

LAKE CITIES COMMUNITY CHURCH
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Easter Sunday – Public Launch
April 8, 2007

The Promise Keeper John 10:7-18

A month ago, I received a very exciting e-mail from an Englishman named Jonathan Archer. A man whom I have never met. He wrote to me about some potentially very important information. Something that, if true, could change my life. *The letter began:*

“We wish to notify you again that you were listed as a beneficiary to the total sum of £4,600,000.00 GBP (Four million Six hundred thousand British Pounds Sterling). We contacted you because you bear the surname identity and therefore we can present you as the beneficiary to the inheritance since there is no written will....” And the letter ended...

Yours faithfully,

Jonathan Archer.

Wow! That is a lot of money 4.6 million British Pounds Sterling – I’m not even from England and – I’ve never met Jonathan Archer –yet...was kind enough to seek me out, via my personal e-mail address, to let me know that I am a beneficiary...maybe...

Now, you will have to agree that, if true, that promise could change me life. I could become wildly wealthy! And buy us a new church building! I know it sounds to good to be true, but what if it is true? I can see that you are skeptical. Maybe you are just jealous that Jonathan Archer e-mailed me and not you. Oh, he did e-mail you also?

Our passage this morning deals with a tremendous promise. Not a promise from your e-mail, but from your Bibles. But in a way, like my e-mail example... it may seem too good to be true. And there are those who would reject it as quickly as they would dismiss my e-mail.

This Easter morning we are going to first look at three bold promises that Jesus makes, and then together evaluate them. Are there compelling reasons to believe? If so, they will –they must - change our life. If you have your Bibles, I would ask you to turn to the gospel of John chapter 10, verses 7-18. John 10:7-18.

Bold Promises (7-10)

Before we get to the text, let me give a little setting. The gospel of John was written by the Apostle John – one of Jesus’ 12 disciples. The purpose of the gospel is to persuade skeptical people to believe in Jesus Christ and not to dismiss Him. To help people understand Jesus, John picks up on several wonderful images of Christ – For example, Jesus as the Vine. Jesus as Light. In chapter 10, the chapter we are in - it is Jesus presented as - The Good Shepherd.

Look first, at verses 7-10. It is here we are introduced to the promises. Verse 7:

Jesus therefore said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.”

Stop here – We just said that the image John is using is that of the Good Shepherd, with his sheep. But what does Jesus mean – “I am the door of the sheep.” No doubt the first century audience knew exactly what he was talking about. To us, we need more background. One commentator put it this way:

When the sheep returned to the sheep fold at night after a day of grazing, the shepherd stood in the doorway of the pen and inspected each one as it entered. If a sheep were scratched or wounded by thorns, the shepherd anointed it with oil to facilitate healing; if the sheep were thirsty, he gave them water... After all the sheep had been counted and brought into the pen, the shepherd lay down across the doorway so that no intruder—man or beast—could enter without his knowledge. The shepherd became the door. (Gospel of John, Expositor’s Bible Commentary)

The image is one of care and protection for the sheep. Now with that in mind – look at verse 8.

Jesus says, “All who came before me were thieves and robbers...” and verse 10 “The thief comes

only to kill and destroy.” And so, what is Jesus promising? Jesus is saying that as THE door – the one who protects the sheep - and in contrast to all other religious leaders – He is authentic. Jesus is saying that He is the ONLY genuine article – the One sent from God. The Messiah. The Savior.

Jesus is speaking during the Hannukah celebration. A time when the exploits of Judas Maccadbeus was celebrated – A leader who for a time shook off the Roman oppression. It as a time when many people claimed to be the Messiah –

- “Follow Me as the Messiah” they cried.
- “Follow Me into battle” they encouraged.
- “Follow me to Freedom” they promised.

But their promises only lead to disappointment and damage. Jesus said – because *They are not the REAL Messiah.*

Madonna, in reflecting on her life, said, “It’s all a fiction, you know that, don’t you, Tommy? I’m just a character in a novel. None of this is real. And so as I think about my e-mail last month, I wonder if Jonathan Archer is real? Is he a fiction? That is a critical question that has weighty bearing on whether I am going to believe him or anyone else.

Jesus is saying all others who set themselves up as an alternative from Christ are fiction. Our text tells us that in contrast to them - Jesus is THE door – the only Messiah – the Shepherd – the Door.

The second promise is just as bold - “I am the door. If anyone enters through me, he will be saved” (9a). After all, this is what the Messiah was suppose to do – an anointed one. A savior. The key question, though is, “Salvation from what?” The false Messiah’s said – salvation from the Roman Empire. Salvation from Israel’s enemies. Jesus offers a very different salvation. The apostle Paul tells us in Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Salvation from the punishment of sin – salvation from death – that is what Jesus promises.

Salvation resulting in Eternal Life...

Billy Graham tells the story of a time early in his career when he arrived in a small town and asked a boy where the post office was. When the boy told him, Billy invited him to come to the meeting that evening. “You can hear me telling everyone how to get to heaven.” The boy looked concerned as said, “ I don’t think so. You don’t even know your way to the post office.”

What is Christ inviting us here to believe? First – that He is the authentic savior. There are many voices saying – Follow-me. But Jesus says He is the one to listen to. And the Authentic Savior – Provides salvation – Eternal life.

Now let’s find our third promise. Last part of verse nine “He shall be saved, and shall come in and out and find pasture. And in verse 10 Jesus says, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

Jesus promises abundant life here – on earth! Freedom – as seen in the sheep going in and out of the pen – finding pasture to graze. It is the promise that Jesus will take care of his own. Jesus came that we might have life – and have it abundantly!

Now the fulfillment of this is not in Jonathan Archer’s e-mail promise of untold riches. That is not the abundant life Jesus promises. For example, the famous businessman Lee Iacocca said, “Here I am in the twilight years of my life, still wondering what it’s all about. I can tell you this: fame and fortune is for the birds.” Lee Iacocca. Contrast that to a quote to a man who gave up a promising career in business and entered the ministry D.L. Moody. This quote has hung over my desk for the past 5 years. “Life is very sweet to me, and I can conceive of no sweeter work than what I am engaged in.”

That is the abundant life. Being the presence of the Good Shepherd. Following Him, Trusting Him. Living Life under His care. The authentic Savior – who offers Salvation -Eternal Life and Abundant Life. Those are bold promises. *Which leads us to a natural question.*

Why Should we Believe Jesus?

After all, Jesus is not the only religious leader who has promises true “life” – or even salvation. Just as there were competing Messiah’s 2000 years ago. There are competing religions today. Aren’t they all authentic, in their own way? Don’t they all teach about the same things?

In His book – *Jesus and Muhamad – Parallel Sayings*, Dr. Kenneth Atkinson argues: “Once Christians and muslims open the Bible and the Koran, they will discover that these texts contain the same message...these two great religions possess a common moral and spiritual foundation.” Is that true? Does any religious leader have the same credibility when it comes to the promises they have made? Is it the same message? Why should we believe in Jesus’ promises that He is unique, that he alone offers eternal life and abundant living? Look at verse 11-15

John 10:11 “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

John 10:12 “He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters *them*.

John 10:13 “*He flees* because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep.

John 10:14 “I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, John 10:15 even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.

FIRST REASON - Jesus LOVES you: Why believe Jesus? The first reason is that “*Jesus Died for You.*” As the good shepherd he Sacrificed His life for yours. Why? Because a price had to be paid for your salvation – the wages of sin, we saw, was death. Why did he go to this extreme level of commitment? Because *He is the owner*, not a hired worker. The hired worker would flee at the approach of danger, but the owner would die for the sheep. And this is not out of a sense of duty, but because of His love for you. We see that in that the shepherd knows you. He know His sheep and they know His voice. This is very personal. Do you know how my letter from Jonathan Archer began? “Dear Friend.” 4.6 million pounds, and “dear friend.” Jesus does not promise us with “dear friend,” but with Dear Malcolm, Dear Tammy, Dear Monica, Dear Ian, Dear Rhonda...

Because in His death he shows loves the sheep. Paul said in Romans 5:8, God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. One commentator added, “This is not merely about obedience to God nor is it his personal honor. Rather, Jesus is willing to die because of his profound commitment to the ones he loves.”

That Jesus died is a compelling reason to believe in Him. He paid the price for our salvation! You can trust Him to carry through on His promise.

You know, though... Jesus is not the only great religious leader to die. Shortly before the death of Buddha, it is reported that he SAID, “Have I not often told you that it is in the very nature of things that we must eventually be parted from all that is near and dear to us? Behold, O monks, this is my last advice to you. All component things in the world are changeable. They are not lasting. Work hard to gain your own salvation.”

It is in the nature of all things to die. And I suspect that Buddha loved his monks. And while I would argue that Jesus’ death by design accomplished more than any other religious leader’s death, if we stopped here, we stopped at verse 16 – we would stop with a dead Jesus. There is another compelling reason to believe.

SECOND REASON - Jesus is Alive!

But - Look now at verses 17-18

John 10:17 “For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again.

John 10:18 “No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”

Why should we believe Jesus’ promises? Because of the most compelling reason in the universe! That JESUS IS ALIVE!

By His own authority, the Bible said he laid his life down and has taken it back from the grave and He stands here in front of us. This is the turning point of History and the high point of the Christian Faith.

You are aware, of course, that claims of resurrection from the dead are fairly rare, because they are easy to disprove. The only exception to that is in fiction. Spider-Man's Aunt May died, but it turned out she was being held hostage and the dead woman was an impostor. A guy named the Vision died, but his operating system was downloaded into a new body. The Thing died, but his partners in the Fantastic Four stormed heaven to retrieve his soul. Journalist Leonard Pitts said, **“In comic books, casket lids have handles on the inside.”**

Not so in real life. Buddha died and was cremated. Tammy’s grandfather Harold died two weeks ago and the casket was open at the funeral. He was gone. And by verse 16 in our text Jesus, too is dead – sacrificing His life for the sheep.

Verses 17-18 separate Jesus from every other religious leader and give him the compelling credibility to fulfill His promises to us is that He is now alive! Even non-Christian scholars have to admit that something happened 2,000 years ago. In ABC’s special last year, “the resurrection: Searching for Answers.” Daniel Schwartz, a professor of history at Jerusalem's Hebrew University, said: I don't know how they convinced themselves. But the historical fact is, you've got people who are convinced he was resurrected,"

The special noted that, as we have seen from our text today, there were many leaders who claimed to be the messiah around Jerusalem in the first century. But their movements all died when the Romans crucified them. When they were killed their movements would collapse. This was the intent of those who killed Jesus. They thought it would lead to the collapse of the movement.

Jewish scholar Albert Baumgarten of Jerusalem's Bar Ilan University. Says But what makes the Jesus story so interesting, is that this movement did not collapse. Instead, the disciples who had abandoned Jesus changed -- dramatically. The men who had fled after his crucifixion were now in the streets proclaiming Jesus as the messiah.”

Why. Because He is alive! He is alive. He is Alive! And that separates Him from all others. His death paid the penalty for our sin and the resurrection offers us new life in Christ, in eternity in heaven

and in abundance of life here on earth. If you are looking for a compelling reason to believe in the Christian faith, the Resurrection makes all the difference.

CONCLUSION:

Stand now please in the presence of our Risen Lord. In awe of Him. In prayer – close your eyes. If you know Him – worship Him. He is alive. He loves you. He knows you. Jesus Christ is alive and can therefore fulfill his promises to you. Worship Him and love Him. Follow Him as your good shepherd. Listen to His voice only.

If you do not know him – will you put your faith in Him today? Be compelled by His love. Be compelled by His resurrection. Some see the evidence, but don't believe. Let me urge you to believe – put your faith in Jesus Christ – by telling Him that is what you want to do. Perhaps a prayer like this. “Jesus I know I am a sinner – and that my sins deserve to be punished. I believe Jesus died for me and rose from the dead. As best as I can, right now, I put my faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone as my authentic Savior. Thank you for the forgiveness and everlasting life that I now have. In Jesus Name.

Amen.