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THE GOOD LIFE Part Two- The Good Shepherd

Greetings, saints! We pray that you are experiencing God's goodness right now in the land of the living!

Last month, I began talking to you about "The Good Life" that the Lord has prepared for each of us to live: We learned last month that when David began this psalm by saying, "The Lord is my Shepherd," he was making a declaration of his faith! He was in essence saying, "I know my God, and He is my Shepherd!"

Saints, knowing the true nature and will of our God is such an important aspect of living the good life because if one does not know that God is truly good, then they will have a hard time receiving the things that He wills to do in their lives. So, that is why we are embarking on a journey through the 23rd Psalm- to discover what His will for us truly is.

Now as we are talking about the Lord being our Shepherd here, I think it is important that we go over to John chapter 10 and look at the section of Scriptures where our Lord Jesus Christ revealed Himself as our "Good Shepherd." My reasoning for this is because I believe it answers some of those questions as to why it seems as though God is good to some and not so good to others.

As we read this parable in John chapter 10, it becomes clear that Jesus is revealing Himself as not only our Shepherd, but also as the door that the sheep both enter in by and go out by. The premise of this parable is to show how our Lord is the Shepherd as opposed to the hirelings - the thieves and robbers - that have come before Him. Now the context of this parable is not my point as much as the characteristics that our Shepherd possesses, because He reveals in this parable some wonderful attributes that we should take heed to.

In verse 11, when Jesus reveals Himself as the Shepherd He described in this parable, He doesn't just say He is any old shepherd - rather He says, "*I am the Good Shepherd!*" and goes on to describe Himself as the Good Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep.

Now there are a lot of things that make the Lord a "Good" Shepherd, but nothing trumps this one point - that He died for us that we might live! Amen! While we might acknowledge the fact that Jesus died for us and that the Father did not spare Him so that we might live, I think what Christians have failed to reconcile is that if the Father gave up His only begotten Son for us, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things? (See Romans 8:32) Amen? In other words, if He was willing to give us His very best - the Only Begotten of the Father - then why would we doubt that He would give us anything else we needed? That would be like me sacrificing Levi on your behalf and then you doubting that I would help you pay your power bill. No, if I would give up my son for you, then I would most certainly be willing to give you things of much less value. Amen? He wants to take care of every area of our lives, and He has made the provision for this.

So, the truth is- the Lord has been good to all of us through the giving up of His only begotten Son for us! This should be our only consideration when it comes to that question of God's goodness. He was, is, and always will be good to everyone of us because He gave Jesus for all of us!

But when it comes to salvation (as I'm sure you are well aware), we have a part to play. Yes, we must

receive and walk in the free gift that has been given. Likewise, receiving all of God's good gifts is our responsibility. As Isaiah 1:19 says, *"If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land."* So, if we are both willing and obedient in hearing His voice and following His direction, we will receive the good of the land.

And that is what I want us to look at in this month's Living Logos – how the Lord showed us that we receive all of the goodness that He has to offer! So, let's look at some of the things Jesus showed us here in John chapter 10 that both characterize Him, our Good Shepherd, and us, His sheep:

LIFE MORE ABUNDANTLY

Let's begin by looking at that familiar passage here in John 10:10 that we quote all the time: Here, Jesus said, *"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly."* I love the way some other translations expound upon this verse: The Amplified Bible says, *"I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance [to the full, till it overflows]."* The Message Bible paraphrases this last part of the verse as so: *"more and better life than they ever dreamed of."*

You see, this echoes what we will be seeing throughout this look at the 23rd Psalm - that Jesus came to give us the good life - that is, the more abundant life. Again, this first of all describes "life" in our spirit - which overflows in our hearts as righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (see Romans 14:17). It describes a more fulfilling and pleasurable life where we experience good in all aspects of life - wholeness in our bodies, soundness in our minds, financial freedom, strong relationships etc., etc., etc. So, this is obviously not just us existing; this describes a life that is *thriving*, not just *surviving*.

But now I want you to notice that in John chapter 10, there are some specific promises given to the Good Shepherd's sheep. And we will see that these benefits of being in the Good Shepherd's flock are keys to experiencing His goodness.

Notice in verse 3, that Jesus says that His sheep:

- ✓ Hear His voice.
- ✓ Are called by name.
- ✓ Are led by Him.

HE KNOWS MY NAME

Let's start with the fact that His sheep are called by name: In verse 14, Jesus said, *"I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own."* So again, we see the importance of knowing the Lord like we discussed last month, but I want you to notice that here we see the flipside of this: While it is certainly important to know that the Lord is not just our Shepherd, but that He is my own personal Shepherd, it is also important to know that our Shepherd knows us individually and specifically. So not only can we know His name; He knows our names too!

Isn't that just awesome that our Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, knows His own sheep and calls them by name?!? Friends, that is a personal relationship. He knows who I am individually and who you are personally. He knows our names - which is not just knowing that we are Joe, Mary, etc.; it is knowing our personality, character, etc. He knows everything there is to know about us! Hallelujah!

This is so super important to understand because it creates confidence in God - that He knows who I am, what I need, what I like, etc., etc., etc. He knows me and, therefore, will not leave me hangin'! This is a big first step to experiencing the goodness of God here in the land of the living.

HEARING AND KNOWING HIS VOICE

But in this passage, we also see that Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice. In verse 4, He goes as far as saying that they *know* His voice. Therefore, if the Lord is our Shepherd, we can rest in the fact that we hear and know His voice.

Now I understand that many Christians struggle with this, saying things like - "I just don't feel like I hear from God." Well, I believe a big reason for this is because many born again, Spirit-filled Christians have a serious misconception as to how God speaks to us.

When I hear this doubt in Christians that they can hear God, what I want to tell them is - If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you do indeed hear from God! Yes, you already do hear from God! How do I know this, you ask? I base that on these very Scriptures in John chapter 10. So, if Jesus - the Lord, our God - says that we hear His voice, shouldn't we come into agreement with Him and start believing that we hear His voice? Of course, we should!

But you will hear believers cite their own experiences saying, "But I don't hear His voice! I have asked and sought to hear from God, but I just don't hear anything." This is when we must base our belief system upon the foundation of His Word. As the Apostle Paul said in Romans 3:4- "Indeed, let God be true and every man a liar." In other words, if our experiences and testimonies conflict with what God said in His Word, then those things are a lie in comparison. Saints, God's Word is absolute truth. So, if He says here that we hear His voice, then we hear His voice, whether we feel like we do or not. This is one of the cornerstones of hearing from God - faith that we hear Him!

You see, we get what we expect from God (based on what He has spoken and promised to us). Things that God has provided are only going to be fully manifested in our lives as we actively put our hope in those promises and mix our faith with them. Everything from our initial salvation to hearing His voice is fully realized through our faith and hope - our confidence and expectation of them. So, we need to start believing and confessing that we do hear from God for He has said that His sheep hear and know His voice!

But someone will say, "Well, maybe I do hear something, but my big problem is that I do not know when what I am hearing is God or the devil, the Lord or myself." I am glad you made that point because notice again what our Lord said: He said in verse 3 that His sheep hear His voice, but at the end of verse 4 He said that we know His voice! That means that not only do we hear the voice of our Good Shepherd but we also know how to discern His voice from other voices. However, in my experience, the general problem here is us: It is not that God is not speaking; it is us who are not hearing correctly.

A good example of all of this is that just as there are signals being transmitted in the air all around us right now - radio frequencies and television signals - there are also spiritual messages being transmitted in the atmosphere around us right now. But how many of you know that it would be ridiculous for one to say that they don't believe that there are these signals and frequencies in the room with us right now just because they don't see or hear them?

So, regarding this example, you can tell some people this and they might counter by saying - "I don't hear

spiritual frequencies and I don't see these spiritual signals." Well, it might not be that it is the transmitter that is broken; it might be that the problem is with their receiver! You see, all of these unseen programs are being constantly broadcast, but if you do not have a receiver of some sort, you will be oblivious to them and won't see or hear anything. And it is like that with all of those spiritual realities we are promised; they still exist even though we cannot see, hear or feel them. Friends, there is a spiritual world around us right now that actually is more real than this natural world we live in. Why? Because the spiritual world parented this natural world. All things were made by the things unseen (Hebrews 11:3).

But that's what faith does, right? It believes that the things that are made were created by unseen things. This verse teaches us an incredible lesson - that the Word of God was the parenting force that created all the things which are seen. And, bless God, you can bet the bank that it still works this way today! God's Word can bring to reality in the natural realm things that are already a reality in the spiritual realm. The mirror of God's Word reflects what is seen in God's world. So, you see, it's already there and we are not trying to get God to do something that He has not already done. No, we are simply positioning our receiver to hear and see what He has already done. Amen! And this certainly pertains to this promise of hearing God's voice.

But I personally believe that the reason that many people's hearing of God's voice is so fuzzy is because they simply have not learned how He is communicating to us. That is where this third and final benefit of our Good Shepherd comes in - He leads us. So, let's look at a couple of passages that clearly indicate that we do hear from God and know His voice...

AS MANY AS ARE SHEEP = AS MANY AS ARE LED

Let's now look over at Romans 8:14 at another passage of Scripture that verifies my point that God's children do hear His voice. Romans 8:14 says, *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."* Many will read this and say something like - "Oh, well, I better start being led by the Spirit of God so that I can become a child of God." No, it is actually saying the opposite - It is saying that the by-product of being a child of God is that you are led by the Spirit of God.

Now I have heard some try to make a distinction here saying that being led by the Spirit requires great maturity - thus the reason Paul refers to the phrase "sons of God" like these believers are the grown-up ones, but I disagree with this mainly because Paul uses the terminology "children of God" and "sons of God" interchangeably. You can look down at verse 16 and see where he uses the term "children" and in Galatians 3:26, he says, *"For we are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."*

No, I see all of this as an excuse as to why more people are not led by the Spirit. And whether you were just saved yesterday or 50 years ago, you can be led by the Spirit of God just the same. In fact, I believe many baby Christians are able to be led better than Christians who have been saved for a long time because their hearts are more soft, pliable and sensitive to His direction - not being hardened by the constant friction of not walking in the light that they have.

But notice again that the Bible tells us that the sons (or daughters) of God are led by the Spirit of God: Not can be led, not should be led, but are led! This verse is basically equating "as many" who are led by the Spirit to "as many" who are the sons and daughters of God. Therefore, if we are God's children, we are led, just as if we are God's sheep, we do hear His voice. So, again, we need to get into agreement with God and start believing and expecting to be led by the Spirit of God.

EVIDENCE THAT YOU HEAR FROM GOD

But, now, let me begin to prove to you that you do hear from God and you are led by the Spirit (and this will also illustrate to you how God speaks to us and leads us today): First of all, skip down a verse in Romans 8:16: It says that the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. Well, how do you know that you are saved and a child of God? If someone were to ask us how we know we are born again, our response would generally be something like, "I just know." It is just a "knowing" that we have on the inside of us. This "knowing" is the Holy Spirit communicating with our spirit that we are the children of God. We just know it in our knower.

Well, it stands that the same way He communicates to us that we are saved is the same way He will communicate to us to turn left, stop, go there, etc., right? He will communicate to our spirit - our inner man - and this is evident by just knowing something in our knower. Therefore, He will bear witness with our spirit on other things as well and these situations will be recognized as that same "knower." We see this at work when Luke says in chapter 1 of his gospel that he wrote the book because "it seemed good." He KNEW that he should write the book. And we too can know things as they are revealed to us by God.

For example, after you got saved and received the Spirit of God, what happened when you did something wrong or were about to do something wrong (i.e. hurting someone)? You had no problem knowing / discerning that what you did was wrong, did you? Of course not! That was God speaking to you / leading you. You just knew that you were wrong and did not necessarily need to know what the Bible said about it. Something just irked you when you did it.

This is something God showed me about why we can hear from God so clearly and precisely when we miss it and it seems so much harder to hear Him when it comes to seeking direction? In other words, why is it that we know God is telling us we are doing something wrong and it is so hard to hear from Him when we need to know what to do? I believe this is the case because God's desire is for us to look into His Word and find the general direction that we should be going. And once we begin to move in that direction, the Lord will keep us on our assigned path by correcting us when we are beginning to get off that path.

But my point is that you have no problem hearing from God when you miss it, so you do indeed hear His voice and are led by His Spirit. Therefore, His sheep do hear His voice and those who are sons of God are led by the Spirit of God. Before we do anything else, we first need to begin to believe this! This is the foundation to everything else we will build upon in this study. Therefore, faith in God's Word that we hear His voice and are led are an integral part to growing in this area of Christianity.

DO NOT FEAR, LITTLE FLOCK!

Church, these are the benefits of the Lord being our Jehovah Ra'ah (i.e. the Lord our Shepherd). Therefore, when we say the Lord is my Shepherd, we are also saying, "I hear and know His voice", "He leads me", and "He knows me."

Jesus used this same illustration in Luke chapter 12 to ensure His disciples that they never need to worry, but that God will always care for them: In verses 22-30, Jesus exhorts us, His disciples, not to worry about what we should eat or how we will be clothed, etc. He tells us not to have an anxious mind about these things because our Heavenly Father knows what our needs are. Then, in verse 31, He says, *"But seek the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added to you."* Now Matthew's account of this says

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to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...” This is important to bring out because it is not as lucrative for us to seek the kingdom seventh, fifth or even second. No, we are commanded to seek the kingdom and His righteousness first. And as much as most of us would like to think we are already doing this, I can assure you that most of us are not seeking first the kingdom of God. It’s tight but it’s right!

Now we are still talking about living the good life because how many of you know that experiencing the good life comes by laying our lives down for the greater good of the kingdom? This all needs to be said because experiencing God’s best is greatly determined by seeking first His stuff above our own. Amen?

Then Jesus went on to say in verse 32, *“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”* Here, Jesus was establishing our hearts in a very important truth - that the reason we do not need to fear or worry about our needs being met is because “it is our Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom!” So, again, our belief system of understanding the goodness and grace of God is super important to receiving from Him. And this Scripture teaches us that He doesn’t want to give us just enough; he wants to give us His kingdom - the very kingdom that He told us to seek. So what the Lord was saying here is seek first the kingdom because the kingdom holds all the things that you need and desire anyways.

Now a very important point here is how He referred to us as His “little flock.” Little flock of what? Of His sheep, of course! Now a flock of sheep was not a band of pets. You realize that, right? Back then a flock was a business! So, God sees you as His business, and He is not about to let His business fail.

But, as we have seen- the only thing that can keep us from experiencing the goodness of our Shepherd is us. All that is required of us to experience life and life more abundantly is, number one, knowing Him and believing that He knows us as well. This requires a mind renewal to how good, loving, and gracious our God is. But then it is imperative that we learn to recognize His voice and do what He tells us to do. Hearing from God and doing what He says will always yield smooth and straight paths. But we have seen that one of the primary ways that He speaks to us is by simply leading us. This is why learning to be led by the Holy Spirit is also so very vital. He will always ultimately lead us into the Promised Land if we will simply follow Him.

I hope that this teaching has blessed you this month, and if it has - we ask that you would contact us through the information below and let us hear from you. It is always encouraging to hear from our readers.

Until next month- Maranatha!

Victoriously,

