

VIGIL



“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

~ I Peter 5:8

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CHRIST**

JESUS CHRIST: THE ULTIMATE SERVANT

Dale Hubbert

Every area of the earthly life of Jesus is without human parallel and is worthy of scrutiny with the intent to imitate. Our Lord was perfection in action and clearly illuminates our spiritual eyes. To place the microscope upon the Christ is to magnify the message God intended for us to receive.

One of the intriguing elements of God's son was his readiness to serve. Jesus willingly lived his life as a servant though he is aptly described as “KING OF KINGS” and “LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:16). Deity lowered himself to the lowest form of humanity that the Father's will might be obeyed and that we might have footsteps to follow (1 Peter 2:21). Before we can reign as kings we must joyfully toil by serving.

Why did Jesus serve? All of his actions were motivated by love. The words of Paul in Galatians 5:13 were exemplified in the life of Jesus, “by love serve one another.” Doing for others happens for various reasons, not all of which are good. Service will never be fulfilling, acceptable, or consistent unless the driving force is our compassion for others. Jesus served by love!

Servants who please God are

servants who are immersed in humility. Being a servant was not what most people dreamed of being in Jesus time nor in our current society. Jesus “humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). We will become better contributors to God's cause when we humble our heart and see the joy service provides.

Our Savior taught us that effective service comes from our desire to serve. When we mature to the point where we look to others instead of self as Christ did then we will have moved to a position to be valuable to the church. Those who have the desire to be elders are those who should have the desire to serve (1 Timothy 3:1).

Jesus was the ultimate servant because he was completely committed to the doing of the Father's will. Jesus Christ declared, “I came down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of him who sent me” (John 6:38). A crucial element of successful servanthood is the laying aside of our will and enthusiastically serving a gracious and kind God. “Not my will but thine be done” (Luke 22:42) were the words of a servant absorbed in pleasing God the

Father.

Service can only be seen by action. It is in this way that our Lord painted pictures easy to appreciate. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John record numerous events in which Jesus was doing for others with little regard for himself. “And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20). Jesus didn't just talk about being a servant, he was one!

The recording of the deeds of Jesus as noted in John 13 draws open the curtains to the mindset of a servant. Jesus the Master quietly but profoundly shows the disciples the glory and beauty of service by girding a towel and washing their feet (John 13:3-5). Jesus then explained his actions and challenged the apostles to commit this attitude and service to their lives (John 13:12-17).

The washing of feet was not an isolated incident of service in the life of Christ. Jesus daily fed the hungry, gave water to the thirsty, healed the sick, comforted the bereaved, taught the unlearned, and responded with compassion to the needs of those he met. (Continued on page 8)

EDITORIAL

JESUS CHRIST: THE SON OF GOD

Ronnie Hayes

Jesus Christ – what do you think of when you hear His name? Son, servant, savior, shepherd, sinless or maybe sacrifice are all terms that come to mind. In this edition of the *Vigil* we will be discussing Jesus, the sweetest name known to man.

We can see the **pronouncement** of Jesus as the Son of God. At His baptism we read, “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:16,17). Then on the mount as Christ was transfigured we read of a similar proclamation. “While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Matthew 17:5). There is no doubt that heaven proclaimed Jesus Christ the Son of God. The angel said to Mary, “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David” (Luke 1:32). The angel also said that the “...holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

Some want **proof** that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Paul told the church at Thessalonica to “prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The Bereans were lauded as “more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). Our faith

must be based upon proof. The writer of Hebrews penned, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). We should not have a faith based on no evidence. What proof is there that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? One proof was His power to perform miracles. When Christ walked on the Sea of Galilee, saved Peter and proved His power over the wind, His disciples said, “...of a truth thou art the Son of God” (Matthew 14:33). Nicodemus could recognize the connection between Christ and God when he said, “...Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him” (John 3:2). A second proof that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is all of those who recognized him as such. Many of the inspired writers of the New Testament readily called Jesus the Son of God. Mark called Him the Son of God. “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). John writes, “And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God” (John 1:32-34). Saul upon his conversion began to preach Christ. “And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20). Some could say, those were His disciples, what else would they say? But his disciples weren’t the only ones who called Him Jesus. Demons did also. Look at the reaction and listen to the statement of demons as Christ comes into the country of the Gergesenes. “And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with

devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time” (Matthew 8:28,29)? In a court of law these demons would have been considered hostile witnesses, yet, they called Christ the Son of God. There were others who recognized Christ as the Son of God. The centurion at the foot of the cross and those that were with him saw what transpired and were convinced. “Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54). We too should be convinced, without a doubt, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

There is a **promise** that is made to those who will confess that Jesus is the Son of God. “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God” (1 John 4:15). John goes on to say, “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:13).

Do we have the hope that is promised of God? We do if we have obeyed the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Have we believed that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world (John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)? Have we repented of our sins (Luke 13:3)? Have we made the good confession (Acts 8:31)? Have we been baptized to wash away our sins (Acts 22:16)? If we have we can be confident in God’s promises.

May we read the pronouncements, see the proof and one day receive the promise of knowing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST

Ben Wright

The very first place we read of a coming Savior in the Old Testament tells us that He will be bruised (Genesis 3:15). As we read further in the Old Testament we see that this Savior will undergo very harsh treatment: “Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:4-5). In this same chapter we are told that he was to be oppressed and afflicted (vs. 7). The reason for this shameful treatment is told to us in verse 8: “...for the transgression of my people was he stricken.” Truly, Jesus was our sacrifice because He took our place. Isaiah tells us that His soul was an offering, or sacrifice, for sin (vs. 10).

When we think of the sacrifice of Christ we should think that it was **vital**. “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Later, Paul, by inspiration, wrote that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Each accountable person that has lived, is living or will live falls into condemnation based on Romans 3:23. The death of Christ is vital because it offers us several things.

Christ’s death offers us sanctification: “By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all” (Hebrews 10:10). Paul told the Ephesians that Jesus gave Himself for the church in order to “sanctify it with the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:25-26). You and I are set apart for the purpose of serving Christ by obedience to the New Testament. This is made possible only by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

It offers us redemption as well: “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and

purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). There was nothing else that could redeem us according to Peter: “For as much as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things...but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19). The only way we could be ransomed from sin was by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. For these reasons and others, the sacrifice of Christ was vital.

When we think of the sacrifice of Christ we should think that it was **vicarious**. “For Christ also hath suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God...” (1 Peter 3:18). Jesus took our place on the cross. It should have been a guilty party on the cross, not the innocent Christ who knew no sin. The American Standard Version translates Isaiah 53:8 this way: “By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who among them considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgressions of **my people to whom the stroke was due** (emphasis mine, BW)?” You and I should have been nailed to that tree, not the sinless Son of God.

Have you noticed the word “our” in Isaiah 53? The Suffering Servant bore “our” griefs, carried “our” sorrows, was wounded for “our” transgressions, was bruised for “our” iniquities. The chastisement of “our” peace was upon Him. You and I can be healed with His stripes. All of this was made possible because Jesus was willing to take my place, and yours, on the cross.

I have never seen the movie, “The Passion of the Christ.” I do not have anything against it but have just never seen it. I do remember seeing a scene where the actor portraying Jesus was standing before Pilate covered in blood. I was very moved by this scene, to the point of having a lump in

my throat and tears in my eyes. It was not because of the tremendous acting of the one portraying Jesus. It was because I saw, in my mind’s eye, my Lord taking abuse and punishment for me. As the hymn reminds us, “Knowing that it was for me He died on Calvary.” The sacrifice of Jesus was vicarious.

When we think of the sacrifice of Christ we should think that it was **victorious**. The death of Jesus on the cross and His subsequent resurrection brought victory for us. “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:55-57). You and I can be victorious over death and sin because of the sacrifice of Christ. Death and sin were weights that could not be carried by us. Through His death, we no longer have to bear those burdens. “Come unto me all ye labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Because of the suffering of Christ, we can be adopted as sons of God. “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom all things are, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Hebrews 2:9-10). We can shout with joy and awe as we sing the words, “O victory in Jesus!” The sacrifice of Jesus was truly victorious.

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SINLESS Ashley Kizer

When Paul told the Romans that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,” he was, of course, not speaking of the Man who came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Romans 3:23; Luke 19:10). He clearly made this distinction in the context of the passage by articulating to us that sinners can be justified “through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” because God has declared *His* “righteousness for the remission of sins...” (Romans 3:24, 25). We can conclude that all have sinned save one – Jesus Christ the perfect Son of man. It is because of *His* righteousness that we have the hope of salvation through Him.

It seems almost impossible that a man could live His entire life without committing one transgression of God’s Law. Job was “perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil,” yet he was not without sin (Job 1:1). Enoch walked with God and was taken by Him, but he did not live a sinless life (Genesis 5:24). “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord,” but, on at least one occasion, he too experienced the shame of sin (6:8; cf. 9:21). Perhaps the most outstanding illustration of this point is the life of King David, whom God called “a man after mine own heart,” even though he was to later commit such heinous sins as adultery and murder (Acts 13:22; cf. 2 Samuel 11). Now, let us consider our lives. We are certainly not sinless, are we? How long can we withstand temptation before we sin again?

Jesus claimed to live a perfectly righteous life in the sight of God. On at least one occasion, to the Jews standing around Him, He said of His Father, “...I do always those things that please him” (John 8:29). Did He literally mean always? Is it possible that Jesus never thought any immoral thoughts or took any sinful actions from the moment He was born until He died on the cross?

The righteousness of Jesus must have been apparent to all those who witnessed it. When He told His disciples of His sinless nature, John noticed, “many believed on him” (8:30). Peter witnessed the life of Christ personally and claims through his writing that He “did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth” (1 Peter 2:22). This appears to be an allusion to Isaiah 53:9, but the apostle goes on to give examples of Jesus’ resilience to temptation: “Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed *himself* to him that judgeth righteously...” (v. 23). This must be true, considering even His enemies could find no justifiable case against Him when they called for his torture and execution (cf. Matthew 26:59-60). Pilate was a more neutral and objective party, yet he said to the chief priests and to the people, “I find no fault in this man” (Luke 23:4).

As we ponder the concept of the sinless Christ, we may be tempted to disregard His human nature. John made it clear that He was “flesh,” and His physical body was fundamentally no different from ours (John 1:14). Though He possessed the strength to fast for forty days and forty nights, “he was afterward an hungered” (Matthew 4:2). When upon the cross, He cried, “I thirst” (John 19:28). Jesus was obviously a physical man who experienced all the difficulties that go along with living in this fragile shell.

The Hebrews writer noted that the Savior “was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin” (4:15). The Hebrew word χωρίς (choris), which is translated here “without,” is used as a preposition that could also mean, “beside” or “by itself.” When used as an adverb, the same word can mean “separately or apart from” (Strong). The clear message here is that Jesus of Nazareth, though tempted, kept Himself apart from sin. He was not corrupted by it, nor did He

let temptation sway Him to the right or to the left. This is the true nature of God and (more specifically) the Son of God: that He cannot and will not condone, accept, or overlook iniquity. Let the proponents of postmodernism understand that this is an unchangeable principle of our eternal God (cf. Hebrews 13:8). The Lord will not change His mind about the consequences of sin on Judgment Day! Isaiah has made it clear that when anyone has sinned, those “iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2).

However, though we have sinned, we can be justified by the blood of the sinless Christ. In Hebrews 7:25, we read, “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” In order to express the importance of the sinless Christ, we must notice the primary reason Jesus is able to make intercession for sinners. The Hebrews writer continues: “For such an high priest became us, *who* is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens...” (v. 26). Do you see the importance of the life of Christ, in that it was completely free of any iniquity? Our salvation is not only contingent upon our obedience to God, but the sinless nature of His Son, our Savior and Redeemer.

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EARMARKS OF THE TRUE CHURCH

(Continued from November/December 2005)

Hugo McCord

The Holy Roman Catholic Church with a pope in charge of all churches cannot be traced back of 606 A.D., when Boniface III claimed to be the universal bishop. His immediate predecessor as bishop at Rome, Gregory the Great, had condemned as “anti-Christ” anyone claiming to be the universal bishop.

Similarly, the Lutheran Church, founded by Martin Luther in Wittenburg, Germany, in 1517, only has one earmark of Jesus’ church, that is, good and bad people in its membership.

Likewise, all the other denominations have earmarks number four, but lack the other four:

The church of England, established by Henry the VIII in London in 1534; the Presbyterian Church, established by John Knox, in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1556; the Baptist Church, established by John Smythe in Amsterdam Holland; the Methodist Church established by John Wesley in Epworth, England in 1739; the Mormon Church, established by Joseph Smith in Fayette County, N.Y., in 1812; the Seventh Day Adventist Church, established by William Miller in 1830; the Church of Christ, Scientist, established by Mary Baker Eddy in Boston in 1869; the Christian Church, established by L.L. Pinkerton in Midewya, Ky., In 1859; the Jehovah Witnesses, established by Charles T. Russell in Brooklyn, N.Y., in 1872.

Sometimes it is said that the church of Christ was established by

Alexander Campbell in Washington, Pa., in 1804. He said that he did not establish any church. However, if he did start a church, it was not purchased with Jesus’ blood (Acts 20:28), and its future will be the same as that of all other denominations: “Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain” (Psalm 127:1, NIV).

Are we at a dead end? Is there any way that people in the 20th century can be sure they are in the church that Jesus built? The Scriptures give us “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3), and they let us know that there is another word besides the *ekklesia*, the “called out” people, that describes Jesus’ church, namely, “the kingdom” (cf. Matthew 16-18-19; Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:9; 5:10).

How does the word kingdom let us know that we can be sure we are in Jesus’ church? Because the kingdom, the church, is reproduced by a “seed,” which, said Jesus, is “the word of God” (Luke 8:11). The divine seed, the word of God, germinated in the hearts of sinners to produce Jesus’ church in Jerusalem on Pentecost Sunday, A.D. 30: “they that gladly received His word were baptized” and “the Lord added” them “to the church” (Acts 2:41,47). Some manuscripts omit the word “church” in Acts 2:47, but they all have that word in Acts 5:11, a reference to the same saved people. The KJV has a mistake in Acts 2:47, saying the Lord added to the church daily such as

should be saved,” instead of what Luke wrote, “were being saved” (*sozomenous*).

What gives us living hope today is that the same seed, the same word, that produced Jesus’ church in Jerusalem in A.D. 30 is just as powerful 2,000 years later and will be until Jesus returns. Sinners in the 20th century, exactly like those in the first century, can be “born again not of seed which is perishable, but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God, “the word that “abides forever” (1 Peter 1:23-25).

When the church does not exist in either a locality or in a given period of time, its restoration is as simple as planting seed. Several years ago, there appeared in the National Geographic an account of some lotus seeds, which were found in an old dried-up Manchurian lakebed. Carbon -f14 tests indicated they were more than a millennium old. When the rock-like crust was filed away, they were placed upon some moist cotton in a culture dish and they sprouted! The article contained a picture of the Horticultural Gardens in our nation’s capital where today grow beautiful lotus blossoms from those seeds that slept a thousand years (Hardeman Nichols, THE SPIRITUAL SWORD, October, 1991, p. 19).

Deceased 2004

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SAVIOR Chuck Webster

No one ever accomplished a fraction of what Jesus did in His slightly more than three decades on Earth. In a world that had precious little knowledge in the way of healing the human body, Jesus cured ailments that still baffle the medical establishment today . . . and He did so with a spoken word. He demonstrated His power over nature when He calmed the stormy sea (Mark 4:39), multiplied the loaves and fish (Matthew 14:15-21), and walked on water (Matthew 14:25). As He cast Legion into the herd of swine, He emphatically showed that the demonic world was also subject to Him (Mark 5:1-19). He gave a preview of His eventual decisive victory over death when He spoke life into the decaying body of His friend Lazarus (John 11). He was, quite clearly, a miracle worker.

As impressive as those feats were, however, they fall far short of explaining the reason the “Word was made flesh” (John 1:14). He did not come to heal the sick or raise the (physically) dead. He did not come to help people with relationship problems or merely make their lives better. In fact, His primary purpose was stated long before He ever performed His first recorded miracle in Cana (John 2). While Christ was in His mother’s womb, God’s angel said, “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS, for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). The name given to Him at birth explains His entire purpose for giving up heaven’s glory for Earth’s struggles: He came to save us from our sins (John 1:29). This implies two important things:

Sin is humanity’s greatest problem. Lately a prominent “Christian” evangelist who “pastors” a huge church has sold hundreds of thousands of books and attracted multitudes to arenas where he has spoken. His speeches are motivational

. . . he addresses the need for everyone to exhibit love and helps people handle life’s difficulties (relationship issues, health problems, etc.). Though he claims to be a Christian who speaks from a biblical perspective, he avoids two crucial issues: sin and the cross. One question begs to be asked: *How could a ministry claim to be Christian and avoid sin and its solution?* It is not an overstatement to suggest that sin is the overarching theme of the Bible. From Adam’s choice in the garden to the animal sacrifices of the Jewish economy to the sinless Lamb who offered Himself as the ultimate blood sacrifice, the theme of the Bible is humanity’s sin and God’s plan to address it. Sin drove man from the tree of life (Genesis 3:22-24), ushered death into the world (Genesis 2:16-17; Romans 5:12), and, most importantly, separated him from God (Isaiah 59:1-2). The “wages of sin is death,” Paul wrote (Romans 6:23), and Jesus came to save us from this horrible destiny (Luke 19:10). Our most pressing problem is not how to deal with a disappointing marriage or get along with an incorrigible employer. Life’s most vexing issue is not cancer, AIDS, or world hunger. Our problem is sin . . . it deceives us, distorts reality, and ultimately damns those who practice it. If we treat the superficial manifestation while ignoring the underlying problem, we are not doing what God called us to do.

Jesus Christ saves people from sin. The answer to our greatest problem does not lie with offering blood sacrifices, keeping laws, or observing annual feasts. The Jews offered thousands of sacrifices on the Day of Atonement, yet did not atone for a single sin. If a faithful Jew succeeded in attending every feast and offering every sacrifice, and failed only once in reference to one law, he had no recourse. The sacrifice of

every lamb in Judah would not forgive that one transgression (Hebrews 10:4). But when Jesus came, He did what the Law and its corresponding sacrifices could not do. As a High Priest and sinless sacrifice He “appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26).

In that one selfless act He became our Savior, the One who redeemed us from our sins. Paul wrote, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). When He came out of the tomb Sunday morning our “Saviour Jesus Christ . . . abolished death and . . . brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10).

The primary problem for us today has nothing to do with nuclear weapons or struggling economies. On a more personal basis, though we might struggle with marriages, interpersonal conflict, or poor health, none of those is why we need Jesus Christ. Our issue is that at some point in our lives we chose to violate the Word of God and follow our will instead of His. In short, we became sinners.

But thankfully, because of the “kindness and love of God,” our Savior appeared and saved us as we obeyed Him (Titus 3:4-5; 2 Thessalonians 1:8). Jesus Christ helps us with relationships. He helps us be better husbands and wives. He helps equip us to deal with life’s challenges. But those are peripheral to His main purpose for being incarnated. He came to save us from our sins. “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift” (2 Corinthians 9:15)!

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SHEPHERD

Kerry Richardson

In John 10:11, the inspired writer records the fact that Jesus boldly proclaimed, “I am the good shepherd.” In observing the context of His words, it is important to realize that Jesus proclaimed this message in the presence of some of the Pharisees (9:40). Earlier in chapter nine, the Lord healed a blind man on the *Sabbath Day* (9:14). After interviewing the healed man in order to find fault with Jesus’ actions, the Pharisees “cast him out” (*of either the temple or synagogue*) because he defended Christ’s relationship to God (9:30-33). After being cast out, the text indicates Jesus found the rejected man and verified His identity as the Messiah (9:35-38) to him (*resulted in the man’s belief in Him*). Following that conversation, an interesting dialogue took place:

And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. And *some* of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth. (John 9:39-41).

Immediately following this exchange, Jesus transitioned into a discussion pertaining to the idea of “shepherding” (*probably because the Pharisees and scribes viewed their roles among the people as such... spiritual shepherds*). The concept of “shepherding” is not a profession that is commonly observed in America today... therefore, there is difficulty in completely understanding the ideas Jesus presents regarding “shepherding.” However, to a native of Palestine listening to Him on this occasion, the message of Christ would have been clearly understood because flocks of sheep dotted the landscape around that region. To assist us with understanding, notice the following

excerpt: The routine of the shepherd’s duties appears to have been as follows:

In the morning he led forth his flock from the fold, which he did by going before them and calling to them, as is still usual in the East; arrived at the pasturage, he watched the flock with the assistance of dogs, and should any sheep stray, he had to search for it until he found it; he supplied them with water, either at a running stream or at troughs attached to wells; at evening he brought them back to the fold, and reckoned them to see that none were missing, by passing them “under the rod” as they entered the door of the enclosure, checking each sheep, as it passed, by a motion of the hand; and, finally, he watched the entrance of the fold throughout the night, acting as porter. The shepherd’s office thus required great watchfulness, particularly by night. It also required tenderness toward the young and feeble, particularly in driving them to and from the pasturage. (William Smith; revised and edited by F.N. and M.A. Peloubet; Nashville: Thomas Nelson; 1997).

While it is likely that Christ exposed these Pharisees as “strangers” (10:5), “thieves and robbers” (verse 8), and “hirelings” (verse 12), Christ clearly emphasized the fact that He was the model keeper of the sheep. And in doing so, four ideas support the reason He could assert this statement “as fact.” First, He proclaimed *He knew His sheep* (verse 14). The first century shepherd, a respected figure in society, was intimately familiar with his sheep. In order to successfully separate his sheep from those of another fold or recognize a shortage among his number, a shepherd would know every sheep belonging to his fold (*several sources indicate shepherds would actually “name” each individual sheep*). As the shepherd of God’s flock, Christ knows each

sheep... so intimately that He knows the numbers of hair upon our heads (Matthew 10:30) and our basic needs (Matthew 6:32). In addition, Jesus stated *He leads His sheep* (verses 3-4). As was observed in the excerpt on the subject of “shepherding,” a primary responsibility of 1st century shepherds was that of daily leadership of his flock. Whether to food, drink, rest, or safety, sheep were totally dependant upon the leadership of their shepherd. Similarly, the sheep within the fold of God can completely rely on Christ’s guidance (Ephesians 5:23-24). Closely related with the idea of leadership, Jesus also indicated *He provides for His sheep* (verse 9- “and find pasture”). Those who follow Christ find both physical and spiritual provision (Matthew 6:33, 2 Corinthians 9:8, Philippians 4:19). Finally, Jesus indicated *He protects His sheep* (verses 12-18). When danger approached, the loyal 1st century shepherd protected sheep within his fold, often putting himself in harm’s way to do so (1 Samuel 17:34-35). As the loyal shepherd for God’s children, Jesus placed Himself in harm’s way (*on our behalf*) by accepting God’s mission for His earthly existence (Philippians 2:5-8).

As a sheep in ancient Palestine, what flock of sheep would you have chosen? A flock whose shepherd didn’t know his sheep and exhibited poor leadership? One whose sheep lacked nourishment and whose shepherd would desert his flock in times of danger? I am confident that each of us would have desired to be part of a flock whose shepherd didn’t possess these characteristics... rather, we would desire the exact opposite in a shepherd. Today, we have the opportunity to belong to a “flock” whose shepherd exemplifies these traits. Faithful Christians can proclaim, “The Lord is my Shepherd”... can you?

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Jesus Christ: The Ultimate Servant by Dale Hubbert -----Continued from page 1

Service is the key to greatness. How many people are aware of that concept? The church or person that wants to be great needs to give great dedication to serving. How do we know this will work? The Bible tells us so.

Listen as Jesus speaks: “And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all” (Mark 9:35). “ And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant” (Matthew

20:27). “But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister” (Matthew 20:26). “But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve” (Luke 22:26).

The need for servants in the home, church, and world is as great or greater than ever. Many want to be served but few seem to enjoy serving. What about me? What about you? Am I busy serving in the Father’s

kingdom and blessing others through that service?

Jesus Christ was the ultimate servant. His work pleased the Father, profited the multitudes, and left an unmistakable example for all to follow. May it be our passion to humbly and actively lead the life of a servant.

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