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## LIFE IN HIS NAME

### SPECIAL MESSAGE

John 10:22-42

I would like to go off script a little bit this morning and share with you from this passage, which is the passage that we are in as we are studying our way through the book of John. So I'm going to ask the tech team to turn the power point off because I am going to share a little bit of a different message. It's just what God has put on my heart. I would like to pray and then share God's word.

Father, would you open to us now the scripture. We have been tremendously encouraged, hearing how you are working in the lives of our young people. It is a miracle every time a person is saved, when a person has a revelation of you and comes to know you. We are so grateful, Lord. We are so grateful for what you did in their lives. Now as we come to the study of the word, we pray that you would just work in our lives, that we would receive your truth, in Jesus' name. Amen.

In John Chapter 10, Jesus has presented himself as the good shepherd. We looked at this last week. We looked at the first 21 verses of this marvelous passage where Jesus stands up and declares: "I am the good shepherd." He is promising in that claim to care for you, to protect you, to take care of you, to shepherd you in life and for all of eternity.

It's important that we know that he is presenting himself as a contrast to the religious leaders of his day. He has just healed a man who was born blind, and in this amazing event the religious leaders of his day are not happy for the man. They are not celebrating the miracle or what God has done. They are actually resisting the work of God. The religious leaders of Jesus' day resisted Jesus and the work that God sent him to do. That, in and of itself, is a sermon which warns us against a false religion, a false tradition, of going through the motions without the vitality of the life that Jesus brings by his Spirit.

So in a parabolic fashion, we see a blind man come to sight and the teachers of Israel exposed for their blindness. The event and their resistance to Jesus lead Jesus to make this claim: "I am the good shepherd." Out of that, in the second half of John Chapter 10, they then corner him in the temple. They say to him in verse 24:

“How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep.”

This is very interesting because they are trying to trap Jesus. They are trying to nail him down, take his words, and then use those words to accuse him and to eventually kill him. As they do that in this passage of scripture, Jesus tells them, “Listen, my works are obvious. My claims are obvious. I’m not hiding anything from you, but you are unable to see.” This is really the theme that connects these two passages. You see, many times we are in a position where we are saying to Jesus exactly what the spiritual leaders were saying to him. “Why don’t you just make it obvious? Why don’t you just show me? Why don’t you just tell me? Lord, could I just hear your audible voice? Could you just speak to me and make it clear and I will believe and I will follow?”

Jesus’ response to that is: “I’ve been making it clear. It’s in front of you. It’s all around you. You are unable to see it. The problem is not what I am showing you or not showing you.” The problem is spiritual blindness. Just as the man who was physically blind -- you would come up to him before that healing and he could perceive nothing in the physical world through eyesight -- we are unable to see.

I think the key in the passage as Jesus develops it is that spiritual eyesight comes as we trust in Jesus. He opens our eyes, and as we respond to that trust we have a new identity in Christ. We have intimacy with him, and as we walk with him we begin to see clearly. When we reject Christ when he comes to us, even now through a teaching or a testimony or the worship that we are experiencing and he is there showing himself to us, in that moment we are making the decision to move into the light or move back into the darkness. We respond with worship. We respond with thanksgiving. We respond with faith. We respond with obedience. And the result is deeper intimacy and awareness of our identity in Christ. So really, when we say, “I am going to wait, and if God will show me more I will act,” we are making a choice to live in blindness.

We just have a few minutes, but this morning I want to make a specific application and go back to verse 10 of chapter 10. It’s one of those verses that is very rich, marvelous. I’m grateful for it. When I was in college I worked at a warehouse. I worked at a Winn Dixie grocery warehouse while I was going through college. For a while I was the janitor. I know that’s not impressive, but I think I was the top-performing janitor in this particular warehouse. I came home and told my Mom, “You

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know, this is just such a waste of time. It's so boring. All day long I'm just cleaning up messes." So my Mom took index cards and wrote out passages of scripture. She would send me to work with these index cards and I would memorize scripture while I cleaned up messes all day long. I know that makes me look much more spiritual than I am. I was in many ways a rebellious...well, I wasn't that bad, really.

My Dad is here today. Just telling that story, I am honored to have my Dad with me, visiting for a few days. I memorized this verse. My Mom gave me this verse to memorize, and I think it's a theme for us in life. John 10:10: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." Jesus is contrasting himself with the leaders of his day. He is telling us: "I am a legitimate shepherd. I come through the gate. I am the gate. I am the good shepherd. I will lay down my life for you so that you can be saved." When he contrasts himself with false leaders he tells us: "These are thieves, and they come only to steal and kill and destroy. So, I come to give you life; they come to destroy."

If you would, just turn back a couple of pages to John Chapter 8, verses 44 and 45. Jesus is speaking to the religious leaders of his day. He declares this:

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.

When you put those two verses together with John Chapter 10, verse 10: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy," you discover that this false leadership had a spiritual force behind it. It had spiritual power behind it. There was more to it than meets the eye.

Jesus makes a stunning accusation. He tells them that Satan is at work in you and through you. That is not a recommendation if you are a pastor, a priest, a rabbi, and God brings this stunning condemnation to the religious leaders that were opposing Jesus. He tells us that Satan, out of his very character, is a murderer and a liar, that he brings deception. John 10:10: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

Here is the application I want to make this morning for all of us, and that is that you are in a spiritual battle. You are in a spiritual war, and if you are unaware of that spiritual battle, you will suffer loss.

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But the moment you become aware of the spiritual battle, if you are in Christ you begin to win. The knowledge of it, the awareness of it is critical to your thriving in Christ.

In this season of my own life, I'll be honest with you, I've been ministering out of weakness. There are just seasons where there is nothing going wrong. You are going along and everything is fine for the most part. Problems are small problems. I don't know if it's entirely just fatigue - emotional fatigue, physical fatigue, or whatever the source may be - but I have found myself in this season struggling. As I was trying to preach and trying to minister...some of you are sitting there saying, "Oh, that's what it was. Yeah." I hope that's not the moment you are having right now. But I'm being honest with you. I am being transparent. I'm never dishonest, except for that moment where I just said I'm never dishonest.

So I did something. I realized, "Wow, this is just a spiritual battle." This first thing I did is I went home, had my wife sit down on the couch and said, "You know what, I'm struggling." I want to tell you the thoughts I'm having, the emotions I'm feeling, the temptation to quit that's knocking at my door. I know it's not the Lord. I'm not very proud of that and I want to ask you to pray with me daily in this battle. Immediately, even saying that to my best friend, my life partner, and engaging together in prayer, even in that moment you begin to feel the fog lift.

You and I are in a spiritual battle. You cannot explain everything that's going on in your life by the natural. That doesn't mean that you have to live some kind of weird, unexplainable existence. There is a logic to faith. We live according to the reason of scripture and the renewed minds Christ gives us, but we are in a spiritual battle.

Here are two or three thoughts to help you. I think Jesus is saying to you in this passage of John 8, 9, and 10, "Listen, I will take care of you, but you must draw near to me and you must be aware that the stakes are eternal, that giving in to sin, giving in to temptation, just saying, 'I'm through; I'm going to quit fighting,' puts you on a track with one whose desire is to destroy your life.

Let's look at two or three more passages. Would you turn, please, to Ephesians Chapter 6, verse 10-12?

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle

against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

These introductory verses tell us very clearly that we are engaged in a spiritual battle, that these forces that oppose us are arrayed according to a certain spiritual hierarchy, and that there are schemes. There are schemes designed to bring our destruction. Verses 13-18:

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints...

Paul says, "Dress in the armor." In many ways the armor is simply a description of the gospel. Dress yourself in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ dies for our sin, pays for our sin, our guilt, our condemnation, to remove our shame. When we trust in Jesus Christ, we receive the gift of his righteousness. The spiritual battle is won in Christ. As long as I see my strength, my defense, rooted and grounded in me and my own goodness and my own righteousness, I have no standing with which to resist the enemy.

However, when I stand in Christ and understand that I am dressed in his righteousness and I hold up the shield of faith, which is faith in Christ, I am able to stand. The emphasis in the passage is to stand, to resist. He gives us two offensive weapons here. One weapon is prayer and one weapon is the word of God. So, we dress ourselves in Christ. We are in the gospel, in the good news, living in his identity.

Would you turn to 2 Corinthians, Chapter 10, verses 3-6?

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of

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God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

Again, the theme is warfare. Paul is saying we have divine weapons, the weapons of God, to stand. There are forces that oppose us. They are not explained only in the natural. There is a supernatural dimension to the battle that we find ourselves in. The battle takes place largely in your mind, and winning the battle looks like a restructuring of your patterns of thinking. We destroy arguments, every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God. Every thought, every pattern of thinking that tells me my existence depends on me and my righteousness rather than the accomplishment of Jesus Christ, every thought that tells me some created thing is the key to my success and happiness, whether it's money or career or relationship or family - very good things, all which we pray for God to bless -- but when they become ultimate and become God in our lives, they become strongholds of destruction, which then, because of their fragility, because they cannot be God, cannot sustain us. Whether it's a desire for health or a desire for a happy marriage or financial security, those things are not able to be God in our lives. They are vulnerable. They can be taken. They can be gone in a moment.

Jesus tells us that we pray and trust him for these things, but we do not put our faith in these things. We put our faith in the Lord, so that when we find one of our kids struggling, whether it's a health issue, a spiritual issue, whatever it may be in their development, we go to war. We fight for them. But as we do this -- listen very carefully, parent - as we do that, we understand that there is a war in our own hearts, where we are learning to trust Christ. God gives us the strength to do that, and we find ourselves experiencing a change of pattern in our own thinking. We are bringing every thought captive, obedient to Christ, ready to punish disobedience.

Now, before I leave this passage to go to one last passage, let me just say this, putting together these ideas. The battle is won in Christ. It's learning to walk by faith, trusting in the accomplished work of Christ, and then knowing that the battle often is taking place in your own mind. The balance of these two truths helps direct you in daily life, so that we would say, "Okay, I'm not going to live my life in legalism, trying to follow a list of rules of what I can do and can't do. That's not going to earn me a right relationship with God. I understand that. It comes by faith in Christ.

And yet, I also understand that my daily activities, my entertainment, my relationships, my words, my thoughts, everything that I'm taking in, and everything that I'm putting out is governing the way

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I'm thinking. If I'm not walking and living in Christ and taking in his word and using the weapons of my warfare and engaging in fellowship and purposing to get out of my comfort zone (as some of our youth told us and challenged us today) to walk in the glorious obedience to Jesus Christ, then I may be in Christ well enough, but I am completely unaware of that identity because everything I'm putting into my mind and in my life and in my heart is contrary to that.

It's a difficult truth to communicate and I will communicate it to all of us. It's not just a younger generation. Your obedience matters. What you are doing with your time does matter in your walk with the Lord. It doesn't earn you a relationship with God. It's the gospel. It's good news. "The thief comes to steal and kill and destroy, but I have come that they might have life and have it more abundantly."

The last passage is a passage we read while we were in our worship time, which is Ephesians 5. Let's go back to it and we will conclude with it. Ephesians 5:15-16: "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil." There is a call there for discernment. There is a call there for diligence. Verses 17-21:

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

I'll just leave this passage with you. In this spiritual battle...if you are a guest here you will observe that we are working to experience community together in Christ. We value diversity. We value the fact that we have multiple generations, many races, many different backgrounds represented, and we are fighting. We are working to engage relationally in community. Passages such as this teach us that that is critical to experiencing the fullness of the Spirit of God.

One of the things the Spirit of God does is produce the fruit of the Spirit, the character of Jesus. He helps us to be patient and kind. Now, if you always stay alone and keep to yourself, you don't have anyone to give you an opportunity to be patient with. You need some of us there just to irritate you a little bit. The dynamic of life in Christ is lived out together and the fight for your own soul to overcome fear and anxiety or discouragement or depression or sinful strongholds is to be lived out in relationship as others stand with you.

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The fight for your marriage, the fight for your children, the fight for the abundance that God has for you -- and I don't mean that to insinuate you are just going to have an easy life -- but we need one another. In it we experience offense and we hurt one another and we have to learn. Sometimes it takes time to forgive and to release offense. Yet, this passage is teaching us that as the Spirit of God fills us, he flows through us to bless others, to share the gospel with those who don't know Jesus, and to encourage and to address one another with the worship of God. Amen? Amen.

Friends, it's a simple message today. You are in a spiritual battle. Whatever you are going through in the last week, whatever you are going through in this season, whatever you went through this summer, whatever awaits you this fall, you need to walk in the power of Jesus Christ. Draw near to him. Begin to identify: "You know what, those thoughts are not right! Those thoughts are just full of unbelief and fear." "Lord, bring me into the relationships that will help me see that as we grow together in Jesus Christ." That's the message for today.

Now, here's a response for you. If you are here and you don't know Jesus Christ, my hope for you is to trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. He is the good shepherd. He will care for you. He will protect you, not only in this life but for all of eternity. But there must be a moment where you personally turn from doing your own thing and say, "I'm going to follow you, Jesus, and I am trusting you. I believe that you died to pay for my sin, and that by faith in you I receive the gift of salvation." His promise is to give you the Holy Spirit when you turn from sin and trust in him, but there must be a moment where faith fills your heart and you follow Jesus Christ.

Whether you know it or not, there is a spiritual battle. You look around the world -- so much of what's taking place in the world in which we live cannot be explained apart from the presence of personal spiritual evil. I got up this morning to read messages on my phone. Again, I always read the headlines first thing. It's probably not a good idea, because it's never good news. There's another shooting, there's another this, there's another that. The same was true this morning as I read about events in Milwaukee and other troubling events that talk to us about the need of the human heart, awareness of the spiritual battle that we're in. "The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy, but I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly." Let's pray.

Lord, I want to ask that today would be the day of salvation for those here this morning who have not confessed personal faith in you, Lord Jesus. I pray that they would turn to you and turn from sin, that they would pray, "Lord, forgive me. I trust in you, Lord Jesus. You died for my sin. Come

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into my heart and make all things new.” For those that are here as Christians, here to worship you, Lord, would you awaken us to the spiritual realities that are taking place, that we have your power accessible to us in Christ? Lord, you have called us to fight this fight in prayer and in the power of your word and the power of your gospel. Lord, some of us are just living lives locked into the natural, completely unaware of the spiritual dynamic taking place all around us. So, Lord, would you open our eyes to see what we are not seeing? In Jesus’ name. Amen.