

## **I AM...the Good Shepherd (John 10:11)**

**Readings:** Ezekiel 34:1-16; John 10:11-21

"I am the good shepherd." Don't forget, this is one of the seven "I AM" statements of Jesus that we are studying this year during this lead up to Easter.

In these statements Jesus wants us to think of God speaking to Moses out of the burning bush; at that time God identified Himself as "I Am Who I Am."

By using the same expression, Jesus claims divinity,  
He claims to be God's equal,  
He claims to be part of the eternal Godhead.

That claim is especially true when you see that throughout the Old Testament God is thought of and spoken of as the shepherd of Israel:

(Ps 23:1) The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

The scribes and Pharisees knew this and were outraged with Jesus' statement,  
"I am the good shepherd."

We also need to look at the good shepherd of John 10 in the light of what God says through Ezekiel 34.

Who are these shepherds of Israel?

They are the priests, prophets, judges, kings, nobility, and other leaders of the people.

Instead of looking after the sheep, they fleece the sheep.

Instead of protecting the sheep, they attack the sheep.

Instead of feeding the sheep, they feed themselves.

Jesus compares them to thieves and robbers or to a hired man (Jn 10:8,12).

These shepherds of Israel remind me of many political rulers today.

Instead of serving the country and the people, they serve themselves.

They are in office to line their own pockets instead of looking after the common good.

You only have to look at Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe and you get a picture of corruption.

Then you get a glimpse of what God is saying about the leaders of Israel.

Mugabe, who holds an enormous party to celebrate his birthday...

While his countrymen starve.

God does not tolerate this corruption of leadership.

So what does he do to the shepherds of Israel?

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I...will hold them accountable for my flock. (Ezek 34:10)

We know what happened: the leaders of Israel were stripped of their positions and led into exile while the common people, the sheep, were left behind.

God did not tolerate corrupt shepherds in Israel.

And, He does not tolerate them today as well.

We also cannot look at the good shepherd of John 10 apart from the shepherds of Jesus' day: the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, and kings.

Once again, as shepherds, they neglected the sheep.

They were more concerned about their precious law than the sheep.

Jots and tittles, letters and strokes, were more important than the law of love.

The letter of the law was more important than the spirit of the law.

They weighed down the people.

They made the service of God a burden instead of a joy,  
a duty instead of a calling.

In the previous chapter you see these so-called shepherds at work.

A man is born blind.

Here is someone the scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees should have tender care for.

But they don't.

Jesus heals the man.

Instead of rejoicing with him in his healing, the leaders wanted to know if Jesus broke the Sabbath in the act of healing.

After investigating the healing they threw the man out of the religious community.

The scribes and Pharisees were not dumb.

They knew that Jesus was condemning them with his words.

At the same time he was also raising himself up a different picture of a good shepherd...

And relates that to himself.

So we have to ask ourselves...why does Jesus call himself the Good Shepherd?

He is telling us through this parable three things about himself as the good shepherd.

But before we see what is good about the good shepherd, we need to look at this word *good* in the Greek language of the New Testament.

There are two words that can be translated into our English word 'good', The word used here is *kalos*.

Rodney Whitacre writes (in John IVP) – “This word (good) refers in such a context to that which is beautiful, noble, honorable, worthy of praise. In other words, Jesus is fulfilling his job as a shepherd in an exemplary fashion so that such goodness is able to be perceived. He is the admirable shepherd, and there is something admirable, heroic and attractive in His death. Consequently, it is in His death that He will draw all men to Himself.”

It is the kind of goodness that makes us feel secure.

This morning I want us to note three things about the relationship of the shepherd to his sheep.

Jesus could have told us a lot of things that a good shepherd does for his sheep.

Sheep are so utterly helpless that He must look to meet all of their needs.

But Jesus does touch on any of those things, but goes straight to an unexpected one, when...

**First**, He declares, “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (11)

This is obviously of crucial importance because Jesus repeats it four times (11,15,17,18).

He is willing to die for the sheep.

Easter reminds us that Christ the Good Shepherd laid down His life for the sheep.

Jesus is the good shepherd because He saves His sheep rather than Himself.

Remember how time and again Jesus had the opportunity to avoid the way of the cross and the grave?

"Bow down and worship me," said Satan, "and I will give you the kingdoms of the world and their splendor."

He could have gained His Kingdom without going the way of the cross and the grave but He turned Satan down (Lk 4).

After feeding the 5,000 the crowds wanted to make Jesus king by force;

again, He would have gained His kingdom without going the way of the cross and the grave but Jesus snuck away before they could act (Jn 6).

He could have gotten away from Gethsemane before Judas and the crowd came to arrest Him.

He could have called on 10,000 angels to beat back the soldiers.

His disciples were willing to die fighting.

But Jesus is the good shepherd.

It is He Who dies rather than the disciples, the soldiers, or the people.

He lays down His life for the sheep.

Charles Dickens's "Tale of Two Cities" presents a classic illustration of this. Set during the French Revolution, it is the story of two friends, *Charles Darnay and Sydney Carton*.

Darnay is a young Frenchman who has been thrown in a dungeon to await the guillotine. Carton is a wasted English lawyer whose life has been one of careless living.

In a beautiful allegory of Christ's atonement for us, Carton slips into the dungeon and exchanges clothes with the prisoner, allowing Darnay to escape.

The next morning, Sydney Carton makes his way up the steps that lead to the guillotine.

This is the sort of love Jesus shows as the good shepherd. He takes our place. He lays down His life for the sheep.

It was rare for a Palestinian shepherd to die for his sheep.

And, when it happened, it was a tragic accident.

He did not plan to die for them; rather, he planned to live for them.

Jesus, however, planned to die for the sheep.

That was God's set purpose and His intention.

When the shepherd of Palestine died, that usually meant disaster for the sheep.

They were scattered.

They became prey for all their enemies.

Many died or were lost.

But Jesus is the good shepherd.

His death is not disaster.

In fact, it would be a disaster if He did not die, because then we would remain in our sin and misery.

Three things stand out about His death.

This death was *Voluntary*.

Jesus death was neither an accident nor a tragedy.

Jesus says in v18, "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord."

He makes it clear that his life is not simply taken from him by his opponents.

"He did not die as a martyr, killed by men; He died as a substitute, willingly laying down His life for us" (Warren Wiersbe).

He chose to lay down his life for his sheep.

He offered His life as a sacrifice for the sheep.

These sheep were in mortal danger not from wolves and lions but from sin.

This death was *Vicarious*.

Jesus dies, “for the sheep” (v11) - that is Jesus did not die for His own sins – he had none – but for ours in our place.

As the Apostle Paul states in Romans 5:6-8, “When we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his love of us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Christ died not only on behalf but in an even greater sense in our place!

This death was *Victorious*. (vv. 17-18)

Jesus further makes the statement that he has the authority to lay down his life and the authority to take it back again. “...No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” I have authority to lay it down, and authority to take it up again.”

Not only is the Good Shepherd willing to die for his sheep but ...

**Secondly**, He declares (v. 14)

“I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and my sheep know me.”

Middle-Eastern shepherds didn't have large flocks.

Often the flocks were small and the shepherd and his family had intimate knowledge of each one.

It was not uncommon for the family to view these sheep as pets.

Each was named.

He had nicknames for each one – blackie, nose, or whatever.

Each was special.

In this computer age, it's easy to begin feeling like a number instead of a person.

We are identified by our Tax File Number rather than by our name.

We often get junk mail that is addressed to "Resident" or "Occupant."

Such impersonal methods may cause some people to feel a lack of significance.

They may even conclude, "No one cares for me."

But that's not true...Jesus cares.

In fact, like the shepherds of Palestine, he knows everyone by name.

He knows and loves his sheep.

We know he loves us because the word 'know' means to know experientially.

It's not to know by reading it in a book,

it's to know it because you have experienced it.

And the word "know" very often in the Bible is used in terms of a love relationship.

So when Jesus says he “knows” his sheep he is saying that our relationship with God is not theological, not an intellectual one, but a personal one. He loves me.

Now isn't that a wonderful truth?

The Lord has millions of sheep but He knows each of them intimately.

He not only knows our name...he knows our natures.

He knows our trials and temptations.

He knows our strengths and our weaknesses.

He knows everything about us –even our darkest thoughts!

The wonderful news is that he loves us anyway – enough to die for you.

Not only does the Good Shepherd know His sheep but..

**Third**, The Good Shepherd Keeps His Sheep Eternally. (vv. 27-28)

Here is one of the greatest truths in the Bible.

Some people think you can be saved today and lost tomorrow.

They suffer unnecessarily all of their lives under the mistaken belief that you can be saved today and lost tomorrow.

But I want you to listen to John 10:28-29, I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.”

Do you see the symbolism here?

Jesus is saying that He puts his hand around the life of the believer and He is safe forever.

But if that is not good enough.

God the Father, then puts his almighty hand over both Christ and the believer.

Surely then no force in all the universe can take a poor believer out of the grasp of our Lord and Savior.

We can be thankful that we are not saved and kept by our own works.

The reason that I can believe so firmly in eternal security has nothing to do with me, our eternal security is not dependent upon ourselves but upon Jesus.

If you ever feel like a little lost sheep, alone and frightened in a dark and hostile world, remember the good shepherd.

You can know he loves you because he laid down his life for you.

He, who loved you this much, will never desert you.

In Jesus you are never, never alone.

## **Conclusion**

Notice how Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, creates division on earth... *V19-20*

People still talk about him that way today.

"Why pay any attention to him? He lived 2,000 years ago. We're much smarter, much more understanding, much better educated today. We don't go in for those primitive ideas that he taught."

"He has a demon, and he is mad; why listen to him."

But others were saying... *V21*

There is no question that Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

The only question that remains at this point in the service is this: Do you know the Shepherd?

Surely one of the most meaningful aspects to believers about Jesus is that he does for us what no one else can do.

Do you feel that?

No one else can satisfy your heart, no one else can solve the problems of the mind, no one can answer the questions about life after death like Jesus can.

No one can touch a human situation of conflict and strife and bring healing and deliverance like Jesus can.

Don't you often feel like saying, with Peter, "To whom can we go? You alone have the words of eternal life,"

Do you know the Shepherd?

How you answer that question determines where you can expect to spend eternity.

Your answer to that question will make all the difference between Heaven and Hell.

If you know the Shepherd, then you can rejoice in the fact that He will ever be with you and that He will ever watch over you.

If you do not know Him, then I invite you to come to Him right now.

You do not have to, nor should you want to wait. Delay is dangerous! Come to Jesus today and He will save your soul. He will place you in the flock of God. He will give you a new life and a new birth. Will you come to Him?