*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

March 11 - 16

*Jesus in John’s Gospel*

**Monday, March 11 John 10:1-10**

*“I am the shepherd . . . I am the door”*

 In verses 1-5, Jesus presents himself as the true shepherd of the sheep. He enters the sheepfold by the door, having been recognized both by the doorkeeper and by the sheep. But, there are also false shepherds. They attempt to bypass the doorkeeper, who would never allow them to enter, by climbing over the fence unnoticed. They are strangers, masquerading as shepherds, disguising their voices, trying to come between the true shepherd and his sheep. They are thieves and robbers coming to divide and destroy.

 In verses 6-10, Jesus presents himself as the door into the sheepfold. He is the one and only entrance by which the sheep can enter the fold and join the flock. There is no other way for them to have access to the sheepfold. Here they are safe, given wholeness as they join the other sheep in the fold. They live in liberty, freely going in and out, led by the one to whom they belong, for they hear the shepherd call their names. And they are satisfied, for he provides pasture, sharing with them the abundance of his own life.

*I have entered new life through you, Jesus, and I am safe. Amen.*

**Tuesday, March 12 John 10:11-21**

*“I lay down my life for the sheep”*

 Jesus is the good shepherd because he gives his life for the sheep. This is why he has come. He cares for the sheep daily, watching, feeding, and protecting them. But in the end he must finally deal with their greatest danger, face the mightiest thief, the evil one, who spreads darkness and disorder through his servants, the false shepherds. So the good shepherd will give his life at the cross in the last struggle with his enemy and overcome.

 Jesus is also the good shepherd who knows the sheep and they know him. There is a loving intimacy between shepherd and sheep. The shepherd knows the weak and the strong, the stubborn and the submissive ones, the hurts and needs of every sheep. And the sheep know and trust their shepherd – every inflection of his voice, the way by which he leads them out to pasture, his courage in the face of danger. He is their shepherd. This intimate knowing between shepherd and sheep is rooted in and modeled after the union between Father and Son.

*You know me, Jesus, and I know and trust you. Amen.*

**Wednesday, March 13 Ezekiel 34:1-10**

*“Prophesy against the shepherds”*

 The title *shepherd* was a well-known designation of kings in the ancient Near East. For example, when the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron to make him king over them, the basis of their action was the Lord’s declaration concerning David: “You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler” (2 Samuel 5:2). In Ezekiel’s revelation of judgment, however, the Lord is coming *against* his shepherds – the kings of Judah – because they have failed to fulfill their role of shepherd.

 The proper task of a shepherd was to care for the flock – gathering those who strayed, leading the flock to good pasture and clean drinking water, and taking special care of the hurt and the weak. Instead, these shepherds have viewed their position as an opportunity for personal gain, ruling harshly and brutally, feeding only themselves, not the flock, and even slaughtering the choicest animals. Because of their sinful self-interest, the Lord will step in and remove the false shepherds from their office.

*I pray that those who shepherd your flock, Jesus, do so with integrity. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

March 11 - 16

*Jesus in John’s Gospel*

**Thursday, March 14 Ezekiel 34:11-24**

*“I will find my sheep and rescue them”*

 The Lord will bring his people back from their places of foreign exile, feeding them on the rich pasture of the Promised Land and causing them to lie down in safety; he will search for the lost and bind up the injured; he will establish justice, punishing the oppressors and strengthening the weak. This last thought leads into a further revelation of judgment against the “rams and goats” or the “fat sheep.” These are the broader class of leaders of the community, who had oppressed the weak with violence and grasped the limited resources for themselves without considering the needs of those without influence or power.

 This intervention will take the form of God setting over them “one shepherd, my servant David.” God’s solution to a history of bad shepherds is not to replace shepherding with a better system, but to replace the bad shepherds with a good shepherd. This good shepherd will be like the great king David, the king after God’s own heart, the archetypal picture of a strong king ruling with justice and fairness.

*You, Jesus, are the good shepherd who rescues me from sin. Amen.*

**Friday, March 15 Ezekiel 34:25-31**

*“I will make a covenant of peace”*

 The Lord promises to make a covenant of peace with his flock. In the covenant God made with his people in the Sinai wilderness when he gave them the law through Moses, he pronounced blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. For the most part, his people disobeyed and experienced the curses: wild animals, drought, famine, and the sword of foreign nations. They will now experience the blessings of the covenant: safety, rain in its season, fruitfulness, and peace.

 This “covenant of peace” is thus not so much a new covenant as it is the experience of the blessings promised in the original covenant. In place of the monarchy dominated by sinful kings, God’s people will be united under one shepherd. In place of a succession of false shepherds, they will be given a ruler after God’s own heart, a new David. Then indeed they will know that the Lord their God is with them – for blessing and not for curse – and that they are his people. They will be his sheep and he will be their God.

*Through you, Jesus, I am at peace with God. Amen.*

**Saturday, March 16 Psalm 23:1-6**

*“The Lord is my shepherd”*

 The idea of pilgrimage through dangerous territory to the house of God is interwoven with the images of the Lord as our shepherd who guides and protects us, his flock, on our journey, and who finally brings us safely home. The image of pilgrimage assumes that where we are now is not where we are heading. The goal of the Christian life is to finally enter into the eternal presence of God as intended by him since the creation of the world.

 Meanwhile, the world in which we live falls far short of the place of completeness and wholeness to which we look forward. We have yet to experience the fullness of what we are promised in Christ. We live as strangers in a strange land, travelers on the way, not at home here. We are in Christ but that does not mean that the troubles, cares, pains and dangers of this world are simply removed from us. We remain in the presence of our enemies, but we are not alone for the Lord is with us, setting a table for us, honoring us as his children, and bringing about abundant blessings (which are a foreshadowing of heavenly blessings).

*You are with me, Jesus, shepherding every step I take in this world. Amen.*