

THE GOOD SHEPHERD**John 10:11-18****(Read John 10:11-18)**

INTRO: I've already pointed out the fact that sheep herding was prevalent in the Holy Land in biblical times and still is, for that matter. For the Psalmist to talk about the Lord being his Shepherd, and for Jesus to use the illustration we have here in John 10:1-18, which is the passage we've been studying these two weeks, was for them to be talking about something practically all listeners and readers would be able to imagine and understand.

I'm convinced that Jesus also used the illustration because sheep are just plain down DUMB! I may offend our sheep owners here at ABC by saying that, but even they, in their heart of hearts, know I'm right. Maybe I can soften the blow by assuring them that sheep aren't the dumbest animals, chickens are, and then sheep. Because of this deficiency in the area of intelligence, sheep need shepherds. They need guidance and protection and feeding and care, because domestic sheep would not do well left to their own devices. Here for this latest I AM statement as we continue our I AM STATEMENTS OF JESUS series, Jesus shows how he is THE GOOD SHEPHERD for helpless sheep-like humanity.

Here in these verses Jesus points out that hired hands will run when adversity hits – they will not stay around in the face of danger. The shepherd, the one who not only guards the door, but also IS the door to the fold or the sheep pen, will not abandon his flock. Even though there might be assistant shepherds out caring for the flock by night, they do not have the vested interest in the flock that THE shepherd does. He's bought and paid for this flock and he's going to care for it if his life depends on it. Which, in fact, it did. Let's look at it further. First, let's examine . . .

The GOOD Shepherd

- G. Campbell Morgan rightly points out that a direct and literal translation of v. 11 from the original language is "*I am the shepherd, the Good.*" There is a contrast as I already pointed out – there are shepherds and then there is the GOOD Shepherd. Going further with this, Lionel Whiston points out that the biblical definition of "good" is one who brings "blessing" and not "curses". This has been God's promise all along. In some of his final words to the people of Israel, Moses makes God's word clear, *See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.* Deuteronomy 30:15-20. The GOOD Shepherd brings blessing. Leaving the fold will bring destruction – not by the Shepherd, but by the danger that lurks there.
- Instead the GOOD Shepherd offers a personal relationship. The intimacy of the Father and the Son that we see in verse 17 can also be had with the Shepherd and the sheep. He knows his sheep and they know him. He cares for them so much that he would die for them. That's what makes him good – he dies for the sheep. You see . . .

Our life cost the Shepherd his life

- It's all through this passage. Jesus makes it perfectly clear that he literally lays down his life for the sheep on their behalf. In our passage from last week, we saw in verse 10 that Jesus came to bring abundant life. Look at it again, *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.* John 10:10. The Good Shepherd provides abundant life by laying down his own life. He lays down his life for them that they may possess life of their own – that we may have life and have it abundantly.
- It's costly caring, but it's what the Good Shepherd does. He gives his all for the safety of the flock. Not so the hired hand. Nope – when the wolf attacks, he's outta there! He's not taking the risk. He's got nothing

ventured so he saves his own skin. He's only in it for what he gets out of it so when going gets tough, he's gone. But the Good Shepherd stays, and even though it costs his life, his sheep have kept theirs. It's from darkness and death of the lone who would kill and destroy to the light and life of the one who guards the sheep pen, or using the older term, fold, let me say something of the beauty of . . .

Many Folds but one flock

- In verse 16 Jesus makes an interesting statement, *I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.* John 10:16. I've heard this be an explanation the possibility of life on other planets and that Jesus had to go to them too. That's REALLY far-fetched, and I'm pretty certain it holds not validity. Mostly because the implication of what Jesus is saying is clear, and the Pharisees didn't want to hear it. You see, the other sheep pen Jesus is referring to is the one that holds the Gentiles. The Jews liked to think, as God's Chosen People, they were his only people and therefore the only ones in God's fold. The truth was, as his Chosen People, they were where deliverance for all humanity would come from. In other words, they didn't have the market cornered – but they were the source of God's plan. Jesus came to save not just the Jews, but all people.
- This brings up a teachable moment – many folds but one flock points to the beauty and diversity of many churches and denominations. I often hear people pointing out how many different churches there are like this is a problem. They act as it it's a sign of weakness that there are Baptists and Brethren and Lutherans and Mennonites and Independent Churches and Methodist and Catholics and Churches of Christ and Assemblies of God and all kinds of other tribes of people who call Jesus Lord. They say this is a sure sign of the problem of Christianity – all our differences. And while all or most of our groups came about because of unresolved differences between human beings – the Church, which is the Fold, or Sheep Pen, still stands strong. Instead of the Church crashing and burning because of its many flocks I believe God has taken what began as differences and has made beauty in diversity. That's why we pray for the other Bible believing and Bible teaching churches in this town and throughout the world – because we are all in this together – we are many flocks in one fold. God brings beautiful things out of our human messes.
- Rant over. Once more thing as we finish this up. The Shepherd only lays down his life . . .

Because he chooses to

- F. B. Meyer says *“Men die because they can't help it. Christ was born that he might die, he died because he chose to”*. In other words he freely lay down his life. Jesus said *Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.* John 15:13. That's the kind of love that steps up and takes the sin of the world. It's the greatest love of all. And he chose to do it.
- And not only that the final verse of our text tells us that he has the authority to do it. Listen, *No one takes it (his life) 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. This command I received from my Father.* John 10:18. Jesus uses the power and authority he has personally received from God, the Father, to carry out God's saving will – to give up his life so we can have life – and not just life, but abundant life. You see, he wasn't a victim of the Jews or the Romans – he was carrying out a plan. And while it would appear that he was a victim of humanity's sin, and a case could be made for that, actually he is the VICTOR over humanity's sin and the death that comes from it. Death for him in exchange for life for us. His choice and our blessing.

Conclusion: So that's it. He's the great I AM and he is the Good Shepherd and we are the sheep of his pasture. We lack nothing, our souls are refreshed, we fear no evil, and goodness and love will follow us all the days of our eternal life. Amen.