

Red Chairables

The Good Shepherd

Part 11 - August 7, 2011

Ever had to hitch-hike? When someone finally offers a lift, there's that critical moment just before you get in, when you evaluate whether they've come to help ... or to harm! The journey to Heaven is like that. And eternal life depends on who is in that driver's seat. In the parable of *The Good Shepherd*, Jesus makes it clear that His sheep know His voice and are led safely into His Kingdom.

"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman 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 they did not understand what he was telling them. Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He 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. ... 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. ... 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." - *John 10:1-10;14;18 NIV*

Remember when Jesus rubbed mud on the blind man's eyelids?

As [Jesus] went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. ... Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. - *John 9:1-3, 6-7 NIV*

Why the mud? And, why the Pool of Siloam?

Incredibly, sewer repairs in 2004 led to the discovery of the Pool of Siloam. It was a major gathering place for the Jews, who took a ritual bath here before going up to the

Temple. This is the very place where the Blind man washed his eyes! A quarter-mile road connected the pool to the Temple Mount.



The Pool was used from about 50 BC, until the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD; Pool (bottom, left), Temple (top, right)

Here's how that area looks today from the pool. Jesus would've bathed in this pool when he was twelve! And, guess what they found at the far end there. The entrance to the original road!



They've been digging under those homes on the hillside, and they recently finished excavating the entire length of the road! They have only uncovered about six feet of width (of about 25 feet). Notice how the steps are deep and shallow? This kept the people from hurrying and reminded them to bow their heads. This is the very road that the blind man navigated!

And directly under this road is a large storm drain. Archeologists found the road broken open in several places. The Romans had done this (in 70^{AD}) when they destroyed Jerusalem, in order to get at the Jews who were hiding in the drains.



1,600 feet of road



Looking down the path



Storm drain that runs under the entire road



Broken road revealing drain

All this could've been avoided if the Jewish leaders embraced Jesus as the promised and proven Messiah. But they stubbornly and self-righteously led their people to destruction.

So, why'd he rub mud on the blind man's eyes?! Because, it was the Sabbath; and six months before the cross. And Jesus is revealing himself and confronting the hypocritical, self-righteous legalism of the religious rulers.

He points out (John 7:23-24) how they side with the Law, and violate the rabbinical Sabbath restrictions whenever the two conflict; and yet, they condemn *him* for siding with the higher command of love. By the end of chapter eight he's at the Temple calling them liars, murderers, and sons of the devil. He calls himself the Son of God, offers eternal life, and claims divine preexistence. Do you know why he did this? Was he just out of control?! He did it to prove his point and provoke public debate.

At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. - *John 8:59 NIV*

Picking up stones is a violation; but, I'll assume the irony (and the point) was lost on 'em! And in the *very next verse ...* he sees *that blind man!*

The disciples say, "What kind of sin put him here?" Jesus says, "*Sin didn't put him here, God did! What do you say we make some mud and display the real handiwork of God?!*"

Guess what one of those restrictions was! Jesus is about to turn this man into a walking billboard that says "Sabbath violation".

"I'll just rub it around like so, and a bit more; and now, go wash that off in the Pool of Siloam and you'll be healed." "That's a long way. Are you going to walk me there?" "*Nope; you need to do this alone.*" "But the steps are uneven; and no one will assist me because it's the Sabbath." "*Sad, isn't it. But nobody's forcing you to go.*" "I'm going! I'm going! Just ... aim me."

The next time you really need God's help, and instead, you get mud rubbed on your eyes and sent groping along, assume it's all part of the plan; and glorify him as you make your way along."

Think of the stir and the buzz, as this blind man fumbles his way to the pool, with mud caked eyes, in direct violation of the rabbinical restrictions, claiming he's going to be healed! Did Jesus know how to control the public conversation or what?! People would've followed along, afraid to touch him but probably calling out, "That's a short step!" And then, at the pool, they all see it happen: a genuine, Sabbath-violating miracle!" And this is very confusing. So, they take him to the Pharisees.

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. - *John 9:13-14 NIV*

The Pharisees demand that he denounce Jesus. But instead, he defends him! So, they insult the un-blind man and throw him out. But some of the Pharisees aren't so sure; and they were divided.

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" [Daniel's term (7:13-14) for when God comes to earth as Messiah] "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. - *John 9:35-38 NIV*

And Jesus lets him! And worship was reserved for God alone! And Jesus tells the gathered crowd that he can only reveal himself to those who admit their 'blindness'. And some of the Pharisees are there, and they say, "Are we blind too?" And he says that those who claim to see, won't. Their arrogance is their judge!

And that's when he tells the parable.

I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. - *John 10:1-3a NIV*



Community sheep pens had a gate and a watchman; the shepherds paid to 'park' their flocks there at night so they could go home with the family.

Jesus uses this familiar sight to say that he alone has come the truly law-abiding way. And that is in fulfillment of God's Word.

When the un-blind man stood up to the Pharisees, he specified a very personal and very significant 'gate' that Jesus had used.

Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing. - *John 9:32-33 NIV*

It's true. No prophet, priest, or apostle ever made blind eyes see. According to the Psalmist, this was a work of God.

The Lord gives sight to the blind ... - *Psalms 146:8a NIV*

And it was reserved for the Messiah, as Isaiah prophesied.

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened ... - *Isaiah 35:5a NIV*

Jesus healed the blind more than any other miracle! And then he says ...

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. - *John 10:3-5 NIV*



He doesn't call His *flock* by name; He calls his "sheep" by name. My grandma (who drank Rainer, smoked Pall Malls, and always wore a muumuu - which has nothing to do with this story; but, that's my grandma) had three of the ugliest, most unpleasant, Bulldogs. But, she loved 'em and named 'em: Lacy, JoJo, and Tami.



A typical flock only had ten to twenty sheep. And they were usually given pet names. But, not like Puffy or Cotton Ball, their name corresponded to a peculiar or dominant trait, like Stubborn or Timid or Feisty or Dumdum. Jesus isn't just saying that he *knows* your name the way your schoolteacher did; he's saying that he's *named* you.

He named Peter (the "Rock"), and James and John (Sons of Thunder). Question is: what do you think he's nicknamed you? Stubborn? Willful? Courageous? Timid? Faithful? Humble? I hope mine's not Dumdum ... I think I'd rather be Tami!

And he says that he: "leads them"

A tourist in Jerusalem noticed a shepherdder walking behind the flock, driving them with a whip. She points this out to the tour guide and says, "I thought shepherds led their sheep!" And he says "Oh, yes, shepherds always lead their sheep. That's not their shepherd ... that's the butcher."

I can choose to be led into security, freedom, and joy, or driven by my impulses, pride, or fear into death and destruction. But, if I'm going to "follow", I have to "know his voice". Flocks mixed together in the pen. But when the gate was opened, and the shepherd called out, his sheep knew and trusted his distinctive voice and came to him as the rest retreated in fear. Do you know and trust his voice this way?

We can't know his voice without knowing His Word. Ever hear people complain that God doesn't speak to them? That might be a self-incriminating accusation! His Word is how his voice becomes familiar. *And*, how we learn to discern the *butcher!*



Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He 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. - *John 10:6-10 NIV*

In this new analogy he's not only the shepherd, he's also the "gate". This was familiar too. A shepherd's private sheep pen (or sheepfold) was just big enough for his flock.

And when they were inside, he'd lay across the doorway ... like a gate! And whoever enters through him, will "come in" (that's security), "go out" (that's freedom), and "find pasture" (that's joy)!

But, all this comes at a mighty steep price for the Shepherd.

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. 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. - *John 10:14-15, 18 NIV*

Let's break that first complex sentence into its two components. He says: "I know my sheep" - "just as the Father knows me". He knows us as closely and personally as God-the-Father knows-God-the Son. But, he also says: "my sheep know me" just as "I know the Father". This doesn't mean 'with the same level of knowledge' but 'in the same manner': personal relationship over impersonal facts. Is this how you know your Shepherd?

Six months before the cross, he's using the mud, the Sabbath, and the now un-blind man, to reveal his authority, his divinity, and his willingness to become a human sacrifice for the sheep. It was usually the other way around!

The Good Shepherd will do whatever it takes to keep you from ending up in the gutter at the mercy of the enemy.