Praise the Lord, for He is good!

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep.”*

 John 10:1-2

We who are followers of Christ, are the sheep. Sheep is a really good description for us, among other things, we need a shepherd. But we as sheep are not to allow ourselves to be deceived either. So, our true and most caring Shepherd gives us something to look out for.

There are many who would shepherd us; who would teach us and lead us, who would love to have us follow them. But for all the wrong reasons. It would be for their own glory or their own material gain. These are false teachers and false shepherds and thieves and robbers.

Jesus tells us to watch how they enter the sheepfold; how do they present themselves to the congregation they seek to influence. Jesus tells us that they must come through the door; the proper door. If they come in any other way, they are to be avoided.

So, what is the door? First, a few verses later, Jesus identifies Himself as the door. If there is anyone who tries to lead the sheep who denies Christ, who says anything disparaging about Him, who denies His deity or humanity, who does not confess Him as the only way to the Father, they are a false teacher and we are not to be misled by them.

Secondly, Jesus is the Word of God. We have the word of God and we call it the Bible. So, the Bible is a door that a proper shepherd should come through. If someone denies the Bible and its authority, that is a clear sign that they are not a true shepherd and they should be rejected by the sheep.

Before following any who claim to be a shepherd, see if they come through the proper door. If they come from any other way, flee from them; they will do harm to your soul.

In Christ’s love

John

 3-26-23

John 15:1-17

As Easter approaches, we have been considering some of what took place in the upper room, where Jesus and the apostles had the Last Supper. Jesus knew that His hour had come; the ultimate purpose for which He lovingly laid aside His abilities as God and became one of us in order to save us from the wrath of God. The moment of His passion was about to begin, and He had some very important teachings to leave with His disciples before His perfect sacrifice.

At this point, the disciples were sad and confused. They were catching on that Jesus was leaving them, but this didn’t mesh with their expectations of the Messiah. They were looking for a Messiah that would lead a revolution against the Romans and restore the glory to Israel that it had back under David and Solomon. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but He wasn’t doing what they expected Him to be doing.

The disciples weren’t stupid. They believed the Scripture they were taught in synagogue and at the temple feasts. They believed that Messiah would come and make things right. They believed what the Scripture said; what we call the Old Testament. The problem for them was that the word of God is spiritual, and it must be interpreted with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They were looking for a Messiah who would release them from physical bondage, when the Scriptures were pointing to a Messiah who would release them from spiritual bondage; release them from slavery to sin and satan, release them from the just wrath of God.

Now, the time will come when Jesus will restore the glory to Israel, but that will be when He comes back to establish His Kingdom here on the earth. His first incarnation was to make it possible for mankind to be part of His Kingdom. No one is worthy to be His subject, no one has the right relationship with God that is required to be in Christ’s Kingdom; so Jesus had to come here a first time to make us right with God.

Because God is completely holy, He cannot let sin go unpunished. Because He is infinite God, it would take us forever to undergo the punishment we deserve. On the cross, Jesus took the punishment that we deserve in our place. The only thing we have to do is truly believe on Jesus Christ for salvation. Here, when Jesus speaks about the vine, He is giving a picture of what truly believing in Him looks like.

There is a difference between simply believing in Jesus and truly believing unto salvation. Consider James 2:19, “*You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder*.” Simply believing in God, even the God of the Bible, isn’t enough. God the Father sent His only begotten Son to suffer and die for us; He made Jesus the way for us to be reconciled to Him. We must believe on Jesus.

There are several places in the Gospel accounts where the demons know exactly who Jesus is and believe in Him. For example, Mark 1:23-24: *Just then there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, “What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!”* The fallen angels have no doubt that Jesus is real and they know who He is; but that will not save them. In fact, there is no offer of salvation to any in the spirit world who have turned from God. That offer is only to we who are made in God’s image.

More to the point for us, are those who have a form of belief in Christ, but don’t have a belief unto salvation. Jesus relates some scary words to us in Matthew 7:22, “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’*”

Jesus is not saying here that performing works, good works, will get us into heaven. In fact, we see that there are those who will perform good works in Jesus’ name that will be turned away. Doing the will of the Father, first off, comes down to believing in His Son, Jesus; and believing that His work on the cross is the propitiation for our sins. Once we have this, we will have the Holy Spirit to guide us so that we may do the will of the Father. If we do not believe in Jesus as Lord and Saviour, our works, no matter how good, are unacceptable to God.

In this farewell discourse of Jesus in the upper room, before He talked about the vine, He told the disciples that they would receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had always existed and He is part of the Triune God. He was active in the world, bringing God’s word to His people and drawing people to God the Father. So He worked with the disciples to give them the understanding that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.

But they would have to wait until Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to indwell them before they could develop a complete understanding of what Jesus’ Messiahship meant. Again, the words of Scripture and the words of Jesus are spiritual words; they can only be understood through the direction of God’s Spirit. And that is a most wonderful and precious irrevocable gift that we receive from God once we accept Jesus as our Saviour; we receive the indwelling Holy Spirit. And that is an integral part of what Jesus is referring to when He speaks of the vine.

Just as the branches of a vine cannot survive apart from the vine, we cannot survive apart from Christ. We cannot even be Christian unless we are vitally joined to Jesus. This is very serious stuff. We don’t want to hear those words, “*I never knew you*.”

Keep in mind that Jesus’ words are spiritual words and they must be understood spiritually. He uses the physical picture of a vine. The branches draw their nourishment from the vine and do so only as long as they are attached to it. We draw our spiritual nourishment from Jesus. If we don’t stay attached to Him we will wither and die.

Our spirits were once dead; they were separated from God. But once we turned to the Lord Jesus for salvation, our spirits were reborn; they were made alive again. Anything that is alive needs nourishment and our spirits need nourishment. That food comes from our union with Christ.

Jesus is our example. In John 4:34 we are told, ‘*Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.”*’ Now, Jesus had to eat real food; He was a man and He would have starved to death if He didn’t eat. He is talking here of spiritual food. His spirit needed to eat also and we can see that spiritual food is very different from natural food.

Our physical bodies need physical food; our spiritual bodies need spiritual food: an attachment to Jesus by the Holy Spirit, the word of God, prayer, Christian fellowship, and even good works done in Jesus’ name. These are all spiritual food, yet they must all be in union with Christ or they are of no value to us or acceptable to God.

There are those who will never attach themselves to the vine of Christ. They will never be spiritually reborn, they will be dry branches fit only for the fire. There are also those who will seem to become part of the vine and they may even flourish for a time. They will act the part and do works in Jesus’ name; but their heart will not be right, they will seek their own glory instead of the glory of Christ. They cry “Lord, Lord”, but Jesus won’t know them. These will wither and be cut from the vine. Again, fit only for the fire.

But also notice that things won’t be easy for those who are truly in Christ; for those who bear fruit for Jesus. Jesus tells us that God the Father is the vinedresser and that He will prune us. Pruning is the process of removing parts of the living plant. It is not a pleasant prospect for the plant. But it is good in the long run; the branch can bear even more fruit. Interestingly, the word used here meaning prune is cleanse. So, the process of the Father pruning us is cleansing us.

We know this as the process of sanctification. It is the lifelong process of being recreated into the image of Jesus. It is often painful and unpleasant, but that’s what it takes to remove the sin that still lodges in our hearts.

As we are pruned or cleansed, we are able to bear more fruit. Bearing fruit is growing in the characteristics that the Holy Spirit gives us and accomplishing those works God planned out for us from before the beginning of time.

Sometimes, in the work world, if we do a good job, we just get more work. It’s not a very good incentive. Being pruned and bearing more fruit almost sounds like the same thing. But here’s the difference: When we have truly accepted Jesus as our Saviour, there wells up in us a desire to do more for Him. Bearing more fruit is not a burden; it becomes a desire. As it is written in 1 John 5:3, “*For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.*” Once this becomes our way of life, then one day we will hear those beautiful words, “*Well done, good and faithful servant*.”

Verse 7 must be considered carefully. *If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.* This is one of the verses false teachers like to pull out of context and claim that Jesus will give you anything you ask for; and they apply this to carnal desires. If you ask in faith you can have health, wealth, and happiness. No. That is a perversion of God’s word. God will help you in the physical world and provide for your needs, but remember that Jesus is speaking spiritual words.

The whole point of what Jesus is talking about is uniting our life with Him; to be attached to Him, draw spiritual nourishment from Him, and bear fruit for Him. When we enter that kind of union with Christ, His desires become our desires, we want what He wants, we ask Him for the will of the Father to be done. That promise does not excite our greed; it excites our desire to glorify our Saviour. Verse 9 cinches it. When we bear fruit, it glorifies the Father. When we are in Christ, that is what we will ask for in His name.

The greatest commandment is, of course, to love God with everything you have. But the Bible lets us know time and again how important it is to love one another. We are to love our enemies. Husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. We are to love our neighbor as ourselves. Here, in the drama of the hour of Jesus’ sacrifice, He raises the bar to the highest point it can possibly be. And furthermore, He makes it a command. He’s not making a suggestion. This is a command from our Lord and Saviour; and we are to show our love for Him by obeying His commands.

In verse 12, Jesus tells us to “*love one another, just as I have loved you*.” Put those words in your heart and think on them. This is not to simply love one another in some abstract way. We are to love one another as Jesus has loved us. How much did Jesus love us? He laid aside all His glory to come save us; stepped off His throne to be born of a woman and go through everything involved in being a person.

He went to the cross, ridiculed and wounded by those He loved. Endured scourging and crucifixion; had our sin placed upon Him when He was pure from sin; suffered separation from His Father and experienced the full wrath of God.

This is the love we are called to for each other. Now, we can’t do all that because Jesus was God and we are not. But Jesus does speak of being willing to lay down one’s life for another. We may never be called to such a heroic measure, but to be a servant to each other, is in fact, giving up your life for another. Once you give your time to someone, it can never be taken back.

We see now how this fits with Jesus calling His disciples to be servants. When we serve another, we are giving up our life for them. Whoever serves the most, loves the most. Jesus washing the feet of the disciples was a foreshadowing of the cross; and a lesson for us in how to die for each other.

Prayer

Merciful Lord, first, show us our hearts. We desperately need to know if they are true to You. If we have blinded ourselves and not truly turned to You for salvation, please show us now, before we hear dread words when it is too late. Save us Jesus, You are the only way.

Cleanse us Lord, that we may bear fruit for You. We ask for work to do that will bring glory to the Father and that will bring souls into the Kingdom of Jesus. Create in us a desire to see Your will be done on this earth; give us discernment to know Your will; give us courage to do Your will no matter the cost to ourselves.

We can never achieve the love You call us to on our own. We ask for Your Holy Spirit to give us what we need to love others as You call us to. May we be servants of others in obedience to Your command, so that we may demonstrate our love for You.

We thank You and praise You in Jesus’ name

Amen