

TWO REASONS TO TRUST JESUS, THE GOOD SHEPHERD

10 I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, that man is a thief and a robber. ²But the man who enters in by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The watchman opens [the gate] for him; and the sheep respond to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger; on the contrary, they will run away from him; because they do not know [any] stranger's voice. ⁶Jesus told them this parable, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. ⁷Therefore Jesus again said to them, I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All those who came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not respond to them. ⁹I am the gate; if anyone enters in through me he shall be saved, and shall come in and go out, and shall find pasture. ¹⁰The thief only comes in order to steal and kill and destroy; I have come so that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand is not a shepherd—the sheep do not belong to him. When he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³[He runs away] because he is a hired hand and does not care about the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd; I know mine own [sheep] and my own [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 do not belong to this fold; I must also bring them. They, too, shall respond to my voice; there shall be one flock [with] one shepherd. ¹⁷The Father loves me because I lay down my life—[I lay it down] in order that I may take it again. ¹⁸No one takes it away from me, I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again. I received this commandment from my Father. (Jn. 10:1-18)

Introduction

California's winters can be cold, foggy, and rainy in the alfalfa fields south of Bakersfield. Each year thousands of lambs are born in that area during those wintry months of January, February, and March. Their warm, moist little bodies pass from the protection of their mothers' wombs to an often-hostile environment. The motherly attention of the ewes, warm and nourishing milk, and the diligent care of the shepherds guard and preserve these fragile little lambs. Lambing season is a time when the shepherds are working night and day: watching over the ewes as they give birth, and caring for the little baby lambs.

The loving care of the shepherds for the sheep, and especially for the helpless little lambs, is typified by the actions of one Basque shepherd named Domingo. One day Domingo was seen with a little lamb draped over his shoulder: it was an orphan, and he was looking for a ewe to mother it. He took that little lamb to one of the pens where a ewe was nosing the still, lifeless body of its dead lamb. It was a pathetic sight as she bleated plaintively to the lamb that could not respond. Domingo placed the orphan lamb in the pen with the ewe: it tried to suckle, the ewe sniffed it, and

then she accepted it. Thanks to the loving care of Domingo, a good shepherd, a little lamb's life was spared and a ewe had a new baby for which to care. (*POWER*, 3/24/91, pp. 4-5)

As we consider Domingo and his loving care for his sheep, let us all the more appreciate the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd who loves us and has our best interests at heart. Because Jesus is the Good Shepherd, we can trust Him with complete confidence.

I. You Can Trust Jesus, the Good Shepherd, Because He Came to Give Life

As the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus contrasts Himself with the thief: *"The thief only comes in order to steal and kill and destroy; I have come so that they may have life and have it abundantly"* (vs. 10.) The sole purpose of the thief is to steal, to kill, and to destroy; and the ultimate thief is the devil himself:

He was a murderer from the beginning and is not established in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he is speaking in accordance with his own [nature]; because he is a liar and the father of [lies.] (Jn. 8:44b)

In the very first lesson on the Gospel of John, it was noted what Scripture says about the devil in Genesis 3:1-6,

Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field that Jehovah God had made. And he said to the woman, Indeed, has God said, You shall not eat from any tree of the garden? ²And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; ³but concerning the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, or else you will die. ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, You shall not surely die; ⁵for God knows that in the day you eat [the fruit of that tree] your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be like God, knowing good and evil. ⁶And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired [as a means of] making one wise, she took of its fruit, and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband with her, and he ate it. (Gen. 3:1-6)

The devil, operating through the serpent, sought to convince Eve that she and Adam could live independently of God, without obligation to God and without fear of divine retribution (vs. 4.) He sought to convince Eve that she and Adam could be like God—he alleged that God was selfishly withholding His personal privileges from them, but they could seize that same privileged position for themselves (vs. 5.) He introduced Eve to the forbidden fruit and convinced her that she and Adam should indulge their desires and gratify themselves (vs. 6.) The devil convinced Adam and Eve to sin against God by breaking His commandment, the LORD had explicitly instructed them, *"you shall not eat from*

[the tree of the knowledge of good and evil], *for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die*" (Gen. 2:17.)

Now consider the actions of the devil as they are revealed in Zechariah 3:1,3,

... he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of Jehovah, and Satan was standing at his right side to accuse him ... ³Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments as he stood before the angel. (Zechariah 3:1,3)

Having lured us into sin—the tactics he used with Adam and Eve in the garden are the same tactics he continues to employ against us—the devil now turns around and becomes our accuser before God, demanding our condemnation.

In contrast to the thief, Jesus declares that as the Good Shepherd He came that we might have life.

Having listened to the tempter when they should have fled from him, Adam and Eve now hide from the LORD when they hear His voice, because they were afraid that He would immediately execute His righteous judgment against them:

Then they heard the voice of Jehovah God walking in the garden in the cool of the day; and the man and his wife hid themselves among the trees of the garden from the presence of Jehovah God. ⁹And Jehovah God called to the man, and asked, Where are you? ¹⁰And [the man] said, I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; so I hid myself. (Gen. 3:8-10)

But in His mercy, the LORD seeks them out and graciously promises to send a Savior who shall crush the serpent's head, (i.e.; administer a deadly, victorious blow against him:

And Jehovah God said to the serpent, Because you have done this, you are cursed beyond all cattle, and beyond every beast of the field; upon your belly shall you crawl, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life. ¹⁵And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall crush your head, and you shall bruise his heel. (Gen. 3:14-15)

This promise was fulfilled at the cross of Calvary: *"having disarmed the powers and authorities, [Christ] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by [the cross]"* (Col. 2:15.)

Consider the LORD's gracious character as it is revealed to us in Luke 15:7,10, a passage in which is revealed His delight in receiving repentant sinners:

I tell you that ... there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous men who do not need to repent. ¹⁰... I tell you,

there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.
(Lk. 15:7,10)

Because Jesus is the Good Shepherd who came to seek and to save lost sheep—because He is the Savior who can bestow forgiveness and life—we can entrust ourselves to Him without fear of rejection or condemnation. As He testifies in Luke 19:10, *“the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.”* Note, too, the testimony of John 3:16-17,

... for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world; but [rather], that the world might be saved through him. (Jn. 3:16-17)

Jesus further declares that as the Good Shepherd He came to offer an abundance of life to those who trust in Him: *“I have come so that they may have life and may have it abundantly”* (vs. 10b.)

Consider the testimony of a Christian woman named Iris:

As a brand new Christian, I expected to find the “abundant life” Christ promised me easier than the life I had known before. Instead, almost immediately after conversion, I was thrown into a series of serious illnesses, financial hardships, and marital problems.

In January of 1982 I received Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. Then my troubles began.

First, I became severely ill. ... I went from doctor to doctor in search of a cure, but no one seemed able to diagnose my problem. When the doctors couldn't find out what was wrong with me, others began to wonder if I was making it all up. ... people began avoiding me, and it became even more difficult to get help when I felt sick.

My own relatives avoided me for a different reason. Born into a Jewish family, my new belief in Jesus Christ was blasphemy to them, and by custom I was no longer considered their child. It seemed everywhere I turned I was an outcast. ...

Where was the abundant Christian life God promised me? Still, I didn't lose faith. I was only a baby Christian, but I knew one thing for sure: the Bible says God always keeps His promises.

Yet things went from bad to worse ... During this period my son had a bad fall and broke his leg. He was hospitalized for a month. Medical bills piled up.

Then my husband's business failed, and we were forced to file for bankruptcy.

How could this story possibly have a happy ending? That's what I kept asking God as I tried to cling to His promise that all things work together for good to those who love Him ... some days I simply couldn't rejoice for what was happening to me. The only thing "abundant" in my life seemed to be suffering and I didn't understand why.

Gradually I began to see what God was showing me—that He was the only thing I could depend on. My health, my family, my marriage, my finances, my friendships were crumbling. God wanted me to depend solely on Him. And so I did, clinging to the psalmist's words: "*I call on the LORD in my distress and He answers me*" (Psl. 120:1.)

Answer me He did! ... my husband became open to the Gospel and received Jesus as his Savior. He is truly a new creature in Christ, and we have been blessed with a new marriage because of it. He is back in business, too, this time trusting the LORD will work out all the difficulties one way or another. My family, too, was amazed at my ability to cope with so many problems at once. They asked for the source of my strength and hope and I insisted it came from the LORD. Some of my family are now Christians; other are asking lots of questions. ...

I cannot end this story with "They lived happily ever after." We still struggle financially at times. Though my health has improved dramatically, I still have hypoglycemia and probably always will. I still have daily cares and problems like everyone else. Does that mean Christ was a liar when He promised an abundant life? No. Through all the trials I've learned that *circumstances* are not the source of abundance. As a Christian, my abundance comes from God's sovereign presence in my life. Even when all else fails, God is still there, keeping His promises to be my strength, my hope, my provider, my healer, my counselor, my salvation. I have found new life as a Christian, and it is abundantly full through Him. (*POWER*, 10/9/88, pp. 4-6)

Because Jesus is the Good Shepherd who cares for His sheep and is true to His Word, we can entrust ourselves to Him without fear of rejection or disappointment. In the words of the hymn writer, Frances R. Havergal,

Every joy or trial falls from above,
Traced upon our dial by the Sun of Love.
We may trust Him fully all for us to do;
They who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true.
Set upon Jehovah,
Hearts are fully blessed,

Finding as He promised,
Perfect peace and rest.

II. You Can Trust Jesus, the Good Shepherd, Because He is Committed to His “Sheep”

The Lord Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, contrasts Himself with the hired hand:

The hired hand is not a shepherd—the sheep do not belong to him. When he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³[He runs away] because he is a hired hand and does not care about the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd; I know mine own [sheep] and my own [sheep] know me—¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. (Jn. 10:12-15)

A hired hand works with the sheep, but he is not a shepherd; he works for money, he feels no love or devotion to the sheep. The hired hand does not have a personal interest in the sheep because they do not belong to him: the sheep are his living, but they are not his life. He tends the sheep, but he is not tenderly attached to them. The hired hand will not risk his life for the sheep: he sees the wolf coming, he forsakes the sheep and runs for his life, he flees because he does not care about the sheep.

In contrast to the hired hand, Jesus declares that as the Good Shepherd, He cares for the sheep (vs. 14-15a.) There exists a mutual love and communion between Himself and His sheep. Jesus declares, *“I know my own [sheep].”* He is personally acquainted with His sheep, and they are precious to Him. As He testifies in verse 3, as the Good Shepherd, *“He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”* Note, also, what is said of the LORD as the Good Shepherd in Isaiah 40:11, *“He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and will gently lead those that have their young.”*

Furthermore, Jesus declares, *“my own [sheep] know me.”* There is a reciprocal acquaintance, affection, allegiance and love on the part of the sheep towards Jesus the Good Shepherd. Note how the sheep respond to their Good Shepherd: *“When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice”* (Jn. 10:4.)

Because of His commitment to His Father, and because of His great love for His sheep, Jesus as the Good Shepherd protects His sheep with His own life (vs. 15b.) In an emergency a good shepherd would venture to risk his life for his sheep. Note 1 Samuel 17:34-35, where David relates his experience as a shepherd:

David said to Saul, Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, ³⁵I went after it,

struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When [the wild animal] turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. (1 Sam. 17:34-35)

But Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, came into the world for the express purpose of voluntarily laying down His life for His sheep! Jesus laid down His life to protect His sheep from the righteous wrath of God: “[He was] *stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.* ⁵*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed*” (Isa. 53:4b-5.) He laid down His life in order to satisfy God’s justice and thereby silence the accusing voice of the devil.

In His resurrection life Jesus continues to plead on behalf of His people and guarantees our protection until we arrive safely at our heavenly Father’s home: “[Jesus] *is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them*” (Heb. 7:25.) As Christians we may at times be exposed to severe testing and attack by the evil one, but in the midst of such ordeals we shall be preserved and finally delivered. Just as the Good Shepherd interceded for Simon Peter, so does He for each of His sheep: “*Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you like wheat.* ³²*But I have prayed for you, Simon, so that your faith may not fail. And when you have returned, strengthen your brothers*” (Lk. 22:31-32.)

Because Jesus is the Good Shepherd who cares for His sheep and is true to His word, we can entrust ourselves to Him and be confident of His divine protection. As we do so, we will come to experience the truth of the Psalmist’s testimony: “*The LORD is my shepherd ...* ⁴*Even 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*” (Psl. 23:1,4.)

In verse 16 Jesus reveals that He has “*other sheep that do not belong to this fold.*” That is to say, there are others who belong to Him and will believe in Him who are not of the nation of Israel. Jesus informs His hearers that it is imperative that these other sheep—those who would believe in Him from among the Gentile nations—must also be brought home to God their heavenly Father (vs. 16b.) Like the sheep who belong to Him from the nation of Israel, these Gentile sheep will also recognize His voice and respond to the Good Shepherd and follow Him. Consequently, these two flocks, (the one composed of believing Jews and the other composed of believing Gentiles,) will be united into one blessed flock under one Shepherd: the Lord Jesus Christ (vs. 16c.) At the time our Lord spoke these words, this was a startling revelation to the Jews, and a wonderful revelation for the Gentile nations, that the Good Shepherd of the house of Israel should call Gentiles also into His fold and promise to provide for us as His very own sheep. The Apostle Paul addresses this unity of the Good Shepherd’s flock—this unity of the church of Christ—in his epistle to the Ephesians:

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)—¹²remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. (Eph. 2:11-13)

He came and preached peace to you who were far away [i.e.; Gentiles] and peace to those who were near [i.e.; Jews]; ¹⁸for through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. ¹⁹Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household. (Eph. 2:17-19)

Because Jesus is the Good Shepherd who cares for **all** His sheep, we can entrust ourselves to Him with the complete confidence that He will provide for us. He will provide for our needs throughout all the days of our life:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall lack nothing. ²He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters. ³He restores my soul. He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. (Psl. 23:1-3)

He will provide for us a place in His Father’s heavenly kingdom:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. ²In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, so that you also may be where I am. (Jn. 14:1-3)

Conclusion

May the LORD grant us an ever-greater appreciation of the fact that He is the Good Shepherd who loves us and has our best interests at heart. Because Jesus is the Good Shepherd, we can entrust ourselves to Him with complete confidence—confidence that He will neither reject us nor disappoint us; confidence that He will protect our souls, even though we may be called to pass through severe trial; and confidence that He will provide for all our needs in this world and the world to come.