

A study of Jesus' Parables

LIGHTS OUT

There is absolutely one thing every athletic event has in common—it ends. After the concessions close, fans leave, and custodians clean, all that remains is a record of winners and losers. Sure, some competitions offer up participation awards and “everybody wins” status, but everyone knows who *actually* won. Winning and losing is fact, not opinion. It is objective not subjective. And, it is exclusive based on the rules of the game—there aren’t *almost* winners, only *actual* winners.

In a world that speaks of truth as “relative,” real-life has a way of proving that idea idiotic. Relative truth suggests, “I’m okay, you’re okay, everyone is okay, and nobody’s ideas or viewpoints should win over anybody else’s.” That would be fine if that statement wasn’t incorrect. It’s a statement that I disagree with, so, based on relative truth, is that statement still true? If you want to defend that relative truth, then you are implying that your “truth” wins over my truth and you contradict your own statement.

Sorry for the philosophy lesson, but athletics (like many other things in life) prove that some things are true, and other things are false. Some people win, and other people lose. Truth is not relative, it is absolute. The only question that remains is, who gets to decide what is true?

JOHN 10:7–15

⁷ So Jesus said again, “I tell you the solemn truth, I am the door for the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters through me, he will be saved, and will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come so that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.

¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand, who is not a shepherd and does not own sheep, sees the wolf coming and abandons the sheep and runs away. So the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them.

¹³ Because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep, he runs away.

¹⁴ “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me— ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.

SCOUTING REPORT

SETTING Jerusalem crowd mixed w/ proud Pharisees

NEED Contrast godly & ungodly leaders

STORY Behavior contrast: sheep, robbers, shepherds, and hired hands

TRUTH Jesus knows, cares, and sacrifices for his people

DISCUSSION

Break into two teams. Take a few minutes and debate with one team defending “Truth is absolute” and the other team defending “Truth is relative.”

1. What two-word phrase does Jesus begin with in verses 9 and 11?

2. What one shepherding act did Jesus refer to twice in today’s passage? (11, 15)

3. What reason does Jesus give that he came? (10)

4. If Jesus is, in fact, “I am,” (see study notes) how does that validate his claim that he is the only way for salvation?

5. If Jesus isn’t the only way how does that change the purpose of his “laying down his life?”

6. How should that fact that Jesus is “I am” and that he is the only way for salvation impact the way you live?

Our culture has almost no tolerance for someone who says, “I disagree.” Of course, there is a difference between disagreeing and being disagreeable. If you struggle with the exclusivity of the Gospel or how to present it, talk with your coach today!

ICEBREAKER

OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

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STUDY NOTES

PLAY BY THE RULES

The Apostle Paul, writing to his young friend in ministry said, *"If anyone competes as an athlete, he will not be crowned as the winner unless he competes according to the rules"* (2 Timothy 2:5). To win, you must play the game by the rules. But in life, like we asked on the first page, who gets to decide the rules?

As I write this, another professional sport is in the middle of major controversy. It appears that one of the franchises has been caught cheating. While we, as fans, are disappointed that a game we love gets tainted, it's not surprising that the pressure to win is so great that teams take every opportunity to get the upper hand. Even at a professional level, "winning at all costs" is almost expected—as long as you don't get caught.

Life, however, doesn't work like that. Officials and sporting commissions aren't all-knowing, God is. If you break the rules, God knows. The rules he has set up are pretty simple, he is the best and only thing that deserves our worship. And he has made a way for us to enjoy a relationship with him forever.

Today's parable shows Jesus making some incredibly bold claims. His teaching flies in the face with one of the major teachings of our culture; that truth is relative. In this passage, Jesus claims that he is God and that it's *only* through him that a person might be saved—not good works, not going to church, not doing bible studies, etc. Faith in Jesus exclusively saves.

GOD'S CARE BRINGS LIFE

Jesus opened this parable answering the question from the first page about deciding truth—*"I tell you the solemn truth."* He went on to make two incredibly bold statements, *"I am the door for the sheep,"* and *"I am the good shepherd."* What makes these statements so shocking isn't that Jesus said he's a door or a shepherd, but that he said, "I am." Jesus used a two-word phrase in the original language that literally means, "I, I am." He wasn't stuttering. This was a title he claimed for himself. This was the way God revealed himself to Moses back in Exodus 3:14. So, by claiming this title for himself Jesus just claimed to be God in the flesh. His audience would have immediately understood his meaning—he's not only telling the solemn truth; he's saying that he gets to decide what truth is.

Jesus said, *"If anyone enters through me, he will be saved."* Whereas *"the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come so that they may have life, and may have it abundantly."*

According to this passage, following a "theif" (false teachers) amounts to having your stuff stolen, getting killed, and facing destruction. Salvation, however, equates to abundant life. Life isn't abundant because you get cool stuff, it's abundant in the eternal sense of becoming adopted into the family of the King of all creation. So-called "abundance" in this life is like a bottle-rocket compared to a space shuttle—a bottle-rocket is great for half a second, but a space shuttle shakes the earth on its way to unimaginable places. An abundant life in the context of this passage is one that will extend into eternity. It's one that will one day experience more pleasure and awe-struck-wonder than we can currently fathom.

A GOOD SHEPHERD ILLUSTRATES GOD'S CARE

Jesus could be compared to a shepherd in many ways. For example, sheep are notoriously dumb animals, and people can act dumb as well. However, that's not Jesus' point in comparing himself to a shepherd. He is a good shepherd because *"the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."* To make it explicitly clear, Jesus reiterated, *"I lay down my life for the sheep."*

The parable of the Good Shepherd is designed to contrast Jesus to other leaders. The religious leaders in Jesus' day knew the Bible and did good things. However, salvation isn't by good works a person does, it's through the sacrificial work of the Shepherd who gave his life so we may taste his victory.

Winning at life isn't about what you do, it begins by acknowledging that even your best efforts fall short. We call this "sin." And what's worse is that sin isn't just what a person does, it's our very nature—any good thing we do is ultimately tainted by our own imperfection. The religious leaders misunderstood this saying in effect, "Our way is *the way*, we are good enough."

It's these kinds of people that Jesus called *thieves*, *robbers*, and *wolves*. It's any person that denies Jesus' truth that he is the *only way* we can be saved from the eternal punishment that our sin deserves. Many people deny Jesus because they deny their own sinfulness. They don't understand that sin wins when a person is convinced that "good" is good enough.

These people, seemingly well-intentioned, want to show you their bottle rocket of life and tell you it's the best and only thing you can hope to have. God wants more for you than the best this life has to offer—an eternal life of no shame, no tears, no fear, no longing for anything at all—it's complete satisfaction.