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*I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. John 10:28*

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## *A Savior You Can Trust*

What a beautiful song of worship and what a joy to sing together. One of the privileges I enjoy is hearing all these voices lifted up. I look forward even more to that day when it's 10,000 upon 10,000, worshipping the Lamb. My prayer this morning is that we will "behold the Lamb" and leave here with a clear vision of who Jesus is in all of His beauty and glory. Communion Sunday gives us an opportunity to focus on Jesus and the cross. I'm grateful for the opportunity. Mitchell will be continuing his series in the Gospel of John.

I'm sure many of you watched the Super Bowl a couple of weeks ago. I did and enjoyed it very much. Perhaps you too saw the commercial, "He Gets Us." It's an advertising campaign that portrays the very real human sufferings of Jesus Christ and says that because he's suffered, he understands us in our very real human situation. The ad simply seeks to attract people to learn more about who Jesus is. Now, I'm not here to evaluate the "He Gets Us" campaign, but a variety of responses certainly drew my attention, and I spent some time looking at them.

Of course, some of the criticisms have to do with the amount of money that went into buying Super Bowl commercial time and some criticisms relate to the political or moral stance of those who funded these commercials. But the one that has drawn a lot of my attention and that I have been pondering has to do with the very nature of that advertisement and who Jesus is. I read an article seeking to tell people, "don't believe that, don't listen to that, don't be led astray.... We know what Christianity is really about." And then the article delineates the various abuses and hurts not only throughout history but even in our day by those who claim the name of Jesus. The article argues that that is what Christianity is *really* about.

My first response was anger, "No, that's not who Jesus is!" But more than that, I am sad. Many people in our world today hear the word Christian and think of hate, hurt, and abuse. They think of hypocrisy and scandal. Some also point to the abuse of religious authority for political purposes. When people hear the word *Christianity*, too often, they do not see Jesus. Instead, they are turned off by what they have seen of those who claim the name of Christ. Jesus himself dealt with that question.

Jesus said, “Come and see who I am.” If we see Jesus as He is, we will see Him as one who cares. One who is good. And we will find him to be trustworthy and one who will never let us down.

Jesus makes this very clear in John chapter ten. He begins with very familiar words. He says, “Very truly, I tell *you*....” And at this point, we have to stop, because we realize, we're dropping into the middle of a conversation. Whenever Jesus says, “Very truly,” or in older translations, “verily, verily.” When Jesus says this He is drawing a conversation to a powerful conclusion and we must ask ourselves, “what is this conversation about?” Who is “you?” Who is Jesus talking to in this passage? To find the answer, we have to back up a bit. If you are reading a modern NIV translation your text reads, “I say that you *Pharisees*...” The word Pharisees was inserted so we would understand *who* Jesus is talking to. They did the work for us. But that is not in the original language, and not in many of your translations.

Jesus is talking to the Pharisees and he's continuing a conversation begun in John nine. Let's do a review of John Chapter nine. It is an astounding passage. Jesus leaves the temple with his disciples. As they are walking they see a man who was born blind. After some conversation, Jesus makes mud and rubs it on the man's eyes and tells him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. The man goes and washes the mud off of his eyes and he's healed. Some of his neighbors and other beggars see him and say, “Wait a minute, isn't this the guy who was born blind? How can he be seeing now?” And the guy says, “Yes, I'm he.” And the others say, “No, it can't be! “So the crowd takes him off to the religious leaders, the Pharisees, to see what happened. The Pharisees are the authority and the ones responsible to teach the truth and to lead people in ways of righteousness.

The Pharisees say, “What happened to you?” And the man describes what happened, and here is where the Pharisees start to really get interested in the story. Because the thing is, all of this took place on the Sabbath day. The Sabbath is the day that God set aside to be Holy. It's one of the Ten Commandments. Honor the Sabbath, set it aside, particularly for the Lord. The Lord worked six days and rested on the Sabbath. And so you also should work six days, but do not work on the Sabbath. It seems the Pharisees forgot about the root of the commandment, which is “honor God” on the Sabbath. And they got all wrapped up in the laws that *they* created to make sure that nobody would ever violate the Sabbath by working on that day.

The Pharisees have many laws about what constitutes work on the Sabbath. Laws you had to follow to be sure you were not working on the Sabbath. In the mind of the Pharisees, Jesus did two things that were work. He made mud. And he healed. To the Pharisees, Jesus was a lawbreaker. The Pharisees totally forgot about the heart of God and what brings Him the most glory—healing a man born blind. They were focused on a set of rules by which they determined “who's in and who's out,” who belongs to God and who doesn't. And they were very clear in their condemnation of anybody who, in their mind, was on the outside. And some of the

Pharisees thought Jesus, as a sinner, should not be allowed to heal. They "determined to investigate."

So they called his parents. And asked the parents, "Is this your son who you say was born blind? What happened to him? Why can he now see?" The parents are dismissive, "Hey, we know he's our son. That's very clear. And we are absolutely sure he was born blind." The parents had no doubt about it. But at this point, they step back and say, "but we really have nothing to do with the situation. Ask him." They are afraid. John explains to us that the Pharisees had already determined that anybody who followed Jesus as the Messiah would be kicked out of the synagogue. Jesus stirred up plenty of controversy by claiming to be the Son of God, by claiming God as his own Father, and by claiming the name "I AM" for himself.

The Pharisees know that they want nothing to do with Jesus and are determined that anybody who has anything to do with Jesus will be cut off. We know the power plays when those in authority sense that they are in a position of danger, and immediately start punishing anyone who goes astray. The Pharisees are exercising their power and abusing the right of people to see Jesus for who he is and to follow him. To be cut off from the synagogue is no small thing. It is like being kicked out of a social club. And it means they might lose family ties, their business, and their entire social support network. The parents are afraid of being truly ostracized and entirely on their own. The Pharisees are threatening a complete loss of livelihood if someone dares to follow Jesus. And this is why the parents say, "Hey, he's our son. He was blind. We don't know anything else. Talk to him."

So the Pharisees call the man back and talk to him again. And say to him, "We know this man. Jesus is a sinner." But the man responds, "I don't know if he's a sinner, but I know one thing. I was blind, but now I see." He has seen Jesus and he knows, but they didn't know. And they say to him again, "Tell us again what happened."

And the man responds, "I've already told you once. Do I have to tell you again?" But the Pharisees persist, "Lay it out for us. Where does this man come from? We follow Moses. We know where our truth has come from. We are the people who have the right and the authority. This guy, Jesus, we have no idea where he comes from. We have no idea what his basis of authority is."

But the (formerly) blind man says, "This is incredible. You are Israel's spiritual authorities, and here you have a man who clearly has God's authorization because he can perform a miracle that nobody has ever heard of! He is from God! He goes on, "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." And here the Pharisees power up and sneer, "You were steeped in sin at birth. How dare you lecture us?" And they threw him out. Not just out of their presence. They threw him out of the synagogue. They excluded him from the people. Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and went to find him.

Jesus asked him, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

“Who is he, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him.”

Jesus said, “You have seen him. In fact, he is the one speaking to you.”

“Lord, I believe!” And he worshiped him.

So we come to the end of the story, and we have just a guy. He has no power, he has no influence. He's been a beggar all of his life. But he saw Jesus and he believed, and he responded in the only way possible. He worshiped. And as we come to the end of chapter nine, we see that the Pharisees have been revealed for exactly who they are. They have shown their legalism. The only thing that matters to them is strict adherence to the laws that they invented in the first place. They've shown their hypocrisy, and failure to give glory to God. Instead, they seek power and glory for themselves. The Pharisees have shown their stubborn unbelief, self-interests, and cruelty. And they asked Jesus for his evaluation of them.

And now we come to John ten, where Jesus tells the story of a sheep pen. “Very truly, I tell you, Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he is brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger. In fact, they will run away from a stranger because they do not recognize his voice.”

The parable is fairly simple, but the key thing to understanding is the nature of a sheep pen. It's a dangerous thing to be a sheep, particularly to be a sheep in the ancient world. There are enemies all around. There is danger out there. There are wolves who seek to attack the sheep and tear them apart. There is the possibility of getting lost or being separated from the rest of the flock and the shepherd. There is danger of not finding pasture and starving to death. Out there is dangerous. The sheep pen is safe. It has walls.

And the purpose of the walls is to keep the bad things out and keep the good things in. There is only one gate into that sheep pen, and when the shepherd comes through the gate into the pen, he calls the sheep by name. And they know their names and respond to him. They know his voice, and they run to him. And he leads them out into the pasture. The sheep also know that anybody coming over the wall is a thief and a robber. Someone who wants to take advantage of the sheep for his own personal gain. The sheep know to avoid a stranger and will run away. But the sheep will follow the shepherd.

Jesus told this parable to make it pretty clear to the Pharisees who he was and who they were. Interestingly, Scripture tells us that they didn't understand the parable. Jesus uses two metaphors to lay out his meaning very plainly for the Pharisees and anyone listening.

First Metaphor: I Am the Gate

“Therefore Jesus said again, Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate. Whoever comes in through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it to the full” (John 10: 7-10).

When Jesus describes those who came before him as thieves and robbers, he is saying, “You Pharisees are the thieves and robbers. Jesus is outlining the Pharisee’s entire unfitness to be pastors and spiritual leaders for the people of Israel. He is drawing attention to their self-seeking work, and their desire to be on the street corners, to be admired and followed. He is calling attention to their pursuit of personal gain and abuse of their spiritual power for the sake of building up their own prestige and position of authority. He is saying they are thieves. They are the ones who have used and abused the sheep. And have betrayed the trust given to them. They have deceived and manipulated and led the “sheep” astray.

And of course, here we come to the truth that our world is filled with people who look at those claiming the name of Christ, but see the money-grubbing, and self-enriching at the expense of the sheep. People look at those who claim the name of Christ and see manipulation of the name of Christ for the sake of building up political or personal power. We see scandals that have rocked the church and people whom we have loved, admired, and respected most of our lives but have demonstrated themselves to be devoid of the Holiness of Jesus. These are the thieves and the robbers. And the sheep see that emptiness, and betrayal of trust and think, *that's not worth following*.

But Jesus says, “*That's not worth following, but I am worth following*. I am the gate for the sheep. I am the way that you can trust. And I will never fail you.” In verse nine Jesus lays it out more clearly, “Whoever enters through me will be saved.” Jesus does not define salvation here, but the sheep know that they need to be saved. We live with this general sense of anxiety and malaise, betrayed not only by religious leaders but also by political leaders. Betrayed as this man was by his parents. We are betrayed by so many people. We don't know whom we can trust, but we know there is danger out there and we need to be saved. And Jesus says, “Come through me and you will be saved.”

He continues saying, “They will come in and go out and find pasture.” What a beautiful expression. Think about the sheep living in that dangerous world, but not having to worry about a thing. You can go out, you can come in and you are safe because the shepherd is with you and

satisfies your very deepest needs. We need Someone we can trust. We need Someone who will genuinely care for us, not out of self-interest, but simply because He loves us. We need Someone looking out for our good, who will provide our needs. Go by the way of Jesus. You will come in, you will go out, and you will find pasture.

Psalm 23 gives us similar imagery. Jesus says, "Here's the pasture, it's green, it's abundant. Lay down, here's the water, it's clean, it's cool, it's flowing freely. Drink of it." That's what he offers those who go his way. In verse ten Jesus goes on to say, "Not only will you find life in me, but you will find 'abundant life.'" You'll find life to its fullest. Of course, he's not talking about an abundance of material possessions. Jesus does not promise that by following him we are going to be rich. Nor does He promise that by following him we won't experience suffering. He promises the opposite. He says, "You are going to suffer in this world." Oh, how we suffer. We suffer loss and grief. We watch loved ones go through devastating illnesses. We suffer the loss of reputation and even livelihood. That's not what Jesus is talking about in Psalm 23. He doesn't say He leads me *around* the valley of the shadow of death. He leads me *through* the valley of the shadow of death.

But I have life in abundance because I am with the Shepherd who will never let me down. He cares for me and guides me. He is with me all the way. The abundance of life that we have in Jesus is described in Ephesians chapter one, where the apostle lays out every spiritual blessing which is ours in Christ, chosen by Him before the foundation of the world, loved by Him, adopted as sons and daughters, give him the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our inheritance. Jesus describes streams of living water that fill us up and flow from us to those who are around us. The Holy Spirit is the abundance that we can experience in this life. Jesus says, "Come by me, you will be saved, you'll be safe, and you'll be satisfied. "

Second Metaphor: I Am the Good Shepherd

I am the one that you can trust. I am the Savior that you can love. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep." (John 10:11).

Jesus is the way we can trust. And he is the shepherd who is good. The shepherd we can love. There are so many rich truths in this passage that define for us the love of the Savior and how we can respond to him in love.

The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Here we come to the salvation that Jesus is talking about. Among all the needs that we have mentioned to this point, the need for a Savior is the most basic of every human need. Because of our sin, we are separated from our loving and holy God and doomed to eternal judgment and condemnation—cut off from the hope and the glory that awaits us.

When we come to the communion table this morning, we are coming to acknowledge that Jesus Christ is that Savior who laid down his life for his sheep. The bread indicates the broken body of Jesus Christ. The cup indicates his blood, shed for us. The Jesus in John Chapter ten who says, “I am the good shepherd,” is the same Jesus going to the cross at the end of the Book of John. He is lifted up on that cross—that cross that a thief and a robber deserves.

Jesus, who committed no sin and deserved no judgment upon Himself, became Sin in our place. He who deserved no condemnation felt the full wrath of God poured out on Him. The Good Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep and not just for any sheep. For you who long for a Savior, a place to be safe, who long for your deepest needs to be satisfied, Jesus went to the cross for your sake. He died so that we can have life. He rose from the dead to demonstrate that God has accepted that sacrifice. And now the way is open. He is the gate. We can go through him and be saved and be safe and satisfied. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

The Good Shepherd knows his sheep.

Jesus describes a perfect and intimate relationship that the Father and Son share. They have perfect knowledge of each other. Jesus says that that kind of loving knowledge is the knowledge that he has for us and that we can have for him. “I know my sheep and my sheep know me.” He knows us perfectly yet loves us unconditionally.

The Good Shepherd keeps his sheep.

‘I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one can snatch them out of my hand’ (John 10:28). This is a Savior that we can love and trust. Our response is, first of all, the same response of a blind man. We don't know how many years he was caught in darkness. But one day Jesus came and opened his eyes. And when that man saw Jesus, he knew whom He could trust. And he said, “Lord, I believe.” If you do not know the loving, caring, trustworthy Savior this morning, he says, “do you believe in the Son of Man?”

Don't look to those who have failed you. Look to Jesus. Look to the Savior whom we can trust and who is worthy of our devotion.

*Heavenly Father, this morning we need to see Jesus. You are the God and the God who sees you were the God who knows our hearts. You know, the depth and the darkness of our sin. But you invite us to come and Lord, we pray that by your Holy Spirit, you would move to open eyes that are in darkness and to help us to see Jesus and to run to him and lay before you, our sin and our need. May we receive from you living water, green grass, and calm pastures. May we receive your gift of life, peace, hope, and holiness that be found only in Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.*

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February 26, 2023*

*Edited by ckg*