

## The Shepherd and the Judge

Relationships are so important, aren't they?

And during this time of social distancing, they have taken on a new significance.

And what about our Christian testimony?

Do we have a relationship to our community and our fellow workers that is God honouring?

Yes, relationships are important.

And this might be a good time to thank Kevin and the other elders for their hard work in maintaining our relationships in the assembly during this pandemic.

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This morning we will be meditating upon the most important relationship of all—our relationship to Jesus, and through Him, our relationship to God.

And not only is this relationship important, but it is **unavoidable**.

Oh, we can ignore Jesus for our entire life, and many have chosen to do that, but we can't ignore Him forever.

You see “---**the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice "and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”**

**[Prayer]**

I would like to begin by listening in on a conversation Jesus had with a blind man whom He had marvellously healed—and we won't be the only ones listening in.

John 9:39-41 **“And Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind." Then *some* of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, "Are we blind also?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, ‘We see.’ Therefore your sin remains.”**

And it was to this group of religious leaders, and perhaps some others, that Jesus expounded a parable, or a proverb, concerning a sheepfold.

I'm sure everyone in attendance that day were familiar with sheepfolds.

They were a regular part of the landscape.

However, in our case, a bit of explanation might be in order.

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To begin with, Jesus wasn't talking about a permanent sheepfold consisting of walls and doors which would be a common structure in their towns and villages.

No, He was talking about a temporary shelter, hastily constructed in the wilderness, and consisting of thorn bushes or some other available material.

You see, after a long day of tending their sheep, the various shepherds would band together to build what you might call a *communal* enclosure.

Having completed their task, and with darkness swiftly approaching, the weary shepherds would light their fires and try to get some sleep.

But there was one shepherd who would be getting no sleep, at least not until his replacement arrived.

He would station himself in the *entrance* of the sheepfold, forming what you might call a *living door*.

During his watch, he would keep his eyes and ears open for any signs of trouble, be they human or otherwise.

In the morning, the weary doorkeeper would admit the rightful shepherds, whom, of course, he knew personally.

As each shepherd arrived, he would collect his flock and lead them out to pasture.

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And with this information in hand, we are now ready to listen to the first part of Jesus' parable.

John 10:1-2 **“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. "But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.”**

In this parable, Jesus is using the very familiar sheepfold to describe the nation of Israel.

Unlike the thieves and robbers, no doubt referring to Israel's religious leaders, Jesus, the true Shepherd and their Messiah, has entered by the legitimate door of prophecy.

For instance, He had been born of David's line and in the city of David's birth.

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John 10: 3-5 **“To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. "And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. "Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”**

Once again, we must increase our education, this time concerning the Israeli shepherd.

How did he separate his flock from all those other sheep milling around in the sheepfold?

After all, you can't brand a sheep like cow because of all that wool.

Well, he had a very successful method, which you might call *mental imprinting*.

It was virtually foolproof, employing three levels of security.

Sounds kind of high-tech, doesn't it?

Here's how it works.

From beginning to end, it was all based on *recognition*.

Level No. 1 -- The door keeper was a fellow shepherd and could readily identify the legitimate owner.

Level No. 2 -- Every sheep knew its own shepherd and would flee from strangers.

Level No. 3 -- The shepherd recognized his sheep, even to the point of knowing their names.

*Rachel, Mary, Reuben!* —and their little heads would pop up.

And even if some thieving shepherd should overhear their names, and even if the doorkeeper was half asleep, he can't steal the sheep for they **“do not know the voice of strangers.”**

In short, they were all pets.

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And so, using this very familiar procedure, Jesus explains what was happening in the nation of Israel.

Their rightful shepherd, their Messiah, had come through the proper door of prophecy, being admitted by the doorkeeper John the Baptist, and was now standing in the presence of **“the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”**

Did everyone recognize their Messiah?

No, they didn't.

As Romans 9:6-7 explains, **“---it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called.”**

No, not everyone in Israel was His sheep.

But some of them, like the disciples and many others like them, were.

They recognized their Shepherd and followed their Messiah out of the sheepfold of Israel, out of their dead religion with all its hypocrisy and man-made rules.

But what about the others who did not hear His voice?

What about those religious leaders, who were listening to this very parable?

Well, V6 tells us--- **“they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.”**

The truth is, their willing blindness had resulted in judicial blindness.

As Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 13:13, **“Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.”**

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Nevertheless, Jesus continues His parable.

Only this time, those who **“did not understand”** were left far behind.

John 10:7 **“Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.”**

As you will notice, Jesus didn’t say He was the door of the *sheepfold*.

No, He was---**“the door of the sheep.”**

V9-10 **“I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.”**

Yes, Jesus was the *door* out of Old Testament law.

He was the *door* to discipleship.

And in process of time, His disciples would be moulded into the church of Jesus Christ.

Or, to make a long story short, Jesus is the *door to heaven*.

As He said in---V11-15 **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.**

**“But a hireling, *he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them.***

**“The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. “I am the good shepherd; and I know My *sheep*, and am known by My own. “As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.”**

Yes, Jesus would lay down His life for the sheep, and they would become part of His spiritual body, His representatives in a fallen world.

But there would be ravaging wolves and false leaders and hirelings who did not *care* for the flock.

The believer’s only safety would be found in the Good Shepherd and His faithful *under shepherds*.

In the beginning, the church would be 100% Jewish, but that would change.

As Jesus said in V16 **“---other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock *and* one shepherd.”**

Yes, the Gentiles would be brought into His flock, thus fulfilling God’s promise made to Abraham---**“In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.”**

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What a picture this is of the church of Jesus Christ under the leadership of the Good Shepherd.

No thorny sheepfold to keep them in, as was the case in Old Testament Law.

No cowboys driving the herd before them.

That would be Satan's method, wouldn't it?

No, they would be His flock and under His care.

As David, a shepherd himself, wrote in Psalm 23---**“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”**

Anyone who knows anything about the Israeli landscape, and for that matter, life in general, will tell you, we’re not always knee-deep in clover.

Oh, there are green pastures, but there are a lot of rocky paths and dark valleys in between.

And if we follow our Shepherd, we will experience many of them.

However, there are two ways to follow Jesus.

The first one goes something like this.

You look at the cliffs on the right, and the frightening abyss on the left, and the vultures circling overhead, and say to your fellow sheep, “This is really ba-a-a-a-d.”

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Now everybody is upset!

But there’s another way, a better way.

You move ahead confidently with your eyes on the Shepherd.

Don’t look down. That will scare the life out of you. Look at the Shepherd!

He knows where He is going.

Yes, there are two ways to follow Jesus, and they both lead to the green pasture.

After all, that’s where the Good Shepherd is going.

However, if you choose the first way, you'll have an upset stomach when you get there.

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So, is there any value in the rocky way?

Is it just a necessary evil?

Is the green pasture the only real place of worth?

Not really.

You see, when darkness starts to creep in, you instinctively draw closer to your Shepherd.

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But what if we *don't* follow?

What if the rocky way is too rough, or the green pastures too boring?

What if we wander away?

That's when the second principle of our personal relationship to Jesus comes into play.

The first principle is *following*.

The second is *ownership*.

Like it or not, we *belong* to the Lord Jesus.

Paul reminds us of this in 1 Corinthians 6:20, **“For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify**

**God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”**

And do you remember the shepherd who went out into the mountains to find his sheep.

Jesus spoke about him in Luke 15:4-7

**“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? "And when he has found *it*, he lays *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing. "And when he comes home, he calls**

**together *his* friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ "I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety–nine just persons who need no repentance.”**

Yes, that wandering, unprofitable little animal is just as much His sheep as the other ninety and nine. It's the principle of *ownership*, and it's the basis of our eternal security.

And while we're talking about eternal security, I would like to jump ahead to John 10: 28-29 **“And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. "My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father’s hand.”**

And, do you remember Jesus’ High Priestly prayer, spoken on the way to the garden?

Please turn to John 17:12 **“While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”**

No, a Christian can never be lost.

It’s an agreement between the Father and the Son.

He’s the Good Shepherd.

He is the One Who has bought us with His own precious blood.

And He is the One Who said of His disciples, and Who says of us---“**Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost---**”

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And there's a second aspect to the principle of ownership.

The Israeli shepherd didn't keep his sheep for nothing.

Shepherding wasn't a *hobby* with him.

His sheep supplied him with wool.

And that's the most natural thing in the world for a healthy sheep to do.

Likewise, it's the most natural thing in the world for our new nature to produce the fruits of the Spirit.

But that's not true of our old nature, is it?

Try as it may, a pig cannot produce wool, and a sheep cannot produce anything else.

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And there's a third aspect to the principle of ownership.

Because we belong to the Shepherd, it's His prerogative to decide what our service will be.

It may be wool, or it may be our very lives that are required.

It's His right to lead, and it is our privilege to follow.

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Getting back to John 10:17-18, Jesus finishes the parable of the sheepfold with these words---

**“Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.”**

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But what about those who have rejected Jesus to the bitter end?

What will their relationship to the Son of God be?

I think we have already answered that question.

It will be a bitter end.

Rather than a loving Shepherd, they will find themselves standing before the Judge of all the earth.

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I'm sure you remember the man who sat by the pool of Bethesda in the hope of being cured of his infirmity.

After 38 years in that pitiful condition, Jesus healed him.

It's a wonderful account of Jesus' power and compassion, but it's an account that unbelievers can twist and distort.

Their reasoning might go something like this.

Jesus just happened to come upon this poor man as He was out walking, and being constrained by his pitiful condition, He healed him on the Sabbath.

And then, suddenly realizing the consequences of His actions, He melted away in the crowd.

However, when Jesus re-established contact with the man in the temple, a place where He was well known, it only took a few inquiries to establish His identity.

And having acquired the necessary information, the man ---**“told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath.”**

And so, the story goes.

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Now, if Jesus was just a man like you and me, that would have been a reasonable explanation—but He isn't.

And besides that, all the evidence points in a different direction.

No, Jesus wasn't taking a walk to get some fresh air and happened to meet this poor man by accident. Jesus never does anything by accident.

And if He was looking for fresh air, He wouldn't have chosen a smelly sheep market or a crowd of very sick people as His destination.

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No, Jesus was going to the pool on purpose, and that purpose was to meet a specific individual.

Nor was this act of healing in response to the man's entreaties.

I don't think he even knew Jesus.

Also, Jesus hadn't picked the Sabbath by accident.

After all, the man had been afflicted for 38 long years, and Jesus could have picked any day of the week to heal him.

So, why did He choose the Sabbath?

It goes without saying. He wasn't conducting a campaign against the observance of God's holy day.

No, He was making a point, and He was looking forward to meeting His accusers.

And they were looking forward to meeting Him.

With religious zeal they had tracked Him down, being fully persuaded that God was on their side.



After all, wasn't this one of the Ten Commandments---"**the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work**---

But were they really defending God's Law?

No, they weren't.

They were defending one of their rabbinical traditions.

And there's no doubt that this man had broken one of them.

Even today, you can go to the Orthodox Union website,

*ou.org/holidays/sabbath/the\_thirty\_nine\_categories\_of\_sabbath\_work\_prohibited\_by\_law*

and you will discover that this man had broken the very first law concerning *carrying*.

In fact, nothing can be removed from the house.

When a man leaves his house, he must carry nothing but the clothing on his back.

No keys, pocketbooks, purses, etc., may be carried.

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Now, there's no doubt that God meant the Sabbath as a time of blessed rest.

If you were a servant, or a slave, or even a beast of burden employed by a workaholic, you could count on at least one day a week of rest.

And there's something else about the Sabbath that is unique, even without all those man-made rules.

The Sabbath does not apply to God.

God never rests.

**“He who keeps Israel Shall neither slumber nor sleep.”**

And there's never a moment when He is not upholding all creation.

No, the Sabbath does not apply to God, only man.

And that was Jesus' defence.

John 5:17 “---**My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.**”

But, wasn't He jumping from the frying pan into the fire?

After all, V18 tells us, “---**the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.**”

No, He wasn't jumping from the frying pan into the fire.

In fact, that was the real reason why He had picked the Sabbath.

And when they vehemently accuse Him of making Himself equal with God, He agreed with them.

Yes, Jesus is equal with God.

And He is the source of all life, both spiritual and physical.

Listen to His words.

John 5:20-21 **“For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. “For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to *them*, even so the Son gives life to whom He will.”**

And it wouldn't be long before His claim would be vindicated.

Within a couple of months, He would raise the son of the widow, recorded in Luke 7.

And about six months later, He would raise Jairus's daughter from the dead.

Also, near the end of His public ministry, He would call Lazarus back from the grave after he had been dead for four days.

And then, as their blood pressure literally hit the roof, Jesus continues to enlighten them:

V22-23 **“For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, “that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.”**

Like it or not, Jesus is the Judge of all the earth.

And Jesus is the gateway to heaven.

**“He who does not honor the Son”** will find the doors of heaven fast closed against him.

No, there are not many ways to heaven.

Neither Mohammed, Buddha, nor the false cults who rob Jesus of His rightful place, can offer an alternate way to glory.

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And yet, He had a message of hope for those furious religious leaders.

V 24, **“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.”**

Yes, **“has everlasting life.”**

That's in the *present tense*, isn't it?

Everlasting life isn't something we work for, hoping it will be finally attained when we die.

No, it's a present possession.

That is, it is the present possession of everyone who has trusted Jesus as his or her personal Saviour.

And what will their future be?

Jesus covers that, too.

Continuing with V24---**“and shall not come into judgment.”**

Yes, just as everlasting life is a present possession, our judgement is a *past event*.

It happened over 2000 years ago at Calvary.

And that's why the believer---"**has passed from death into life.**"

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But what about those, like these religious leaders, who reject Jesus, or simply ignore Him?

Before we answer that question, let's ask another one.

Is it possible to **ignore** Jesus?

Well, yes, it is.

But not forever.

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You see, every living soul that has ever existed on the face of this earth will meet Jesus someday.

It's unavoidable.

Once again, listen to Jesus' words.

John 5:25-29 "**Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, "and has given Him authority to**

**execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice "and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."**

Yes, like His Heavenly Father, Jesus has power over both physical and spiritual life and death.

And those powers were being manifested in Israel.

Many who had been dead in trespasses and sins had been marvellously born again.

And there were others, like the widow's son, who had been given back their physical life.

But what about V 25 and V 26, where Jesus says--- **"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice "and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."**

Obviously, He is talking about a physical resurrection.

And it is quite evident that all will be involved.

Yes, one way or another, **"all who are in the graves will hear His voice "and come forth."**

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In the book, “Bible Truths Learned from Life” by Gailen Abbett, there is an account of an Hungarian Countess, an avowed atheist who fought the things of God her whole life.

Upon approaching death, she gave orders that her tomb be sealed in a way that it could never be opened again.

She ordered a plaque to be placed there, giving her name and the date of her death, with the inscription: “Not to be opened for eternity!”

She defied God to raise her from the dead.

Unknown to the cemetery workers, a simple acorn had fallen into the space around the Countess’s coffin.

With time, that tiny acorn sprang to life and began to make its way to the surface of the ground.

Bursting the tomb asunder, this little acorn became a mighty oak tree, showing God’s power to open any grave.

Yes, “---**the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice "and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”**

As you will notice, Jesus indicated two resurrections.

First, there will be the resurrection of life, when the works of the just (or the justified) will be tested by fire.

Paul describes that day in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.

**“According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”**

Yes, **“he himself will be saved.”**

The foundation that a believer stands on is beyond question.

It was made sure long ago.

However, what he or she has built upon that rock-solid foundation will be evaluated.



If they have laboured in gold and silver and precious stones, their works will survive and be richly rewarded.

If their endeavours have consisted of the wood, hay and stubble of their own self effort or self promotion, it will be burned up and totally unrewarded.

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And then, 1000 years later, the unsaved will answer His call.

That event is graphically described in Rev. 20:11-15 **“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”**

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Awake, thou careless world, awake!  
That final judgment day will surely come;  
What Heav'n has fixed no time can shake,  
Time never more shall sweep away thy doom.  
Know what the Lord Himself hath spoken  
Shall come at last and not delay:  
Though Heav'n and earth shall pass away,  
His steadfast Word can ne'er be broken."

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Yes, we will all hear---"**the voice of the Son of God.**"  
The only question is . . . will it be the voice of your Shepherd . . . or the voice of your Judge?