

SERIES: Gospel of John: Seeing is Believing?
 SERMON: *The Good Shepherd*
 SCRIPTURE: John 10:1-21
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Authenticity and Relativism

I am by no means a great student of culture and therefore am not qualified to be a cultural critic. However, in my limited observation it appears as though the chief values in our culture are authenticity and relativism.

The message that is broadcast everywhere, whether explicitly or implicitly is that everybody and everything needs to be authentic, to be real. Reality TV shows are more real than the standard sitcom. Organic food is more authentic than non-organic. Listening to bands on independent record labels and watching Indie movies that nobody has ever heard of (subtitles preferred) are more authentic than mainstream media. Just be yourself; be transparent; just be real. And make sure that you consume products that are real too. And whatever you do, don't come across as polished or put together; that's not real. That's the message.

I'm not opposed to authenticity. I think generally speaking it is a good value and hopefully marks our relationships as Christians. But there is some humorous irony in how authenticity manifests itself as a chief value in our culture.

The marketing industry has picked up on authenticity in case you didn't notice. They appeal to this value in advertising everything from food to clothing. And so everybody who is trying to be themselves and be real is in fact simply being like everybody else. Or put another way, in an effort to be authentic many of us are phonies simply succumbing to the siren call to be real. One of my favorite examples of "authentic" living is the pre-torn, pre-faded jeans. Torn jeans give that "I'm not polished or put together" look, which is a good indication that you're authentic. And people will gladly spend \$100 or more on a pair of jeans that are already torn for you. I'm not judging, I'm just saying it's ironic that in an effort to look authentic and worn, one buys brand new jeans that were "worn out" by the factory .

Relativism is another big value in our culture. We live in a culture that says truth is in the eye of the beholder. Whatever is true for you is true. And if relativism is paraded as virtue, exclusivity is seen as its arch nemesis. Nobody has the corner on the market of what is true or right in this culture.

But can authenticity and relativism co-exist, or are they in direct competition? If we're looking for the real deal, but there is no objective standard to determine what is real it seems as though the pursuit of that which is authentic will be perpetually frustrating, an exercise in futility.

Why do I bring this up? It is not to give social commentary. It is because I am convinced that the gospel rubs up against this collision of values in our culture. The gospel makes authentic claims if you will. Jesus claims to be the true, or real, Messiah, the Christ the Son of God. And he claims to deal with our real problem, sin. Jesus claims to be the Savior of the world. But his claims are also exclusive claims. He claims to be the only way. This doesn't bode well in a culture of relativism.

Jesus' claim to be the authentic and exclusive Savior was met with tension in his day as well. In our passage this morning Jesus calls himself the true Shepherd of Israel and in so doing he calls others

phonies. Then he makes a claim of exclusivity and says he's the only way. The religious leaders don't like what Jesus has to say. In fact at the end of the chapter they pick up stones to kill him (v. 31). Does this sound like a rerun? That's kind of the way it goes in John. Jesus is developing who he is as the Christ, the Son of God. That case is building while at the same time opposition is mounting. They do not succeed in killing him in chapter 10, but these two paths ultimately collide on a Roman cross. The good news is that his death is the way by which we can have eternal life.

Let's look at John chapter 10 together. You may notice that we are skipping chapter 9 in this series. The reason we are skipping chapter 9 is because Mike already preached on chapter 9 in July. I would encourage you to listen to that sermon again online.

John 10:1–21 (ESV)

¹“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. ²But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

¹⁹There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. ²⁰Many of them said, “He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?” ²¹Others said, “These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

There is so much to cover in this passage. This morning we will simply look three truths about Jesus and the appropriate response.

Jesus is the true Shepherd of the true sheep. (1-6)

Or in other words, Jesus is the real deal; he's the authentic Shepherd.

During the day a shepherd would take his sheep out to pasture, but at night they would often bring their sheep to a sheep pen, or a sheepfold as verse 1 says. The sheep pen, or sheep fold, would hold more than one flock of sheep. There may be three or four shepherds who kept their sheep in one pen.

The shepherds would then leave their sheep in the sheep pen overnight and a gatekeeper would keep watch over the sheep.

The gatekeeper knows the true shepherd. In the morning when the shepherds would come back to take their sheep back out to pasture the gatekeeper would know who the true shepherds were; and the gatekeeper would only let the true shepherds in the pen to get their sheep. They wouldn't let a stranger into the pen. If a thief wanted to get to the sheep they wouldn't be able to get to them through the gate, because the gatekeeper would know who the true shepherds were. That makes sense. But what may not make sense to you is how the shepherds would know which sheep were theirs; how would they distinguish their sheep from another shepherd's sheep?

The true sheep know the true shepherd. Well the sheep recognized the voice of their shepherd. And when their shepherd came in the pen and they heard his voice they would come to him and he would lead them out of the pen to pasture. This is a different image than we have in the West where shepherds use sheep dogs and cowboys use horses to herd. In the East, even today sheep follow the voice of their shepherd.

In verses 1-6 Jesus is using this metaphor to establish the fact that he is the true shepherd of the true sheep. The gatekeeper recognizes the true shepherd and the true sheep recognize the true shepherd.¹ There are two implications for the religious leaders that are listening to Jesus talk about sheep and shepherds and gatekeepers and sheep pens.

The first implication is that the Pharisees Jesus is speaking with are imposters; they are thieves and robbers, strangers. They do not care for the sheep as a shepherd; they want to harm the sheep, like a thief. Remember in chapter 9 the Pharisees were very harsh with the blind man and threw him out of the synagogue. False shepherds or imposters want to fleece the flock and roast the mutton; they don't lead the sheep to pasture.

The second implication is that the Pharisees Jesus is speaking with are not even sheep. Remember from Mike's sermon last week in chapter 8, they think that their status as Israelites (children of Abraham) makes them sheep, children of God; but just because one is in the fold called Israel doesn't mean they belong to the true Shepherd. The true sheep know the voice of the true Shepherd. The Pharisees reject the voice of Jesus. They don't believe.

Notice in verse 6 that this figure of speech that Jesus is using regarding the shepherd and the thieves and robbers is something that the Pharisees didn't understand. And the reason they didn't understand in part is because they were blind (Jn. 9:40), they don't belong to the flock (v. 26); but they should have understood. After all they were Pharisees who knew the Scriptures like the back of their hand and Jesus' talk of sheep and shepherds seems to be a direct reference back to Ezekiel 34. Let's take a look at Ezekiel 34. I think it will shed some light on the significance of Jesus' words.²

In verses 1-10 God indicts the unfaithful shepherds of Israel. These unfaithful leaders of Israel led Israel astray and the result was they were sent into exile in Babylon. I will read a sample from these verses. Could it be that the indictment on the shepherds of Israel applied to the Pharisees?

¹ There is not an explicit correlation with the metaphor of gatekeeper. Could it refer to the 7 witnesses in John which all validate Jesus is the Christ? One of those witnesses is Scripture. This metaphor refers to Ezekiel 34, which is one of the testimonies concerning Jesus (cf. Jn. 5:39).

² What follows regarding Ezekiel 34 comes from sermon on Matthew 1, December 2010.

Ah, shepherds of Israel

...who have been feeding yourselves (v. 2)

...you cloth yourselves (v. 3)

...you do not feed the sheep (v. 3)

...the sick you have not healed (v. 4)

...the strayed you have not brought back (v. 4)

...with force and harshness you have ruled them (v. 4)

So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd... (v. 5)

Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am against the shepherds...I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them." (v. 10)

Then in verses 11-24 God says what he planned to do to rescue his sheep that were scattered during the exile in Babylon. I will read a sample from these verses. Could it be that God's plan to rescue his sheep is fulfilled in Jesus, the authentic Shepherd?

...I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. (v. 11)

...so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them... (v. 12)

And I will bring them out... and will bring them into their own land... (v. 13)

I will feed them on the mountains of Israel... (v. 13)

I will feed them with good pasture... (v. 14)

I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, (v. 15)

and I myself will make them lie down... (v. 15)

I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and (v. 16)

I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak... (v. 16)

I will feed them in justice. (v. 16)

I will rescue my flock... (v. 22)

And I, the LORD, will be their God... (v. 24)

What did God promise to do? God promised that he would be their Shepherd. This is strong language and a reassuring promise, but notice in verse 23 after saying time after time that God himself will be their Shepherd, God says "*I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David.*" This is referring to the Davidic Messiah who was promised. How is this possible? How is it possible for God to be the Shepherd *and* the Davidic Messiah to shepherd God's people?

Jesus makes all of this possible. Jesus is the Christ (the Davidic Messiah) and the Son of God. So, in John 10, when Jesus calls himself the shepherd (vv. 11, 13), we need to feel the weight of what he's saying. Not only is he saying that the Pharisees are like the false shepherds of Israel that ultimately led Israel into captivity; he's saying that he's the fulfillment of all that was promised in Ezekiel 34. He is God, the Shepherd who has come to rescue his sheep. And he is the Davidic Messiah, the Christ, who has come to rule his people. Jesus is the long-expected Christ, the Son of God. This is the theological way of saying Jesus is the true Shepherd of the true sheep. His authenticity is bound up in the fulfillment of the Scriptures (cf. Jn. 5:24).

God appoints human leaders to shepherd his people. Not all of them are like the false shepherds of Israel or the Pharisees, but all of them do fail to some degree. There are many things to learn about biblical undershepherding that are helpful for Christian leaders. But I want to emphasize something

different than that this morning. There is no substitute for The Shepherd – for Jesus Christ. He is the only one who doesn't fail the sheep and the only one who can save the sheep. There are good things that human leaders can do for people, but there is some things only Jesus can offer. Therefore, a good undershepherd will point the sheep to the chief Shepherd because he is the only one who can provide eternal life. And that brings us to our second truth about Jesus.

Jesus is the only door of the sheep. (7-10)

In verses 7-18 Jesus expands the shepherd/sheep imagery and explicitly ties it to himself, but in verses 7-10 he throws a bit of a curve ball and says he is not only the Shepherd, but he is actually the door for the sheep. It is through him alone that the sheep enter the fold.

He also introduces the idea of pasture into his metaphor. The pasture is where the sheep would find nourishment that would give life. In this context the pasture refers to eternal life. So when Jesus says he's the door he is saying if the sheep want to make it out to pasture they have to come through him, the door; Jesus is the only way to eternal life. This point is further demonstrated in verse 10. *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. [Jesus] came that they may have life and have it abundantly."* As we said two weeks ago, this abundant life refers to eternal life which is not only quantitative (length of life), but also qualitative (abundance of life). Jesus is the only way to eternal life. Nobody else can provide it.

Don Carson puts it this way. "...Verse 10 is a proverbial way of insisting that there is only one way/means of receiving eternal life...only one source of knowledge of God, only one fount of spiritual nourishment, only one basis for spiritual security – Jesus alone."³

Jesus is using metaphorical language in verses 7-10 to say the same thing that he says later theologically in John 14:6. *"...I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* We live in a culture of relativism and pluralism which says there are many ways to God. Jesus in no uncertain terms is saying that there is only one way to God, there is only one way to eternal life, it is through him alone, the true shepherd and the only door.

Why is this the case? Well that brings me to the third truth about Jesus we see in this passage in verses 11-18.

The good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep and takes it up again. (11-18)

Notice in verse 11 and in verse 15 a very important preposition. The good Shepherd lays down his life *for* the sheep. Sacrifice is implied in the word "for." Jesus' death was sacrificial; he died for the sheep. Jesus' death was substitutionary; he died in place of the sheep.

Verses 12-13 point out that a hired hand would be less inclined to risk his life for the sheep because they do not ultimately belong to them. A shepherd on the other hand would be willing to risk his life for the sheep, but even a shepherd wouldn't knowingly give up their life for the sheep. And a shepherd would never risk his life if the sheep were not actually in danger; that would be foolish. Some people like risk for the sake of risk. That's not what a shepherd does.

³ Don Carson, *The Gospel According to John*.

Jesus is the substitutionary sacrifice. This metaphor helps us understand what Jesus has done in his death on the cross and his resurrection. Jesus not only risks his life for the sheep. He intentionally lays it down and takes it up again. But Jesus doesn't simply give up his life to show us how much he loves us, though his sacrificial death does demonstrate his great love. Jesus is more than a great example of how to love. Jesus lays down his life for us because we are all in grave danger in our sin.⁴ If Jesus didn't lay down his life we would all face eternal death. We all face the wrath of God because we have rebelled against a holy God. So Jesus the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep *because* we are in great need. If Jesus didn't die we would be without hope. But in our place condemned he stood, sealed our pardon with his blood, halleluiah! what a Savior. Jesus provides eternal life by his sacrificial death and resurrection.

But only Jesus is qualified to do this. His authenticity as the Christ establishes his exclusivity as the Savior. As we discussed on Christmas morning, if Jesus were not fully God and fully man he couldn't have saved us. Only the long-expected Christ who is both fully God and fully man can save us from our sin. This is the beauty of the incarnation. The eternal Shepherd became the Lamb in order to save God's sheep from eternal death and provide eternal life. Jesus became the sacrificial lamb, slaughtered for our transgressions.

Jesus is the sovereign sacrifice. But remember what I said earlier. This is an intentional sacrifice. The language in these verses doesn't portray Jesus as a victim; it portrays him as a volunteer. God is sovereign and Jesus willingly lays down his life. No one takes his life from him (v. 18); he lays it down sovereignly and takes it up sovereignly. God is in control. The death and resurrection of Christ were ordained by God and it is by the death and resurrection alone that we can have eternal life.

We see in verses 19-21 there was a division among the Jews. Some thought he had a demon. Others thought there was no way he could have a demon, based off of the miracles he had performed. We're not going to get into that discussion this morning. The reason I think these verses are in this passage is to cause the readers to ask themselves what their conclusions are. So, after hearing this teaching about Jesus how will you respond?

The sheep that belong to and know the Shepherd hear his voice and follow.

This passage is full of metaphor and while the metaphor was difficult for the original hearers to understand (cf. v. 6) it is not as difficult for us to understand. After all this is one of many passages in John that is supporting his overall goal in writing his Gospel – “*that [we] might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing [we] may have life in his name*” (Jn. 20:31).

Let me summarize how the imagery in this passage fits with the overall purpose of the book. We've established this morning that Jesus is the Shepherd and that means Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the long-expected Davidic Shepherd. But he's not just the Davidic Shepherd, he's actually God himself who comes to save his people, as Ezekiel 34 promised. In other words, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And he provided this salvation in an unexpected way. Because the real problem was sin and death, the good Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep and took it up again; he died for our sins and was raised from the dead. The Shepherd became the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29).

⁴ Don Carson, *The Gospel According to John*.

We established two weeks ago that knowing God is virtually synonymous with eternal life (Jn. 17:3; cf. Jn. 15). And we've established in other weeks that hearing Jesus' voice (Jn. 5) and following Jesus are virtually synonymous with believing. Then we come to our passage this morning and see that those who hear the Shepherd's voice and follow him (vv. 3-4) also know him (v. 15) and he leads them to pasture (v. 9). Or to use the words of John 20:31, Jesus is the Christ; the Son of God, those who believe will have life in his name. Those who have eternal life believe.

So how will you respond to these truths that Jesus is the Christ, who gives up his life that we might have life?

Will you believe these things? Will you believe that we are in great need of a Savior from our sins and that we will die an eternal death separated from God without a Savior? Will you believe that Jesus is the only way to have eternal life? Will you believe that Jesus is fully God and fully man, the fulfillment of the Scriptures? We can't just believe anything we want to about Jesus, we must take him as he is. If we believe these truths we will have eternal life, life to the fullest (v. 10).

...those who will believe in me through their word (John 17:20)

To believe these things about Jesus is the main thing this text calls for. But there is another response that is on my heart. And I want to share it with you at the risk of calling for a response this text may not be explicitly calling for.

Notice in verse 16 Jesus says that he has other sheep as well that are not of this fold. The gospel is not only for the Jews. It is also for the Gentiles. The gospel is for people like you and me and the many other people you encounter throughout your week who do not believe the gospel. Verse 16 reminds me that there are many of his flock who do not yet believe this good news that God sent his only Son into the world as a Savior (cf. Jn. 17:20ff). Jesus tells us in John 17 that his disciples would be sent into the world in a similar way that he was sent into the world (v. 18) and that people will believe through the word of his disciples (v. 20).

Last night my grandmother died. She had been battling cancer for a few months. And her death has reminded me of the urgency of the gospel. If we actually believe the things this passage teaches then it should change the way we view the people we encounter day in and day out. If we believe that we are in grave danger in our sins apart from a Savior, if we believe that Jesus is the only way to eternal life, if we believe that Jesus' sacrificial death actually provides eternal life to whomever would believe, then we must share this urgent and good news with the people we encounter as we scatter from this place throughout the week.

I suspect that one of the reasons it is difficult to share this message with people is because it is an exclusive message. Any exclusive message runs the risk of being rejected in our relativistic culture, but we must remember that this is a true message. And in a culture that values authenticity this true message deals with reality in a very fundamental way. The reality is we are dead in our sins and face eternal death apart from Jesus Christ. The reality is without belief in Christ we will die in our sins. And the reality that all who believe have eternal life. If you want to be authentic then we need to get real about this reality.

We must share this good news with our neighbors. It is so easy to talk on the surface with them about our yard or the weather. That's fine, but we must go deeper. Let's get real with them and talk to them about their real eternal situation. We must share this good news with our co-workers. It's

easy to talk to them about what we did over the weekend or about our children. That's fine, but we must go deeper. Let's get real with them and talk about the reality that faces us all without faith in Christ and the solution to that problem in Christ. We must share this good news with our family members. There is nobody more difficult to talk with about matters of religion than our family members, but we must remember that one day we may not have that family member with us anymore. We need to be bold in our witness for Christ.

The Shepherd became a Lamb and laid down his life so that we might have eternal life. Believe this gospel and let it go deep into your heart. And share this gospel – let it go wide into the world. It is for whoever would believe. It is real, it is relevant, and it is urgent.

Benediction

Hebrews 13:20-21 (ESV)

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

References

Carson, D. A. *The Gospel According to John*. The Pillar New Testament commentary. Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991.