

INTRODUCTION

We're in the tenth chapter of John where Jesus identifies himself as the Good Shepherd. Every time we travel to Israel we see flocks of sheep led by shepherds. Many Bible characters were shepherds. Abraham was a shepherd. Jacob worked for fourteen years as a shepherd for his father-in-law, Laban. Moses was a shepherd in Midian for forty years. And before David became King of Israel, he was a singing shepherd.

On many sheep ranches in the U.S. and Australia, large flocks of sheep are driven by trained sheep dogs. Years ago we met a shepherder in New Zealand who had named his two dogs Goodness and Mercy. He said, "Because they will follow me all the days of my life." The dogs would follow him, but the sheep had to be driven by the sheep dogs.

But in the Middle East, shepherds never drive the sheep, they always lead them.

The New Testament scholar, John Stott, used to tell the story about being in Israel on a tour bus going through the wilderness of Judea. The tour guide was on the microphone making the point that the shepherds in Israel never drive the sheep, they always lead them. Just as the guide was saying that, a tourist raised his hand and pointed out the window, and said, "What about that guy?"

Everyone looked and out to see a man with a stick driving a flock of sheep toward a corral. Not wanting to be called a liar, the guide had the bus driver stop. He got out and ran up the man with a stick and could be seen waving his arms and talking to him in Arabic. Then the guide ran back to the bus and got on board. He took the microphone and said, "I'm still right. That man isn't the shepherd, he says he's the butcher!"

I often tell that story when I'm training pastors around the world. I tell them that a pastor should love and lead the members of their congregation. But I've met some pastors who were more like butchers than shepherds.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who loves and leads us.

John 10:10-21. "A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance."

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. 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. The reason my Father loves me is

that I lay down my life—only to take it up 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. This command I received from my Father.”

The Jews who heard these words were again divided. Many of them said, “He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?”

But others said, “These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

In the Gospel of John, Jesus makes seven statements claiming to be God, the great “I am.” He said, “I am the bread from Heaven. I am the light of the world.” In the last message Jesus claimed, “I am the gate for the sheep.” He was saying He is the only door to Heaven. And in this passage, He said, “I am the Good Shepherd.” So what’s so good about the Good Shepherd? I’m so glad you asked. Let’s notice three good things about the Good Shepherd.

1. The Good Shepherd knows His sheep.

If you have a pet, you understand how a person and an animal can have a bonding experience. That was the relationship a good shepherd had with his sheep. Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.” (John 10:14) We read last week that the Good Shepherd would call all his sheep by their names. He knew them and they knew him.

I mentioned a butcher earlier. So, when you think about a shepherd, you’ve got to think more about wool than lamb chops. The Shepherd raised the sheep for their valuable wool, not for mutton.

We saw last week that the Good Shepherd called each of his sheep by name. A farmer who was a member of my church once told me that they had a family rule that they would never name an animal on the farm that they knew was going to end up on the dinner table.

We made that mistake when I was in high school. We didn’t live in a farm, but one summer my dad built a pen behind our house and he bought a couple of live turkeys. We were going to fatten them up and then have one for Thanksgiving and one for Christmas. But my sister named the turkeys. They were named Ike and Tina Turkey. We fed them, and got used to waking up each morning to the sound of gobbling. So as you can imagine, Ike and Tina never ended up on our menu.

Of course, Audis and Deborah Byrd don’t follow that rule. They named three of their steers on their ranch, Ribeye, T-Bone, and Roast! But the Good Shepherd doesn’t eat his sheep. He leads them to still waters and feeds them in green pastures.

The Shepherd knows the name of his sheep. The older I get, the more I’m learning I have to search my memory banks for names. I can remember pastoring my first church out of seminary. I literally knew the names of everyone who attended the church. I miss that. I really

wish I knew everyone's names. I don't. And often when I'm out in public someone will greet me because they know me. And I have to say, "Please tell me your name." I'm a little jealous because the Good Shepherd knows the names of everyone who is in His flock. He calls you by your name.

The most glorious fact in the universe is that there is a God and that this God wants to have a personal relationship with you. If I'd said it once, I've said it a thousand times. Eternal life is not living forever. Eternal life is KNOWING God. Do you know the Shepherd?

2. The Good Shepherd cares for His sheep.

In John 10 Jesus identifies three individuals who deal with the sheep. He mentioned the thief who sneaks in to rustle the sheep. He said the thief comes to kill, steal and destroy. The thief is a metaphor for Satan. But then he mentioned the hired hand. Jesus said, "The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep...he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep." (John 10:12-13) Jesus was talking about the Jewish religious leaders. They claimed to be shepherds, but they didn't really care for the sheep.

Ray Stedman grew up in Montana where there were large flocks of sheep. He points out that there was a huge difference between a hired sheep herder and a real shepherd. A hired sheep herder was the lowest worker on the social ladder. They were drifters who really didn't care for the sheep. If the sheep were attacked by a predator, the hired hand wouldn't defend the sheep, he would flee for his own safety.

That's how Jesus described the hired hand. He said the hired hand doesn't OWN the sheep, so he doesn't care for them. But by contrast, the Good Shepherd owns the sheep and He will lay down His life to protect them.

Phillip Keller who wrote the book, *A Shepherd Looks at the 23rd Psalm*, tells the true story of how a young Maasai Shepherd in Kenya was tending the flock of sheep that belonged to him and the other members of his village. One night a young lion attacked the flock. The young shepherd single-handedly attacked the lion with his spear and club. The lion was driven away, but the young shepherd was mauled and had to be driven over 30 miles to the nearest hospital. He almost died, but he survived. Keller says that reason he defended the sheep is because he and the villagers owned the sheep. As owner of the sheep he cared for the sheep enough to fight for their survival.

The Bible teaches we are owned by God. In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 the Bible says, "You are not your own. You were bought at a price." You may sometimes hear a person say, "It's my life, I can live it any way I please." For a Christian, we should say, "It's not my life. I belong to Jesus."

And because we belong to Jesus, He cares for us. The Bible says that God cares so much for you that every hair on your head is numbered. Jesus said our Heavenly Father is aware when the tiniest sparrow falls to the ground, and as the song says, "If His eye is on the sparrow, I know He watches me."

A friend in my former church was a sharp young businessman. We were about the same age, so we were friends and he was in a prayer group I met with every week. He really loved the Lord, but over time, he became more and more successful in his business. He was spending more and more time at work, and less time with His family and involved in church. Then I got word that he had suffered a heart attack. I haven't known many men in their thirties who had heart attacks. I remember visiting him in the hospital in Birmingham after he had coronary bypass surgery. He said, "Pastor, I never understood that verse until now." And I asked him, "What verse are you talking about?"

He said, "In the 23rd Psalm it says, 'he MAKES me to lie down in green pastures.' I've become so busy that I haven't been a good dad or a good churchman. But the Lord has put me on my back. He MADE me lie down to get my attention." I had never understood that verse like that, but God used that experience and that Psalm to get him to change his priorities. Jesus is a Shepherd who cares for you.

3. The Good Shepherd seeks His sheep.

There is a verse in this passage that has become the source of many different interpretations. Jesus mentions bringing other sheep into the sheep fold. Who are the other sheep He is talking about? He said, "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)

There are some people who believe that the "other sheep" are people living on different planets. They say that since earth is one small planet in a solar system that is part of a huge galaxy and that our galaxy, the Milky Way, is one galaxy of thousands of galaxies and there is a very high probability there are other planets in the universe where life exists and Jesus is talking about these aliens as his other sheep. That's one take on it.

And our Mormon friends really camp out on this verse. In the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith claimed that Jesus Christ appeared to Natives in North America after He was crucified and resurrected. He ordained Nephi and eleven other men to be apostles. These Nephites would be the first Mormons. So they teach that the "other sheep" Jesus was referring to were these native North Americans and all the Mormons.

But the truth about the other sheep is very obvious. Jesus wasn't talking about extra-terrestrials or Mormons. He was talking about us, the Gentiles. Jesus said He had come for the lost Sheep of Israel. He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him. Even though many of the Jews believed in Jesus, the nation of Israel rejected Jesus crucified Him. So Paul wrote that the mystery of God hidden from the ages was that God was going to save the Gentiles and make us part of His flock.

And Jesus predicted that one day there would be ONE flock and ONE shepherd. In Revelation 7 we see this fulfilled. The Bible predicts there will be a great multitude gathered in Heaven from every nation, every tribe, every people, every tongue. We will be gathered around the throne of God and will be praising God together.

The Christian faith started in Jerusalem with 120 people gathered in an upper room—all Jews. But today it has spread around the globe until there are over 2 billion people who profess that Jesus is Lord.

In Luke 15 Jesus taught us what God is like. He said that God is like a Shepherd who had a hundred sheep. Ninety-nine of them were safe in the sheepfold and one single lamb wandered away. Our God is the kind of God who left the ninety-nine and went to seek out the one lost lamb, and when He found it, He picked it up in His arms and carried it back into the fold. That one lost lamb was in Beijing, or in Moscow, or in Bagdad, or in Tehran.

According to an article by Jim Denison this month, the nation with the fastest growing Christian Church is the Republic of Iran. He made reference to a new documentary entitled *Sheep among the Wolves*, the underground church in Iran is spreading like wildfire. And the Christians in Iran aren't making converts, they are making disciples. Even the intelligence minister of Iran gave a speech recently about the troubling rise of Christians in Iran. 60% of these new disciple-makers are women.

I believe that when we get to Heaven we are going to be surprised with the diversity of people there. We think of America as being a Christian nation, but in Heaven we will make up on a tiny minority of people who have been redeemed through the ages. There will be one flock and one shepherd.

4. The Good Shepherd saves His sheep.

Jesus knows us, He cares for us, He seeks us, but most importantly, He is willing to die for us. Jesus repeats the statement, "The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the Sheep" five times in this passage.

He says, "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... 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." (John 10:11, 18)

Before he was a king, David was a shepherd who was willing to lay down his life for the sheep. When young David went to the front lines he saw that the Philistine giant, Goliath was taunting the Israelites. In 1 Samuel 17 David told King Saul, "When I was tending my father's sheep. A lion came and took a lamb from the flock. I went out and attacked the lion, and rescued it from its mouth. When he rose up against me, I grabbed him by the beard and struck him and killed him. I have killed both the lion and the bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them."

And that's exactly what little David did. As the singer Carmen communicated it in his rap song, "Little David must have just been in his teens; when he faced Goliath of the Philistines. He was armed with just his slingshot and some stones. Well Goliath was a giant and as strong as a tank; and when he looked at men their stomachs sank. And there stood little David all alone. But with faith in God he flung that stone; and much to their surprise, he nailed that monster with a

rock that nailed him between the eyes. Then he decapitated his fallen foe to make sure that he was dead; and showed everyone there he was someone who really knew how to get ahead."

Before David was a mighty warrior, he was shepherd boy who was willing to die for the sheep. He didn't have to die for his flock.

Jesus was called the Son of David and He did die to save His sheep. As we have been studying the Gospel According to John, there were several attempts by the Jewish leaders to arrest and kill Jesus. In the 8th chapter of John, they picked up stones to stone Him, but He walked through their midst. Later in this chapter, in verse 31 the Jews pick up stones to stone Him for claiming to be God, which was blasphemy. But the Bible says He eluded them.

Jesus knew He was going to die, but He also knew the time and the place He would die. He was in complete control. That's why He said He would lay down His life for the sheep. They couldn't kill Him until He was ready to lay down his life. He said, "No man takes my life from me. I lay it down willingly."

Jesus wasn't some martyr who was killed for a cause. He was the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world. He would go to the cross in full control of His destiny. He chose to die during Passover. He would become the Passover Lamb who shields us from the eternal punishment for our sins.

Jesus claimed He had authority to lay down His life. But He also had authority to pick it up again. He was speaking about His resurrection. There are situations where we might be able to lay down our lives for someone else. If my wife or children or grandchildren were threatened and I could lay down my life for them, I would do it. But I couldn't pick it back up again. A Secret Service agent is trained to take a bullet for the President. If called upon, an agent would lay down his life, but he wouldn't have the authority to pick it back up again. But Jesus did.

His voluntary death was followed by his victorious resurrection. His resurrection validated everything Jesus said and everything Jesus did. If there had been no resurrection, there would be no New Testament and no churches. And we would be the most hopeless of all people. But because He lives, we can face tomorrow. Because He lives all fear is gone. Because we know that life is worth the living, just because He lives.

CONCLUSION

Those of you who have studied the history of gospel music in America may recognize the name of Ira Sankey. He lived in the late 1800s and wrote the music for many of the hymns we grew up singing. He also was the music evangelist who worked with Dwight L. Moody. Ira Sankey was from the North and fought in the Union army during the Civil War as a young man. A few years after the end of the war, Ira Sankey was singing one of his favorite hymns at a rally. It was "Savior, like a Shepherd Lead us." He had a deep baritone voice that could carry a long distance since there were no amplification systems then. After the service, a man approached Sankey

and said, "I thought I recognized your voice. Were you by any chance a Union soldier at the Battle of Shiloh?" Sankey said, "Why, yes, I was."

The man said, "Do you know if you sang that song one night for the troops?"

Sankey said, "Yes, I often sang that song. Why do you ask?"

The man said, "You didn't see me, but I saw you. I was a Confederate sniper. And I was hidden in the shadows just outside your camp. I took aim at you as you stood around the campfire singing. I never missed my target, and I was about to pull the trigger when you started singing that song. I knew the words as you sang, 'Savior, like a shepherd lead us; Much we need thy tender care. In thy pleasant pastures feed us, for our use thy folds prepare. Blessed Jesus; Blessed Jesus; thou hast bought us; thine we are. Blessed Jesus; blessed Jesus thou hast bought us thine we are.'" I just couldn't pull the trigger when you were asking the Good Shepherd to protect you. You might say that song saved your life."

Ira Sankey hugged the man and said, "Sir, it wasn't the song that saved my life. It was the Shepherd who saved my life!"

Sheep need a shepherd. They are helpless and dumb animals. They wander off. They get sick. And we are like sheep—we need a Shepherd. Jesus wants to be your shepherd. Will you surrender to His ownership and His care for you? Will you commit yourself to follow Him and allow Him to feed you with His Word? When you do that you can say like the Psalmist, "the Lord is MY Shepherd. And that's all I need!"

OUTLINE

The Good Shepherd:

1. Knows His sheep.

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me." *John 10:14*

2. Cares for His sheep.

Jesus said, "The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep...he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep." *John 10:12-13*

3. Seeks His sheep.

Jesus said, "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*

4. Saves His sheep.

Jesus said, "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... 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." *John 10:11, 18*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
Green Acres Baptist Church
Tyler, Texas*
