

Session 13

May 24, 2020

Unit 2: Jesus Encounters . . .

The Pharisees

Jesus is the gate through which we find salvation.

The Word

John 10:1-18

Session Outcome

To understand the ways Jesus is the Gate through which we find salvation and eternal life.

Discover:

Illustrated Bible Life describes the ancient Jewish group known as the Pharisees, and provides verse-by-verse commentary on the Scripture passage.

Last Week:

We explored the healing Jesus offers to the spiritually blind.

This Week:

We will explore the ways Jesus is the Gate through which we find salvation.

Listen:

Who were the Pharisees? That's the focus of this week's Illustrated Bible Life podcast on FoundryLeader.com.

Discover:

You do not have to read very far in the Gospel of John before you encounter the Pharisees. They can be found in 1:19-28 questioning John the Baptist. Fast forward 18 chapters and we see them helping to arrest Jesus! An understanding of this group can enhance how we study their frequent

encounters with Jesus in this book. Learn more about “Pharisees in John’s Gospel” in this week’s Illustrated Bible Life article.

Engage the Word

The Pharisees continue strong opposition to Jesus. While this section conveys much reassurance for followers of Christ, it also contains sharp language toward Jewish religious leaders. Jesus makes His teaching emphatic by the duplicated phrase “Very truly” (am?n, am?n, pronounced “ah-mane”). Only John includes this stylistic feature. Also, John 10 has echoes of Psalm 23. In the psalm “the Lord” is “my shepherd.” The reader of, and believer in, Psalm 23, affirms that God is the true shepherd. Another background text is Ezekiel 34, which thinks of earthly kings as godly “shepherds.” Ezekiel spoke prophetically to his era, confronting kings for living selfishly and failing to properly care for the nation. Notice how Jesus positions himself in this debate about who is the one true shepherd of Israel.

THE SHEPHERD’S VOICE LEADS

John 10:1-6

A familiar voice can invite listening. Trust grows from intimate relationships. Jesus knows His followers “by name.” Believers are called individually, but are then brought into community. Jesus, the ultimate leader, leads. While in Israel, our tour bus came upon a large flock of sheep. They were on both sides of the road, and in the road, seemingly in no hurry to move. Our bus stopped and waited. It turned out there were two flocks and two shepherds. The two shepherds stood on opposite sides of the road. As they called the sheep gathered in those two places, and the road quickly cleared. The sheep knew their shepherd’s distinctive voice and followed him. In John 10 Jesus calls with the good shepherd’s voice. The Pharisees spoke with the voices of strangers.

The theme of Jesus’ opponents not understanding Him continues. The Pharisees failed to comprehend Jesus’ message, even though He used what appears to be readily understandable figures of speech drawn from the Old Testament (Psalm 23; Ezekiel 34). He kept “telling them again and again” ? (the Greek imperfect tense suggests the idea of Jesus continually seeking to make His words understood). The Pharisees’ rejection of Jesus in chapter 9 was a determined resistance, a deliberate continuing in ignorance.

THE SHEPHERD IS THE GATE

John 10:7-10

To those attempting to come into the sheep pen some other way, Jesus used strong language, calling such individuals thieves and robbers. Jesus is always welcoming to the many, but He makes clear that the way to a full and rich life, the experience of salvation, is through Him. He is the gate.

Jesus seems to envision an enclosure of rocks and brush, a variety of natural barriers built and

improved over time into a “pen.” The rough walls of this pen would provide protection from threatening animals at night. Likely there was only one rather small entrance. When the entire flock was safely in the pen, the conscientious shepherd could then position himself between the vulnerable flock and threatening wolves. During the day the flock might move more freely, going in and out, grazing on nearby pasture, and visiting a safe watering hole. The shepherd continued to keep the flock in places of safety and security, places of life. To stay near to the shepherd was to know life “to the full” and to “be saved” (or “kept safe”).

The letters of John refer to some who “went out” from the churches, calling them “antichrists” (1 John 2:18; 2 John 1:7). In the gospel, dangerous opponents are “thieves” who seek to “steal...kill...and destroy” (10:10). The competition for disciples continued, with the Pharisees and Jesus’ followers vying for some of the same people. This would make understandable the labels and sharp warnings of John chapter 10. Divisions within the Christian churches, as the letters seem to depict, may have been a later development. No doubt the competing voices as to who exactly Jesus was would still have agreed that the shepherd, Jesus, was the gate, or door, that one entered to experience spiritual safety, to “be saved.”

THE SHEPHERD DIES TO GIVE LIFE

John 10:11-18

Until now in chapter 10, Jesus had referred to himself as the “gate” for the sheep enclosure. Now He speaks of himself as the shepherd. Some think this shift of emphasis is due to John blending two parables, both of which had to do with sheep and shepherds. But there seems to be no compelling reason to think of this chapter as somehow a “blended” creation of two parables into one. As mentioned above, the faithful shepherd might well have also functioned as “the gate” at nightfall. Such a shepherd would not first think of saving himself, but rather look out for the flock. Three times Jesus spoke of laying down His life for the sheep. The good shepherd does not run away, but rather runs to the place of threat, to defend and rescue the vulnerable sheep.

Jesus’ death was not a tragic accident. He died that others might live. He claimed an authority, the full power, to lay His life down, and to take it up again. Jesus and the Father know each other in an intimate way. This spiritual connection, God reaching out to persons in saving ways, means that Jesus is a “missionary” come from God. Jesus had, and has, “other sheep” (referring most likely to Gentiles). These others will listen to Jesus’ voice and become part of the one flock.

Did You Know?

John’s gospel includes seven metaphorical “I am” sayings of Jesus. Two are in chapter 10. The seven sayings make an interesting study. In addition, look for absolute “I am” sayings in John. These are places that reflect the encounter of Moses with God (Exodus 3), where God identifies himself as the “I am.”

Think About It

When Jesus refers to himself as “the good shepherd,” might He have been presenting himself as King? Kings in Ezekiel’s time had often failed at being the shepherd/king (see Ezekiel 34). Jesus would not fail.

Reflect

Take time to think about Jesus as the “shepherd” and the “gate” this week?

Rick Williamson

Discussion Guide

Insight

The psalmist uses the metaphor of the shepherd and his devoted care of his sheep to communicate God’s profound care and concern for His children. God the Shepherd provides, protects, and guides.

Connect to My Experience

Did you ever get lost as a child? Maybe at a busy park or the grocery store? Share a time when you got separated from your parent or other guardian.

How did it feel when you realized you were separated? How did your body respond to the realization?

Describe the experience of being reunited with your loved one.

Transition:

In this passage, Jesus describes himself as both the Gate and the Good Shepherd. The sheep, His followers, recognize His voice and respond by following His lead. Others may try to usurp Jesus’ authority as the Good Shepherd, but they will ultimately fail. Today, we will gain a deeper understanding of what Jesus meant when He spoke of being both the Good Shepherd and the Gate.

Connect to the Word

Invite someone to read John 10:1-6, then discuss the following,

In the face of angry resistance manifested in the previous chapter, Jesus turns to a metaphor familiar to His Jewish listeners, that of a shepherd and sheep. Sheep know the voice of their

leader. Others may try to infiltrate the flock through nefarious means, but the sheep will only respond and obey the voice of their shepherd.

What comes to mind when you hear the imagery Jesus uses?

Why would Jesus choose this particular language?

What is He implying about the Pharisees?

The true shepherd calls his sheep by name and leads them as a flock.

What does this tell us about the intimacy between the shepherd and the flock? Between the sheep themselves?

The shepherd goes before the sheep, leading them to safety and nourishment, as opposed to goading the flock from behind.

What does this positioning tell us about the character and intentions of the shepherd toward his flock?

Why do you think the Pharisees did not understand the words of Jesus?

Invite someone to read John 10:7-10, then discuss the following,

Jesus leaves metaphor behind and states clearly, I am the Gate. While others seek only to steal, kill, and destroy, Jesus came to give life. The life He comes to give is life to the full. Such a life is not one marked by mere survival, but one that overflows with the goodness and provision, the result of heeding the shepherd's voice.

Jesus declares himself to be the Gate. What is the purpose of a gate? How does Jesus embody those characteristics?

Those that enter via Jesus find salvation. How is Jesus using the term salvation in this passage? From what and for what will the sheep be saved?

The contrast between the purposes of the thieves and Jesus could not be more starkly different. The thieves take while Jesus provides.

What does this contrast reveal about both the purpose and method of Jesus' work?

Those who find life in Jesus will have it "to the full." The Greek word here (perisson) carries the implication of that "which goes beyond our wildest dreams."

What kind of "full life" is Jesus describing? What fruit might such a life bear?

Invite someone to read John 10:11-18, then discuss the following,

Jesus transitions to a new metaphor and announces that, not only is He the Gate, He is the Good Shepherd. Jesus becomes more explicit about the implications of this title, which includes giving His life for the sake of His sheep.

The hired hand flees trouble because he does not own the sheep. Jesus gives His very life for the sheep.

What does this difference imply about the relationship between Jesus and the sheep?

How does this intimate relationship between Father and Son impact Jesus' identity and vocation as shepherd?

Jesus describes himself as actively pursuing other sheep, creating one flock. This is a potential reference to the message of salvation reaching the Gentiles. While Jesus calls each sheep by name, He has a unified flock in mind.

What message of encouragement or correction does this offer to the church?

Connect to My Life and the World

We can trust Jesus' intentions toward us as He is one with authority from the Father and demonstrates faithful, self-giving obedience to Him. It is the will of the Father that we heed Jesus, the Good Shepherd, that we respond to the voice of love calling our names, and stay near to the flock (our faith community), and to join Jesus in His work of inviting all sheep into the fold of God.

To hear and recognize Jesus' voice ought to result in following Him. How can we become more attune with the voice of Jesus?

What practices and disciplines might better enable us to listen and obey the voice of love?

How might this realization, of Jesus' profound love and understanding, deepen our intimacy with Him?

In what ways does this knowledge transform our image of God, away from a distant judge and toward a loving, always-near advocate and guide?

Jesus is the Gate, protecting us from harm. Sometimes His protection might come in the form of a "no" to something we desire.

What would it look like to trust Jesus' guidance, the gifts He gives, and the things He withholds as for our good? How might we actively submit to His protection?

How might we participate in God's active, loving pursuit of those not yet in intimate relationship with the Good Shepherd? In what ways can we point people to the Gate?

Close in prayer, thanking God for the Gate and the Good Shepherd.

