

## **“Abundant Life”**

**Psalm 15; John 10:7-18**

September 15, 2024

### Introduction

- Ben and I at the train tracks.
- I took Ben to visit an elderly member when he was about 2 years old.
- It was a wonderful time. She gave him a bunny plushie that I think we still have to this day.
- But, as we went to leave, I got stuck behind a train at Westland farms.
- Abundant life is everyday life if we'll just wait for it.
  - o But we've got a problem, don't we?
    - Too often, we don't like that we live in a much harsher place.
- Two words for life.
- God wants Zoe for us but there is a problem.
  - o There are other forces at work that tend to prevent this.
    - Sin is a huge one.
    - But the point is this, we are detached from the life that God wants us to have much of the time.
      - We're caught in bios life, unconcerned with the world beyond our immediate noses.

### Setting the Stage

- From the Gospel of John and it comes at an important place.
- Jesus has just healed a man blind from birth.
  - o But He's done so on the Sabbath which breaks a rule in the mind of the Pharisees.
    - This is serious stuff. When the parents of the man are summoned, they're actually fearful of being put out of the synagogue for their participation in this.
- The Pharisees get it wrong, as is often the case.
  - o In a figurative sense, they're the ones that are blind.
- So, this passage comes as Jesus tries to differentiate himself from the leadership of the Pharisees.
  - o Ultimately, Jesus is on the topic of bad shepherds.

### Shepherding

- While known intimately to the ancient world, how many shepherds do you know?
  - o Interesting to note, shepherds were looked down upon in the ancient world as being simpletons.
    - Far from it as managing a flock took serious work and dedication.
- But we don't know terribly much about sheep.
  - o Natalie went to Australia to study sheep while she was in veterinary school.
    - I don't know how her learning on the subject is today but, at the very least, we have somewhat of an expert who'll rebuke me if I say something wrong.
- Sheep are wonderful creatures but have some idiosyncrasies that are well-known.
  - o First and most significantly, they are a flock animal.
    - That means that they feel safest and most comfortable being in larger groups of sheep than standing alone.
      - This is both for safety and for socialization's sake. Sheep flock even in the absence of predators. They like each other, so to speak.
    - I can't help but notice that we tend to flock as well.
      - Ben and I and others here will “Flock” to the Panther game after worship.
    - I'm serious, we tend to be social creatures, in fact, one of my favorite books of all time is a book called “The Social Animal” and it's about us, humans.
    - It's important to note that being together is deeply scriptural.
      - As you read the Bible, you realize that we're supposed to be in a loving, wonderful community of people.
        - o We, like sheep, weren't meant to be alone.

- This is part of that Zoe life that the Bible mentions in the Gospel of John.
- They have a great sense of hearing.
  - That's what Jesus is talking about, sheep hear their shepherd's voice.
    - It wasn't uncommon in ancient times for shepherds to intermingle their flocks during the day.
      - Then, when it was time to depart, the flocks would disassemble by following their own shepherd's voice.
  - We have a keen sense of hearing and tend to listen to the voices that please us the best.
    - Right now, many of us are listening to politicians crow their words.
      - But it's important for us to understand that the Republican or Democratic parties are NOT our shepherds, never were, never will be.
    - We listen to these people make promises that we know in our hearts can't be true but we follow them year in and year out and remain disappointed.
      - That's because they're not very good shepherds and many of them don't have us in mind at all when they do their actual work.
- Nibble their way into trouble
  - Grass doesn't grow in fields in Judea in grows in clumps.
    - A sheep will get to eating a clump and, when finished, all it cares about is its next clump.
      - So, it sees it and moves to it, without much concern.
        - But do this a dozen times and you're libel to be way away from the safety of the flock.
- I think we do this as well.
  - It isn't the case that we want to stray, it just happens.
    - We're sitting there, eating our little clump of grass, we see another and head to it, without thinking.
      - This is why people end up lost, I believe.
        - Nobody sets out and says, you know what, I want to get lost today.
          - It just happens.
            - We nibble our way into unhappiness.
- Natural Followers
  - Sheep are thought of as being dumb animals but that's not the case.
  - In fact, it's thought that sheep being dumb is the result of cattlemen who didn't understand how to herd them.
    - You see with cows you get behind them and make loud noises to get them to move forward.
      - When you do that with sheep, they just get behind you, waiting for you to lead them.
  - Judas Goat
    - In fact, sheep's sense of following is so strong, it's used to their demise.
      - A goat leads them right to the slaughterhouse door.
      - They follow to their demise.
- We sometimes follow to our demise.
  - Again, I've spoken of politicians but there are other voices that cry out sometimes.

IT'S THIS COMBINATION OF TRAITS THAT MAKE THEM ATTRACTIVE TO PREDATORS!!!!

Excursus – Gambling in Sports

- One of the toughest things about being a preacher is NOT SOUNDING LIKE a preacher.

- Nobody likes to be told what to do or how to think and that's not really what we do but sometimes it can feel like that.
- One of the voices we're hearing really loudly right now is to gamble.
  - I get bombarded with emails daily asking me to make bets.
- Gambling addiction is real and affects a known percentage of the population.
  - And here they are out crying out about gambling and point spreads are now being shown in matchups on television.
    - We're normalizing gambling and it's going to be a problem, mark my words.
- And we must remember the more ominous tones of this passage.
  - The thief comes to kill and drain life away.
    - We're meant to have an abundant life.
      - That's God's desire for us.

#### Abundant Life

- In the Greek, there are two words for life.
  - Bios – meaning physical existence.
  - **Zoe** refers to spiritual, eternal life — the kind of life that Jesus offers, which transcends mere physical existence.
- Jesus talks about abundant life, what does He mean?
- Abundant life in Christ is the fullness of joy, peace, and purpose that comes from a deep, transformative relationship with Him. It's more than simply living — it's thriving in the grace and love of God, where each day is infused with meaning and direction. In Christ, we are free from the weight of sin, anchored in His unshakable promises, and invited into the fullness of God's eternal plan. This life overflows with hope and purpose, not defined by circumstances, but by the presence of God within us, leading us to live richly, boldly, and eternally in His care.
  - This is the life that Jesus wants for all of us sheep.

#### Jesus as the Good Shepherd

- Jesus declares Himself as the Good Shepherd.
- He lays His life down for His sheep.
  - We recognize that what Jesus did on the cross atoned for our sins forever and ever.
    - Whatever we've done is long since forgotten.
      - **Jeremiah 31:** *“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”*
- In order to accomplish this, Jesus a perfectly sinless man took on guilty verdict from the world.
  - He walked a lonely road to Cavalry where He was crucified on our behalf.
    - Jesus atoned for our sins in His death.
    - The Holy Spirit is with us now to avoid sin.
- Jesus has done everything necessary for us and for our salvation.