

<Bonn City UBF Spring Conference 2021>

JESUS, THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Thank God for our Spring Bible Conference through which we may come to know Jesus more deeply as our Good Shepherd and further deepen our relationship with Him. We pray to become good sheep of Jesus by hearing His voice and following Him and thereby growing as shepherds for His sheep.

On Friday afternoon, our conference began with a Bible study. We divided into four smaller groups and studied John 4:1-26, after which we heard the encouraging message of Sh. Thank You-Peter Pilawa for this text. We learned about the broken shepherd heart of Jesus toward a lonely, wounded, and sin-sick Samaritan woman. With humility and initiatory love, Jesus ministered to this woman so that her heart was opened more and more. Finally, she confessed her great thirst for souls and asked Jesus for the living water. Jesus opened her spiritual eyes to her sin and worship problem, and He introduced Himself as her Christ and true worship object. We were greatly encouraged by the message to respond to Jesus' invitation and initiative love and come to Jesus with our sins and ego worship and ask Him for the living water. We thanked Jesus who is the gift of God and the source of living water and who completely quenches our soul thirst and changes us into the true worshippers of God.

After that, we heard two more encouraging testimonies from M. Josefine Pilawa and Judith Pazhavarikal. M. Josefine thanked God for healing her of distrust, self-righteousness, and feelings of hatred and restoring her relationship with Jesus her Lord and Shepherd. She prays to follow Him from her heart. With Col 3:16, Rom 12:11,12, she prays to struggle spiritually to grow in a love relationship with Jesus. She prays for her Bible students Mersina, Sebastian and Philip to come to Jesus and ask for His living water. Judith thanked God for giving her Psalm 23:1-3. Jesus is her good shepherd who knows her well and guides her on the right path. She thanked Jesus for forgiving her unbelief and giving her living water. She prays to be a source of living water for Catherine and other classmates.

Early Saturday morning we had a devotion via Zoom. We heard a gracious message from Anna-Petra Pilawa on John 4:43-54: The healing of the son of a royal official. Through the faith and heart of the royal official, we learned that we must deny our pride and self-confidence and fully trust and obey Jesus' Word in faith in order to experience Jesus' healing and power to change. Anna-Petra prays to obey God's Word from 1 Peter 2:9, Exodus 14:14, and Luke 2:37 by faith, and as a royal priestess to share God's Word and His love with her schoolmates. She also prays to overcome her laziness and distraction and learn well in school with Jesus' help.

After breakfast, we had group Bible study on John 10:1-21 and then we listened to Sh. Xenofon's message. We learned that Jesus is the good shepherd who knows us by name. He alone gives us life and full sufficiency. Therefore, we can firmly trust in Jesus and His guidance in our practical lives. We also learned that we are true shepherds when we first pass through

Jesus' door ourselves and receive his love and grace for us personally.

Sh. Martin then recited his reflection. He remembered God's grace and thanked God with all his heart that Jesus became his shepherd, king, lord, and savior by paying for his guilt and sin on the cross. He prays to be a good sheep of Jesus himself by continuing to study God's word, hearing Jesus' voice, and have spiritual fellowship with the brothers and sisters in faith. He prays that God will continue to change him into a blessing and shepherd for others.

On Saturday afternoon we heard two instructive special lectures. First, Shd. Elke Dietzel told us about the origin of the Bible. The history of its origin, the tradition and the prophecy fulfilled in the Word of God makes the Bible unique and absolutely trustworthy. Her presentation awakened in us a spiritual desire to engage more deeply with the Word of God, to discover God's mysteries for ourselves, and to continue to grow in faith. Shd. Heidi Grigoriadis shared in her lecture about the nature of the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. We learned about the sense of responsibility of a shepherd towards his sheep and his motive that the shepherd seeks only the best for his sheep and gives himself for them. The sheep, in turn, know the voice of their shepherd and trust him. When they are with their shepherd they feel safe and secure. We were greatly encouraged by her report to always listen to the voice of our good shepherd and learn from Jesus in order to grow as shepherds for His sheep.

On Saturday evening we heard the third lesson from John 9:1-12 by Sh. Alexander Ripken: "Jesus heals a man born blind" Jesus' disciples were always asking about guilt and were very fatalistic in their hearts. But Jesus opened not only the blind physical eyes of a man born blind, but also the spiritual eyes of the disciples by saying to them that the works of God shall be made manifest. Through this lesson, we learned about Jesus' mercy, who cares for us human beings from the heart and wants to lead us from the darkness of sin to His light. We are called to cooperate with Jesus as long as we live. And we can do this by trusting Jesus' word and obeying him practically, like the man born blind.

Following this message, we heard two encouraging testimonies from Shd. Joyce Pazhavarikal and Sara-Marie Pilawa. Joyce thanked God from the bottom of her heart for leading her to Bible study in 2016 and thereby bringing her out of her superficial faith and spiritual blindness. She was struggling under the meaningless daily life by spending a lot of time watching TV, distracting herself with unimportant things, and falling into despair because of her marriage crisis. But through Isaiah 43:1,2, God opened her spiritual eyes to her Savior Jesus, and through Ezra 7:10, she received new direction in life. She prays to give her time and heart to God's work. She prays for her daughter, Judith, that she will continue to grow in faith through Bible study, and she also prays for her sheep Sandra and her husband, Johnson, that they will each receive a word from God personally and become spiritually sighted. Sara-Marie has newly embraced God's plan for her life, that He will make her a blessing to others according to Genesis 15:5,6. Through the healed man born blind, she learned that God blesses faith, trust, and obedience to the Word of God. She prays to subordinate her human thoughts to the Word of God and grow up as a mother of faith in the work of God.

Finally, Sunday morning came. After the group Bible study on John 21:1-25, we heard the message of Sh. Joachim Dietzel, "Do you love me?" We were able to learn about Jesus' shepherd heart for his disciples who had failed in discipleship and were now helpless and disoriented. We learned that Jesus' love is stronger than all the disciples' failures. Jesus again invited his disciples to the love feast. The true basis for our new life is solely this unchanging and unconditionally forgiving love that God made manifest in Jesus by dying on the cross as the Lamb of God for the forgiveness of our sins. We also learned that Jesus desires us to return his love through our confession of love and by caring for his sheep by going to find them and giving them the word of life to eat. Our hearts were greatly moved by Jesus' great love and we embraced his urgent heartfelt desire to feed his lost sheep.

Afterwards we heard a personal testimony from Christiane Pilawa. She thanked God from the bottom of her heart for Jesus' redeeming love. She was easily distracted by performance-oriented thoughts. But now she decided to listen anew to the voice of her good shepherd Jesus. According to 2 Tim 2:15. She prays to continue to follow Jesus and grow in His image through faith in His love.

At lunch time, we had joyful and loving meal fellowship in our respective groups. And in the afternoon, at the end of our conference, we all together took a relaxing walk in the beautiful sunshine with Jesus' grace in our hearts and with lots of fresh air. We were all heartily grateful to God for making this conference possible for us, despite the obstacles caused by the Corona pandemic. Above all, we thanked God for warming our hearts anew by his shepherd love and for deepening our love and trust relationship with him as our good shepherd. Praise be to Jesus!

Thank you so much for the prayer support of all ubf around the world. May God continue to bless all of your service for our Lord Jesus – Amen!

In Christ, Sh. Joachim Dietzel