

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

The Good Shepherd

John 10:11-18

Intro: Jesus is in the midst of His last public discourse recorded in John's Gospel. The occasion of this is the healing of the man born blind and his subsequent excommunication from Judaism by the religious rulers. These men could not accept his testimony that Jesus had actually healed him (on the Sabbath) and he wasn't about to let them weasel out of acknowledging that the miracle did in fact happen and that it happened by the hand and power of Jesus. So, after he was cast out, Jesus found him and revealed Himself to him and the man believed on Him. Of course, there were Pharisees present and they began to badger Jesus. This is what prompts Jesus to deliver this discourse, not just to explain the stark contrast between His ministry and that of the religious authorities of the day but also to provide comfort to the healed man and all others who choose to accept Jesus as Savior and follow Him as Lord.

As **ch10** opens, Jesus begins painting a word picture using the imagery of a shepherd with his sheep. He presents Himself as the legitimate Shepherd who is calling His sheep out of the fold of Judaism. Since His audience fails to catch on to what He is saying (**v6**), He changes the imagery slightly and applies it more directly to Himself. Last time we dealt with what He meant when He said "I am the door..." Today, we'll spend our time looking at another great claim of Jesus, the 4th of the "I am" sayings in this Gospel – "I am the good shepherd," very likely the most popular of all the "I am" statements in John. This is not because we understand it so completely but because there is so much in this claim that brings great comfort as it speaks to the depth of passion by which Jesus loves His sheep.

"I am the good shepherd" There are 2 things to notice about this claim: 1) Jesus is uniquely good. We've all had people in positions of responsibility over us that we may consider good: parents, pastors or civic leaders; but Jesus is good in a way that they are not. The Greek word translated "good" here carries the sense of being morally good but it also means beautiful, winsome, lovely and attractive. When you compare this claim of Jesus with His other claims of being the true bread or true vine, we see that the word also means genuine or true, as opposed to false or artificial. Thus, we

should see Jesus as the good, beautiful, winsome, lovely, attractive, true, and genuine Shepherd.

2) Jesus is exclusively good. He's not a good shepherd, as in one of many. He's the Good Shepherd. There have been other shepherds. The OT speaks of both good and bad shepherds over Israel. The NT speaks of shepherds for our day and Jesus is called the Chief Shepherd who assigns the responsibilities of the leaders of God's people. Tho we may consider many of these undershepherds good, compared to Jesus they barely register as that at all.

Why does Jesus call himself the Good Shepherd? Or put another way, what's Jesus like or what's He done that warrants this title? Our text answers this question in two parts. First, Jesus is the Good Shepherd because He lays down his life for the sheep (11). Second, Jesus is the Good Shepherd because He knows His sheep and directs them properly (14). In both of these aspects, Jesus is far and above all other leaders of men.

11- This speaks to the unique and exclusive goodness of Christ in that He gives His life for the sheep. This must have been a fairly rare occurrence among the shepherds of Palestine in that day. It wasn't a normal job requirement or there wouldn't have been many vying for that position. But it is characteristic of Jesus and it's the primary reason He chose to use this metaphor. The highest act of care for sheep is that of laying down His life. Of course, when a shepherd in Palestine happened to die in defense of his sheep, it was an accident. His plan was to live for his sheep, not die for them. But for Jesus, His death for His sheep was His set purpose. Also, the death of a shepherd in Palestine meant disaster for his sheep. The death of the Good Shepherd means life for His sheep.

12-13- Here, Jesus contrasts the behavior of the man who is not really the shepherd at all, just a servant, paid to do his work. There's no evil implication in the term hireling like in thief, it refers to someone who's interested more in wages, not sheep. It's one who's more concerned with what they're paid for doing the job rather than the job itself. This person lacks the concern and responsibility of ownership. When they see the wolf coming they don't risk danger – they abandon the sheep and run. The hireling runs because he is what he is – hired. He's not deeply concerned

for the sheep. He's not involved in their situation. Their care and benefit are of little concern to him because it doesn't benefit him. Thus, his passions are not aroused by their distress. The interests of sheep are of little interest to him.

There's an astounding amount of teaching about the death of Jesus vs11. The point Jesus makes is that He can be called the Good Shepherd primarily because He gives His life for the sheep. This is obvious because He repeats it 4 times (11, 15, 17 & 18) and also because it's emphasized in contrast to the hireling who runs when danger threatens. The good shepherd sticks by His sheep, defends them, and will even die for them if necessary. This is the main point. What's surprising is the amount of teaching about Christ's death that occurs over and beyond this.

First, Jesus' death was voluntary (vs11, 17 & 18). We must never think that Jesus' death was an accident or worse, a tragedy. It was a tragedy when President Lincoln was assassinated. It may or may not have been a tragedy when John Wayne died. It was certainly a tragedy when those 4 young Vanderbilt students drove into the bayou off Hwy 182 and drowned. But it was most certainly not a tragedy when Jesus died at the age of 33. This was no accident. This was and still is the great turning point of history. It was planned before the foundation of the world. Peter spoke of this in his first sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:23). It was for this very purpose Christ was born, as the angel instructed Joseph, "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Mt 1:21). All of Jesus' life consciously and deliberately moved toward this purpose. He didn't have to come to this earth, any more than a man has to be a shepherd. He didn't have to die. Yet, He came and died voluntarily for our salvation.

Second, His death was vicarious; meaning: Jesus didn't die for His own sin (He had none). He died *for* our sins and *in* our place (The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep). Jesus died, not only for others in the sense of "on their behalf," but even stronger than this, He died in the sense of "in their place." This is revealed beyond any doubt in Rom 5:6-8. This means: We are sinners; as sinners we deserve to die (physically and spiritually); but Christ willingly died in our place, taking our punishment, so that we might be set free from sin and its penalty to serve God.

Third, His death was specific. He died for a specified number of people

designated here as His sheep. We don't know who these sheep are. It's not for us to know. We cannot know. If we'd lived in Sodom, would we have judged Lot, to be a saved man? Probably not! Yet the NT says he was accounted righteous in the sight of God, though he messed up in going to Sodom (**2 Peter 2:7**). Would we have considered Judas to be saved? Probably so, but Jesus says explicitly that he was a tool of Satan (**John 6:70-71**). We can't know precisely who these are for whom Christ died. But Jesus knows them and died for them.

Finally, Jesus died for the sheep because He cares for them (**v13**), because He loves them. Sinful sheep, rebellious sheep, even in this, Jesus loves us and gave His life for us. In fact, He still gives His life for us in that He lives to plead for us, to defend us, to represent us in heaven. He lives to rule providence and the circumstances of this life for our good. It is for us He lives and because He lives we live also.

I can't understand such love, can't fathom it. I can't wrap my head around the reasoning of such love. But I believe it and I can respond to it with rejoicing. That's really all we can do. David wrote about this in (**Ps 116:12-13**), How can I repay the Lord for all His goodness to me? I will believe God concerning His offer of salvation and praise him for it! This is why we gather here on Sunday and this is why we sing. Not because it's latest cool song on the radio but because it speaks to either the person or work of Jesus Christ – or both! It is both our joy and duty to lift Him up in honor and praise and so we sing, knowing that ours is the loveliest, most glorious song in the universe because we are singing about Him, we are singing to Him and we are singing for Him.

14-15- The 2nd reason Jesus is the Good Shepherd is because He knows His sheep and is known by them. This speaks of a relationship based on mutual knowledge (reciprocal) that's not superficial but intimate. When Jesus says He knows His sheep – He means He knows everything there is to know about them. Conversely, the Christian walk is a constant, daily discovery of Who Jesus is and what He's like as revealed by His Word and the experience of His presence in our lives. Jesus actually compares this to the knowledge He has of the Father and vice versa.

There's great comfort in that. Why? Because as human being, we desire to be known and to know others and yet we are basically incapable of doing

so. Sure, there's a certain amount of knowledge between people. Friends know one another. Parents know their children, children their parents. There's often a special and beautiful knowledge between husband and wife. But in spite of all this, deep in our hearts there's a hunger to be known better, to be known for what we really are, and to share a similar knowledge of another. It exists on the human level (horizontal) but even more on the divine level (vertical). Even though we're sinners and in rebellion there's still a certain emptiness or hunger to know God and be known of God. Augustine "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."

Also, there's comfort in Jesus knowing His sheep because it's precisely as "His sheep" that He knows them. To be known of Him means to be a member of His flock and thus, to be one for whom He died and who will never be snatched from His hand. This is both a permanent relationship, and a personal one. Am I His sheep? Yes, then I will be forever! Is He my Shepherd? Then that is forever too.

Finally, there's comfort in Jesus knowing His sheep so I need never fear that something about me might suddenly rise up to startle Him and diminish His love. That can't happen because He already knows me so well!

All of this is especially encouraging when you stop to consider the nature of sheep themselves. We've talked a lot about the characteristics of the shepherd but what about the sheep? Well, for one thing: sheep are all different. We are so oriented to mass-produced products these days that we seldom think of differences when it comes to animals. Drive past a pastures full of domesticated animals and what do you say? "Look at the cows...horses...goats...sheep. To us a cow is a cow, a sheep is a sheep...even a person is a person. But sheep are different from each other, just as people are different from each other; and the Good Shepherd recognizes those differences. In fact, it's by their differences that He knows them. If they were all alike, they would be indistinguishable. Many times, the problems in the Christian church come from us trying to be exactly like someone else, or from other people trying to make us be like them. Sheep are different. Jesus made them different and knows that they're different. So, be yourself first, for that's who Jesus saved; then strive to become all that Jesus wants you to be personally (that's why He saved you).

Sheep are also helpless. Jesus knows they're helpless, and that's why He's

become our Good Shepherd. Did you know that it's possible for a sheep to get stuck on its back like a turtle, unable to move, and in warm weather it can die in that position within a few hours? It's a "cast" sheep and must be rescued. Also, a sheep is indiscriminating in its choice of food: it will eat anything, even poisonous roots and weeds. A sheep is helpless in the face of predatory animals. It becomes so terrified that it often will simply stand there without uttering a bleat until it is attacked and killed? Do you see yourself in any of these characteristics? I do, I am even more grateful for my Good Shepherd.

Sheep are also wayward. They can have perfect pasture, all they need or ever can need; yet, if there's so much as a tiny opening in an otherwise secure fence, somehow the sheep will find the opening, wriggle through, and wander away to less ample grazing and into greater danger. I am like that, and so are you. "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it; Prone to leave the God I love..." as the old hymn says; and it's so true. All we like sheep have gone astray yet in Jesus we have a Shepherd who is constantly on the alert to keep us from wandering and to seek us out when we succeed (as we often do) in going astray.

Finally, sheep are useful. Each year, under proper management, it produces a valuable crop of wool. Thus, when we're told that Jesus knows his sheep, we know that He knows that of us too and that He desires to have us be useful both to Himself and to others. Of course, He doesn't need us. He who created the heavens and earth and all that's in them doesn't need sheep for what they can give Him. He certainly doesn't need our good works. He doesn't need us to convert people or even to sing His praises. He has angels to do all that. But the fact is: He's created us; He's called us into His flock; and He's given us work to do. So, what will we do? Will we be useful or useless? Will we be industrious or lazy? Focused or easily distracted? Our attitude should be, "Lord, what would you have me do?" To be willing is to express gratitude to the One who is indeed our Good Shepherd. ☺