

Pastor Daryl Diddle

Sermon Series: *The Color of Redemption*, No. 3 **White (Good Shepherd)**

March 27, 2022

John 10:11-21 (NIV)

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. ¹⁸ 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."

¹⁹ The Jews who heard these words were again divided. ²⁰ Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?"

²¹ But others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

We're in the book of John again this morning. If you'd turn there with me, you could follow along. John, Chapter 10. We were here last week – same book and same chapter, but these verses begin the second part of Jesus' explanation of His illustration that, as verse 6 there says, the Jewish leaders didn't understand.

Part one was Jesus' statement that we looked at last week: He is the gate. Jesus said, as opposed to them and to false prophets both past and future, that He is the way, the one and only way, to God the Father.

So, in relation to our path to God and to salvation, Jesus is the Gate.

But in relation to people – to those who need salvation, Jesus is also something else: He is the Good Shepherd.

Now, again, He's using this metaphor (using shepherd and sheep language) because it's culturally relevant to His day. Shepherds were all around Him in the Galilean countryside, which made them living illustrations, especially of this particular point. Because just as others were claiming to be gates or the way to God – but were not, so were others claiming to be shepherds of God's people.

And others were indeed leading God's people this way and that, but they were not doing it well. They were not, by Jesus' standards, good shepherds.

But what, then, is it that makes a shepherd a good shepherd? What differentiates a good shepherd from a not-good one?

That's the real issue here, isn't it? And that's what Jesus is telling us.

Our denomination, the Free Methodist Church: we don't really talk denomination all that much here, compared to some of our brother and sister organizations.

Some talk denomination more than they talk Jesus, as if you have to be this or that specific group – whatever Cathli-presby-metho-bapsterian group – if you want to really know and get to God.

Our denomination is part of a group of denominations called the Holiness churches, which can be a compliment or a condemnation, depending on who's talking.

That group includes Free Methodist, the Wesleyans, the Nazarenes, Salvationists, Assemblies of God, Southern Methodist, Church of God Anderson, ECNA. There are a few dozen of them – including the traditional United Methodist church. This is also the heritage from which both Asbury Institutions, and another couple dozen colleges, universities and seminaries were born.

Now, without getting too deep in the theological weeds here, the key element of this tradition is our belief that God's intention is that every Christ-follower be sanctified, which means to be set free from the controlling power of sin in our lives and to be set free from that by the work of God's Holy Spirit within us. And it's important to add that this conviction uses John Wesley's definition of sin, which is "the voluntary (or intentional) transgression of a known law of God."

So, the way we define sin, you see, is central to understanding why Wesleyans believe as they do about the possibility – and not just the possibility, but the expectation (in fact, God's expectation) – of the sanctification of Christ-followers. We believe God can help us not to break the laws of God of which we are aware.

Now, all that is a series of sermons in itself – how all that works, biblically.

That's not what I want to talk about today.

What I want to say about that is: our denomination, like many of the holiness groups in years past, at one time became very performance-oriented in this idea of sanctification – of being free from sin, of being holy.

Over the decades, Free Methodists and others morphed this idea of sanctification, by and large, into a legalistic, external, outward-oriented form of holiness, whereby people were evaluated and judged by all sorts of outward appearance standards, to the point that people were deemed sanctified or not – holy or not – by things like the way they dressed, the way they wore their hair, the things they said – and the way they said the things they said, the words they used, the way they worshipped, the jobs they held, the homes they lived in, the cars they drove, and a whole lot more.

Years ago, someone put it this way, "Legalism is rules without relationship, standards above savior, and laws over love." So, holiness became a very external, performance-oriented thing that, sometimes intentionally and sometimes not, wound up saying, "You're a wicked

sinner and you need to get rid of all your filthy habits if you want the Lord to accept you.”

Which meant that even the proof of a person’s new birth, of regeneration, was seen almost entirely in what that someone either does or no longer does – external standards which, in many cases, are not even expressly mentioned in Scripture.

Now, of course it is absolutely true that God has very high standards, and anyone honestly reading the Bible cannot deny that God expects His people to live His standards of thought, word, and deed: in our attitudes, in our sexuality, in our families, in our relationships, in every part of us.

*Be holy, as I am holy.*¹

*Be imitators of God.*²

*Live a holy life.*³

*Be completely humble, gentle and patient.*⁴

*Act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God.*⁵

God’s expectations of people are lofty.

The problem with legalism is that it gets things backwards. The legalist demands a person first change themselves on the outside in order to earn God’s favor; however, in reality, God deals with people – He transforms people – from the inside out.

So, in legalism, what happens is that too much stress winds up being placed on God’s wrath and not enough on His mercy, and holiness is made a matter of human effort rather than supernatural empowerment. And often, more importance winds up being placed on looks, customs and traditions that are not in Scripture than on even those things explicitly mentioned there.

The truth is, in many places in our denomination and others like it, though things are very different in most places these days, as recently as 30 or 40 years ago, this kind of thinking about holiness was very prevalent. People were often hastily and rather nastily judgmental and critical and all but grace-less on the inside toward others, and yet many of those very people saw themselves, and were seen by others, as righteous and oh, so holy – based on their external appearance.

In short, it was all about the outside.

And in Jesus’ day, this was the kind of holiness belonging to the Pharisees and Scribes, who were the teachers of the law.

“Whitewashed tombs.” That’s what Jesus called them.⁶

Think of what that term really means, because we’ll come back to it. “Whitewashed tombs.”

Jesus told the people to respect them for their position, but to not be like them.⁷ Why? Because they

were hypocrites. Everything they did, they did for the sake of appearance; they did for other people to see. They were not really on the inside as they appeared to be on the outside.

Jesus also called them blind guides,⁸ and accused them of traveling far and wide to influence – to *shepherd* a person (you see?) – and then in doing so successfully, Jesus tells them, “You make that person into as much a child of hell as you are.”⁹

That’s all in Matthew 23, and it’s just the tip of the iceberg of Jesus’ critique of them.

But the core of it all is this: though they tried to appear holy on the outside, they were not, in fact, holy, because they were not holy on the inside. You have to be holy on the inside before you can ever be holy on the outside.

And this is the central issue that, here in Jesus’ mind, separates good shepherds from poor shepherds (or hired hands, as He calls them there in verses 12 and 13): the condition, not of their outsides, but of their insides. What is the state of their heart, their soul, their attitude toward God, themselves and others?

What is it in here [point to heart] that moves them to do what they do?

In one of his books, N.T. Wright talks about this friend he has who, after working in big business for most of his life, came to the conclusion that the trouble with so many business leaders these days is that they’re only in it for themselves; they’re only in it for their own immediate profit.

He says the basis, the motive, for the decisions that more and more business people make is nothing more than, “What will benefit me the most today?”

But it wasn’t always like that.

I mean, sure, if you’re going to be in business, you have to make a profit of some sort, or you won’t be in business for long and you won’t do anyone any good.

But people used to be concerned about other things besides just making a big profit for themselves in the moment. Business people used to want to really build the business for the long term. They were concerned about looking after their workers, about leaving something for their children to operate, about how their business affected those around, about contributing meaningfully over the long haul to their city or town.

But now so many people just don’t care about that stuff. They’ll close a factory here and open one a few towns away, or a few nations away, in a heartbeat, if that gets them their bonus and their share of stock options.

People – not just in business, but in all walks of life – used to be concerned about the welfare of others, but now, more and more are concerned only for themselves.

Talk about a pandemic! You see this everywhere, all around the world!

That is, you see, an internal problem – a heart problem – a motive problem – and it is, in essence, what Jesus is saying the difference is between good shepherds

¹ 1 Peter 1:16, Leviticus 19:2

² Ephesians 5:1-20

³ 1 Thessalonians 4:7

⁴ Ephesians 4:1-6

⁵ Micah 6:8

⁶ Matthew 23:27-28

⁷ Matthew 23:3-5

⁸ Matthew 23:16

⁹ Matthew 23:15

and poor shepherds: good shepherds aren't just in it for themselves and their own profit, because good shepherds have something going on inside them that poor shepherds don't.

Good shepherds have a different disposition – a different perspective – than poor shepherds.

Good shepherds have an attitude of love and care and concern toward others that overrides even their own self-serving, self-exalting, self-enriching nature.

Good shepherds are different from poor shepherds at the motive level – at that place deep within them that determines why they do what they do.

Now, granted, sometimes that's hard to see. It's hard to tell, really, what a person is at that level, because people can do things that make them look very good – very holy – on the outside, right?

But more often than not, here's how you can tell, really, what a person is on the inside – Jesus tells us here: it's how a person responds in times of choice.

When an opportunity comes along that will enrich the person but cause others (the company) to suffer, what does that person do? How do they choose?

Or, when an opportunity comes that will enrich or help the company, but might cost the individual (the leader), what will they do? How do they choose?

In times of crisis, in times of choice, Jesus says there in verse 11, good shepherds will choose to bear the cost themselves if that will save their sheep, while poor shepherds (the hired hands) will choose to save themselves and leave the sheep to suffer.

Why? Jesus tells us there in verse 13, "because hired hands," no matter how good and caring and loving and concerned they say they are or they seem to be on the outside, hired hands, in truth, "care nothing for the sheep."

You see, they have a motive problem way down – in here [point to heart].

They may look great on the surface.

Their resume may shine.

They may have the education and training.

They may look the part, dress the part, talk the part – they may even have executive style hair.

Everything on the outside says they're good shepherds.

But what they do, when push comes to shove, reveals that, on the inside, they're really only in it for themselves.

They're still more concerned with the good of self than of anyone else, and that is precisely the opposite of Jesus, of Christ-likeness, of what it is to be a good shepherd.

Jesus says there, "I am the good shepherd, and I lay down my life for the sheep."

And, you notice, no one is making Him do that. No one's threatening Him to "do this or else!" It's completely His choice; it's a response that comes from within Him. In verse 18 there, He says, "No one takes it (my life) from me – I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again."

When confronted with the choice, "Do I do what's best for me or what's best for others?"

Jesus chose to bear the cost Himself and do what was best for others.

Those other religious leaders would never have done that. Actually, they were actively not doing that right there in front of Jesus.

And that's the difference – the difference between good and poor shepherds, between good and poor leaders: good shepherds have a purity of love, at the motive level inside, that drives them to do what's best for others, even when it costs them personally, you see? And in Jesus' case, it cost His life.

This purity of love at the motive level: that's what allowed Him to be the sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. No one else could have done what He did.

He was the pure one, the guiltless one, who chose to bear a cost that He didn't owe – for the sake of all the rest of us who did.

That's why the color of redemption is white; our salvation, the salvation of our world, required a purity within – a purity of motive that only Jesus possessed.

But because Jesus is who He is, and because Jesus did what He did, that purity of motive is now available to all who are in Jesus.

That's the work of God's Spirit in our day: to cleanse us within from the sort of self-interest that we were born with – the self-exaltation that plagues humanity.

Because of Jesus, we are not bound to be, we do not have to be, whitewashed tombs: people who look good on the outside, but who continue to be dirty and dead within.

Because of Jesus, we can be clean on the inside at the deepest levels – at the motive level. The reasons we do what we do can be transformed, which means that because of Jesus, we can be truly holy, as He is holy, you see?

We can be clean in our love for God and for others.

We can live in ways that take the focus off of ourselves. We can act in ways that truly benefit others.

Our good and *our* glory no longer need to be the center of who we are.

We were born preoccupied with self – every one of us, but we can be freed from that. That's what God's Spirit will do for any Christ-follower who will dare to invite Him to do it.

Whether you realize it or not, we pray for that every time we receive communion: "Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name."

"Cleanse us from this preoccupying love of self – so we can love you, God, and in doing so, truly love others."

This sort of perspective was so different in Jesus' day. That's why many of them said, there in verse 20, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?"

But the thoughtful among them realized (verse 21), "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon."

You see, even then, some of them realized that this sort of purity of motive, this sort of love, really is the only thing that will save our world.

And it's still true today.

A pure love for God and for others: that's the only thing that will save us from ourselves.

God wants His people, His Church, to receive this from Him so we can live it and share it—for the salvation of our world. That's really what being like Jesus means: living a life of pure love toward God and others.

That's what Jesus died to make possible.

That's why He sent His Spirit to His Church, so that His Church would be full of truly good shepherds: people, leaders, shepherds like Jesus.

Will you be that kind of person, that kind of leader, that kind of shepherd?

Will you receive that cleansing—a cleansing of the inside, the purifying of your motives?

Would you welcome that work of God's Spirit to make you more like Jesus? That's real holiness: God working in our lives, for the good of others, making us clean and pure, from the inside out.

Closing Song: *Whiter Than Snow*

Benediction:

That song itself is a prayer. If you want the Spirit to do a work in your heart, all you have to do is say, meaningfully, the words of that song, and let the Spirit do what He wants to do.

The word "good" in "good shepherd" is not the best translation; it's the best we have, but there is something beautiful about it that the word "good" doesn't communicate in English. There's a beauty to this, to who Jesus was. There's an attractiveness, and you can see how there would be a beauty, if this is what characterized the church of Jesus Christ. It would be attractive; it would be saving.

When people say, "Why are you doing that for me?" we could say, "because God changed my heart. God changed my heart."