

# What Do We Do When Our Plans Fall Through?

## 3) When We Don't Want to Listen

John 10:1-10 • 2020-05-03 • Easter Series



I was walking down Phoenix street the other day and I noticed a sign had been knocked down. There were tire tracks veering off the road which led right into the signpost. The sign lay flat with the front facing upward. It was one of those signs that pictured a child running on it and it read, "Slow – Children at Play." I'm sure you've seen one of those signs before. My first response when seeing a sign like that is to think, "Any parent will tell you that children... are never slow." But in all seriousness, I also thought, "No child would have been fast enough to avoid that vehicle." Evidently someone didn't like the sign telling them to slow down. People don't always like to listen. Maybe you've noticed that to be true after some grocery stores put up signs directing people to pass through the aisles going one way. Their efforts to help with social distancing during the pandemic have resulted in most people ignoring directions. Some are even protesting on social media, "That's going too far. I'm going to purposefully go the wrong way next time I go shopping." People don't always like to listen.

That's not just true for instructions on signs. Human nature leads everyone to ignore directions and invent their own path. That's even the case when it comes to our dealings with our God. There is a natural, rebellious human desire to ignore the Word of God. That even leads to defiance. What happens when someone doesn't listen to God? Jesus addresses that topic in John 10. This morning we'll see what happens when we don't want to listen.

Jesus was surrounded by people who did not want to listen to him. It seemed like so many people were driving their cars right over his signpost and speaking against him. Many of his disciples had deserted him saying, "This man gives a hard teaching." The religious group called the Pharisees had charged Jesus with being demon possessed. They had ordered that anyone who listens to Jesus' teaching should be kicked out of their synagogue.

Jesus' flock is still familiar with that same defiance against his Word. Have you ever noticed just how many churches there are today? Some people argue that there are so many different churches because God's doesn't really speak clearly enough to understand. They contend that God left a lot of room for confusion. But our Good Shepherd does not set out to confuse his flock. His Word is written down. His voice is clear. He calls out by name and leads his flock. God did not divide his church. Rather, many flocks have decided there are parts of his Word which they do not want to hear. Many churches still follow Christ but are in danger of straying or being snatched by the wolves, false teachers. Others have already left Christ because they refuse to listen and have been devoured. The largest Lutheran church body in America has strayed so far from Christ that their official media channel wishes blessing upon non-Christian religions who oppose Christ. They wish them to be blessed in their religious rituals even though those practices speak against Christ crucified and deny the resurrection of Jesus. Such churches have altogether stopped listening to Jesus with their obstinate defiance.

But it is not just the bigger institutions which outright don't listen. Instead of listening to their Christian parents many young people will turn to their unbelieving peers or paid promotions that speak contrary to God's Word. Instead of spending even a few minutes in God's Word each day they will spend hours on social media listening to every other voice. Not all these voices have their listeners' best interest in mind. Most of those voices have only their ad revenue in mind and care not what happens to the children sucked into their products and productions. Instead of listening to their Christian pastor many families will turn to their favorite hobbies or leisure activities. They will regard time in church as an optional item to occasionally check off the list rather than the first voice they ought to listen to each week. Time listening to God's Word is replaced with time shooting, fishing, camping, or grilling. Those activities are not bad or wrong. But they become idolatry if they take the place of listening to God's Word. Instead of listening to Jesus' Word when facing challenges some will turn to godless psychiatrists. Psychiatrists aren't all necessarily wrong or bad. They can often be helpful. But they cease to be helpful when they tell Christians to go against God's Word and advise them, "Do what feels best to you and what you want." Never mind what Jesus says is best. They advise things contrary to God's will for human life, contrary to his will for husband and wife, and contrary to his will for the use of our bodies and all his gifts.

Jesus' Word is ignored or defied by false teachers and by wandering sheep. It is like some see a sign from God that says, "Slow. Listen carefully. My creation's well-being for today and eternity are at stake," and they veer off the path to knock it down. God says, "Travel this way, please. It's my store and I want you to be safe and not hurt other people." And most people say, "I can't believe anyone would ever tell me what to do in their universe. I can do whatever I want."

How should God respond when so many are not listening? In John 10 we read about Jesus' counterattack on all those who did not want to listen to him. "Amen, Amen, I tell you: *Anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the door, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.*" Jesus' illustration would have been clear to his hearers. Those with any domesticated sheep or goats in ancient Israel would have needed to round them all up each night. There was danger from

attack by predators and danger from thieves. But the ancient flock was protected by the latest technology. When I was at college in Milwaukee everyone had a digital pass card that gave them access to each building. You couldn't get inside any of the buildings without first swiping your card. The dorm rooms even had a large clear glass lobby that everyone could see. It would have been exceedingly difficult for someone without a pass card to try to sneak in through those doors without at least someone or a surveillance camera noticing. This was the first layer of security. Herdsmen in ancient Israel used their best technology for herd security: a doorkeeper. The doorkeeper could control who had access to the flock. Anyone who entered by a breach in the wall was easily identified as a thief out to steal and harm the flock.

There was a secondary security feature for the ancient herdsman. It operated on voice recognition. If the flock didn't hear a familiar voice it wouldn't follow. I can tell you this security does work. I had the opportunity one summer to care for a flock of sheep while a friend of our family was out of town. I can tell you from first-hand experience that those sheep did not have any inclination to follow a stranger. They skittishly came to the fence edge only when they realized that I was offering feed. I could have walked ahead of them all day calling and they would not have budged any closer to me. Sheep are not all that clever, but they're not entirely senseless and stupid.

These are the two levels of security which God has given his flock, his church. Jesus says, "I am the door. My sheep listen and follow me." The flock needs only ask, "Did this person come to the flock through Christ or some other way?" And when a false church comes along and denies that Jesus is the only door to heaven, they stand out as thieves and robbers. When you hear a church preaching about bettering yourself instead of pointing to Jesus as the source of salvation, they are trying to illegitimately gain access to the flock. Faithful shepherds of God's flock will always use the door. They will always point to Jesus as the door -the only way to escape the curse of sin, the attacks of the devil, and the dangers of hell. He alone saves. He is the center of all of Scripture. And for added security the flock only needs to listen to each teacher and ask, "Do we recognize their voice? Do they speak according to the Word of Christ?" When a teacher speaks against any part of God's Word, they are teaching falsely. They will stand out because they lack proper clearance.

Why is this so important? It's the difference between abundant life and certain loss and death. *"I am the door. Whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."* Jesus says that he came so that we might find what David calls "green pastures." We are saved from the dangers that lurk. Sin, death, and the devil cannot harm us if we are within the sphere of Christ through faith. Listening to and trusting in our Good Shepherd we live freely. That's because he loves us so much that he laid down his life for us. Jesus, the Son of God saw the dangers that faced his creation. He saw the fate of all mankind. But he came to rescue us from all dangers. He died in our place so that we might be free. And the same Jesus who laid down his life for his flock now lives forever as our Shepherd. The enemy has lost. The flock is secure.

Jesus says that he came to give us life that is abundant. All the lies of false teachers which feed our egos rather than our faith in Jesus will fall flat. All the promises of those who promote godless entertainment products are pushing their products because of their greed. Many productions feature messages and material that will lead us down into the darkness of sin and death. Many distractions will leave us not fulfilled in life, but with guilt and despair for neglecting the Word of God that gives us true life. Many counselors will try to help but will only help themselves to our wallets so that they can offer fruitless advice.

Those false teachers will get their praise and money, but they won't get the hearts of those who listen to Jesus. The flock listens to Jesus and finds forgiveness and freedom. There is only one who plans for our good and carries out his promises of blessings: Jesus. If a young Christian sees something online in some godless production, they can recognize when it is not the voice of their Lord. They are not so vulnerable that they are duped and hopeless victims. They need only ask, "Is this in-line with the voice of Christ?" When a family is tempted to ignore the Word of Christ and stray away from his voice they can listen. They can hear his voice leading and wake up from spiritual slumber. He who died and lives for us now says, "Follow me." And he leads us with his voice to pastures far greener than any we could find in this dreary sin-cursed world. He brings us to peace, joy, abundant life now, and eternal life with perfect resurrected bodies. When a Christian struggling with life or a Christian couple struggling in their marriage needs counseling, they recognize when a psychiatrist speaks against Jesus. They hear those who say, "Do what you want." And they recognize, "No, what my Shepherd, Jesus, wants, is always best."

Listening to Jesus isn't merely about some slow down sign to make you safer. This is about death and life and eternity. The devil will use whatever methods he can for getting the flock to stop following Christ. He will try to deceive the flock. But he won't enter through the door. He won't come preaching Christ who laid down his life and who lives as Lord of all - the only way to salvation. And the flock is secure as it listens to Jesus. *"They will never follow a stranger, but will run away from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers."* Instead they will enter through Jesus into his kingdom. They will be saved. They will live safely and find good spiritual food. And with Jesus they will have abundant life.