

I AM the Good Shepherd

DAVID DEN HAAN

I still remember the Bible that I received when I graduated from 8th grade. On the cover was a drawing of Jesus surrounded by children and holding a little lamb – really cute! The artist who drew the scene was using a picture that Jesus Himself gave us in John Chapter 10 – the picture of Himself as a shepherd – a good shepherd. Now, what that Bible cover did not tell us was that Jesus’ original purpose for that picture was to confront the religious leadership of the day. Stay tuned as we talk about what Jesus said with that picture long ago, and what it means today.

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am David Den Haan.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; so David, we have been engaged in a series of programs on the “I am” sayings of Jesus from the Gospel of John: I am the bread of life; I am the light of the world; I am the door; and today we come to another one.

DAVID DEN HAAN

We do indeed, and it is kind of a gentle picture, don’t you think, of Jesus as a shepherd; and yet, there is this reality behind the scenes that we get in John Chapter 9 of this conflict that Jesus has with the Pharisees.

DAVE BAST

Yes, it is really interesting to me, the way we take our cues on these popular biblical passages, and especially when we start to illustrate them or draw pictures of them. You mentioned Jesus holding the lamb; actually I think that owes more to Isaiah – to the Old Testament – than it does to this passage in John. You know, it says: He gently leads those that are with young and carries the lambs in His bosom. It is a very different feel in this passage in John.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Yes, it is a very different feel indeed. You know, Jesus is really kind of angry as He says this. He is angry at the Pharisees because what they have done is to take a miracle He performed back in John 9 – the miracle healing of the blind man – and they have kind of pestered this man with lots of questions. They want to nail Jesus to the wall, so to speak, because He did this healing on the Sabbath.

DAVE BAST

Yes, they really flip out. Here is a man born blind, *born blind* – so this isn’t some temporary affliction or condition; he is absolutely hopeless and helpless, and Jesus comes along and heals him, but He does it on the Sabbath day – oops. And if there was one thing that we see consistently through the Gospels, it is that the religious authorities just were obsessed with Sabbath keeping and all the rules that they had added to the commandment, and now Jesus sort of flouts those rules in order to deliver this man from darkness.

DAVID DEN HAAN

So what is it about the Sabbath that has these Pharisees so captured that they are so aligned with this doctrine, this practice, that even when Jesus brings healing and goodness and grace into this man’s life – the blind man – like you say, they wig out on Him. They just go crazy.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and I don't know, I mean, completely; I have some guesses maybe, but I think it is a cautionary tale to all of us, especially those of us who are – let's face it – religious authorities. One of the things we have to be really cautious about in the Gospels is just the language that we use, and we have to face the fact and recognize that when John especially in his Gospel talks about "the Jews," as Jesus' opponent; and that language has been used to justify anti-Semitism historically, and we live in an age where we just cannot not recognize that. So we have to be sure we are clear that Jesus was a Jew, John was a Jew, they were all Jews – the first Christians. It is the religious authorities that lie behind this, and those are the people whom Jesus is attacking; and it goes all the way back through the Old Testament prophets, too. Again and again we see in the Old Testament how God is just thundering His denunciation of these corrupt leaders who basically took His righteous and holy Law and twisted it in a form that sort of reinforced their power.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Yes, Jesus is echoing that kind of anger from God at the Jewish religious leaders; and speaking of things that they say, listen to this from verse 34 in Chapter 9. This is what they say to the blind man after their interview with him and after he has kind of frustrated their questions by saying: This is what happened, guys. I got healed.

Dave Bast: Have you ever heard of such a thing, he says; yes, right.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Hello! And they get so angry and they say:

9:34 You were steeped in sin at birth. You know, this guy is blind from birth and now they are saying: Yes, but that is not the biggest reality. The biggest reality is that you were steeped in sin at birth. How dare you lecture us! These guys were hot.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and then they also try to sort of prick the bubble: Don't you know who this guy was who healed you, this Jesus character? And the blind man replies: Well, I don't know – you know – but this thing I do know, once I was blind but now I can see. I don't know about Him; you are trying to run Him down; but I do know that He opened my eyes.

DAVID DEN HAAN

I think at some point in the conversation he even asks them: If you are so interested, why don't you go and become a disciple of His?

DAVE BAST

Yes, which made them all the more angry. So this is the background now to... We come to Chapter 10, and Jesus begins with a different sort of word picture of false shepherds and the true shepherd: those who are robbers and thieves and do not really care about the sheep contrasted with Himself.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Right; He has about six verses there at the beginning of John 10 where He really lays that contrast out for everyone, and guess who the robbers are, everybody? It is the religious leaders that Jesus is railing against after the experience of John 9; and then we go into that scene that we looked at in our last program, where Jesus says: I am the gate for the sheep; and He is the gate that bars the way to the sheep against the false shepherds and against all other enemies, too, of course. He protects them; He is the way to life; and then we get to our text – our text in John 10 beginning at verse 11; and Jesus is still separating Himself from all the leaders who fail to take care of their people by bringing them to God, and He says:

11 "I am the good shepherd," and as I hear him say that, Dave, I always think of myself as a leader of God's people, and I am picturing Jesus, not only as my shepherd, but I am also picturing Him as a model for me as a leader of God's people.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely. You know, the Latin word for shepherd is *pastor*. We used to say, in kind of an old-fashioned way, we are under-shepherds, you know, which is a little archaic, but it is a beautiful truth. Jesus is the ultimate model for what it means to care about people, care for people, especially for spiritual leaders who are called to that great and wonderful pastoral work; and we will dig into that more deeply next.

Segment 2

DAVID DEN HAAN

Welcome to Groundwork. I am David Den Haan.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and we are talking about Jesus' great saying in John Chapter 10, "I am the good shepherd." Let me just read a few verses, beginning at verse 11:

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand is not the shepherd and he does not own the sheep. When he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away; then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know My sheep and My sheep know Me. ¹⁵Just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father, and I lay down My life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They, too, will listen to My voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."

DAVID DEN HAAN

Wonderful words.

DAVE BAST

Boy, I love that passage.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Yes, it is rich with theology, too. There is so much going on here; and Jesus is really tying together a number of pictures that He is painting here in John Chapter 10. The one that we looked at in our last program was, "I am the gate for the sheep," and now He is really kind of qualifying that, or describing it, or fleshing it out a little bit by saying: I am the one who protects at the cost of My own life, and that qualifies Me as a good shepherd – the best you will ever have.

DAVE BAST

We mentioned some of the background culturally in First Century Palestine and the fact that these sheep pens would be somewhat remote, out in the countryside, and often just a rude stone wall with an opening, or a cave even; and so the shepherd literally was the door and would sit himself in that opening or lay himself down so that, not only could the sheep not sort of wander off, but if any attacker came, anyone trying to steal sheep – a sheep stealer – or a wild animal; you think of David, you know, how he would kill those wild animals in the Old Testament; the shepherd was there.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Yes; you know, I wonder about contemporary versions of what Jesus is talking about here. Who would you say would be somebody who functions along this line? You know, a person who comes to my own mind is a Secret Service agent, who gives himself to that role of protecting the President at the cost of his life. If there is a bullet that is flying, he is going to throw himself in the way.

DAVE BAST

Amazing, yes; and Jesus says: I won't run away. I won't leave you. I won't abandon you. I won't give you up to the enemy. Instead, I will die for you.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Yes, because the sheep are His; the sheep belong to Him. He is an amazing shepherd who not only calls the sheep His, but secondly, He knows these sheep. He knows them through and through, and one of the things that I think about there is something I have learned from Phillip Keller, one of the writers who does so much with this image, and he talks about the needs of sheep. They are really quite needy, apparently; and they need, of course, food, and they need water, but even beyond that, they need a calm setting in which to feel comfortable enough to graze and to drink. They need freedom from enemies, of course, but they also need freedom from other sheep who might bully them; and that is a reality from the ancient world, too, where the sheep... some sheep were bullies, I suppose, and made it difficult for the other sheep to graze.

DAVE BAST

Good sheep, bad sheep, yes.

DAVID DEN HAAN

There you go; and if you are a sheep that is not grazing well, you are not producing what you need to produce to help the family that owns you – that is, the wool that is produced; and so this shepherd has to know all of these things: Where the best grazing land is; how long to stay on this grazing land so that there is enough grass for all of the sheep; what the grazing habits of his flock actually are; how quickly they consume this grass. That is what Jesus is talking about, isn't He?

DAVE BAST

Sure; yes. So that is a wonderful thought; you know, He knows us; He knows our needs; He knows our strengths and weaknesses, and He has pledged to help us and protect us; but it also goes the other way. I love what He adds there: And My sheep know Me. They know My voice; and that is another wonderful thing that comes out of a little knowledge of the background. Often shepherds would meet out in the fields, and maybe they would, like people everywhere, they want to catch up with one another and they would sit down and have a cup of coffee or whatever the First Century equivalent was...

DAVID DEN HAAN

How's it going with you today?

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; and their flocks would sort of mix together. Then it comes time to go your separate ways to find grazing, and amazingly, the sheep would recognize their own shepherd's voice and they would follow him.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Almost like magic.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and that is what Jesus says here: Those who are Mine also know Me, and they recognize My voice and they follow Me.

DAVID DEN HAAN

I wonder if Jesus is giving us a little glimpse into the theology of the Holy Spirit there; saying to us something like: Yes, if you are Mine, you know My voice; but it is almost like He is preparing us for what He later says to the disciples in the Upper Room: The Holy Spirit will come and teach you all that I have commanded you. The Holy Spirit will help you to know Me personally. Now, this is not something that you can do on your own, in other words.

DAVE BAST

Yes; this is a tremendous text for preachers or for missionaries or for evangelists, or for anyone who is led to share the Gospel with another person, because Jesus is promising here that there will be those who respond; and it is not because of our cleverness or our eloquence or our arguments...

DAVID DEN HAAN

Wow, does that take some weight off.

DAVE BAST

Right; it is because His sheep will hear and recognize His voice. You notice what He says later – this wonderful passage a little bit later – He repeats the claim: I am the good shepherd; and then He adds: I have other sheep that do not belong to this group – this fold. He is talking about us. He is talking about the gentile world; and He uses the present tense: I have them already – I know who they are.

DAVID DEN HAAN

You know what that brings me to? That brings me to that passage in Acts Chapter 18, where Paul is in the city of Corinth. He is all deflated and perhaps disappointed by the treatment he has received from Jews there in the synagogue. He has a vision from Christ; in the vision Christ says to him: Do not fear – that is really God's favorite command, right? Do not fear, Paul, because I have many people in this city.

DAVE BAST

Present tense again. God knows those who are His and those who will come to Him and believe in Him and be saved; and He knows it from all eternity; and it is a tremendous truth that the Bible teaches.

You know, David, I had an experience years ago that I have never forgotten that I think illustrates this about Jesus' sheep recognizing His voice when they hear the Gospel. Years ago we used to partner with a Hmong pastor. The Hmong are a people who live in the highlands of Southeast Asia – Laos and Vietnam – and he one day showed me this stack of paper with a bunch of names on it; lists and lists of names; and he said, "This just came to me in the mail," and it had a cover letter that said: Dear Pastor John. We heard you speaking on the radio about the Lamb's Book of Life and we would like you please to put our names down into that book.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Nice.

DAVE BAST

And of course, he told them: You know, if you have responded to the Gospel, your names are already there. They have been there for all eternity. But what an encouragement.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Yes; and speaking about voices, there are so many voices, aren't there, in the culture around us – voices that compete with the voice of the savior who has given Himself up for us – the savior we love; and next, let's go and do some talking about those very voices.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

Welcome to Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

DAVID DEN HAAN

And I am David Den Haan. Dave, we want to think together about what it means today that Jesus said: I am the good shepherd.

DAVE BAST

Yes; what does that really do to me; or how does it impact my life? It is one thing to think about these ancient images, and that is all lovely, and the promises and claims that He makes are tremendous and amazing; but what about day-to-day for me?

DAVID DEN HAAN

You know, the place for me to begin is simply this Gospel reality, that the good shepherd has done exactly as He said He would in this picture – He has given His life up for me.

DAVE BAST

And you know, that is actually where the image and the analogy break down, because in the ancient world it would have been a disaster for the sheep if the shepherd died on them. They would have been left alone and helpless; but for us, it means everything.

DAVID DEN HAAN

This shepherd who has given His life for us has not left us helpless at all; in fact, He came back to life in power as the Father raised Him from the dead on that third day; spent time with His disciples, enabling them, teaching them, equipping them for ministry later on; ascended to heaven and then did again as He promised and sent us the Holy Spirit.

DAVE BAST

And you know, for any true Christian, I think that is something we never really get past or get over. We just keep coming back to it and back to it and back to it. It is Gospel 101; it is the most basic truth of all; but you think of the Apostle – one of my favorite little verse fragments from Paul is: The life I now live I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. Paul never got over that: Who loved me and gave Himself for me. That is just so basic, we keep coming back to the Lord who laid down His life for us – who had to; it was the only way. He died for our sins because we could not pay for them ourselves.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Well, in the words of a confession that I love: My only comfort in life and in death is that I am not my own, but I belong body and soul in life and in death to my faithful savior (you could put shepherd there, really) my faithful savior, Jesus Christ; and it is His voice that I want to listen to.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, just to revert for a moment to the earlier image of the gate and the door and the way; you know, Jesus says: The gate is narrow – it is exclusive – you have to come through Me; but then He goes on to say: The way is narrow, too – the path – the road; going through the gate is just the beginning; coming to faith is just the start of the Christian life; it is not the end. In fact, all of the promises – all of the Gospel promises in the New Testament are given to those who finish, not to those who begin.

DAVID DEN HAAN

You are talking about discipleship.

DAVE BAST

Exactly; and that is hard too, because it means obedience and it means whose voice are you following?

DAVID DEN HAAN

Right; you know, Paul's favorite word for discipleship was the Greek word *peripateo*, which is *to walk*; and that is really what we are talking about here – walking with our good shepherd.

DAVE BAST

The peripatetic teacher...

DAVID DEN HAAN

There you go; exactly right.

DAVE BAST

If you want to impress somebody with a big word, that means a teacher who walks around. Jesus was a peripatetic teacher.

DAVID DEN HAAN

So what other voices are there that we could be listening to, and that, in fact, many of us do, or at least we struggle to avoid listening to them because they are not the voice of our good shepherd, but they are so compelling. What are some of those voices, do you think?

DAVE BAST

Well, they are the common ones, you know; just to think about it and to recite them: Consumerism, materialism... I mean, when I am feeling down, I want to go buy something, don't you? It makes you feel better, right? Buy a new piece of clothing or buy some shoes, buy a car, buy a yacht.

DAVID DEN HAAN

The advertising makes that image so clear for us. You never see sad people on commercials. You never see sad people buying things on television; it is always people who look so alive – well, I would like to be that way; and that voice, so to speak, of that advertisement says to me: I am your good shepherd – just buy a Buick – or whatever.

DAVE BAST

The voice says: Stuff will make you happy, and it does for about ten minutes...

DAVID DEN HAAN

And then you have to buy something else.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

DAVID DEN HAAN

You know, I think about other voices that shape us. I think about voices that even... like an employer, without intending to, saying to me: You are what you produce. I think about piece work that I did as a kid on a nursery, and we had to plant these little seedlings in place, and with every hundred seedlings we got a little stick that we would cart over to his desk or building or whatever, and then at the end of the day they would count up all the sticks. So if you got a lot of sticks you were worth a lot.

DAVE BAST

Sure, yes; or the voice that says: Family is the most important thing in the world. Family is what you live for. Family is what satisfies; so you sacrifice everything for your kids; you give them everything; you indulge them completely; if they are into sports you give up everything else so that they can have fun in sports.

DAVID DEN HAAN

Well I think churches deal with that all the time – parents who are so protective of their kids, you know; they want to make sure their kids feel good about church or feel good about the youth group: Don't make my child angry; don't disappoint them; and don't make them bored because I do not want them to be bored with church.

DAVE BAST

So there are all of these sort of competing voices, and many of them are saying things or talking about things that are somewhat good in themselves, but they are not the best...

DAVID DEN HAAN

Right.

DAVE BAST

And there is an overriding voice... I have a good friend who is an executive for a mission that sends people to hard places, and he is always talking about... One of the things he said recently was: The people who most object when folks feel called to go are often their parents, who do not want them to move away; do not want their grandkids to be far away from them; and again, it raises the question: Whose voice are you listening to, Christian?

DAVID DEN HAAN

Yes; I think about some of the statements that our good shepherd has said to us throughout the scriptures, and I will just read a couple of them here, and I want to have you listen to the voice of the shepherd. Here is Jesus saying: Come all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Here is Jesus saying: I lay down My life for the sheep. Here is Jesus: The kingdom of God is near; and He is, of course, talking about Himself and His arrival on the scene. The kingdom of God comes in Me. And here is Jesus' invitation: Come, follow Me. And there we go again with the discipleship reality, right? This is walking with Jesus – this is hearing His voice – this is listening to this voice among all the others.

DAVE BAST

So here is the question: Do we believe Him? Do we believe that He is who He says He is? Will we take Him at His word? And will we follow?

DAVID DEN HAAN

Thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation, and don't forget, it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our topics relevant to your life. So tell us what you think about what you are hearing and suggest topics or passages that you would like to hear on future Groundwork programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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