

**Sermon Series: “The Good News for Life”**  
***The Gate to Abundant Pasture***  
**Pastor Norwood N. “Woody” Hingle III, Ph.D.**  
**Sunday, August 16, 2020**

Have you ever seen a land overflowing with abundance? E.g., I don’t like to brag, but my grandfather on my Mom’s side was from Tennessee and he liked to farm, and farming was much a part of his life, and his last name was literally “Farmer”! He was John William Farmer, and his friends called him “Billy”, and we called him Daddy Billy. He grew tobacco, and every year he would plant a garden with his buddy whom we called Uncle Tob, and their garden was always overflowing with abundance— they grew green beans and sweet corn, and we would eat them at our meals. He also had an apple tree. From my Daddy Billy I learned what it was like to live in a land which overflowed with abundance. Now of course in Louisiana we live in such a land as well. E.g., I recall recently Elena and I went for a day trip through southeast Louisiana and I was amazed at all the fields of sugar cane I saw; and of course in Plaquemines Parish they have their citrus trees— in fact, in high school we used to compete in a track meet in Buras which was called the “Citrus Relays”. In many ways, God wants our lives to be like the land of Tennessee and Louisiana, as we will see in this morning’s text.

READ John 10:1-10 (p. 103)

**CONTEXT:** Jesus has just healed a man born blind, and He did this on the Sabbath, and He gets a lot of resistance from the Pharisee. Eventually the Pharisees say they believe Jesus is a sinner, the healed man believes Jesus is a prophet and he gets kicked out of the fellowship by the Pharisees. Jesus finds him, and the healed man believes in Jesus and worships Him.

“The sheep can follow ultimately two types of leaders. The first is the stranger— also known as a thief and bandit— who seeks to destroy (v 10) the sheep and whose voice the sheep do not know (v 5). ‘The “thieves and robbers” may be the members of the establishment who had shown themselves such unworthy shepherds to needy members of the flock of Israel like the man whose blindness had been cured. We might think also of false Messiahs, insurgent leaders and the like, who gathered followers around them and led them to disaster. . .’” (F.F. Bruce, *John*, p. 226). Cf. Acts 5:36-37.” It is not widely known in this day of urban civilization, but sheep are not very smart animals. In fact, one could put a good case forward that they are some of the dumbest animals around. E.g., I recall reading about a shepherd in Istanbul, Turkey in an event that was reported in 2005; this shepherd was looking after 1,500 sheep grazing near a cliff. All of a sudden one of the sheep jumped from the cliff to his death. Soon thereafter, the other sheep were following suit! One after another they jumped off the cliff to their deaths! The shepherd quickly ran to stop this tragic loss of sheep, and he stopped it only after he lost 450 sheep! Thankfully, many of the sheep that jumped off the cliff did not die, because the pile of dead sheep at the bottom broke their fall! (from S. Thomas and T. Wood, *Gospel Coach*, p. 139). Sheep can do some crazy things. Sheep need a shepherd. And sheep are vulnerable to a destiny of shepherds who lead them badly. That is what Jesus is warning His listeners in this passage. In many ways, you and I are like sheep who are not so smart; in fact, in many ways we make decisions that are simply dumb. In the first century AD there were those who lead people astray, and to their very destruction; READ Acts

537-37. And people still can be sheep not making very good decisions in life. Jesus could see this, as we see from His saying, “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). E.g., I recall reading about a young woman who before she got to the age of 30 was divorced three times, and all three of her past husbands were neglectful and abusive to her. She went to see a psychologist about this, and he pointed out to her the reason for her consistently bad decisions. She did not have a loving relationship with her father or his attention, and she craved it, but because she did not get it she did not feel she was worthy of a good man, so she continued to select husbands who were not good to her. When this was pointed out to her she could better see the error of her ways— and she found it hard to believe that she could make such poor decisions and not see that in many ways she was abusing herself through not feeling worthy of a better husband. And there are many who would lead us astray. E.g., I recall when I was in Junior High I slept over at a friend’s house who had some high schooler’s there, and while the mother slept they broke out a joint of pot and offered me some, but my parents— being the good shepherds they were— had prepared me for such a moment, and by God’s grace I did not take part. One of the guys who did try to pot eventually did a lot of pot in high school and smoked cigarettes, and I lost touch with him, but later heard that he died at age 39. There are those people who, whether intentionally or not, will lead you and me the wrong way, unless we intentionally decide who our shepherd is.

“The second type of leader for the sheep is Jesus who is the gate which leads them to good, safe, abundant pasture and who is the shepherd whom the sheep know by His voice and he knows them by their name. Cf. Ezekiel 34:23-24 for a Davidic claim Jesus is making in John 10. ‘In my youth some shepherds in the Scottish Highlands not only called their individual sheep by name, but claimed that an individual sheep would recognize its own name and respond to it’ (ibid., p.

224).” God in the Old Testament wants to make it clear that He expects those religious leaders need to shepherd His people well, and will be held accountable when they do not. READ Ezekiel 34:23-24. E.g., I have often thought of what my role is in serving churches, and Ezekiel 34 has come to mind as well as James 3:1 where it says let not many of you become teachers, because teachers will be judged with a stricter judgment. The title to which I aspire most is not so much Rev., although it took a lot of work to get that, and it is not Dr., though it took a lot of work to get that, but it is pastor, because a pastor wants to be sure his or her flock is safe and taken care of. I aspire to serve this church as a pastor, and I am trying to grow in this area, and I have a lot to learn. Have you ever had someone pastor you, whether it be a minister or someone in the church? E.g., I recall a pastor I shared some problems I have had, and he prayed with me-- which, believe it or not, can be rare for me to hear from pastors when I share a struggle— and then days later he called to check up on me to see how I was doing. Jesus wants to shepherd us, and lead us to the abundant life. I recall someone who had v 10 as his favorite scripture— my Dad. E.g., I recall he would be an early riser, and you would think that getting up early to get to church on Sundays and getting the whole family in the car would be chore, but this was when he was most happy, my Mom would tell me. He was very punctual, but not all of us in the family were, but he would get us all in the car by about 9:00 or 9:15 AM and to church for the opening devotional, Sunday School, and church. It was clear to me that following Jesus is what really gave his life joy. Jesus also shares that He knows His sheep by name, and He calls to them. He knows everything about us— which skeptics of Christianity mock at times because the universe is so huge and our planet so tiny in comparison, and we ourselves are even smaller! But the skeptics’ view here amounts to “sizeism”— much like “ageism” and “sexism”— where only that which is large is worthy of significant attention and value; but we value small things as of very high or infinite worth, such as babies and diamonds. Jesus said

to His followers, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:29-31). So Jesus knows the number of hairs on our head, and our name. E.g., I am reminded of what the theme song to the TV show “Cheers” had said: “Sometimes you want to go/Where everybody knows your name/And they’re always glad you came/You want to be where you can see/The troubles are all the same/You want to be where everybody knows your name”. That’s the way Jesus is — He knows your and my name, and is always glad you and I came! And the church is the best place to experience that, when the church is walking with the Lord faithfully.

“Which of the two leaders do you and I want to follow?” That is an important question for us. Jesus wants to be our shepherd, and to provide others in our lives who will shepherd us in His ways. And He has called us to shepherd others in His ways.