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JOHN 10

John Series: Get a Life in Jesus

[PRAYER] Lord, as we ponder your faithfulness, we're overwhelmed with gratefulness because you're faithful to us continually. And when we fail you, or we forget you, or when we sin, we just even make mistakes, we are grateful that you are faithful to us. You are reliable. We can trust you. Lord, it's in those moments that things get complicated or trust gets difficult that we know that we must rely on something outside of ourselves. So coming to you just knowing that you're faithful to us, you're here. You're pictured as a rock in the scriptures and we need that. So we thank you so much for being there at our high points, our low points. And your faithfulness, Lord, is just demonstrated in your initiative with us and your sharing of your word. Lord, we're going to open your scriptures now. As we do, we ask you to speak to us in a way that just reveals that faithfulness and that care. In Jesus' name, amen.

If you were here last week you know that we worked through chapter 9, which is about a blind man. The story ends last week, if you remember, that the Pharisees or the religious leaders threw him out of the synagogue. It seems rather dramatic to me what they did. It seems rather harsh what they did. It's mistreatment is what it is. So if you have been mistreated in your life, if there's a mark on you that has to do with some mistreatment you've experienced then I think you're going to find tremendous comfort today in that as we look at Christ a little bit more. In fact I think you'll find it encouraging just in the story.

It says they threw him out of the synagogue and the next verse says – *And when Jesus found him*, it gives the impression that Jesus was out looking for him. And when He found him. I like that idea because Jesus is on the hunt for us. He initiates. He wants to find us. It's a beautiful picture of the comfort that God wants to give us. And He says to the man, "Do you know who the Son of Man is?" And the man says, "I don't know who He is." Well He just healed him, so Jesus says, "You're talking to the person. I'm talking to you." And the man says – *"I believe,"* and it says *he worshiped him.*

There was a transformation in the man at that point that moved him to a personal relationship, not just an idea, not just something that was out there. There was a personal relationship. So we see between Jesus and the blind man something very important take place. We see the blind man experiencing Jesus in a new way and we see Jesus pursuing this man.

Now we move into chapter 10 because Jesus is now going to shift His focus from the blind man. He's going to look at the Pharisees and He's going to start talking to the Pharisees in our passage today. He has a goal in mind. He wants the Pharisees to understand what they're doing is a misunderstanding of faith, what they're doing is wrong, they've got the whole wrong idea here.

And He's going to call them thieves and robbers. They don't get it right away, but that's what He's calling them, thieves and robbers. He's going to compare the thieves and robbers to the good shepherd in our passage today.

We're going to pick it up in John 10. I want to read the first ten verses with you. So if you'd open your Bibles please to John 10:1-10. Stand with me. I'm going to read the passage here and if you have your own scriptures you can underline certain parts or take notes in the margin if you have it with you.

John 10 – “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 has 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 him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.” Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

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 enters 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.”

You may be seated.

There are three different aspects that Jesus is drawing attention to. One is the gate, secondly that they follow Him (notice in verse 4), and they listen to His voice in verse 4 and other places in our passage. So those are the three different aspects of the shepherd idea that we're going to see as we go through the passage.

But Jesus is challenging the Pharisees. The Pharisees had developed this rather intricate to-do list of what it means to please God and they had lost the relationship side of what it means to know God. That's really the essence of our lesson today and that's what the passage is all about.

Let's talk about the difference between religion and relationship just for a moment. Is Christianity a religion or is it a relationship? Well religion is defined this way. Religion is the belief in a supreme superpower of some sort. So if we look at that definition then Christianity would certainly be a religion. But practically speaking when you implement Christianity, it's very different because there's this relational component that's a part of it that sets it apart from every other kind of religion.

There are theistic religions like Judaism or Islam that have a personal god and so there are those kinds of religions. And then there are those that are non-theistic religions like Hinduism or Buddhism that have a metaphysical sense or spiritual energy that you're trying to get into contact with. In all the cases of religion other than Christianity, they are initiated by man. Man is

initiating to do things, to adhere to a list of rules or guidelines, or to practice certain principles or such, and in so doing come into contact with God somehow. That's the goal. It's human initiated. As a result then, like God's the audience or something, and there's some benefit that comes, either paradise or nirvana or some spiritual energy that you get out of it. That's the religion in general.

In Christianity it's different in this way that God initiates with us. That He's the one after us, that He's finding us, that He's looking for us, and He sent Jesus Christ so that we could be saved. So if you look at this idea of the gate down in verse 9 it says – *I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.* So to be saved means to recognize the gate and to enter through the gate. The gate represents this passageway in.

But we have to understand sheep a little more. You see in the idea of the shepherd and the sheep, the shepherds would build these little barriers out of stones, high stones so that the sheep would be corralled in here and the wild animals would not easily get in. But they didn't have a gate. They had an opening at the end in that one place and at that opening they would then have the shepherd either lay down there or the shepherd would sit there. So in that moment then the shepherd would be the one to protect or guard. So there would be this gate that goes in.

I'm going to show you four videos today about sheep. I'm going to do that because I don't think we know much about sheep in our society. We're not talking about auto mechanics or cars or something. Maybe I got that a little bit. But sheep, that's a little foreign to me. So let me show you an idea of what the gates are all about.

[Video]

The idea here is that the shepherd blocks the opening, but he also provides access. So let's just pause there for a moment and ask the question, have you met the gate? Because that's partly what Jesus is saying to the Pharisees. Let's not just look at this as a religious system. Let's look at this as the gate. He says, "I'm the gate, and I protect the sheep, and the way to get into the fold is through Jesus Christ." So we want to ask ourselves that question. Have we asked Jesus Christ to be our Savior, to be the one to provide this? God's initiated salvation; we respond to that and receive that gift of salvation. That's the first thing we see in this particular passage.

The next thing I want to draw attention to though is the voice. In verse 3 it says – *and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.*

Alright. Let's look at this in a practical level. Do you hear God speak yourself? Do you hear God speak? Most people will say I don't because they think audible voice. Right? But God speaks to us and uses His word to do that. He'll speak to us in different ways. He might speak to me through my children or my wife, through a life situation or creation. But the most compelling of the ways He speaks and the way we check everything out is through His word. We look at God's word and He speaks to us.

So if you open up the Bible today or tomorrow and you read a verse or verses, God will speak to you and you'll start to hear His voice. And He starts to guide you and direct you. He leads you

on a path or He takes you in a place, wherever it might be. Then you're listening to the voice of God. We need to learn to be sheep that listen to the voice of God. That's just part of what He's saying here.

Now how do we do that? How do we get to know God's voice? I think it's through that experience of regularly opening up God's word. So if you're not in the habit of opening up the Bible, you want to do that. Open up God's word and read it. Read it for yourself. As you do, God will speak to you and you'll be able to hear what He has to say.

Now there's a contrast being made here because you're saved and you've come into the gate through the shepherd, now you're one of the sheep. Those sheep have a special relationship with the shepherd and the sheep listen to the voice of the shepherd. Notice it says in verse 5 – *But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.* He chose sheep because it's very characteristic of sheep.

I want you to look at another video now in just a sec and in this video we're going to see an experiment take place. Okay? In this experiment, there are three objects in this object lessons. Because the bus driver or the tour guide comes up and he's in front of this farm area where the sheep are in the background. Each one of the three young people are going to get out and they're going to try to call the sheep. I want you to see what happens when they try to call the sheep compared to the farmer or the shepherd who he goes out and he calls the sheep. Notice the responsiveness that they have in each one of these cases. And just think for yourself: Are you like this? Are you able to listen to the shepherd and respond to His voice?

[Video]

It's fun to watch the sheep, isn't it? But let's look at our lives. Are we listening for God to speak? Are we hearing what He's saying? Because when we do, then there's this pasture that's being described in this passage that we have access to. God wants to offer us this life.

Let's look at the last verse of this part of our passage. Verse 9 says – *I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture.* And then He gives this statement because He's trying to convince the Pharisees, help them understand – look you guys, you've got a problem. *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

You see the problem with religion, and frankly let's look at our own hearts that sometimes we establish our own religion so to speak, this list of rules we have to obey in order to please God or this thing that we try to satisfy, this heart longing inside of us. We do these things and therefore God will be pleased with me. Those ideas rob us of something. They rob us of the personal experience that God wants us to enjoy of knowing Him as the shepherd.

He describes Himself as the shepherd who cares for the sheep. And there's a contrast in this verse 10 between the thief whose job or role is to steal, to kill, and to destroy. That could be all kinds of things. Not just the Pharisees, but it could be things around in our world system. Because the whole goal of the world system is to steal, to kill, and to destroy. But Christ offers

us life. So if we start listening to the voice of the world, it starts to do something to you that is destructive. That is the idea here.

For example if you start to develop bitterness, you're justified. The world will say you're a victim, you have rights. And so there's this whole emphasis on I'm justified in my anger. So the anger starts to grow and turn you into an ugly person. Right? Well of course Jesus teaches us more about releasing that and forgiving and trusting Him so that we don't become bitter people. Because He wants us to enjoy the pastureland. He wants us to have life to the full.

In the world system there is ways to handle your money in the world system that if you want it, buy it. I often get a notice in the mail: Your credit card limit has been increased. I call them up and I say, "Don't increase my credit limit. Put it back where it was. I don't need an increase in my credit limit." Why is that? They do that because they want people to believe (and this is what some people believe) "oh good, I've got some more money now!" You don't have any more money. You just have more opportunity to get into financial bondage.

It's a problem when the world is out there offering solutions that pollute and ruin the pastureland that God wants us to enjoy. Because Christ has come to give us the fullness of life. The world has all these ideas of what will make you happy and what you can do in your life.

Engage in sexual relations outside of marriage. If you do that, it will damage you. It will certainly damage a marriage relationship that you will have now or in the future. But it starts to do something to your own sexual wholeness when you do what the world is saying to do. It's damaging.

God says – *I have come to give you life so you can have it to the full.* So realize that *the thief is here to steal, to kill, and to destroy.* And you want to be very careful not to listen to the voices that are out there that create a problem.

Let's go on to verse 11. Jesus continues talking to the Pharisees. *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand (now we're going to compare two different people. We're going to compare the shepherd or the owner to the employee. Owner versus employee. 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.*

He's drawing attention to the fact that Christ has a personal interest in you and in me. It's very personal and it's an interest. He's committed and He's faithful and He wants that relationship with us. It's personal. It's like the sheep. Put yourself in the picture of the sheep here and it really makes it stand out that wow, the shepherd loves me and cares for me.

In verse 14 He repeats what He said in verse 11. Do you see that? *"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. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen."*

I'm glad He put that in there because if we start to think that our church is the only one, we need to recognize there are other sheep out there that are part of this larger flock that are under the shepherd's guidance. Oh certainly there are churches in our community that aren't teaching the word. But there are churches in our community that are great churches. I talked to Pastor Emmons this week from GraceWay Bible Church. It's a great church and they're serving the Lord there. He proclaims the message of the gospel as he teaches, as well as several other churches in our area. I like that statement. *I 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.*

The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

The Jews who heard these words were again divided. Many of them said, “He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?”

But others said, “These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

Notice again the Pharisees are divided. And they should be because there's some truths that are happening, some experiences that are happening that should be pointing to the Messiah. They should know that and they're missing this. That's why He calls them spiritually blind in the previous passage.

Now I'm thinking of this whole idea of sheep and shepherds and I like the pasture picture that we showed a moment ago. Remember the sheep are out there on the pasture. I like that because it gives me this sense of peace, separation from the busyness of life. I think that's probably why we're attracted to Psalm 23.

Paul Jurik is a U.S. Marine and he was telling us this week that the favorite passage of the chaplain of the U.S. Marine is Psalm 23. Why? Well just think about it. He *prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies. He leads me beside quiet waters. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, He is with me.* Now for someone engaged in battle, the seriousness of their lives would love Psalm 23. And I know some of you who aren't even in the Marines would benefit from that and enjoy that passage because of what it does for you. You recognize that there's a shepherd because verse 1 – *The Lord is my shepherd.* He's the good shepherd and He provides this relationship.

I like the picture of the pasture. But I don't live in the city. Okay, I live in the suburbs. But my life is busy. And to imagine the sheep and the shepherd analogy in the busyness of my life can be complicated. When I go on vacation I got that. I mean two months ago my wife and I went on vacation. The place where we went to, you get off the interstate and it's 45 minutes down windy roads to finally get where we wanted. I'm saying this is great. This is out of the way. This is a reclusive area. I liked that a lot. I can imagine the shepherd concept in that. But can I bring that

shepherd idea into the busyness of my life crossing streets, and dealing with phones that are ringing, and so on?

So this next video that I show you is going to illustrate that. I want you to get a sense of following the shepherd in the busyness of life. Now notice we have a bunch of sheep on the other side of the street. This is a short video in Amman, Jordan (the capital city of Jordan) where the sheep are going to cross the street. Just notice a number of things. Notice the shepherd is leading them. They're following the shepherd. Notice they're not going ahead of the shepherd. The shepherd doesn't even have to turn around and rebuke them. He's just taking them through. Watch what happens in this video and get a picture of Jesus Christ as your good shepherd living through the busyness of your own life.

[Video]

Jesus is the good shepherd. (I'm afraid for that one last sheep there. If he doesn't get over there we're going to have a problem.) But I'm just so impressed by the good shepherd being that good shepherd in the busyness of life. I need that in my life to recognize that this idea of the shepherd is something that I can apply to my life today. Why? Because it's about a personal relationship with the shepherd. I want Him to be able to lead me on the busy streets of my life.

As we continue into the passage in the next few verses, it says this: *Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."*

Now that's a really important statement because of the prophecy in Isaiah 35. In Isaiah 35 looking forward to this Messianic time, it says that there is going to be someone who is going to come (the Messiah) who is going to heal the eyes of the blind, who's going to open the ears of the deaf, who's going to make the man who's mute to be able to speak. Those are the signs that you're going to know the Messiah. So these Pharisees have got to be thinking about the reality of scripture. Now they're wrestling with something in their hearts, I'm sure, and that's why they're divided. On the one hand some are saying, "Could this be the Messiah?" and others are saying, "No. He doesn't fit into our lists of guidelines that we've established. He must not be the Messiah." There's this wrestling going on in them about whether He's the Messiah or not.

So Jesus' response is this: *"I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."*

I'm a sheep. I want to follow. Not lead. I want to follow the shepherd.

"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?”

This idea of the sheep and the shepherd is a really good one. Isaiah says (speaking about us) – *All we, like sheep, have gone astray.* And that means we’ve left the flock. We’ve left the group and we’re kind of wandering off on our own with our own idea of how to accomplish something or do something. We want to do our own way. *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—each one—to our own way; and (the rest of the verse in Isaiah 53 says) the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

The point is when we sin God has given us a solution for that sin and that is for Jesus Christ to come back to the gate. But what about the sheep that goes off and goes astray? See Jesus uses the same analogy of the shepherd and the sheep in Luke 15 when He says this: The shepherd who has one hundred sheep gets them all into the pen. As he’s counting them as they’re jumping over him as they’re going into the pen, he finds out that he only has ninety-nine. One is missing. So what does he do? He doesn’t just say, “Oh well. I’ve got ninety-nine. I don’t need the other one.” He goes after the lone sheep (which is you and me). He goes after us in a personal way. He wants that personal relationship with us.

The most dangerous thing for a sheep is to be alone. Because when you’re a lone sheep then you’re in danger of being attacked by the... I could put a Discovery video here where the sheep is being attacked by the whatever, the wolf, and you can see him getting destroyed and you’d be motivated by fear. “Oh no. I better not do that.” But I’m not going to do that. You can go watch the Discovery Channel if you want to do that.

What I’m going to do is I’m going to show you a picture of the shepherd coming after the lone sheep. I’m just touched by this. The shepherd has left his other sheep. He’s coming to find the sheep that’s all alone. I want you to see what happens when he gets to the sheep. Does he scold the sheep? Imagine being the sheep that’s going astray. Watch what happens.

[Video]

I love that picture. The shepherd and the sheep. So Jesus uses these words to try to convince the Pharisees that what they’re doing wrong, that they have this application that we all walk away from as that lone sheep knowing that Jesus wants this personal relationship with you and me. We’re all like that lone sheep and Jesus comes, He wants that personal relationship, He wants to be close to us.

The same person who wrote these words in John that God used to write in the book of John also wrote in the book of Revelation these words that describe this a little bit differently about the relationship. In Revelation 3:20 it says – *Here I am!* Jesus says. *I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice (we’re back to the voice thing again – if you hear His voice calling) and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.* It’s a verse that describes relationship. That’s what God wants for all of us.

I hope today as you go away from this morning God will use this passage in John 10 to motivate you to open the book this week, to listen to His voice. Let Him speak to you. And then learn to follow Him and draw close to Him. If you've been away from Him, He wants you to come back into that special relationship with Him.

Would you stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] So Father, we're thankful and grateful for your faithfulness. Your faithfulness that shows care and love to us even when we've gone astray. Your faithfulness that continues to reach out to our hearts. Lord, I ask that you'd help us in the busyness of the crossing of the streets of our lives this week, that we would be sensitive to follow you, to listen to your voice and be sensitive to it. We want that fellowship and we ask that you would help us to experience that because we know that you've set up our relationship with you to mean much more than religion. It's a relationship that we can enjoy. Prompt us to enjoy it, Lord, this week. In Jesus' name, amen.