

John on Jesus - Take Me To Your Leader

March 24, 2013

Welcome to Faith Church. I want to send a special greeting to those of connecting through the Internet. It is good to have you with us. In November, we pushed the pause button on our series in the Gospel of John. For Christmas and the winter we spent 12 weeks studying the Old Testament book of Daniel. We just finished that exciting book.

Since it was four months ago when we last studied the book, we will begin by taking a few moments to reconnect with the storyline before we put our fingers in the text at John 10.

The Gospel of John is one of four books in the Bible that tells us the story of the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the first nine chapters, that we already studied, we followed Jesus' travels back and forth from Galilee in the north to Judea and the city of Jerusalem in the south. Jesus shows up in Jerusalem at the various Jewish holidays. The Gospel of John shows us how Jesus is what each of those Jewish holidays pointed toward. Jesus is everything God was pointing the Jews to looking for.

In our last study of this exciting book, we were in John 9. Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths. In that chapter, Jesus faced serious friction from the local religious leadership. Jesus made some pretty strong claims about being God in the flesh. He didn't make those claims without giving evidence to back it up. Jesus supernaturally healed scores of people. He fed a crowd of thousands with just a small boy's lunch. Jesus was doing things only God could

do. Jesus' claim to be God was the only logical conclusion of his actions, which were the actions of God.

Even though Jesus backed up his claim to be God with a truckload of God-only miracles, the Jewish leaders hardened their hearts. They rejected Jesus and made plans to bump him off. He was threatening their power.

In chapter 9, this came to a climax with the healing of a man born blind. The healing of a man, blind from birth, was a miracle on the order of the creation account in the book of Genesis. Jesus created optic nerves and retinal tissue that didn't exist. Jesus didn't just create eyes in the man's body to give him sight. The text tells us he also supernaturally opened the eyes of his heart that were also blind from birth. Jesus opened the eyes of his heart so he could see the true identity of Jesus as God in the flesh.

The religious leaders had a blind man who could see physically and spiritually. While they could see spiritually, the eyes of their hearts were blind to the identity of Jesus. The chapter ends with tension so thick, you could cut it with a knife.

That brings us to John 10, where we pick up this morning. I read this chapter many times. It talks about Jesus being the good shepherd of his sheep. While I love the verses, they perplex me. First, why this sudden change of subject? In chapter nine, we were talking about a blind man and the religious leaders were about ready to mug Jesus. In the next chapter Jesus was daydreaming about sheep in the pasture.



Why did Jesus change subjects? Did he have A.D.D.? Was he trying to give them a verbal tranquilizer to calm them down? What happened?

In addition, this whole sheep and shepherd theme doesn't seem like it fits. It is too effeminate. It reminds me of the cotton balls and flannel board my Sunday School teacher used in sixth grade. It seems girly. That doesn't jive with the in-your-face Jesus of chapter nine.

This week, as I studied, I realized these verses are not what I expected. We need to chuck the effeminate mental picture of Jesus acting like a cosmetologist for sheep in the pet store. These verses are laden with testosterone. They are powerful words on leadership. This is a totally in-your-face section. Let's dive in.

Background

Why did Jesus make this sudden change of subject? Did you ever think the subject never changed? Maybe this is still about blind leaders. Jesus was just talking to them a different way. Did you ever think there might be a common experience about sheep and leading people that the Jewish leaders, and Jesus, had in common but we are clueless about?

It turns out, that is exactly what happened. There is a lot on shepherding in the Old Testament, but there is one particular chapter that unlocks what happened. It comes from the often neglected book of Ezekiel, chapter 34. The Jewish leaders knew the chapter. Jesus knew the chapter. The chapter describes the relationship between the spiritual leaders in the days of Daniel and

the people. To describe the way the spiritual leaders treated the people, it uses the picture of the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep.

The reason God uses this picture is because sheep are helpless. They need their shepherd to survive. If a shepherd wanted to be a jerk toward his sheep, he could get away with it. The sheep would endure the abuse because they had to.

In the days of Daniel, God described the leaders of Israel as abusive shepherds. They used their position not to care for the sheep but to prey on the weak and hurting. They abused their sheep to pad their lifestyle. In Ezekiel 34, God railed on those spiritual leaders calling them unfit shepherds.

When Jesus started talking about sheep and their shepherd, he reached into the religious leaders' memory banks and tied them to the selfish, arrogant and prideful spiritual leaders that God railed on in the days of the Babylonian exile. This was totally in-your-face Jesus. The Jewish leaders made the connection and didn't like being insulted.

Then something interesting happened in Ezekiel 34.

After railing on the spiritual leaders, about halfway through the chapter, God had enough. He said he will take the job of shepherding his people and do it himself.

I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice. Ezekiel 34:15–16 (ESV)

As the chapter continues, God starts to describe what it will look like when he takes over and becomes the good shepherd that guides his people.

Interestingly, God said he will shepherd his people by sending a man who is God, from the line of David. Who is the man who is God that is a descendant of David? Jesus. Jesus is the new rightful leader of God's people. His spiritual leadership is nothing like the abusive leadership the people of God were used to.

And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the Lord; I have spoken. Ezekiel 34:23–24 (ESV)

So when chapter nine closes, we have a great demonstration of the religious leaders of that day acting like inept jerks. They kicked a guy out of the synagogue because Jesus healed him. The man's healing threatened their power. Chapter 10 opens by saying the one great leader of God's people who is actually worth following was there. These verses are about Jesus being the new leader that is worth following with our lives. They answer the questions: Who will follow Jesus as their leader? Is Jesus worth following as a leader? We will close by applying this and learning how to better follow Jesus.

Do I need a leader?

Before we answer that, I know what a number of you are already thinking. We live in the postmodern culture; we don't need a leader. Some of you think you are your own leader and you can shepherd your own life without anyone's guidance.

Before you let your postmodern lenses trick you, realize every one of us is a follower. Nobody is an island. The only questions are:

- Who are we following?
- Are they worth following?

As teenagers, you buy particular clothing. You wouldn't be caught dead in my wardrobe. Why is that? You are following somebody's leadership for your life. It is your peer group. Are they worth following?

Young marrieds, you turn on the television and you are flooded with advertisements about what you should drive, what you should wear, what your family should look like. Everybody is trying to lead you. If we weren't sheep, advertising wouldn't be such good business. The fact is, we are sheep. We follow, even if we won't admit it. The only questions are: Who are you following? Are they worth following?

Who will follow the leadership of Jesus?

Only Jesus' sheep will follow Jesus' voice.

"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. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. John 10:1–6 (ESV)

Jesus pictures a community sheepfold where sheep stayed during the night. While sheep are not the most intelligent animals, they bond with their shepherd and trust them implicitly. Jesus comes to the sheep fold and calls his sheep by name out of the mix. His sheep recognize his voice and follow him. This is a process that happens consistently through the Gospel of John. As Jesus preached and taught, people began responding to him in the crowd. Not everyone responded to Jesus. Not everyone recognized Jesus as their

shepherd. In John 9, the blind man had the eyes of his heart supernaturally opened to Jesus, but the eyes of the religious leaders stayed closed. Their eyes were blind to the identity of Jesus. He was not their shepherd. They thought Jesus was a complete nut job. We saw this same reaction earlier in the Gospel.

And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." John 6:65 (ESV)

"Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God." John 8:47 (ESV)

Before we chose Christ, God chose some of us as his own before the foundation of the world. He marked us off as Christ's sheep. How do we know if Christ is our shepherd? When we hear Christ's words, like sheep to their shepherd, we are drawn to him.

This is a great encouragement for us. Many of us labor under the pressure to lead people to Jesus. How can we convince others they need Jesus? How can we help people see that following Christ is the best thing that can happen? We try to share with our friends what it means to be a Christian, and sometimes it is just hard to get your head wrapped around what to say. We give our friends evidence for Jesus, but it doesn't connect. Why does Jesus seem so clear to us but he is obscure for others? Not everybody will come to Jesus. Only Jesus' sheep will follow Jesus' voice.

I experienced this on one of my recent trips. I sat next to a guy on the plane that had lots of questions about Jesus. I tried again and again to explain Jesus to him and how God loves you. God loves him so much he sent his own son to die in his place for his sin. Even though I did my best explaining Jesus, he

was just blind to it. He kept asking me how Jesus would help him with his horoscopes. I couldn't open his eyes to see Jesus, only God can do that. What is my job? What is your job?

Our job is not to create faith in people's heart. Our job is to bring people within the sound of Jesus' voice. If they are his sheep, when they hear his voice, they will follow him. They will be drawn to him.

Next week is Easter. It is a great opportunity to invite someone to church so they can hear the voice of Jesus from God's word. If they are one of Jesus' sheep, slowly they will be drawn to him. If you are checking things out today and are not sure about this whole Jesus thing, I am cool with that. I only ask that you get a Bible and read it. I ask that you keep coming back and hearing the words of Jesus explained and applied. If Jesus is your leader, you will hear his voice and find yourself following him.

What kind of a leader is Jesus?

He is a leader who protects us and provides abundantly.

So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." John 10:7–10 (ESV)

In this culture, sheep were herded into an enclosure for the night.

Entering the enclosure meant safety from certain death. Exiting the enclosure in the morning was the gate to the pasture in the day. What kind of leader is Jesus? He is like the door to the sheepfold. He is the way into protection and the way out to pasture.

Jesus is worthy to have as the leader of your life because he is the only one who can save us from the wrath of God the Father against our sins that we fully deserve.

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6 (ESV)

No other leader can save us from the one thing we need to be saved from, God! Just as the door is the only way to save the sheep from death, Jesus is the only way to save us from eternal death and the experience of God’s wrath.

Jesus is the only door.

What I love about this is Jesus is more than a door to safety. He is also the door to an abundant life.

Jesus came to give us life and to give it abundantly. He didn’t come to destroy life but to give it. The source of all brokenness, purposelessness and hopelessness is a broken relationship with God. Jesus is the one who brings us back to a relationship with God. He leads us to life and life abundantly. If you think following Christ is about follow a list of rules, you have the wrong picture. That is religion. Jesus is not about religion. It is about a relationship. Being a Christian is about enjoying the God who loves you. The only way to know him is through Jesus. What kind of a shepherd is Jesus for our lives? He is one who protects us and one who gives us abundant life.

He is a leader who knows us completely yet loves us fully.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He 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. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as

the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.
John 10:11–15 (ESV)

There are two parts of this picture. The first is the contrast between a hired hand and the owner of the sheep. When danger comes, the hired hand runs for his life. There is no point in risking yourself for a few dumb sheep when you are paid minimum wage.

Jesus tells us he is a leader that will lay down his life to protect us. He cares about us that deeply. What makes this even more amazing is he is not only willing to lay down his life down for us, but he knew everything there was to know about us before he did it.

Imagine this. Verse 14 tells us he knows us just as intimately as he knows God the Father and as intimately as God the Father knows him. Is there anybody that would like all of their life, all of their thoughts and all of their decisions revealed? I can't think of anyone who would want all of their past known. Imagine that before you came to church the entire congregation came early. People watched a two-hour television special that featured the worst sins of the last 10 years of your life. They watched the lusts in your mind, what you looked at on the Internet, they knew every time you told a half truth. They knew in your mind what you thought about them. They knew every bit of darkness about you. My guess is most of us would not show up at church that Sunday. If even one person knows us completely, we are filled with shame. How could anybody love us if they really knew us?

Jesus knows everything about us. He knows every gory details and every selfish thought. He knows every blemish. He knows our stupid arrogance. He

knows all of it and he still loves you. In fact, he loves us so much, that even though he knows how stupid and unteachable we are, he loves us so much he died for us.

If somebody knows you that fully, yet loves you that deeply, who else would you trust with the leadership of your life? That is the kind of shepherd every sheep needs. Remember, everybody is following somebody. It is only a question of who will you follow and can you trust them?

Jesus is the leader who stayed in the agony of suffering when he could have turned away.

“For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may 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 I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” John 10:17–18 (ESV)

This is an incredible picture. We think that once Jesus was condemned to be crucified, the process was in motion. He was trapped in a domino sequence of events that would end with his crucifixion. That is not the biblical picture. As Jesus was stripped naked and the cat-o-nine tails whipped across his back so its hooks sunk into his body tearing chunks of flesh from his body, he endured it willingly. The sheer agony of the flogging was so brutal that after 40 lashes many died of sheer agony from the overload on the nervous system. These verses tell us that at any moment Jesus could have said, “This is enough.” He could have brought 10,000 angels to his rescue in a moment’s notice. He could have obliterated the planet and the entire human race in a split second decision of his mind, but he didn’t. He endured the pain with his eyes fixed on you and me, helpless, stupid, unteachable sheep. He laid down his life to protect us, his

helpless sheep, from the wrath of God the Father that we fully deserve. He endured it willingly out of love for us.

As Jesus hung on the cross, a form of death that was designed to be the most painful way the Romans could conceive of, a form of death that was so painful they even invented a new word to describe the level of pain associated with it --- calling it *excruciating* pain, at any moment, in a split second decision of his mind, he could have brought it all to an end. He didn't. He endured it all willingly, out of love for you and me.

Even at the moment of his death, he chose the moment of his death. Even then the cross did not have mastery over his body. He said "It is finished" and breathed his last. Out of love for us he chose to tear his soul out of his body and die. At any of those moments he could have brought it to an end and said this is too hard for stupid, unteachable, rebellious sheep. He didn't. He loves us.

Everybody is following somebody. Is there anybody who is more worthy to follow than Jesus? Is there anybody else more trustworthy when it comes to placing into their hands the reigns of your life? I don't think so. The only question that remains is, "How?" How do we follow Jesus?

How do we follow Jesus?

I will give two ways. There is more about following Jesus in your small groups worksheet.

- **Comprehensively** --- This past week, I was reading about a woman who had an ongoing affair when her husband was out of town. When her lover visited the home, she would take the pictures of her husband and turn them face

down. She said she didn't want him looking at her. This was one part of her life he was not part of. What areas of your life are you turning the picture of Jesus face down? Is it your television habits? Is it your spending habits? "God gets 10 percent, the rest is all mine." "I know I am supposed to be gentle, kind and loving but when I am tired and irritated, I turn the picture of Jesus face down and get to act the way I want." Jesus came to give us life abundantly. What part of your life do you have his picture face down because you think you are wiser than your great shepherd?

- **Consistently** - By consistently, I mean we look to the leadership of Jesus on a daily, even hourly, basis. It is easy to start the day with Bible reading and then go through the rest of the day and put Jesus in the box. Here is my challenge: What are the four or five times of the day are you most prone to temptation? When are you most likely to get grumpy? When are you most likely to get angry? As you go through your day, cry out to your shepherd as you approach those times and ask for his help.

Conclusion

Everybody is following somebody. The only questions are, "Who is it?" and "Are they worth following?" There is nobody more worthy to be followed in every way every day than Jesus. He knows us completely and still loves us fully. He loves us so much he chose to endure the agony of the cross and God the Father's wrath against our sins. This week, let's commit ourselves anew to follow him in every area and every time of our life. He can lead us better than we can lead ourselves.



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