

Marks of the Sheep



The Sheepfold (Part 4)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again, sharing with you precious insights out of Scripture that have made the difference between success and failure in my life and can do the same in yours. Our theme for this week has been "The Sheepfold," a theme which provides the answer to a very difficult but also a very important question: Who really are God's people in this world?

In my earlier talks I've pointed out the apparent paradox that Jesus is both the door and the shepherd and I also offered you my interpretation of that paradox, which I will briefly recapitulate: crucified for our sins, Jesus is the door; resurrected from the dead, He becomes the shepherd of those who have entered through the door. But He is a shepherd only to those who have first come through the door of His atoning death. There is no other way into the sheepfold. There is no other way that we can have Jesus as our shepherd.

Yesterday I shared on the shepherd's provision as pictured in Psalm 23. I summed it up in one tremendous phrase: total security. But remember that all provision is measured by our commitment. When our commitment is total, our security is total. But if there are limits to our commitment then we don't enjoy that total security which Jesus offers us.

Now that picture was taken from the Old Testament, from Psalm 23. Today I want to begin by reinforcing this Old Testament picture by the actual words of Jesus Himself in this parable in the New Testament. First we'll look at John 10:10, one of my favorite verses:

> "The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly." (NAS)

So Jesus tells us there the reason why He came. Why did He come to earth? What was it for? Summed up in that very simple phrase, "that His sheep might have life." And not just a little life, or a limited life, but life abundantly. Life overflowing. Life for every area of their being. Life more than sufficient for every challenge and every pressure that comes against us. Abundant life.

And then in John 10:27-28, Jesus speaks about this life and uses another phrase. He uses the phrase, "eternal life." This is what He says:

> "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand." (NAS)

Notice that central phrase there, "I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish." So, if we combine those two statements in John 10: Jesus came that we might have abundant life and that we might have eternal life. Life that stretches beyond this world. Life that goes beyond the grave. Life that lasts for eternity. I once heard somebody say, and it was such a good phrase, "I believe that I shall live as long as God lives because God has become my life." That's the kind of life that Jesus came to offer us.

Now we need to look for a moment at this contrast, the two persons pictured in the words that I read to you. There's the life-giver, Jesus; and there's the life-taker, who's not named, but his name, of course, is Satan. If anybody every told us the truth about Satan, it was Jesus. And He said some very unpleasant things. He said that he was a liar. That he was a murderer. And that he was a thief. And that he never comes into our life to do us any good. We surely do need to give heed to that warning.

Now a liar doesn't tell the truth and a thief doesn't announce that he's coming or if he comes he doesn't attract your attention to his presence, he doesn't tell you why he's come. One of the main ways in which Satan has power over humanity is by deception. He doesn't tell us the truth; in fact, in the book of Revelation it says he's the great serpent, the ancient serpent that deceives the whole world. So be on your guard against deception.

Satan has some very nice titles that he gives himself. He portrays himself in a very false way. He wants you to think that he's come that you may have a wonderful time, that you may really see life to the full. You don't need all these old-fashioned restrictions of religious people. You just need to live it up! You need to indulge yourself. One of the things we hear these days is "If it feels good, do it!" I want to tell you, the voice behind that has got the serpent's hiss. Because he knows that if you do that sooner or later it will stop feeling good and you will begin to realize that you're a captive, that you're a prisoner. That he didn't come to do you good. He didn't come to give you life, he came to take your life, your life physically, your life morally, your life spiritually. He's your enemy. He's not your friend. He's a deceiver. Don't believe him. Believe Jesus. Jesus always told us the truth. If you want life, eternal life, abundant life, that is in Jesus, it's not in the enemy. It's not in the thief. And if you want life you can have it. You can have Jesus as your life-giving shepherd. But remember you have to come through the door.

Now we're going to look for a little while at the other side of the coin. We've looked at the shepherd; now let's look at the sheep as portrayed in this Parable of the Sheepfold. What are their distinguishing marks? In other words, what marks out real Christians in this world? How may we recognize them? More important still, how may we know that we belong to them ourselves?

The answer is really not complicated. In terms of that parable it's very simple. I want to give you three distinctive marks of the sheep. That is, the true Christians, the true believers, the real disciples of Jesus.

First of all, they enter the sheepfold by the door. They don't try to climb up some other way. They acknowledge that they are sinners. They believe that Jesus, by His death on the cross, paid the penalty for their sins. That He shed His blood that they might be redeemed, forgiven, and become His sheep and receive eternal life. They are not proud, they are not self-righteous, they are not all bound up with their own religious concepts and ideas. They are humble. They just have come to the end of themselves. They've seen that all they can do is not sufficient. The Bible says in the Old Covenant: "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." Not all our bad deeds, but our good deeds are as filthy rags. A person has to come to that place. "I can't handle this thing myself." "I don't have the answer." "I'm not good enough." "I'm a captive of sin." "I need a liberator." "I need a deliverer." "I need a Savior." And when a person comes to that place, then that person can truly enter by the gateCby the death of Jesus Christ on his behalf. Remember Christ crucified is the gate; Christ resurrected is the shepherd. But in order to have the resurrected Christ as your shepherd, you first have to enter through the gate of His atoning death. So that's the first mark of the true sheep, they've entered by the door, Jesus crucified.

The second mark is very, very simple but very profound. Jesus says, "My sheep hear My voice. They follow Me." What is that? It's a direct, personal intimate relationship. It's not church membership. It's not a doctrinal statement. It's not the repetition of a creed or some sacrament. All those things may be good in their place but none of them is a substitute for that personal relationship: "My sheep hear My voice. They know Me." And furthermore they also reject the voice of a stranger. They are not deceived by religious substitutes. They do not follow into cults and false teachings because they

hear the voice of Jesus. That's the mark of sheep in the biblical culture. They were not driven by the shepherd, but they followed Him and they followed Him because they heard His voice. And it's still the same today in the land of the Bible, in Israel. Still today you'll see shepherds leading their sheep by their voice. So remember, Jesus does not drive, He does not compel; He leads. But He leads only those who can hear His voice. If we cannot hear His voice, then we cannot follow Him.

And then the third mark is again very simple. "My sheep hear My voice and they follow Me." That's what? That's obedience. In one, simple word, it's doing what Jesus says we are to do. It's being able to hear His voice and then obey it.

So what are those two last marks? What do they speak to us of? A direct, personal relationship and obedience to the Lord. That's what marks out the sheep of Jesus, the true Christians. You see, it's not a denominational label, it's not a doctrinal statement, it's not a form of religion. The true sheep of Jesus can be dressed in many different ways. They can be dressed in very modern dress or they can wear some kind of garb that marks out a special order of the church. It isn't the outward marks, it's the inward attitude and relationship. Don't just look for the sheep of Jesus in one particular section of the church. But look for those people that have that relationship with Him. That they can hear His voice and follow Him. And above all, make sure that you're one of those people.

Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this same time. Tomorrow I'll be sharing about another important element in God's provision for His people: the undershepherds.

Radio Program

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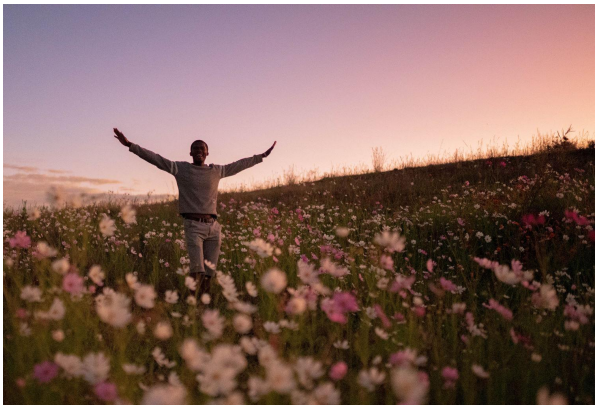

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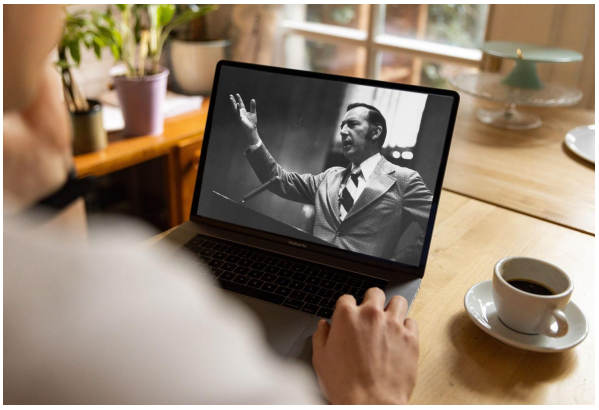

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