

Jesus is the Good Shepherd

The Scriptures are plain and clear. They mean what they say. God does not lie. "God so loved the world," Jesus has said. The apostles have said it too: God desires the salvation of all; all are objects of His grace. Grace is universal. Its universality is a source of rich comfort to us. The fact of its universality is reason for all to thank and praise God unceasingly. God's grace is sufficient and universal. It is also active. We may see or hear of someone who has suffered a terrible loss or endured an unspeakable tragedy. Perhaps we see pictures of starving children or of families whose lives have been destroyed by war or abuse of some sort. Our hearts may well be moved. We may wish that we could do something to help, to save, or to rescue. But we cannot. The problems are so enormous and require resources far beyond our capability. Our compassion is real - but inactive. God's grace is not like that; God's grace is both real and active. He saw our plight already in eternity. He felt our wretchedness, our poverty, and our misery. He knew the torments that, left to ourselves, we would suffer for all eternity. And so in grace He devised a plan for our redemption. And then, prompted alone by His own grace, He was active; He carried the plan out to perfection, even though that plan would cost the suffering and death of the Son of God and Mary's son. Hear again how Jesus Himself sums up that active grace of God: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Jesus was not merely a great man and martyr to a cause. He was not just someone misunderstood who ended up dying because people didn't like Him or understand His message. No, Jesus came because God's grace was active in striving for and in working out our redemption. He came knowing full well what would happen to Him, even willing it. The great prophecies of Christ's redeeming work in the Old Testament (e.g., Genesis 3:15; Psalm 22; Isaiah 53) all bear witness to God's grace as active in seeking and planning and then carrying out the work of redemption. He declared: "I am the living Bread that has come down from heaven. If anyone eats of this Bread, he will live for ever, and the Bread that I shall give is My flesh, for the life of the world," (John 6:51) and in our Gospel today, "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep... No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and have authority to take it back again" (John 10:11, 18).

Much is made today about who killed Jesus: who was to blame? We know who the human agents were, but that's mostly beside the point. No one could have killed Him against His will. "No one," Jesus stressed, took His life from Him. His was a true self-sacrifice out of His boundless love. He had the authority and the power (note here another claim of divinity by Jesus) and the directive from His heavenly Father to give the sacrifice and show the proof. He was determined to die and rise again.

His whole purpose in coming into this world can be summarised with these words, which express His overwhelming power and authority over all things: "I have come that they (believers) may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

Satan and his evil hosts want to strip us of this gift of life, and therefore we must protect ourselves from them. This was the message of the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 4, when he spoke of the blessed "rest" Jesus is preparing for us - a rest, which is eternal life by the grace of God through Christ - a rest we can lose if we do not listen to our Saviour! Down through the ages, Satan has misled many individuals and so deprived them of their eternal salvation. The writer to the Hebrews points to the example of the entire generation of Israelites who left Egypt in glory, but whose corpses littered the wilderness of Sinai because they refused to listen. He concludes his thoughts with this powerful appeal: "Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:11-13). You and I will one day stand before God. Why should we listen to Jesus? We should listen to Jesus because as the Son of God He has the power to give us life on that last day!

No one has the power and authority to remove our sins other than Jesus! No one has the power and authority to defeat our greatest enemies - death and Satan other than Jesus! No one has the power to raise our bodies from the dead on the last day other than Jesus! No one "is the way, the truth, and the life" for us other than Jesus!

"I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." As His sheep, we do not need to fear the present or the future. As His sheep, we are guaranteed His blessing now and throughout eternity. As His sheep, we not only should, but shall want to eagerly listen to Him, because He is the Good Shepherd and because He is the Son of God!