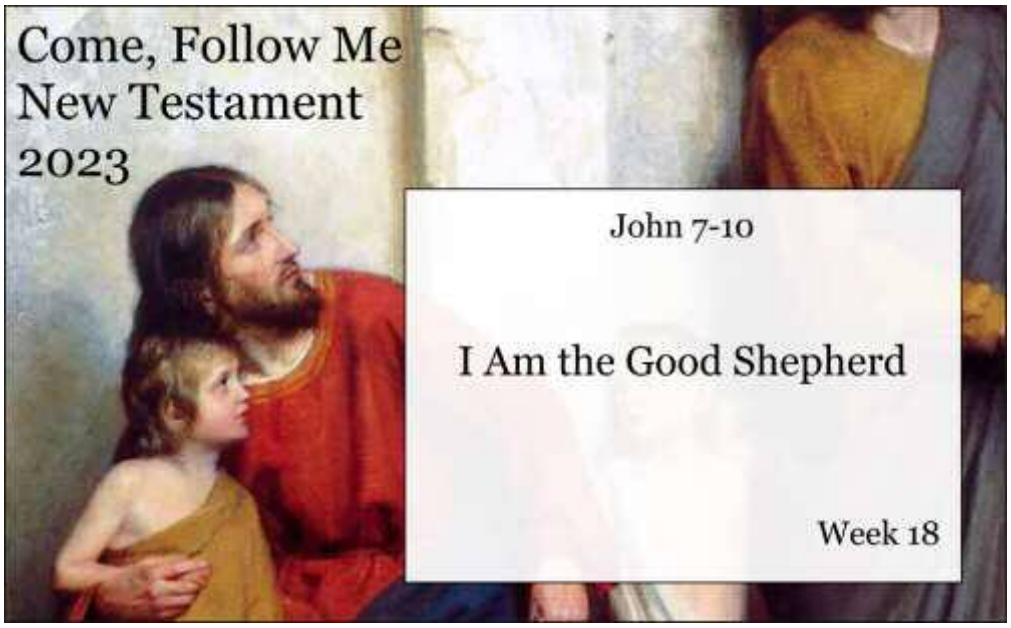

Week 18 is scheduled for study April 24-30, 2023. Our Good Shepherd has many ways of providing for our sustenance and happiness. This week's lessons provide us with just a few of them.

Before you read this week's lessons, I recommend you read the article that gives you a new perspective on what is going on among the Jews during these events.

Background for a Better Understand of John 7-10

Day 1

As you read John 1-10, you may receive impressions from the Holy Ghost about the doctrinal principles in these chapters. Recording your impressions can help you make a plan to act on them.

John 7:14-17 - As I live the truths taught by Jesus Christ, I will come to know they are true.

We have all heard the saying, "by their fruits ye shall know them." This is just another way of saying what Jesus says in these verses -

> 17 If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.

The truth of the gospel principles is always evidenced by the results of living them. Jesus said, in effect, 'even if you don't believe in me as the Messiah, believe in the works I do, for they testify of me.'

When missionaries teach someone about the commandments, they require that the person they are teaching live that commandment for a time before they are baptized. Why? Because it is in living the commandments that God proves to us that they come from Him. We see the fruit of living that law. When we pay our tithing we come to learn how much more we are blessed because we have added living that commandment to our lifestyle. When we add the Word of Wisdom or paying offerings, attend meetings, or read the scriptures, all of them add something sweet to our life. This is the fruit we were looking for - the evidence that they are true principles sent to us from God.

An important part of living the commandments is knowing ahead of time that God requires a period of obedience before we receive the promised witnesses that accompany those commandments. The witnesses come because we have lived the principle that brings happiness. God cannot give us happiness without us having lived the law that creates it. That would be contrary to the nature of happiness. "Wickedness never was happiness" (Alma 41:10).

All truth is able to be tested. This is why we learn to live the truths of the gospel, so we come to see for ourselves that they are true and that they work as promised.

Day 2

As you read John 1-10, you may receive impressions from the Holy Ghost about the doctrinal principles in these chapters. Recording your impressions can help you make a plan to act on them.

John 8:2-11 - The Savior's mercy is available to all.

I am not disagreeing with what the manual says about today's lesson. I just want to make a point. During Christ's mortal ministry his role was vastly different from what it is now. When he came to the Jews, he came representing our Father in all things. He came wanting us to know how much love God has for each of us. Kindness and mercy overflowed in his life as he showed us the love God has for each of us. He did not come

as the great judge, which is what he became after his resurrection. While still being loving and merciful, he makes it very clear that when he comes again it will be to judge the nations of the earth. That wasn't his role during his mortal ministry.

God's mercy, Christ's mercy are eternal attributes of their characters. But they can only extend mercy until the day of judgment. On that day we can no longer repent and expect forgiveness. On that day it will be everlastingly too late, and whatever condition our soul is in is how we will be judged. But in the meantime, Christ's focus is on offering us mercy with the hope that we will take advantage of his loving kindness and his willingness to forgive us. We just need to remember that their mercy, though abundant and eternal as part of their character, has a time limit on how long it can be extended to us.

The day will come when they can no longer offer us mercy, for it will be time for our agency to be reviewed, and to answer for how we chose to use that agency. In that day we become fully accountable for all of our actions, whether to our blessing or condemnation. The day of our ability to take advantage of his bounteous mercy will then be passed.

It is important to recognize that God's mercy offered to those who have made covenants with Him today is no less than the mercy He offers to those who came to mortality and never heard of Him (1 Peter 4:6).

> 6 For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

His mercy is universal in its application. Once those who have gone through mortality without having heard of God or Christ are taught the gospel in the spirit world, they will have the same choices placed before them that we have. Whether they choose to accept His gospel then or not will put them on equal footing with us, for both of us will be held accountable for what we know and whether or not we have chosen to take advantage of Christ's mercy and repent of our sins. In this way Christ's mercy is universally applied and offered to all.

Day 3

As you read John 1-10, you may receive impressions from the Holy Ghost about the doctrinal principles in these chapters. Recording your impressions can help you make a plan to act on them.

John 9 - If we have faith, God can manifest Himself in our afflictions.

The only evidence I know of in the New Testament that the Jews believed in the pre-earth life is found in John 9:2.

> 2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

How could the man have sinned, thus causing him to be born into this life blind, unless they believed that he had been living a life before this one? But that is just a side note.

The premise for this lesson is fascinating. Why do they assume God is going to manifest Himself to us in our afflictions, rather than in our comfort and ease? I laugh at my own response upon reading that last sentence. First of all, I don't usually seek God as earnestly in my comfort and ease as I do in the times of my difficulty and distress. Does that make me shallow? Perhaps, but it also displays my humanity, for that is the way most of us are.

This life is designed to be a series of tests. Day 1's lesson is a good example of that. The gospel of Christ is designed to be lived and practiced from day to day. We learn from our failures and the mistakes we make. The whole point of the gospel is to help us become a different kind of person than the one that was born into this mortal world. That is not done by offering us a comfortable and easy life, but by challenging our moral choices, our habits, our intellect, and our patterns of behavior.

It is in our struggles that God reveals His strengths. Where we are weak, He is strong. Where we fall down in the attempt at being better, He soothes our hurts and comforts us. He is in the moist compress that is used to wipe our brow when we are sick. His Spirit is the warm blanket on that cold night when we can't get rid of the shivers. When we sob from our loss, it is His Comforter who comes to us to give us peace. There is no trial, shortcoming, mistake, sin, or pain He cannot sooth in our soul. This is His strength. The most precious title the Savior bears is the Prince of Peace.

God does not take away our difficulties in this life. His purpose is to show us that even in the most adverse situations His love and peace can open the way to give us the strength to endure and learn. We become better people, more like Christ, because we seek for God in our times of difficulty, as well as in our times of ease. But most of our greatest lessons are usually learned in our times of greatest pain. It is in these times of difficulty that He teaches us to be more patient, loving, generous, tolerant, and gentle.

Day 4

As you read John 1-10, you may receive impressions from the Holy Ghost about the doctrinal principles in these chapters. Recording your impressions can help you make a plan to act on them.

John 10:1-30 - Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd.

The manual has some good material for today's lesson. I have only one point to make.

Shepherds live by their flock. The flock provides them with the wool that is used to make clothing, food to eat, and money to buy the things they can't make themselves. But sheep are stupid animals. They take constant care and a watchful eye. They wander off and do things they should know better than to do, but they do those things anyway.

The Shepherd serves his sheep day and night. By day he talks to them, leads them to places where they can get the best food and water, and protects them from themselves, as well as predators. By night he gives his body to protect them, literally. The sheep pens have no door, just an opening through which the sheep come and go. The shepherd sleeps in that opening, becoming the only barrier between them and the wild animals that would love to have them for dinner. To get to them the animal must go through the shepherd first. Being a shepherd is a 24 hour a day commitment.

Some hire a temporary shepherd, called a hireling, but someone who is not completely devoted to the welfare of the flock runs at the first sign of danger, leaving them to be devoured or scattered at the will of the predator. When Christ calls us to be his under shepherds, he is hoping we will be true shepherds, not hirelings. Are we willing to put in the time and energy to learn of our flock? Can we call each of those we have been given stewardship over by name? Do they follow us because they know we are devoted

to them, like the Good Shepherd? Are we willing to leave the 90 and 9 to search for and rescue the one who has wandered off, for whatever reason? Will that soul who has wandered into danger sense our love and devotion to them and return with us?

We love our Savior, because he first loved us. Now he is calling us to love one another as he has loved us. How willing are we to commit to such a calling?

FHE/Personal Study

John 8:31-36 - Servant of sin

Have you ever considered what it means to be a servant of sin? Funny thing about sin is that so often we treat a particular sin as "our little secret." We figure that if no one else knows about it or that if we can prevent anyone from making a big deal about it that it must be okay. Then there are those who participate in their own personal brand of sin, and do so with a vengeance. If challenged on why they do that particular thing, their response is aggressive or unexpectedly vicious, causing the rest of us to back off, realizing that it isn't safe to touch that subject. Some people actually find a degree of comfort in their own sins. Others feel like they are flirting with danger and like the thrill of it.

Finally, we have the category of sin that is so subtle as to not be really noticeable. We may have sinned for years because of tradition, custom, habit, or from an initial choice. It may not seem like a big deal to us. But if we hold our behavior up to the candle of truth, chances are we will find that there are impurities in our lifestyle that rob us of chances for happiness. We may not be fully aware of how much happiness we are living without, but until the sin goes away we will never really know.

To be a servant of sin we don't have to be a hardcore sinner, a reprobate, a pervert. We only need to be willing to make excuses for not getting rid of it. We defend our sin. I have heard so many times comments similar to the following: "I could be a member of your church, but I just can't do without my glass of wine at dinner." Such a little thing that prevents so much happiness. And it doesn't have to be a glass of wine. Anything that blocks greater happiness is just as guilty. No sin is necessary or needed for a fulfilling life. That is, after all, why it is a sin - it prevents us from being as happy as we could be without it, or at least with something better in its place.

What we have enslaved ourselves to is different from person to person. We alone can decide what is holding us back and what we must do, or get rid of, to move forward. This is where we turn to the Lord for direction. If we ask Him to show us what needs to change in our life, sooner or later the Spirit will whisper or show us where we can begin our journey to greater joy. The key to our change is to seek to love Christ more than our current sins. It starts with a choice, but the more we do it the more we will find that we have wasted so much time by not beginning the journey to God sooner.

Click the link below to

print a PDF copy of the article.

NT18-2023 - I Am the Good Shepherd

Week 18