**Why Do You Want To Be A Sheep?**

Acts 20:17-35; Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:14-23; Psalm 23 5.12.19

Summary: Max Lucado once noted that sheep are dumb, defenseless and boring. Why would we want to be a sheep? The answer to that question says a lot about us and our relationship to God.

 Some time back Max Lucado asked the question: “Couldn’t God Have Thought Of Something Better Than Sheep? Of all God’s animals, the sheep is the least able to take care of himself. Sheep are dumb! Have you ever met a sheep trainer? Ever seen sheep tricks? Know anyone who has taught his sheep to roll over? Ever witnessed a circus sideshow featuring "Mazadon and His Jumping Sheep"? No. Sheep are just too dumb. And they’re defenseless. They have no fangs or claws. They can’t bite you and they can’t outrun you. That’s why you never see sheep as mascots for sports teams. We’ve heard of the St. Louis Rams and the Chicago Bulls and the Seattle Seahawks, but the New York Lambs? Who wants to be a lamb?”

 Yeah, sheep aren’t real impressive. They’re not known as fighters and they generally don’t have much to brag about, and so the world tends to overlook the Church… because the Church is supposed to be filled with good sheep.

 The world often wants more excitement. They want more pizzazz and power. They want to get ahead in this world and… well… sheep are generally followers by nature. So why would I want to be a sheep?

 Well, you actually don’t get much choice.

 God says… you’re a sheep whether you want to be or not.

 That’s kind of how He created you. He created you to be followers… of something. And if you look real close at other people’s lives you’ll find that it’s true. In this world some people follow all kinds of things.

 Some folks follow riches and power and influence because they believe that the more they have, the happier they’ll be. But Andrew Carnegie once noted: "Millionaires who laugh, are rare."

 Others follow the crowd. They’re into the “party scene”. There’s always a new party, a new drug, a new thrill or high. All you have to do is look at the lives of people like Charlie Sheen, Lindsey Lohan, Britney Spears and others to see how well that works out.

 But people are natural born followers. They follow after something.

 They build their lives around something.

 And you can usually tell what it is they’re following by observing how passionate they are about a given item. They’ll have a whole collection of magazines or books on that topic. And they’ll argue you to death defending that one thing they’ve built their lives around.

 It could be racing cars, football, horses, gardening, movie stars, sports, TV soaps, etc. – whatever they are passionate about is what they follow!

 But the Bible constantly drives home to us the fact that – it doesn’t matter what else you follow - if Jesus isn’t at the core of our life… *“We (are) all (going to be), like sheep, (who) have gone astray”* Isaiah 53:6

 Unless you follow Jesus your life will end up not going anywhere.

 You’ll ALWAYS end up going astray.

 And unless Jesus is your Shepherd, you’re not going to have the power to be happy and content. As it says in Matthew 9:36: *“When (Jesus) saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”*

 As I was preparing this sermon those two realities impressed themselves upon me. So let’s start with that first proposition:

**I. Because Following Jesus Will Lead You in the Right Way.**

 There’s no religion in the world like Christianity for making your life count for something. Christianity may not be flashy or impressive but when we follow our Shepherd He leads us to accomplish great things.

Illus: I heard of a pastor who was an active member of the Rotary Club. Each week different members would give a brief statement about their job. When it came to his turn – instead of saying, "I’m a minister” and bragging about the congregation he served, he stated: "Hi, I’m Joe. I’m with a global enterprise. We have branches in every country in the world. We have our representatives in nearly every parliament and board room on earth. Our original Organizer owns all the real estate on earth plus an assortment of galaxies and constellations. He knows everything and lives everywhere. We’re into motivation and behavior alteration. We run hospitals, feeding stations, crisis pregnancy centers, universities, publishing houses and nursing homes. We care for our clients from birth to death. We are into life insurance and fire insurance. We perform spiritual heart transplants. Our product is free for the asking. But that’s a good thing because there’s not enough money to buy it.”

 What the speaker was saying was: “If you want to make a difference in this world there’s nothing like serving Jesus.”

 But now – not everyone believes that. The Christian faith is under attack in our nation like never before. There is a book that I am placing in the library tells of this. (Hold up the book & make it available, David Horowitz: *Dark Agenda*.)

 Many of their claims are that Christianity is a vile, judgmental and intolerant religion that is responsible for many of the wars in the world. I don’t think they have ever read the New Testament and the principles of morality that Jesus taught.

 Jesus teaches: Avoiding hatred (Matthew 5:21-22); No lustful thinking (Matt. 5:28); No unfair judgments (Matt. 7:1-2); Love of enemies (Matt. 5:44); Reconciliation (Matt. 5:24); Non-resistance (Matt. 5:38-39); Avoiding Anxiety (Matt. 6:25, 29); Self-examination (Matt. 7:3-5); Respect for government. (Romans 13:1-7); Equality of man (James 2:1—4); A universal brotherhood (Matt. 23:9); Forgiveness (Mark 11:25) &Thrift and industry (Ephesians 4:28). In summary:

 Christianity is not about YOU and Christianity is not about ME.

 Christianity is about following our Shepherd and listening to His voice. Because it’s only when we listen to His voice and follow Him that we can accomplish anything of any lasting value with our lives.

 Many of the things that people follow in this world are all about satisfying “MY” wants and “MY” needs. But Jesus teaches us that that’s not why you and I were created.

 We were created to have a higher purpose in life.

 We were created – not to satisfy YOUR wants and needs but to serve the almighty and all loving God, and the only way you’re going to do that is to deny yourself and live for others.

 Because of that truth, Christianity has been at the forefront of changing the world. As Jesus said “*You are the salt of the earth*” and “*You are the Light of the World*”.

 Believers in Christ were the ones who put an end to slavery in Britain and the US. Believers in Christ have been the ones to start hospitals, pregnancy centers, universities, Nursing Homes, Homes for Abandoned children, and on and on and on. Now that’s quite a set of accomplishments for a flock of Sheep. But it isn’t because we’re sheep that we get things like that done… it’s because of our Shepherd.

 That’s why Paul could write with such confidence: *“Dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”* 1 Cor. 15:58

 We have the promise that the things we do for God will not be in vain because our Good Shepherd is there insuring that what we’ve done will last. WE KNOW that our labor in the Lord is not in vain.

 And that’s what you can expect if you follow Jesus…

 But if you’re not following Jesus, you’re not going to go anywhere like that with your life, or accomplish anything of lasting value.

 That’s my 1st proposition: That following Jesus will lead you in the right way, you will be blessed and be a blessing to others!

 **My 2nd proposition as to why we want to be a sheep is that….**

**2. Because Following Jesus Will Make You Truly Content & Happy.**

 Now notice, I didn’t say that non-Christians can’t be happy or that they can’t be content. Sure they can be happy… as long as life goes the way they want it to go. As long as our health is good, we enjoy our job, people love us and the sky is blue, anybody can be fairly content and happy.

 But when life goes south; When friends desert you; When your finances are in the tank; When your health is failing; When your dreams are dashed…

 Even Christians have trouble handling those things.

 And Jesus warned us that life can be like that.

 He warned us to avoid putting our treasures where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal. It’s going to happen whether you’re a Christian or not. Life can - and will – get difficult for everybody.

 But there is a secret to being content when that happens.

 Paul said: *“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the SECRET of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*” Philippian 4:12

 Paul had learned the secret to being content even when life went against him. And what was the secret of his contentment?

 The Secret was the Shepherd.

 *“I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.”* (Phil. 4:13)

 That’s why Jesus comment in John 10:14-15 is so comforting: *"I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me… and I lay down my life for the sheep.”*

 He laid down His life for us. He died for our sins. He suffered the horrors of the crucifixion because He loves us.

 If our Good Shepherd was willing to do that for us, why wouldn’t He be willing to be there for us when our lives begin to unravel?

 That’s what David was talking about in Psalm 23 (KJV): *The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil…”*

Why? *“…for Thou art with me…”*

 Whatever tomorrow would bring… the Good Shepherd was going to be there for David. But the non-Christian doesn’t have that.

 Non-Christian doesn’t have a Good Shepherd.

 They don’t have someone looking out for their tomorrows.

 They don’t have someone walking beside them in valley of the shadow of death. And the day will come (if it hasn’t already) that they’re going to be all on their own and everything they’d ever counted on will be gone. And they’ll be alone.

 Jesus said "… *In this world you will have trouble.”* (John 16:33)

 It doesn’t matter who you are… non-Christian or Christian… in this world you will have trouble.

 But the promise from Jesus is this: *"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* John 16:33

Illus: An American tourist was traveling in the Mid East. His tour group came upon several shepherds whose flocks had intermingled while drinking water from a brook.

 After an exchange of greetings, one of the shepherds turned toward the sheep and called out, "Manah. Manah. Manah." (Manah means "follow me" in Arabic.) Immediately his sheep separated themselves from the rest and followed him. Then one of the two remaining shepherds called out, "Manah. Manah." and his sheep left the common flock to follow him.

 The traveler then said to the third shepherd, "I would like to try that. Let me put on your cloak and turban and see if I can get the rest of the sheep to follow me." The shepherd smiled knowingly as the traveler wrapped himself in the cloak, put the turban on his head and called out, "Manah. Manah." The sheep did not respond to the stranger’s voice. Not one of them moved toward him.

Close: Our Bible tells us that we’re all like sheep. We all follow something in this life. Some follow their own passions and desires. Some follow great leaders. Some follow religions and teachings of mere men.

 But there’s only one who is really worth following. There’s only one Good Shepherd who was willing to lay down His life for you.

 Those who follow Him will have trouble in this life, but He will give them the power to overcome those troubles.

 And those who follow Him will accomplish great things with their lives and will ultimately be led to heaven. There’s no other voice like His.

 Jesus said *“My sheep hear my voice… and they follow me?”*

 Do you hear His voice today?

**Prayer: Dear Jesus, lead us by the quiet waters to the green pastures and eventually to our home in heaven. Amen.**