Out-of-the-way sinners,” as Spurgeon calls them, and they were his specific target population (the “lost sheep” of Israel) those were they *that Jesus came for* and this man fits the bill! They are the recruits that we should seek as well. Knowing that the Lord favors such as these (the sick, suffering, afflicted), we may presume on his assistance to win them back to God through us. We should approach them and ask them questions like “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” We should share that we do, and that is why we want to share our faith with you! See 2 Cor. 4:15:

15 For all things *are* for your sakes, so that the grace which is [a]spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.

Witnessing to others is like gathering a crowd for a parade, for a happy day!

6 When He had said this, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his eyes, 7 and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which is translated, Sent). So he went away and washed, and came *back* seeing.

These details I would acknowledge are what appear to be a common folk remedy for eye infections then but it is coupled with a commandment: “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” This command the man receives by faith, and is obedient to do *and, behold, he is miraculously healed.*

We now learn that he was a blind beggar—a feature, a piece of the surroundings—and he is recognized as such. They questioned his identity. “Is this the blind beggar who used to sit street side near the Temple? Yes, it is he. No, but someone like him.” **He kept saying, “I am the man.” “Then how were your eyes opened?” “The man Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Silloam’ (meaning “sent”) So I went and washed and received my sight.**

They brought to the Pharisees the man who formerly had been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made mud and opened his eyes. (Two infractions of Sabbath law!) . . . **This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath. . . . How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?** They were again divided over Jesus’ character and identity. **What do you say about him, since he opened your eyes? He said, “He’s a prophet.”** That was as far as his faith, and religion (as a religious outcast) extended; he would have been excluded from the Temple as a notorious sinner *being blind!* This textures the opening discussion: who is it that is actually “blind” here. The blind beggar would be a prime out-of-the-way candidate for salvation. The Pharisees did not believe the beggar’s testimony and called for his parents and now we learn that he is at least 30 years of age. **Ask him, he is of age. He will speak for himself.** (v.21) His parents were too afraid to vouch for him such was the antipathy of the Jews towards Jesus. **So for a second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, “Give glory to God. We know**

that this man is a sinner. Of course, they knew no such thing! Any other man, yes, but Jesus wasn't just another man.

With ascending boldness, the man who had been an outcast all his life began to stand up to his "betters." **Here's what I know, that though I was blind, now I can see. What did he do? I have already told you and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples? They reviled him, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. . . but as for this man we do not know where he comes from."** Once again they are wide of the mark for assuredly the man wasn't a disciple. He knew nothing of Jesus' whereabouts (see v. 12). But the Pharisees knew about Jesus' background. The man perceiving an opening, takes it: **Why? This is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from and yet he opened my eyes.**(something God alone does!) **We know God doesn't listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshipper of God and does His will, God listens to him.** This is astounding effrontery—sassy/snarky! This untutored man is teaching sound doctrine to the religious leaders. **Never since the world been has it been heard that any has opened the eyes of a man born blind. If *this man were not from God, he could do nothing!*** They know that but cannot admit the truth; it smarted too much. So they retort, **You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us. And (erring in judgment) they cast him out.** Apparently, cancelling others is a thing of the past as well as of the present.

Now the story is so humanly gripping that we are tempted to miss the fact that what is unfolding before us is the recovery of a lost sheep by his good shepherd. Hardly coincidental, or accidental.

All this is a lead-in to Jesus' introduction as the Good Shepherd. Note this: **Jesus heard that they had cast him out** (expelled him as it were from the sheepfold of Israel!) **and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?** Now this was Jesus' preferred title as the Messiah! **He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I might believe in him?** I feel that the translators in trying to clarify one point end up obscuring another. **And who is he, Lord, that I might believe in him?** This rendering has the man unconsciously acknowledging Jesus as Lord and that is congruent with his rising awareness! More suggestive of the ultimate conclusion! **You have seen him; and it is he who is speaking with you.** (v. 37) **He said, Lord, I believe," and he worshipped him.** The blind man saw that Jesus was the Son of Man, Son of God, the Holy One of Israel, **and he worshipped him.** This puts the lie to the school of

objectors who maintain that Jesus never invited worship of himself as God. It happens right then and there!

Jesus then says something very profound about this whole business. The recovery of lost sheep is the judgment of the world! **For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.** On many levels this is not an apparent truth. And some of the Pharisees, Jesus' audience in this passage, were nearby **and heard these things** *and caught the drift of Jesus' words.* **Are we also blind?** This exchange happens whenever Jesus finds his lost sheep but we can't say precisely where it occurred. **If you were blind** (literally, which you are not), **you would have no guilt; but now that you say, "We see," your guilt remains.** The chapter headings (i.e. CH. 10) are singularly unhelpful at this junction because the stream of narrative move straight on: **Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in another way, that man is a thief and a robber.** This doesn't reach to the level of snatching, and scattering (which appears in v. 12) but that is because Jesus escalates their indictment to activity of wolves who are sheep killers and devourers. The Good Shepherd rescues the sheep from the malice of marauders which is the unhappy nature of the Pharisees. They are not servants of God, but are self-serving, abusive and eat the sheep. That figure is a representation of the whole shabby business we have just reviewed! Their treatment of the man born blind, but rescued by God through the Good Shepherd is a study in contrasts. Their hatred (mingled with pride and fear) of Jesus is without bounds *and they are so into it that they cannot see it for what it is.*

How are we to take this **entering the sheepfold through the door**, except as conformity to the prophetic path, as revealed in scripture? God saves but religion slays. The work of the good shepherd is redemptive, and it is opposed to the work of the false shepherd, "the hireling," or thief, or robber—all *strangers* to the sheep, all suspect of the sheep. The good shepherd leads his sheep out to fulsome pasture but the false shepherd takes them to the slaughter house, or simply kills them in the fields. Jesus is the door, all who profess to be the door are painted sepulchres. We have to wonder if the hereditary priestly class which supplanted the prophetic in claiming to be the door to the kingdom. Or perhaps Jesus had in view fractious teachers (the Hillel and the Shammai) heads of religious parties/groups "whose words to their followers were as the word of God." That is plain false doctrine itself. Or perhaps Jesus alluded to the lawyers who slammed the door shut so as to exploit the sheep (to plunder and oppress them). Perhaps these resolve in matters of power, prestige and privilege such as beset the elites in every age ours included.

But the sheep (the people of God) **did not hear them.** *What is true of the sheep and the voice of the stranger is true also of man and of every voice that is not of God.* The child of the heavenly Father only attends to the voice of God— not of devils, fallen angels or the cleverest of men.

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

It is probable that he rather refers to the scribes and Pharisees (his present audience!), who claimed to be instructors of the people, who claimed the right to regulate the affairs of religion, and whose only aim was to aggrandize themselves and to oppress the people. (Barnes) The Pharisees “who were wolves in sheep's clothing, usurped a power that did not belong to them, robbed God of his authority, and glory; and, in a literal sense, plundered men of their substance, and devoured widows' houses, as well as destroyed their souls.” (Gill)

The force of this indictment is doubly felt when it is contrasted with the redemptive program set forth in vv. 14-18. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep and the Father loves him for doing that. All “authority” belongs to Jesus even to laying down his life and taking it up again! This is the charge which the Son got from the Father and discharged faithfully in his work. The result again was division and strife. **He has a demon**, He’s insane versus **these are not the words of one oppressed! Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?** That was the question as we set out on this journey and it brings a roundness to its conclusion.

Amen