

Morning sermon: 6 February

(Sermon Summary)

The best offer anyone will ever make you (John 10:1-18)

If an offer appears too good to be true, there is generally a catch, but Christ's offer is genuine. We are well advised to make sure that we have received it. In this passage the Lord is speaking about the most weighty of matters: our standing before God, who we are and where we are going.

A solemn promise

If someone makes us an offer - for example of financial advice - we need to check their credentials before trusting them. The Lord warns us about people we can't trust: the thieves and robbers (false teachers) and hirelings (those with a nominal responsibility in the church who have their own agenda and are quickly gone when trouble comes). The wolf is the Devil: he loves to scatter churches, and will worry small churches as well as large ones. The 'thieves and robbers' will make us false offers - instant hope and benefits such as health and wealth in this life - but they can't fulfil their promises. Only the Lord can reliably keep His promise.

By using the words "I am", Jesus was making it clear to his hearers that He is God, and that the words He speaks are God's words. He can fulfil His promise of abundant life because of who He is. He can give us solid, enduring life, which is what our souls need most. If you don't hear Him, you will not hear the words of eternal life from anyone else.

We know that Jesus is the Good Shepherd because He lays down His life for the sheep. The sheep hear His voice; it conveys care, and they know it is authentic because of what He did on the cross.

What is this life?

Jesus does not necessarily promise a long, healthy physical life, an easy life or a life which is successful by the world's standards. Rather, it is *eternal* life. God's hold on us will never weaken and we will never perish. The life of heaven begins in the believer as soon as they start trusting in Christ.

If we are to receive this life, we must first be humbled and have our sins forgiven. If we cling to self-righteousness or confidence in our own good works, we will fail on the Day of Judgement. We need to realise we are condemned and not adequate to come near to God. Perhaps you have been coming to church for a while but have only just heard this message - you may have been listening to 'thieves and robbers' who just manufactured nice feelings and produced nice music. Once we realise our need, we can seek the help of the Good Shepherd, who met our need by dying on the Cross. He will then make us kings and priests, true worshippers, clothed in His righteousness.

Life as a believer in relationship with God is abundant, not stale or static. We are not just waiting for Heaven - all the time, He is leading us to better pastures, showing us our sin and helping us to trust Him more. Though trials and hardships may increase, our experience of His love gets better. He will bring us wholeness and healing, and make the Bible more of an open book. We can then take that abundant life out into the world.

Only in Christ

Offers of life outside of Christ, such as those we find in self-help books, are just foolishness. The emptiness and hypocrisy of false teachers, or those who are successful in the world, often becomes more evident as they get older.

If we are Christians, our talents and energy are harnessed for good. We can use gifts of music, art and poetry for a noble end, and experience an abundant life of thought, reflection, creativity and progress.

Have you found this abundant life? Has Christ become everything to you? If you have stalled or got stuck, keep searching, because this is the best offer you will ever hear!