

The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

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This morning I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the Gospel of John 10. As you're turning to John 10, if you're a first time guest or visitor with us or maybe you haven't been with us in a while, we're very slowly and steadily walking our way through the Gospel of John with the goal of getting to chapter 15. In chapter 15, Jesus makes this profound statement, he says, "I am the vine and you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him shall bear much fruit for apart from me you can do nothing."

Now I want to answer a question today that I apologize for not answering previously. I had someone catch me last week after one of the services and they said, "Pastor, I need to know something." I said, "What is it?" He said, "I know the Gospel of John has something to do with MasterLife but I'm really not connecting the dots. Help me out." Well, MasterLife as you've heard about and as many of you have already signed up for, is based on John 15 and so it's kind of the goal as we walk into that study is to build the house of our life on the truth of chapters 1 through 14 being laid as a foundation.

That being said, today we come to chapter 10. Chapter 10 of the Gospel of John, Jesus is going to speak one of the 32 parables of his ministry that we have recorded in the four Gospels, yet this passage is a little bit different. If you study the parables of Jesus, oftentimes the disciples come back to him and say, "Could you explain that? We didn't quite get it." And then he'll go through all the terms and what they really mean. Sometimes he'll tell one or two parables and then come back with the meaning but today in John 10, there is no explicit interpretation of this parable. In fact, if you have a study Bible or maybe one that has notes in it, it will say the discourse or the story of the Good Shepherd. In just a few moments, we're going to read this parable that Jesus communicates and then he's going to speak of the truth of it and then he begins, as we'll study next week, to elaborate on who he is as the Good Shepherd.

So what I thought we would do today is read these eight very simple verses in John 10 and not look so much at Jesus as the shepherd or as the enemy as the stranger, we'll deal more with that next week, but deal with you and I in the picture that Jesus gives of who we as humanity are, we're described as sheep. Now when you hear the concept of being described as a sheep, usually that's not a very positive connotation, but today we're going to see that there is the good, the bad, and the ugly of being called a sheep by Jesus.

Here in John 10, beginning in verse 1, it says,

1 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that enters not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. 2 But he that enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the porter [or the gatekeeper] opens; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. 4 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. 5 And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. 6 This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. 7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.

Now as I mentioned, in this story or this parable, I want to focus on why is it that the Lord would describe us as sheep and what does that mean to understand how the Lord operates and works in our life. Now a couple of other passages we're going to find ourselves in today, the first is going to be in chapter 17 of the Gospel of John, just a few pages to the right. Then we're going to go the very first chapter of the Bible, the book of Genesis 1, as we kind of peel away the layers of what was Jesus really meaning when he described you and I as sheep.

Well, let's begin positive. Let's begin with the good. What can be good about being called a sheep. Well, what we discover in this passage and what we discover later in John 17 is this: that you, that you were formed, you were fashioned, that you were created, you were designed with a purpose. Now I know that's one of those statements that has been put in the title of a lot of bestselling books as of late. In fact, it seems like every time we turn around, someone wants to tell us how to live our life, the purpose for our life, the destiny of our life, how to live our best life, how not to waste our life. Can I just help you out today? I'm going to save you some money and some time and I'm going to answer that question in about five minutes or less. Okay? You don't even have to go and buy the books because you're going to see in the Gospel of John that it's laid out very clearly why you exist and the purpose for your life.

I want you to turn a few pages to the right to John 17. Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane. This is just hours before his eventual crucifixion. He's there and you know the story, that he takes Peter, James and John, pulls them to the side and says, "Please pray for me." Matthew 26 records the three prayers of Jesus which he says to the Father, "Not my will but yours be done." John 17 is the longest prayer of Jesus that we have recorded in the Gospels and it's very unique for several reasons, one of which is this: there is only one statement in the entire prayer of which could be attributed to Jesus asking or petitioning something for himself. In fact, the first four verses, he's addressing the Father, of what the Father desires, what he needs, his glorification and his honor. Beginning in verse 6, he begins to pray for the disciples of which he had led for 3 ½ years. In fact, he says all of them are a part of me. They've all gone with me except one, in verse 12, the son of perdition that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. Then about halfway

through the prayer, he prays for you personally. He prays for those who would come a year later or ten years later or 2,000 years later, those who would walk and follow and believe in him.

But in verse 5, it's the only statement that Jesus prays for himself and I want you to notice what the Bible says. Here are Jesus' words. He asks the Father, he said, "Glorify me," look, "with the glory that I had before the world was." Now oftentimes we just glance right over that. We just read right through it and say absolutely. The glory that he deserves, he needs that glory, he is due that glory, he deserves that glory, but we oftentimes, we think back, that's right because the glory he had before the Incarnation, before he stepped foot on the dirt of this earth, according to Philippians 2 of which it says that he did not think it strange to be equal with God but took on the form of man. In other words, we say, sure, this glory that he deserves, this honor he deserves, after all, for 3+ decades he has been subject to hunger, to thirst, to the dirt and the dust of life. That's right because of the cross, the resurrection. He is due the glory that he deserves. However, look at that last statement, "before the world was." Not before his Incarnation. Not before he was born of a virgin. Not before 33 ½ years ago. Jesus references something I think is very critical for our understanding of what it means to be designed by him and figuring out what is my purpose in life.

You know, there are four questions that every faith, every religion and every person is attempting to answer: where did I come from? What's the problem? How do I fix it? And where am I going? In a nutshell Christianity says we came from God. Sin is the problem. Jesus is the answer. It's either heaven or hell. I mean, that's it in a nutshell. But some of you, in fact I would say most of you because you've read the articles, you've read the books, you've contemplated the thought of purpose and destiny, you take a step back and go, "Why are we here in the first place?" I mean, am I the only person who has ever asked, "God, why did you even make us? I mean, yeah, I understand that we came from you. I understand sin is a problem, Jesus is the answer, but why did you even bother in the first place?" And there are a lot of theories out there. Why would an all-knowing, all-powerful God reach down in the dust of the earth and form humanity?

You know, one of the most prominent theories is that this desire for relationship, that the Lord needed companionship, he desired the interaction that humanity would give him. After all in the garden of Eden it said, "He walked in the cool of the day with Adam and Eve," and I believe the Lord is into relationships and he desires a relationship with us and to us, however, you do understand that that presupposes that somehow, some way, an all-powerful, all-knowing God is lonely and he needs companionship.

You know, the Bible says in Hebrews 12 that the number of the angelic beings is greater than any man can number. You say, "Well, why is that significant?" Well, in Job 37 it says when he created the earth, remember what John 17:5 says, "before the world was," the sons of God or the angels of God rejoiced and threw a party. Now, I can imagine that would have been greatly attended; it would have had a lot of energy; would have been a lot of fun. And this idea that somehow I'm created because an all-powerful God was

lonely? How powerful is that all-powerful God if he's lonely and needing of companionship?

Oh, but there are others who have kind of taken a step back and said, well, any time you see what we know as the Lord and the enemy, the devil, Satan himself, interacting like in Job 1 or 2 or Zechariah 3, there is a lot of legal language that's being used. There is this picture of an attorney coming before a judge and a judge making a pronouncement and so there is this legal picture and there are those who have come to this conclusion: that the reason that God formed and fashioned you and I is because that the enemy, Satan himself, petitioned him and said, "Hey, anybody in my position would have done the same thing." So God created and formed and fashioned us as a way to prove to the enemy that he was in the wrong and that we would make the decision to follow him and his ways.

If you take those two very prominent positions, one says that God was lonely and needed our companionship, the other one, we become some type of legal witness in a cosmic courtroom. I don't know about you, but that doesn't seem real purposeful to me. That doesn't seem real exciting. In fact, many of you may have grown up in a tradition or maybe you even participate now in what is called the Catechism. The Catechism, some of them are short and some of them are long. It's a series of questions and answers of which typically it's parents to children but it can be anybody, where they ask a series of questions with answers to understand the Scripture better. The very first question of the Catechism is: what is the chief purpose of man? Anybody know the answer? I guess you didn't grow up with a Catechism. To glorify God. In other words, for hundreds of years we've said the reason we exist is to glorify God but look at what John 17:5 says, "The glory that I had that's going to be restored before the world was."

Here's what I believe is being said not only in John 10 but in John 17: your purpose, your design for this existence is more than just "keeping God company." Your existence is more than just proving a cosmic point. You do realize that there was an entity, there was a being who originated as Lucifer, became Satan, who had the highest position in the universe. His role, his position, his opportunity was to glorify God, to praise him, to honor him, to serve him, and what did he say? He rejected that. In fact, according to John Milton, the great American writer, he said and this was his perspective of Satan, "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven." He voided. He backed out. He took off and there was a void.

Look what Jesus says in John 17:5, "Father, the only glory I want is the glory that I had before the world was." And there is this idea in verse 5 that it's going to be restored. Do you understand what that means? That means that you're not here just simply but, yes, for companionship, you're not here to settle some cosmic argument, that means your purpose, you've been designed to fill the most important spot in the universe. There is no position greater than what you were designed for. You see, that's the good. We understand that we were designed with a purpose greater and higher than anything that we can conceive. In fact, it is our purpose that was his destiny.

Notice there in John 17:5, it is in the context of the cross event. It is in the context of his death and his eventual resurrection. And according to Hebrews 12:2, that he, Jesus, is the author, the finisher of our faith who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross. That restored glory, allowing us to be in our rightful position in our place that we are originally designed for, he would be willing to come, to live a sinless life, to die a cruel death and to raise from the dead three days later.

You see, here's the good: when Jesus calls us sheep and that he is the Shepherd, he is the one who gives his life for the sheep, the good aspect of that is that you and I were designed with a very important purpose, so important that he was willing to come, he was willing to live, he was willing to die, and he was willing to raise from the dead not just so he could be honored, but so we could be restored to the position and the place that we were originally created for. That's some good news. We're not just here to waste time. We're not just here to occupy space. We've got the most important position in the universe, to glorify the one who created and formed all.

You see, that's the good but here is the bad. Jesus uses the illustration of sheep and I'm going to use some nice words in just a moment, I'm going to talk about our disposition, I'm going to talk about our depravity, but can we be honest with each other? If you've ever been around a sheep, you know that that's not usually a pretty experience. In fact, there are really two overriding qualities that sheep possess and for those of you who have sheep, love sheep, are fan of sheep, please don't be offended. It's just the truth. They are stinky and they're stupid. I mean, they really are.

There's a reason that when you go to the petting zoo, they ask you to wash your hands when you leave. It's because they're filthy. They're animals and they've got all kinds of stuff, but last time I checked, they're not the brightest bulbs in the chandelier. I mean, these guys, you know the illustration about sheep, right? If they will follow the pack, they'll walk right over a cliff if that's where the leader of the pack is going. But oftentimes in environments like this, we say that, we say, "Yeah, we know that's how sheep act and Jesus called us sheep but I'm not that way." Yes, you are. In fact, I can prove it.

Yesterday, many of you if not all of you were watching some form of a football game. I mean, that's kind of what we do here in the South, and most of your teams won. Mine didn't but that's okay. We just keep rolling, right? You're watching a ballgame, guys. Commercials come on. They're only 30 seconds in length and maybe it's a commercial for that new 4x4 truck, maybe it's a commercial for a new set of golf clubs, maybe it's a commercial for the biggest steak you've ever seen and what happens? Baa, I've got to have it. I mean, you do it, don't you? Next thing you know, it's the middle of the third quarter and you're justifying that new truck payment. "I think I can do this." Oh, ladies, I'm not going to leave you out. A commercial, "Oo, that's a pretty blouse. I like her skirt." Baa, you're online buying it right then and there because we see and we hear all these objects and what do we do? We're sheep. They're wearing this. They're driving this. They're going here. Baa, we're just going to go. You see, what we understand is deep

down inside, even though designed and created with a purpose, the bad side of that is, we like sheep have gone astray.

Now if you have Genesis 1 open, I want you to turn back to when humanity was formed and fashioned. This is when we were created as kind of the climax of the creation experience. You read Genesis 1, you have the first six days. Genesis 2 has day seven, that day of rest. But beginning in verse 26, God makes a very collective statement about the creation of humanity. He says in verse 26, "Let us make man in our image and in our own likeness," then he elaborates the details. Think about that. That means that you and I were formed, we were fashioned, we were created originally in the image of God. Pure. Sinless. We were created, we were fashioned, we were designed in the sameness as God and it is that image that produces a likeness. In other words, how you were formed, how you were created, determines on how you behave and how you act. In other words, it was Adam and Eve's image of sinlessness that produced a likeness or a behavior or a behavior mechanism that reflected how they were created. They being in the image of God reflected in the likeness of God.

Now I want you to flip over a few pages to chapter 5 of the book of Genesis and we're going to pick up the story of humanity post garden of Eden. Adam and Eve at this point have had two children: one by the name of Cain and one by the name of Abel, chapter 4. That story doesn't work out real well, does it? We know they both come to offer their sacrifice to worship the Lord. Abel's sacrifice is seen as proper. Cain's not so much. Cain gets upset. He gets jealous. He gets covetous. He kills his brother. He gets admonished east of the land of Nod. And in chapter 5, Adam and Eve again have the privilege and opportunity of having another son. So Cain is the only living child at this point and in chapter 5, verse 3, we're introduced to a young man by the name of Seth. I want you to notice what it says about his birth in verse 3 of Genesis 5. It says, "And Adam bore another son after his likeness and his image." Did you notice something important there? The words, the descriptions have been switched. You see, in Genesis 1, the image of God and the likeness of God; in Genesis 5, our great great great great not so great grandparents, it says in the likeness of Adam and in his image. In other words, what we see happening here in Genesis is very simply this: we see the bad of being a sheep; that we have a disposition, we have an inclination, we have a desire completely away from the things of God, not toward the things of God. And it says real clearly that Adam's child, Seth, was in his likeness, meaning he acted like Adam, he behaved like Adam, he made decisions like Adam, and because of that, it produced the image of man. Fallen and corrupt and lost.

You know, just yesterday I was on a job site and we were serving and someone had come by who was kind of supervising many of the projects and we were entering in a conversation that some of his family members knew some of my kids and we were just kind of having a good break type conversation and in the process of doing so, it was said with great humor, it was well taken, it was funny, speaking about this young man. He said, "Some of the folks in our family say he's not one of us." In other words, joking around, "Well, he acts just a little bit different. Or maybe he's just a little bit different in this mannerism." How many times and if you haven't gotten to this experience, I promise

those of you who have little kids, you will once they become teenagers, I promise, you get to this point where they will make a decision and your spouse will look at you and say, "That one's yours." Acting just like you. "Oh, that sounds like something you would say."

You see, that's what Genesis 5:3 is telling us, that we have this disposition, we have this, if you'll allow me to use the term, we have this stinkiness about us that if left to our own devices, we always gravitate away from the things of God and what does it produce? The image of man which is lost and in sin.

You know, I have a home that may be one of the best pictures of stinkiness in the world. I have three boys. I have two teenagers and one almost teenager. They all play sports and inevitably one of them will forget to place either a garment or a shoe in the proper place. Do you know what it's like when we wake up the next morning? There is this smell that permeates. Even the dogs are embarrassed. I mean, it's something else. I mean, even the dogs are going, "It's bad over there!"

When we leave ourselves physically alone, we have an inclination toward stinkiness. Spiritually it's no different. What happened with Seth is the exact same thing that happens with us. Because we act like, because we behave like those who have gone before us, it produces the image of man and what it becomes is a nature of depravity. A nature of depravity. Now that's a strong word and let me tell you what that means. That means corrupt, evil, total absence of good.

Now I know there are some of you who say, "Well, I'm a positive person. I see the best in everybody. I see the good in everybody." Hey, I see good in folks too, but you do understand that it is a small portion of who they really are. Every now and then our "goodness" rises to the forefront but as a whole according to this passage, we're sheep. And according to the prophet Isaiah, we've gone astray. And according to John 10, we need a shepherd because we are prone to the stranger getting our attention.

You know, every year Parade Magazine produces an edition dedicated to the ten worst dictators in the world. You realize that if we have to judge the ten worst, that means there's a lot more who are just as corrupt and evil. In fact, worldwide every day there are people who purposefully withhold nutrients and items that would bring health in people's lives just so that people will die. You realize that in the last century more people died at the hands of humanity than all other centuries combined. We are a depraved, evil, corrupt humanity.

You say, "Well, there's a little bit of good there." Have you watched tv lately? I'm going to be honest with you, I don't watch a whole lot of tv. When I'm watching tv, here are my choices: I'm either watching football, baseball, basketball, soccer, rugby and if I get real desperate, snow skiing. I mean, that's what I do. I just watch sports but if I do occasionally watch other things, one of the things I've noticed, it doesn't matter if it's sports or a movie or regular show, have you seen the commercials lately? Can I tell you one of the rules in the Meyers' house? Now we're raising kids and this is just our rule and

if you want to see daddy, by the way that's me, if you want to see daddy's head spin off his shoulders, is when a commercial comes on that has no business being in our house and nobody has the remote. We watch everything, somebody's got a remote next to them because have you seen the depravity that are on these shows? Shows about death and rape and all kinds of horrible things right there in front of us and we say, "Oh, I think everything's going right." It's not going well at all.

You see, that's the bad news, that ever since Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, oh by the way, you do know they were the first sheep, right? Lucifer, Satan comes to them and says, "Hey, you want to eat?" Baa, they do. We fell for it then, we fall for it now, and we have allowed ourselves to become this depraved, corrupt, godless people. That's the bad news.

There is also some ugly news. I want you to notice what Jesus says here in verse 4, he says, "And when he puts forth his own sheep, he goes before them. The sheep follow him for they know his voice and a stranger they will not follow but will flee from him for they know not the voice of strangers." You see, the good news is you were created and designed with a purpose. The bad news is you have a disposition toward depravity and corruptness and a complete sinfulness. Here's the ugly news, it's that most of us do not possess much discernment at all to differentiate between the voices that we hear versus the voice that we need to follow.

You know, oftentimes we think, "Well, it's the loudest voice that we need to follow. Or maybe it's the most frequent voice we need to follow." Let me tell you how to discern it: the voice you need to follow is the voice of truth, the voice of righteousness and the voice of God. What does Jesus say? It's either the shepherd's voice or it is the stranger's voice.

I mentioned I don't watch a whole lot of tv. I really just don't. That's just who I am. But there is one show out there that is not sports related that I'm intrigued by. It's rightfully titled "The Voice." I'm sure many of you have seen it. Now, I don't have any type of musical inclination so it's not like I aspire to be on there, but I get mesmerized by the process by which this show operates. If you're not familiar with it, you have a contestant that comes on to sing. When they sing, there are four judges, well-known artists in their field, that have their backs turned to the artist. They cannot see them. They cannot touch them. The only thing they can do is listen to their voice. Here's what's interesting about that show. When someone starts to sing, they don't know if it's a man or a woman. They don't know if they're a little bit older, a little bit younger. They don't know if they're tall or short, wide or thin. They don't have a clue. The only thing they have access to is their voice.

Now here's the part of the show I like to watch. I'm interested in people succeeding and that's great. The part I like are when the judges are trying to make a decision whether to hit the button. You see, the way that the show works is if a judge hits the button and their chair turns around, then they have access to put that person on their team and then there's this contest of what team by what judge will eventually win. So you've got four judges all listening to this voice. They cannot see. They've got their hands on the buzzer and they're

all looking at each other like, "Do you hear what I hear? Is that what I think it is?" And a note will be hit and they're kind of intrigued, "Should I?" And every time when they hit the button, that chair turns around and if you've ever watched the show, it never fails: whoever they see standing before them is not what they expected to see. Oftentimes, they expected somebody of a different stature, a different gender, and they realize, "Oh my, that voice came out of that?"

You see, when all we have is the voice to listen to, discernment must be one of the most critical constructs of our life. Here's the problem: we are prone to listen to the loudest voice. We are prone to listen to the most frequent voice. But what we need to do is listen to the right voice. Notice what Jesus said, he said, "the sheep hear my voice." You see, discernment is one of the things that is so lacking even within the Christian we desperately need to recapture 1 John 4:1, it says, "Test the spirits, see whether they be of God or not."

It's not just discernment, though, that is the ugly part, it's the decision that must be made. You see, the idea that you get from Jesus in this parable or this story is that you're going to follow somebody. You're going to follow somebody. You're either going to follow the shepherd or you're going to follow the stranger.

Now, for those of you who have been through kind of the parenting stage of life and even if you've never hit that stage, as a child you remember, how many times did you hear from authorities, teachers, parents and such, "Danger! Danger! Stranger! Stranger!" or however they worded it in your context? What is it that a stranger does to try to woo the attention of someone who need not go with them? They always sweeten it up with something, right? They always use the right inflection. They always offer that which is most desired but what happens on the other side? When the stranger reveals his true intentions, it's what John 10:10 says, "The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy." Then there's the shepherd just over there on the hillside, not real loud, no pyrotechnics going off, not offering the trinkets and the treats of the stranger.

I'm reminded of Isaiah 30:21, it makes this statement, "When the Lord whispers in your ear, turn to the right, turn to the right. When he whispers in your ear, turn to the left, you need to turn to the left." You see, the decision that we need to make is not about listening to the loudest voices or listening to the most frequent voices, it's listening to the right voice.

You see, the good news is you were designed and created with an incredible purpose of existence. The bad news is that we as sheep have gone astray and we have this disposition toward sin. But the ugly news is that we need to have the discernment and make the decision to listen to the voice that may not be the most popular voice, it may not be the most frequent voice, but is the right voice, because it is the voice of the shepherd that according to what Jesus said, will actually take us into the sheepfold.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. You know, maybe you're that person today, maybe that person as we sit in this place with our heads bowed, that would

be willing to say, "Do you know what, pastor? I've been listening to the wrong voices." Maybe you're that person today who would say, "Do you know what? I've been listening for volume and not for truth. I've been listening for frequency but not for truth." I've got some incredible news for you today, that you don't have to leave this place, you don't have to go another day in life following the voice of a stranger or strangers but the voice of the Shepherd, that according to the passage that we read was willing to give his life for you, the sheep. You don't have to sign up for a bunch of classes, you don't have to go through a rigorous ordeal, in fact, the only thing you need to do today is have a very serious conversation with the Lord. You don't have to have this conversation out loud, in fact, you don't even have to say the same words that I might say but maybe today if you're that person who has been listening to the wrong voice, maybe this is the conversation you would have with God. You say, "God, today I recognize, I confess I've listened to the wrong voices. I've followed the wrong crowd. I've ended up going down the wrong path. But I understand today that Jesus Christ desires to be my Shepherd. He wants to lead me in the right path and he wants to take me the direction I was designed and meant to go. Lord, I confess that I've messed up. I confess that I've sinned but I believe that Jesus loved me so much that even as a Shepherd, he was willing to come and to give his life as a ransom for me. I believe he came on my behalf. I believe he lived on my behalf. I believe he died on my behalf. And I believe he rose again so I could be forgiven and I could be saved and I could be put on the right path. God, today I don't know all the answers to all the world's problems but I do know that Jesus is the answer to my sin problem. In the best way I know how, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and eyes still closed, maybe today is the day that you had that conversation with God. Maybe today is the day that you realize you had that conversation a long time ago but you've started listening to the loudest, most frequent, wrong voices. Maybe today is the day that you need to head in a different direction. We would love the opportunity just to dialogue with you, just to have a conversation with you, just to celebrate with you what God is doing in your life.

Lord, as we come to this time of decision, the opportunity that we have to hear your voice and not all the other voices, Lord, I pray very simply that you would drown the other voices out and yours would be the only one that is heard and that we would follow you in whatever decision that you would have for us to make. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I would ask that you would stand with me as our team leads us. Any decision, I'll be here at the front.