

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

April 21, 2024



GOOD

when it is easy to focus on the bad

by Drew Downs

It is hard to focus on the good when we are feeling bad. Or when we have a critical mind. But the truth is, it is just hard to focus on good things.

Part of our struggle with focusing on the good is how our brains work. And part is how our culture works. The latter especially reinforces negativity as our motivator, punishment as our reaction, and perfection as our goal.

Social scientists tell us that we need to hear seven compliments to balance out a single criticism. This ought to motivate us to recalibrate our sense of balance! Because 1-to-1 is not balanced in any way that matters.

The image Jesus offers of being good requires us to understand what isn't. Our task, then, isn't to dwell or condemn, which we do easily, but to train ourselves to *make* that much more good in our world.

EASTER

2024

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

5 Ways We Read Revelation Wrong

The Biblical Book of Revelation is a bit of an enigma. Here are five mistakes we make in our approach to reading it.

1. **We treat it like prediction.** Unlike every other book in the Bible, we act like this one book predicts the future. Nope. It is something closer to an allegory that helps us make sense of our present.
2. **We read it literally.** Because the book is full of vivid imagery, we usually treat the visions as literal, physical, and real—rather than what they are *imagery*. In contrast, when Jesus tells a parable about seeds, we usually don't struggle with recognizing that he's talking about us.
3. **We think it is about divine judgment.** The evangelist weaves a story about *our behavior* in light of divine judgment. It isn't a story of the stuff God will do (see #1 again), but about who we are in light of who God calls us to be.
4. **We ignore the critique of Empire.** The entire book is about the evil of empire, of exploitation, of stealing, and the ways people extort each other. By focusing on prediction and judgment, we ignore what *actually* is being judged—empire itself.
5. **Those raptured are the ones who reject Jesus.** The underlying plot of Revelation is that the people who follow the way of Jesus are protected like the Hebrew people were protected in the Passover. When we say "you are marked as Christ's own forever," we are connecting ourselves with the mission of God, *rather* than with the mission of worldly empires.

Revelation is definitely the most misunderstood book of the Bible. But knowing how to read it better helps us to understand why it speaks to our world right now.

With love,
Drew

EASTER

2024

FOR SUNDAY

Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 21, 2024

Collect

O God, whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of your people: Grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads; who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

John 10:11-18

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

EASTER

Reflection

As Jesus compares himself to the good shepherd, he creates a contrast between himself and 1) other shepherds and 2) the ones who don't actually want him to be good. In other words, Jesus speaks to both who the good shepherd is and what other people think of him.

I'm reminded of what happens in sports—when we evaluate a team or a player. We might focus on what they can offer the team or we might despise them for beating our favorite team. Around here, just say the name Tom Brady and see what happens—objective is not a word for the response you'll get.

I think most of us want this image of the good shepherd to be a positive descriptor. Tradition has certainly made it so. The back window in the church reflects this very image: the kind Jesus holding a small lamb. But the image is, in fact, also a contrast with *other* shepherds. Those who are also called to lead and protect.

In the previous chapter, some of the Pharisees and church leaders harass a young man that Jesus healed; they also harass his parents and ostracize him. And in the next chapter, they will seek to kill Lazarus after Jesus raises him from the dead.

Unlike these others, who deceive, cruelly condemn, oppress, and marginalize, Jesus heals and frees. And the best part is that we hear his voice, no matter what, or where we are.

The image of the good shepherd comforts and invites. But it also contrasts. Not just with the other shepherds, but with our own expectations. For what is good. And who we ought to root for. And why. Thankfully, Jesus knows the team we're *supposed* to root for. We can still be true fans of the Kin-dom if we've been pulled in other directions. We just need to listen.

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