

The Good Shepherd April 21 from John 10:11-18

A story was given to me where there was once an occasion when two men were called on in a large classroom to recite the 23rd Psalm. One was a published orator trained in speech technique and drama. The orator took his time and then powerfully repeated the psalm. When he finished, the audience cheered and even asked for an encore so that they might hear his wonderful voice again. Then the other man, who was much older, calmly repeated the exact words, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want..." but when he finished, no sound came from the large class. Instead, people sat in a deep mood of devotion and prayer, feeling the spiritual depth of his words. Then, the first man, the orator, stood to his feet. "I have a confession to make," he said. "The difference between what you have just heard from my old friend and what you heard from me is this: I know the Psalm; my friend knows 'The Shepherd.'"

There are seven "I Am" statements appearing in the Gospel of John. In each, Jesus proclaims His identity and purpose. In these statements, Jesus portrays himself as the fulfillment of the needs of all people as the "I Am." The same "I Am" that was first introduced to Moses in the book of Exodus. "I Am who I Am." Say this to the people of Israel.

Quickly reviewing these statements, "I am the bread of life, I am the light of the world, I am the door of the sheep, I am the good shepherd, I am the resurrection and the life, I am the way, the truth, and the life, and I am the true vine. Let us explore the profound words of Jesus, his fourth "I Am" statement: "I am the good Shepherd, not the hired hand." Notice that I put what Jesus said at the tail end of the statement; he is not. I am not the hired hand. What could He possibly mean by this? As we navigate through this passage, let's ponder the distinction between a good shepherd and a hired hand. Is it merely a matter of genuine compassion and love versus a superficial concern driven by perceived benefits? In the context of Jesus' time, shepherds held a significant role, contradicting the text "I am the good shepherd." Shepherds wandered as nomads, grazing their sheep on other people's lands. They were notorious for lying, cheating, and stealing. They were, in essence, low on the gene pool.

Shepherds were known to oppose kosher food laws. They did not practice ritual cleansing or attend worship in the synagogue on the Sabbath. A popular song back then was, "Mamas, don't let your babies grow up to be Bedouins." For Jesus to identify himself as a shepherd appears quite odd, wouldn't you think? Thus, from what we know of a shepherd's life, there is quite a contrast to Jesus's humility when he befriends the outcast or eats with tax collectors and sinners. However, the story first unfolds back in verses 1-6, where Christ often used parables, or stories, to illustrate a truth, notably that the only way to heaven is through Christ our Lord and Savior, that after we accept Him, He leads us. Please be with me as I pause to pray.

Dear Lord, we come to You, the Good Shepherd, seeking solace and comfort. Just as you watch over us, we ask for your gentle guidance to strengthen our faith and give us confidence in your guidance. Please help us to find peace in your loving care, knowing that you will lead us on

the right path. Open our eyes now as we study your word. In the name of Jesus, we pray, and everyone said, Amen.

We must wrestle with two questions today: First, do we know the shepherd, and second, if not, how do we know the shepherd knows us? Let's take a look at the voice of the shepherd. I have to confess that many times, people can get off track when what they believe contradicts scripture. What I mean is that how can we know the shepherd by his voice? Beginning back in verse 5, we read that “the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his sheep by name, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.”

Sheep and shepherds were common themes in Jesus' day so that the people of that time would understand this metaphoric language to express his relationship to us. Sheep are mentioned quite often in the Bible. They are portrayed as dirty, defenseless, and senseless balls of wool. Sheep cannot run fast, nor are they ferocious in any sense of the imagination. Because sheep are not threatening, we all know the old practice that when your kids go to bed and cannot go to sleep, we tell them to count sheep to give them happy dreams. We depend on counting sheep to survive the night. Throughout the Bible, we, the sheep, rely on a shepherd for their survival. Sheep are more afraid of us than we are of them, so counting sheep has become a way of making friendships. A known fact is that sheep are excellent at recognizing friendships. Psalm 23 gives us a prime example that sheep cannot survive without the loving care of a devoted shepherd. And so when we come to this passage, the sheep are a picture of all of us. The reality is that the Bible teaches us that we are like sheep to the good shepherd.

In Isaiah 53:6, Isaiah writes, We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Psalm 100:3 says that “we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.” David when wrote Psalm 23, “The Lord is my shepherd.” David clearly understood the similarity between himself and humanity and sheep. Thus, we need a good shepherd. Folks, we are these senseless creatures, dirty and sinful. We need attention and care from a good shepherd. As messy and dumb helpless sheep, we need a good shepherd to take care of us. His name is Jesus. And so, Jesus, in this passage, uses this illustration.

Jesus says it twice in verses 11 and 14 using the article “the,” not just “a” good shepherd, but “the” good shepherd—the ultimate good shepherd. Then, in verse 16, Jesus says there should be one flock and one shepherd. Sure, there are multiple churches and small flocks around the world that have lower shepherds as pastors, but under the sign of capital “F,” as one flock, we are forming one body under the one chief shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ. The question is: what makes Him the good shepherd? The text gives us four points.

First, the good shepherd is sacrificial, as we see in verse 11. “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” Jesus repeats the same thing in verse 15. “Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep.” A good shepherd risks his life to protect us, his sheep, from harm. He was fighting against

predators like wolves, thieves, and robbers who wished to destroy the flock, standing in the way of a fight. It is incredible to have a good shepherd to lay down His life so others may have life. So that we might have life. This is precisely what Jesus did for us when he went to the cross, willingly giving his life, standing in between the thing that opposes us, which is sin. It's the perfect plan of God so that we might live. He, Jesus, took on sin, though he knew no sin so that we might become the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.

Second, the good shepherd is loving. A couple of chapters later, in John 15:13, we read, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." Jesus lays down his life in his love for us. Jesus did not just say he loved us but demonstrated his love on the cross. Paul writes for us in Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." A sacrificial and loving shepherd. Are you aware of how much Jesus loves you? Even if you did not grow up in church, you probably recognize the song "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." The question: do you really believe what you are singing? Many people have trouble accepting the love of God, most likely because they cannot get over the shame of past sins or because of unworthiness—maybe it's because the enemy is playing games with your mind. Friends, accept the love of God. God's love is a gift, for God gave his only begotten son as a sacrifice for our sins. Are we worthy? No. He is worthy! Accept his gift. He's the good shepherd.

Third, he is caring. We go back to the verse where he distinguishes himself as a good shepherd and a hireling. A hireling does not care about the sheep. A hireling is paid to do a job, but a good shepherd has a calling and vested interest in fighting and not running. Moms and dads, when your kids were throwing up a night, did you run the other way and say heaving hours are between the hours of 9 and 5? Sorry, I'm off the clock; go back to bed. See me in the morning. We love our kids, and that's the difference between a job and a calling. The heart of a good shepherd is the caring. 1 Peter 5:7, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."

Lastly, and as we come to the end, He is personal. In verse 14, Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep, and my sheep know me." Jesus is speaking in relational terms, saying I want a personal and knowable relationship with you. Friends, God is knowable. Jesus says I am known by those who will listen to my voice. Do we really know Jesus in a personal way? Do we know Jesus in the heart? We have to take Jesus' words by heart because, guess what? He already knows you. Jesus does not need to be this far removed spiritual being. Jesus says he is not just "a" good shepherd, but "The Good Shepherd" because he is knowable. This is why he died on the cross, to lay down his life and take it up again, conquering sin and death and opening the door to hear his voice. For the Lord is good and faithful; He will keep us day and night. We can always run to Jesus; Jesus, strong and kind. Jesus, strong and kind. Amen.

