

## LISTEN! FOLLOW! BE BLESSED!

Today I would like all of you to close your eyes. Come on now, this is a group participation exercise so everybody, please close 'em. Close your eyes and picture your favorite meal. Umm! I can see your mouths beginning to salivate right now. Take a deep breathe; what do you smell. Lick your lips: what do you taste? Who pictures a big plate of liver and broccoli? How many imagine turkey, hamburgers, steak, or prime rib? I can see the smiles illuminating your faces!

Okay, you can open your eyes now. I had you do this little exercise because I wanted your brains to be warmed up and ready to work. Now close your eyes again and this time imagine a half acre of land, surrounded by a crude, aging, unpainted wooden fence. There is one wooden gate through which one can enter or exit. Now image this pen filled with lots and lots of sheep: sheep of all sizes; sheep from many different flocks. It's late in the afternoon and sun is about to set behind the low mountains to the west. All night long the hundreds of sheep walk around the pen. They mingle and intermingle. Take a deep breathe. Now it's morning and the many shepherds come to gather their flocks and head for the hills. Now I ask you, "How are the shepherds going to divide the sheep so that each shepherd has all of his sheep: no more, no less. Does each shepherd tell how many he brought in the night before and just count off the first sheep he sees and move them on out? Does each shepherd wander throughout the pen looking for only those hundred or so sheep that are part of his flock? That might take all day!

Folks, it is really not that hard for the shepherd to gather only his sheep, the same sheep that he shepherded yesterday all day! All the shepherd has to do is talk loud enough for the sheep to hear his voice. It's the voice that only his sheep would recognize. It's the voice that leads them daily to "**still waters and green pastures.**" It's the voice of the one who protects them from dangerous predators; it's the voice of the one who seeks them when they stray and get lost. Sheep know the voice of their shepherd. They listen for and follow that voice: only that voice!

Now picture in your mind our world: a sphere spinning at the rate of 1000 miles per hour; our world with almost 7 billion people on it! There are lots of voices calling out to us to follow them. They promise us fortune and fame, power and prestige, riches and wealth, lasting happiness and worldly success. Some are seductive in nature, others are "in your face!" They include voices of communism, socialism, the New Age movement, hedonism, materialism, liberalism, conservatism, and many more. The voices coming from academia, the business world, entertainment people, politics, agnostics, atheists, Moslems, and the

Church. Each voice promising us great rewards if we only will listen to and follow them throughout our life. To whom are you listening?

Actually, there are really only two voices that are calling us to follow them. Do you know who they are? Satan is one, and our LORD Jesus is the other. Satan is a master of deception. Most people do not even recognize him as he speaks out through a variety of “fronts.” He is the Rich Little of the spiritual world. Rich Little was a great impersonator in the 60’s, 70’, and 80’s. He could impersonate politicians, singers, actors, male or female. Well, the devil is a master spiritual impersonator. Often we don’t even recognize his voice as he calls us to live by his value systems and morals, promising us fulfillment, happiness, and great god of success. He can even convince us to sacrifice family, marriage, friendships, and our own moral conscience.

Then there is the voice of Jesus. Follow Jesus and he will lead us into the still waters and green pastures that can only be found in a saving relationship with our LORD. He will bring into our lives safety and protection; he will provide for the daily needs of life; he will give us fulfillment and happiness; and he will bring us into eternal life. Do other voices promise and deliver by being there to help us in the difficult times of life? Jesus does! Do other voices give you the strength to reconcile with others? Jesus does! Do other voices give you forgiveness when guilt haunts you? Jesus does! Do other voices offer you comfort at the death of a loved one or peace when you face your own death? Jesus does!

Sheep may be among the dumbest of animals, but there is one important lesson we can learn from them. Sheep will not follow a strange voice, a voice that they do not know. Instead, they will flee and run for their lives. When we hear any other voice than Jesus’, what do we do? Do we listen to it; entertain it, dabble in it? Or do we run for our lives and flee far from it?

As we read the words of our text in John 10:1-10, the question begs to be asked, “Who are the sheep?” We are! Why is this a good description of Jesus’ followers? It has nothing to do with being dumb! Sheep are totally dependent on the shepherd for food, for protection, and for survival. So, too, Jesus followers are like sheep in that they are totally dependent on Jesus for life, for forgiveness, and for eternal life.

In this section of Scripture Jesus calls Himself the **gate** for the sheep. Just as you can only enter a house through the door or a yard through the gate, so we have fellowship with God, forgiveness for our sins, and eternal life only through Jesus. Notice Jesus does not say that he is “a gate” meaning one of many gates. Rather

Jesus does not use the indefinite article “a” but rather he used the definite article “the.” This means that Jesus is not one of many but that Jesus is the one and only way to enter into God’s fold. Listen how the following references from Scripture support Jesus’ statement. John 14:6 tell us – **“I am (Jesus is) the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** And in Acts 4:12 the Holy Spirit tells us, **“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”**

In verse nine (9) of our text Jesus makes us a wonderful promise. **“I am the gate, whoever enters through me will be saved!”** What a great promise this is. If we trust in Jesus alone for our salvation; if we listen and follow Him, He will open for us the gate to enter into heaven. We can be sure of our salvation today and every day! We can live today in the joy and peace knowing that God loves us dearly!

And in verse ten (10) of our text Jesus makes another wonderful promise to us. **“I come that they have life, and have it abundantly.”** Don’t limit God or restrict this promise by thinking only in terms of money when you think of the “abundant life,” Our God is a great God: the abundant life includes food for today and the next; health and happiness, peace and comfort, assurance and hope, lasting relationships, a good family life, and much, much more. Things that neither money nor MasterCard can buy! Jesus can fulfill this promise because He died for our sins and rose again. Jesus can keep this promise because He is true God and is both all-powerful and our creator. Jesus wants this to happen because He loves us as His death and resurrection prove!

As our Good Shepherd Jesus laid down His life for us! And because Jesus is God He took His life up again. Jesus lives! **Christ is risen!** (He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!) There are a lot of would be and wantabe shepherds calling us in life to follow them. I remember when my parents were living, and they were well into their retirement years, mom would say, “I don’t know about your dad. Sometimes he hears what I say and sometimes, when I ask him to do this or tell him to do that, he acts as if he didn’t hear me at all!” Finally my brothers and I told her, “Mom, dad has selective hearing! He hears what he wants to hear!” My friends, as your Pastor and friend, I urge you to be selective in your hearing! Listen only to Jesus! Follow only Jesus! Let Jesus be your shepherd and your life will be blessed now, tomorrow, and for eternity! In Jesus’ name! Amen.