

Introduction: In our most recent study of Luke's parables, we included this prayer: "Lord Jesus, please rule over every aspect of our lives – including our relationships; our thought-life; our priorities and even our feelings. We would not trust ourselves to be in charge of our existence for even one day. Please keep your hand on us, and may your fingerprints be on our *every* transaction; *every* conversation; *every* decision; and *every* accomplishment."

When God answers this prayer, claiming ownership of every part of us, *then even the pagan unbeliever will be compelled to say*: "This is the Finger of God!" (Exodus 8:16-19)! How wonderful that God can take us as *young, ignorant sinners saved by grace* and gradually teach us to hear His voice, "leading us out" of sin, this world's vain pleasures and the traps into which we fall as His erring sheep, so that more and more our lives become attentive to His voice as our good Shepherd. This is where this week's Bible notes will end – as we ask the Lord to lead us every step of the way as His sheep (hymn # 599):

1 Savior, like a shepherd lead us,
much we need thy tender care;
in thy pleasant pastures feed us,
for our use thy folds prepare:
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
thou hast bought us, thine we are;
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
thou hast bought us, thine we are.

2 We are thine; do thou befriend us,
be the guardian of our way;
keep thy flock, from sin defend us,
seek us when we go astray:
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
hear, O hear us when we pray;
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
hear, O hear us when we pray.

3 Thou hast promised to receive us,
poor and sinful though we be;
thou hast mercy to relieve us,
grace to cleanse, and pow'r to free:
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
let us early turn to thee;
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
let us early turn to thee.

4 Early let us seek thy favor;
early let us do thy will;
blessed Lord and only Savior,
with thy love our bosoms fill:
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
thou hast loved us, love us still,
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
thou hast loved us, love us still.

Monday: read Luke 12:22-34 & 12:49-13:5. Christ's teaching takes on even more urgency during the last six months of His life, leading up to the Cross in Jerusalem. He "sets His face like flint" (Luke 9:51) in preparation for the path of suffering that lies before Him on His journey to that city. His teaching is marked by a warning tone befitting the "present time" (Luke 12:56). Christ wants His hearers to wake up to the ever-present reality of death, judgment and eternal life – lived either in the comfort and hope of the unending "good things" of Heaven (Luke 16:25) or lived in the perpetual misery of separation from God in hell (Luke 16:26).

Because of this reality of impending judgment, we find the command *to repent* frequently in Luke's Gospel: "Unless you repent, you too will all perish," (Luke 13:5); the calling of Peter, where he asks Jesus to, "depart from me, for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8); the woman who loves much knowing that, through the grace of repentance, "she has been forgiven much" (Luke 7:36-50), as well as the parables of the lost and found sheep, a lost and found coin, and a lost and found son (Luke 15:3-32). All these verses underline that we must repent if we are to respond with saving faith to Christ's mission. Zacchaeus also exemplifies repentance in Luke 19:1-10 and saving repentance finds the thief on the Cross at the last moment in Luke 23:39-43. No wonder that we find the concept of repentance more frequently in Luke's Gospel than in all the other Gospels combined!

Meditate and Pray: Oh, may we be thankful for Christ's burden to save our souls from hell through the grace of repentance! Use hymn # 553 as your reflection upon the importance of repentance:

1 My sins, my sins, my Savior!
They take such hold on me,
I am not able to look up,
save only, Christ, to thee;
in thee is all forgiveness,
in thee abundant grace,
my shadow and my sunshine
the brightness of thy face.

2 My sins, my sins, my Savior!
Their guilt I never knew
till with thee in the desert
I near thy passion drew;
till with thee in the garden
I heard thy pleading pray'r,
and saw the sweat-drops bloody
that told thy sorrow there.

3 Therefore my songs, my Savior,
e'en in this time of woe,
shall tell of all thy goodness
to suffering man below;
thy goodness and thy favor,
whose presence from above
rejoice those hearts, my Savior,
that live in thee and love.

Tuesday: read Luke 13:6-35. The *narrow door* of salvation in Luke 13:24 is a frequently used picture of salvation in Jesus' teaching. For example, as James Boice points out, in his book the *Parables of Our Lord*:

- As the Sermon on the Mount closes, Jesus urges the crowd to, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matt. 7:13-14).
- During the last week of His life, Jesus urges those listening to Him in the temple be wise in entering into salvation *now*, lest like the foolish virgins, they are shut out when the bridegroom comes. All their tears will not cause the bridegroom Jesus to open the door when it has been shut and the eternal separation fixed between heaven and hell (Mt 25:1-13)
- Jesus also speaks of Himself as "the gate of the sheep" in John 10:7, 9.

Meditate and Pray: Ask God to give you grace to accept the hard doctrine of separation from God in hell. That is where all unbelievers end up. Though there may be remorse in hell, it will be a selfish regret because of personal pain and discomfort – never a desire to have known Jesus during their lifetimes. Jesus is the Judge of all the earth, and He will do right by all His creation. Those who lived their whole lives down here constantly avoiding Christ and living with no thought of Him as Savior – will finally get their wish: Jesus will leave them alone for eternity. How tragic. No wonder Jesus wept when He considered those who rejected Him in Luke 13:34-35.

Wednesday: read Luke 13:22-23 and Luke 14:1-24. The interesting fact about Jesus' use of the picture of the narrow door in Luke 13:24 is that His words come in response to someone in the crowd who asked, "Are there many or few who will be saved?"

This question is not only **irrelevant** – (As Pastor James Boice says, "*The only thing that mattered to Jesus was whether the questioner himself would be among the number of the saved, whether small or large.*") – It is also **sinister** in the sense that, for the Jewish interrogators, (who were always harassing Jesus with these kind of questions – see Luke 11:53-54), they were hard-core committed to the idea *that they alone as God's chosen people would be saved!* They wanted their religion to be their own "members only" club, so they get angry every time Jesus heals miserable outcast on the Sabbath (Luke 14:1-6). They didn't want those kind of people in their worship services! How terrible! While they themselves refused to enter into the Wedding Feast of salvation at Jesus' invitation, (Luke 14:16-20), they harshly criticized Jesus for going out to the streets, slums and byways to invite the "poor, crippled, blind and lame" to the feast of salvation!

In this way Jesus answers the question as to who and how many will be saved: "Many, but not proud folks like you – but prostitutes, tax collectors and many others, who know their sin and their need for a savior: These God will save! A narrow door will be no hinderance to them, as they by faith break down all obstacles to their salvation!" How sober! We should be reminded of some of the verses from hymn # 469:

1 How sweet and awesome is the place
with Christ within the doors,
while everlasting love displays
the choicest of her stores.

2 While all our hearts and all our songs
join to admire the feast,
each of us cries, with thankful tongue,
"Lord, why was I a guest?"

3 "Why was I made to hear your voice,
and enter while there's room,
when thousands make a wretched choice,
and rather starve than come?"

4 'Twas the same love that spread the feast
that sweetly drew us in;
else we had still refused to taste,
and perished in our sin.

Thurs/Friday: read John 10:1-18: Our subject in recent New Testament studies is on the parables of Jesus. Some of those parables, though fewer in number, are found in John's Gospel. For example, in talking about Himself as the "Door of the sheep", by which they can go safely in and out to find safe pasture (John 10:7-9), Jesus describes both the purpose of His Incarnation in our flesh, and the safety which He gives His sheep. Because on the cross He actually *laid down His life willingly to save His sheep* – they will always find His shepherding touch and strong hand to be their ever-present guide! He simply will not slumber or carelessly ignore His sheep since He paid the price of dying for them! No wonder Jesus is so adamant in John 10 – as He repeatedly declares His willingness to "lay down His life" according to His Father's will – see John 10:11, 15 & 10:17-18. He even outlines a clear direction as to how we can join God the Father in adoring His Son – by loving our Savior precisely because of such sacrificial willingness to lay down His life.

What security that gives us as His sheep! Because of His death on the cross, we absolutely know that our Shepherd will *do whatever is necessary to rescue us from thieves, robbers and predators!* Think again of that picture of our Savior as the door for the sheep. As Nicholas Davis reminds us in a 2019 Modern Reformation article entitled, "I Am The Door":

"This sort of sheep pen didn't have an actual door. It was open, and at night the shepherd would keep the sheep inside and keep predators outside by lying down across the open space. By sleeping there, the shepherd became the door to the sheep."

What a rich picture! Christ our Savior literally positions Himself *between us and every danger that would rob us of our salvation!* The fears we so often fall prey *are set at a distance from us.* Those fears, foes and heartbreaks at times will hurt us – but they *live* outside the sheepfold! Weeping *may* endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning! And even when trials are painful, God's shepherding care will ensure that such trials are actually full of unseen green pastures. How does the hymn writer put it? (# 94 in the red Trinity, verses 1 and 4):

1 How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!
What more can he say than to you he has said,
to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

4 When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie,
my grace, all-sufficient, shall be your supply;
the flame shall not hurt you; I only design
your dross to consume and your gold to refine.

Sat/Sunday: read Psalm 121 and John 10:19-31: How courageous Jesus is in comforting His sheep! Though there are gainsayers in the crowd who mock Jesus' temple teaching about being the good Shepherd, (see John 10:19-20), He persists in reassuring His believing lambs, (John 10:21), that no one will be able to snatch His sheep from either His or His Father's hand – John 10:28-29.

Think of the magnitude of what Jesus is saying. He is asserting His equality with God the Father, so that His foes take up stones to stone Him for blasphemy in John 10:31! This equality becomes clear by considering the following facts of what Jesus says:

- 1) To declare that His hand preserves all those the Father gave Him is to say that *He just as mighty to save as His Father because He has a divinely strong hand!*
- 2) To declare that He has the power to give eternal life is to say that *He was there at the beginning with His Father when life was first created.*
- 3) To declare that He is "one with the Father" is to say that *He is co-extensive with the Father in all things, and to look at Him is to see the Father!* This is why Jesus goes on to say in John 10:38 that the Father "is in Him" because *He is just as divinely immense as God the Father!*

For further reflection: Since Jesus declares so strongly that He is one with the Father, and equal to Him in all things, is it not wonderful to realize that Christ's watch-care is just as tirelessly divine and mightily effective as God the Father's? To put it in terms of Psalm 121:3, both Father and Son are our Keepers – and neither one of them "slumbers or sleeps"! They are always watchful to preserve us as their blood-bought sheep! To make this shepherding watchfulness even more comforting and clear, consider these comments from Charles Spurgeon's Treasury of David:

It is of importance to mark the reason why the prophet repeats so often what he had so briefly and in one word expressed with sufficient plainness. Such repetition seems at first sight superfluous: but when we consider how difficult it is to correct our distrust, it will be easily perceived that he does not improperly dwell upon the commendation of the divine providence. How few are to be found who yield to God the honor of being a "keeper", in order to their being thence assured of their safety and led to call upon him in the midst of their perils! On the contrary, even when we seem to have largely experienced what this protection of God implies, we yet instantly tremble at the noise of a leaf falling from a tree, as if God had quite forgotten us. Being then entangled in so many unholy misgivings, and so much inclined to distrust, we are taught from the passage that if a

sentence couched in a few words does not suffice us, we should gather together whatever may be found throughout the whole Scriptures concerning the providence of God, until this doctrine—"That God always keeps watch for us"—is deeply rooted in our hearts; so that, depending upon his guardianship alone, we may bid adieu to all the vain confidences of the world."

John Calvin on Psalm 121:7-8, as he explains why the Psalmist continually repeats the fact that God is watching over us

The Lord shall preserve. "The word "shamar" imports a most tender preservation; from it comes "shemuroth", signifying the eyelids, because they are the keepers of the eye, as the Lord is called in the verse preceding—shomer Ishrael, "the keeper of Israel". If the lids of the eye open, it is to let the eye see; if they close, it is to let it rest, at least to defend it; all their motion is for the good of the eye. O, what a comfort is here! The Lord calls his Church "the apple of his eye": "he that toucheth you, touches the apple of mine eye". The Church is the apple of God's eye, and the Lord is the covering of it. O, how well are they kept whom "the keeper of Israel" keepeth! The Lord was a buckler to Abraham, none of his enemies could harm him; for his buckler covered him thoroughly. The Lord was a hedge unto Job; Satan himself confessed he could not get through it, howsoever many a time he assayed it, to have done evil unto Job. . . . But seeing this same promise of preservation was made before (for from the third verse to the end of the Psalm, six sundry times, is the word of keeping or preserving repeated), why is it now made over again? Not without cause; for this doubling and redoubling serves, first, for a remedy of our ignorance. Men, if they be in any good estate, are ready to "sacrifice to their own net, "or "to cause their mouth to kiss their own hand, "as if their own hand had helped them: thus to impute their "deliverance" to their "calf, "and therefore often is this resounded, "The Lord, " "The Lord." Is thy estate advanced? The Lord hath done it. Hast thou been preserved from desperate dangers? Look up to the Lord, thy help is from on high, and to him let the praise be returned. Secondly, it is for a remedy of our natural diffidence: the word of the Lord in itself is as sure when it is spoken, as when it is sworn; as sure spoken once, as when it is oftener repeated; yet is not the Lord content to speak only, but to swear also; nor to speak once, but often, one and the selfsame thing. The reason is showed us by the apostle, that hereby he may "declare to the heirs of promise the stability of his counsel." Heb 6:1 Ge 21:32. As Joseph spake of Pharaoh his vision, "It was doubled, because the thing is established by God, and God hasteth to perform it"; so is it with every word of the Lord, when it is repeated; it is because it is established, and God hastens to perform it." — From a Sermon by *Bishop Couper*, entitled "*His Majesties Coming in*," 1623.

The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in. All actions being comprehended under one of these two sorts, "going out" to more public, and "coming in" to more private affairs; or again, "going out" to begin, and "coming in" at the end of the work..." *Thomas Fenton* on Psalm 121:8.