

The Only Place That's Full of Life

Have you made your New Year's resolutions yet? If you have, you're part of 45% of Americans. If you haven't you part of 38% of Americans. If you're not sure if you will or you won't, you're part of 17% of Americans.

If you DO make a resolution, what will it be about? The top ten resolutions a few years ago were these:

- Lose weight
- Get organized
- Spend less, save more
- Enjoy life to the fullest
- Stay fit and healthy
- Learn something new and exciting
- Quit smoking
- Help someone achieve their dream
- Fall in love
- Spend more time with family

Next question (we're not done yet), how likely is it that you'll achieve your goal?

- 8% say they are always successful
- 19% say they're successful half the time
- 49% say they are infrequently successful
- 24% say, "Don't bother!" They never achieve their goal.

Last question, "What correlation is there between resolution success and life happiness?" Are you ready for this? Zero!!! People who achieve their resolutions every year are no happier than those who never achieve their goal. ¹

Which brings us to John, Chapter 10. Yes, we're back now in the Gospel of John and we'll stay here through Resurrection Sunday, which this year is at the end of March. In John 10, Jesus says nothing about New Year's resolutions! However, He does speak about how you can have a satisfying life, a life that's full. Whether you're a resolution person or a non-resolution person, this message is for you!

Through his gospel, John includes seven "I Am" statements of Jesus – statements where He defines Himself using some type of simile. In this chapter alone, He uses three. Let's see what they are. First, Jesus says...

I Am the Gate of Safety and Freedom.

In verse 7, we find the first simile. Jesus says:

...I tell you the truth - I am the gate for the sheep.

Now, let's notice the context. From John 7 we understand that Jesus is in Jerusalem some six months before His crucifixion. This is His last celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, which celebrated the Jews' being set free from slavery in Egypt. In John 9, Jesus heals a man born blind whom the Pharisees subsequently excommunicate from the Temple. Jesus, however, finds the man again and welcomes him into His kingdom saying:

... "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." (John 9:39)

Which angers the Pharisees who overhear Him saying that and they say to Jesus:

... "What? Are we blind too?" (John 9:40)

To which Jesus responds:

... **"If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains."** (Jn. 9:41)

Can you feel the tension in the courtyard? I can feel the heat and I'm 2,000 years away.

Then Jesus says:

"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his sheep by name and leads them out... But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." (John 10:1-3, 5)

This is common knowledge to Jesus' audience but not to us. Here's what He's describing. Each town had a huge sheep pen. During the day, shepherds took their flocks out to pasture and at night they brought their flocks back and put them in the pen. A watchman guarded the gate or actually stood in the gate all night. In the morning, each shepherd came and gathered his flock. How? He whistled a certain way or played a tune on a shepherd's pipe or he literally called his sheep by name. So, what Jesus does next is to say that He is the gate into His spiritual flock. Listen, I'm reading from the more accurate NIV 2011 translation:

... **"Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."** (John 10:7-10)

I read that from the 2011 NIV translation because in the 1984 translation it said, *"All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers..."* That isn't grammatically what Jesus said. If He had said that, it would mean that the prophets and Moses were thieves and robbers. But what Jesus said is *"All who have come before me ARE thieves and robbers,"* meaning the Pharisees who are still alive, not the prophets.

But then something else we must see is that Jesus isn't a gate that only swings one way. No, sheep pens didn't work that way. The sheep pen gate opened to let the sheep in for safety but it also let them out to find green pastures. If Jesus is your gate, He's not like a cult that wants to enslave you and limit your freedom. NO, just the opposite. He gives you safety from the terrors of the night, but He also gives you freedom to find green pastures and enjoy life in freedom.

The thieves have a very different agenda. They come to steal you. They operate by force because they know you won't go to them by choice. Their agenda is not to give freedom and safety but to "steal, kill and destroy." Any cult, any false religion that tries to force you into their sheep pen or tries to threaten you or steals from you - it's pretty obvious who they are. They are spiritual thieves and robbers. Most people know instinctively to steer clear of them.

Jesus never uses force or threats or manipulation as recruiting tools. If you join Jesus' flock, it's always your decision alone. He is the Gate of safety and freedom. But, He also said...

II. I Am the Good Shepherd of Self-Sacrifice.

Shepherding was an ancient occupation in Israel. It literally can be traced back to the very beginning of mankind. Adam and Eve's son, Abel, was a shepherd. So, Jesus' audience

knew what the responsibilities of a shepherd were. But we're probably not so clear about them. So, let me give you a brief tutorial.

In short, the shepherd was responsible for the total care of the sheep. First, he had to lead them to find pasture and water in a land basically as dry as southern Arizona. Secondly, he was responsible for the protection of the sheep from weather or predators. Remember this: where did David learn the skills he needed to kill Goliath? He learned them protecting sheep. And by the way, most shepherds were not the owners of the sheep, so if one died, they had to pay the owner for that sheep. Thirdly, he had to go find the sheep that wandered away.

Now, remember that it was Jesus who told the story of the shepherd with 100 sheep who had one that wandered off. So, the shepherd goes off to find it. But have you ever considered how difficult that might have been? I mean, the sheep are trained to follow the shepherd, right? So, how could he go off to find the lost one? Imagine this...

"All right you guys, George is lost. So everyone stay here, I'm going to look for George."

"George is lost? Oh, no! We're coming with you."

"No, stay here! I can't find him with 99 sheep following me."

"We want to help! What happened to George? Let's all spread out and look for George."

"NO! Don't spread out! Just stay here! Oh!!! These sheep are soooo annoying!"

Any volunteers for shepherding? Interestingly, the kings of Israel were also called shepherds. And now Jesus says:

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the (annoying, frustrating, less than intelligent) sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it..."

I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep...

The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." (John 10:11-12,14-15,17-18)

Do you need a contemporary illustration? Of the 12 people killed in the Aurora, Colorado, theater shooting, four of them were men shot in the back. How did they get shot in the back in a theater? Were they running away? No, just the opposite. These were men who threw themselves over their wives or girlfriends to protect them. Alex Teves was there with his girlfriend, Amanda Lindgren. Amanda said:

"When the shooting started, I was really, really confused at first. But Alex didn't even hesitate, he just threw himself on top of me and held me down. He covered my head and he said, 'Shh. Stay down. It's ok. Shh, just stay down.' He was my angel that night, but he was my angel every day I knew him." ²

Men, you are the shepherds of your family. These men understood that. Do you? We are to love our wives, the apostle Paul says, the way *"Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."* (Eph. 5:25) ... **"The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."** Sometimes being full of life means that you are the one who is willing to die. But you have to make that decision now, before you're facing deadly force. Courage begins with a decision made long before it is acted upon. Amanda Lindgren was asked if she thought Alex knew he was putting himself in danger. She replied:

"I know he did. He'd do anything for me. He always told me that, too." ³

In John 10, Jesus is telling you that. In John 19 we see His courageous act of love. On the cross, He covered you so that you would not be harmed by the wrath of God for your sin. All true acts of love find their source in the actions of our God who took on flesh. He is not only your shepherd; He is the ultimate lover of your soul. Finally, in John Ch. 10, we hear Jesus say:

III. I Am God's Son

This next "I Am" statement is made by Jesus two months later at the Feast of Dedication or as we know it today, Hanukkah. The Jewish leaders confront Jesus with this question:

... "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." (Jn. 10:24)

To which Jesus responds:

I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, no one can snatch them out of my hand. (John 10:25-28)

Let's stop there and notice several things. First, they ask Jesus to tell them if He is the Messiah. Jesus says, "I did tell you, but you do not believe." Why didn't He say, "I did tell you, weren't you listening?" He didn't say that because hearing Jesus isn't about listening, it's about believing.

When you read the Bible, do you hear Jesus speaking to you? Yes, of course you do. But do you know anyone who reads the same passage you read, but they say, "I don't get it. I don't hear Jesus speaking to me through that passage." What's going on? Jesus tells us why some people hear Him in the Bible and other people do not. It's because some believe and some don't. If you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, you WILL hear Him speak to you.

What do I mean by "hear Him"? Do I mean you hear an audible voice? No, I mean you agree with or accept what is being said. If you read in the Bible, "Do not lie," and you think, "Why does it say that? Lying isn't so bad. Sometimes it's a good thing to lie," that's what Jesus meant by "not hearing him." And if you do "hear Him," you have, present tense, eternal life. You have it and you will never lose it. You don't have it just until you sin again and then you lose it. No, you have it and you will always have it. Dr. J. Vernon McGee puts it this way:

I believe in the eternal security of the believer and in the insecurity of the make believer.⁴

Does it anger you that I'm saying that if you don't agree with the Bible, it's because you're not a believer? Well, then you're in the same place as the Jewish leaders. The Jewish leaders got so mad at Jesus, they picked up stones to kill Him. You might be thinking, "Yeah, well, I can understand that. Jesus said a very hurtful thing to them. Why did He do that?"

Jesus didn't just say a hurtful thing, he said a truthful thing. In fact, He said a potentially very "life-giving" thing. The truth was that these religious leaders were dead spiritually. They thought they were alive but, in fact, they were dead. By Jesus' pointing that out, He was giving them a chance to acknowledge the truth, repent of their sin, be "born again" and come alive spiritually. If He had not told them the truth, they might have died in their sins one day and gone to Hell.

Surgeons "hurt" people in surgery. They cut them or do things to them that it takes weeks to recover from. And they do this every day! Why are they such hurtful people? Because their cutting of people saves their lives. These are cuts that heal. Jesus' words to the religious

leaders were “cuts that could potentially heal.” Are you willing to cut a friend so they can be healed?

And to the religious leaders, the most hurtful words of all were when Jesus said, “I am God’s Son.” Yes, it’s a radical statement. Yes, if anyone else said it, it would be hurtful. But no, it wasn’t hurtful for Jesus to say it. It was the ultimate life-saving phrase because this phrase, “I am God’s son,” is the only key that will unlock the door to God and His paradise. Until you use this key, you will never understand the deepest truths and the fullest satisfaction in life. In fact, you will never HAVE anything but physical life.

But when you choose to pick up and use this key, you’ll hear the “click” and you’ll feel the door open in your hand as your vision turns from black and white to full color. You won’t just understand but you’ll experience what Jesus meant when He spoke the word of John 10:10:

The thief comes to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

How full is your life? Let’s pray...

¹ Statistics from two sources: *Statistic Brain*, “New Year Resolution Statistics,” (12-31-12) and Stephen Shapiro, “Interesting New Year’s Resolution Statistics,” Stephen Shapiro’s 24/7 (stephenshapiro.com)

² Christina Ng and Dan Harris, ABC News, Aurora, Colo., July 24, 2012

³ Ibid.

⁴ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible, Vol. IV* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), p. 434