

## “Jesus: The Good Shepherd”

John 10:11-18

*<sup>11</sup> I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. <sup>13</sup> He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. <sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. <sup>17</sup> For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” (ESV)*

We started looking at this portion of scripture from John chapter 10 last week. Jesus started this dialog with religious leaders who asked Him, “Are we blind? Do we not get it?” Then Jesus started a monologue. He started teaching by saying, “Truly, truly I say to you.” He said, “I am the door of the sheep.” In other words, in order for sheep to enter the flock of Jesus they have to come through Him.

Today we look at the next passage (which is maybe more familiar) where Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd.” In order to understand the fullness of this passage you have to understand something of the Old Testament. I’ve told you before, you can know Jesus if you don’t read the Old Testament. You can know Him, you just can’t know Him well. So what’s the Old Testament have to do with the passage that I just read to you about Jesus being the good shepherd? It has everything to do with the passage because if you look through the Old Testament, all the way to the very beginning of the Bible, all the major players were shepherds—all of them. They all pointed toward this good shepherd that we’re going to look at today.

If you go back to the beginning of the Bible you see the first shepherd, Abel. Abel was killed, of course, by his brother Cain because he offered up a better sacrifice (at least in Cain’s eyes). Then you move through the Book of Genesis and the next shepherd that you find is Abraham. Abraham is the one whom God called and said, “Through your seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed.” Abraham was a shepherd. As you continue on through, the next shepherd we come across is Jacob. Jacob was a deceitful, lying, conniving, scheming guy, and that should give you hope because God took the worst of all sinners and made him to be the founding member of the nation of Israel. Jacob was a shepherd. In fact Jacob’s shepherding skills were very famous if you remember. As you go through the Old Testament, the next shepherd you see is Joseph. Joseph’s brothers were jealous of him; they hated him. One day when he was out tending his flock his brothers came and sold him into slavery in Egypt. It was his being sold into slavery in Egypt and his suffering that ultimately ended up in the deliverance of Israel because Israel then went to Egypt and they were saved from famine. The next shepherd that you find was a second career – remember the person of Moses? Moses was born and his mother put him in a basket and he was basically raised as a prince, but in order to be the shepherd of God’s people, he had to go through a little bit of on-the-job-training, so God drove him from Egypt and Moses spent forty years in the desert doing what? Being a shepherd. Then the next big shepherd that you see in the Old Testament is sort of the penultimate shepherd. He’s the one around whom much of the Old Testament revolves. That shepherd, of course, is David.

David was called the shepherd of Israel. Probably the most famous scene from David’s life is when he confronts Goliath. He became a hero for that. The story played out with Goliath taunting Israel and Israel’s army. David came to the front line and said, “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine to be taunting our army?” His brothers said, “Hey, David, why don’t you go back to just taking care of those few sheep? We have business to take care of.” Then David tells about his experience as a shepherd. He says, “I know I can beat Goliath. Why? Because as a shepherd I defeated the lion and I defeated the bear.” Even as a shepherd of regular sheep, David risked his life for his sheep. Then, of

course, when he confronted Goliath, he risked his life on behalf of the sheep that he would eventually shepherd, and that was the whole nation of Israel. It was an amazing thing in the Ancient Near East for a shepherd to risk his life for his sheep. If you think about it, they're just sheep! Would it be a normal thing for a shepherd to risk his life for his sheep? It depends on the level of risk. On one hand they can always be replaced. On the other hand if the shepherd risks his life for his sheep and he somehow dies, then the sheep would be without a shepherd and it would be worse for them. They would be abandoned and left alone. But the fact that David would risk his life for his sheep makes him a hero.

Now, can you get any better than that: someone who cares about sheep enough to risk his life for them? The answer is yes. In the person of Jesus we see a shepherd who not only is going to risk His life for His sheep, but we see a shepherd Who loves His sheep so much He is actually willing to lay down His life for them. That's crazy talk in the Ancient Near East, but that's what we're going to look at this morning.

We're going to look at three things. We're going to look at the shepherd's love. We're going to look at the shepherd's flock, and we're going to look at the shepherd's confidence. Let's look at the shepherd's love first.

*<sup>11</sup> I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

There are a few things to notice here when you consider what Jesus has just said. The first is that there is a definite article there, not an indefinite article. If you haven't been to school for awhile, ask one of your kids. A definite article is when something starts with "the" and an indefinite is "a." Jesus doesn't open up and say, "I am a good shepherd. There are a lot of good shepherds out there, and I'm one of them. I'm a good shepherd." The first thing Jesus says is, "I am the good shepherd. There is only one person like Me. I am the good shepherd." It's a definite article. The other thing that interests us is the word "good." In the Greek language, it is the word "kalos." It could be translated about fifteen or twenty different ways. The word kalos in Greek could mean beautiful, it could mean noble, it could mean exquisite. The one that hit me as I was reading through my definitions was the word "genuine." It can mean good but it means more than good. It means noble or exquisite or genuine. So when Jesus is talking to the shepherds of Israel, the Pharisees who should have been shepherding the people, He says, "I am the genuine shepherd. I am the shepherd. I am the shepherd that all of the shepherds pointed to." If you've ever studied philosophy, remember Plato taught that basically everything around us are shadows. In other words this pulpit is just a form, it's a shadow of the reality somewhere else. So somewhere in the heavens there is a real pulpit that that one is simply trying to approach. Now, was Jesus being like Plato? No, but there is some truth to the fact that Jesus is saying, "I am the shepherd to which all the other shepherds were pointing." Or, "All of the other shepherds in the Old Testament that you saw over the course of your history were shadows compared to Me. I am the good shepherd."

What does the good shepherd do? The fair shepherd, the pretty good shepherd, will risk his life for his sheep. But the good shepherd, the genuine shepherd lays His life for his sheep. What does He mean there? Certainly He is alluding to the cross, but it's bigger than that. It's deeper than that. When Jesus says, "The good shepherd lays down His life for His sheep" besides it being crazy in their eyes, there are two things you need to think about. How much would you have to love your sheep in order to lay your life down for them? The other thing to keep in mind is when He says, "I lay My life down for my sheep," in Greek that's the word "huper," which means on behalf of. It's always used in reference to substitution. Jesus is saying, "I lay my life down on behalf of the sheep," or "as a substitution for the sheep." That's the key to the whole Gospel. The Gospel of Jesus is this: That you and I are aimless, wandering, petty, sinful sheep and Jesus comes and lays His life down as a substitute for the sheep. Theologians would call that doctrine "substitutionary atonement." In other words, you and I deserve punishment from God. You and I deserve the wrath of God. We deserve everything that we get. If anything good happens to you, you should be surprised. We deserve everything that is bad. Jesus comes and says, "I will lay my life down as a substitute for them." Jesus will die so that we can live. He is our substitute. Think how much you must love someone for that. The apostle Paul wrote in

Romans chapter 5 that it astounded him. He says, “Rarely will someone lay their lives down for a good man, yet Jesus, while we were still sinners, died for us.” When Jesus says, “I’m the genuine shepherd. I lay down My life for My sheep” what He is saying is, “I substitute Myself on their behalf. The sheep deserve wrath and punishment and I will die on their behalf.” He contrasts Himself with the hired man. Did you notice what he said in verse 12?

*<sup>12</sup> He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. <sup>13</sup> He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. (ESV)*

Notice that Jesus says, “I lay down My life for my sheep,” not for the goats. That’s true. That’s going to become important in a couple verses. Jesus says, “I lay down My life for My sheep” and implicit is “not the goats.” He says, “When trouble comes, the hired man flees. When the wolf comes, the hired man sees the wolf and flees.” Did you notice what the wolf doesn’t do here? The wolf only comes and disperses and scatters the sheep, but he doesn’t devour them because if you are a sheep of Jesus you cannot be devoured. Later on in this chapter Jesus says of His sheep that, “No one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.” Wolves might come, and troubles might come, and harm may come, and suffering may come, but at the end of the day if you’re one of Jesus’ sheep, nothing can snatch you out of his hand. He says, “On the other hand, the hired man, is being paid to do the job. He doesn’t love the sheep. Since he doesn’t love the sheep, when trouble comes he’s likely to flee.” Just as a side note, your pastors here and your elders, we’re hired men. What do I mean by that? I mean that at the end of the day, if you trust anyone else besides Jesus to take care of you and to love you and to fix you, you’re going to be sorely in trouble. If you trust your pastors and your elders and your leaders more than you trust Jesus, they’re going to fail you. I see some of you guys nodding your head. Some of you knew that already. The point is I love you, but I don’t love you like Jesus does. Your elders love you more than most churches I’ve been in, but they don’t love you like Jesus does. There’s only one person Who loves you so much He’s willing to bear the wrath of God on your behalf, and His name is Jesus. Everything else is like a hireling. It will flee. The question is, “Where is your trust?” That question is not just for you if you’re not a Christian. The question is if you are a Christian and you consider yourself to be one of Jesus’ sheep, but you are miserable all of the time because you’re constantly looking to the hireling to take care of you, when, in fact, the good shepherd is the only one who can help you. I know people are surprised. They come into my office and want help. They ask, “Can you fix me?” I very nicely say, “No, but I know Who can. Only Jesus can help you. Only Jesus can heal you. Only Jesus can take care of you the way you need to be taken care of.” The question is, “Who is in Jesus’ flock and who is not?” The shepherd’s love is such that He’s willing to lay down His life for His sheep, but who are His sheep? Jesus tells us next.

*<sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.*

Notice the fact that Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd.” He says that again. He says, “I know my own and they know me.” What does He mean by “know”? It depends on what your worldview is. If you’re from a Greek background, when the Greeks would say, “Do you know this or that?” or “Do you know your wife” you’d say, “Yeah, I’ve seen her.” The Greek concept of knowing something meant having seen it. On the other hand, the Hebrew concept of knowing something meant something much deeper, much more experiential, and much more intimate. You get the idea from the Book of Genesis after everything was created it said, “Adam knew his wife Eve and conceived Cain.” Do I need to elaborate on what that means more? When the Hebrews talk about knowing something it was a Biblical knowledge, it was a deep and intimate knowledge that no one else could have. Jesus said, “That’s how I know my sheep and that’s how they know Me.”

What’s interesting here is that Jesus knows His sheep before His sheep know they are His. How can Jesus know His sheep before they know they are His? The answer is because Jesus said, “I came to give My life for all whom the

Father has given Me.” He says that over and over again in the Book of John. If the Father hasn’t given someone to Jesus He is not laying His life down for them. He’s laying His life down for His sheep. He says, “My own know Me and I know them just as I know the Father and the Father knows Me.” How does the Father know Jesus? How does Jesus know the Father? Besides His complete and utter intimacy, they know each other before the foundation of the world. That’s how Jesus knows His sheep before the foundation of the world. Some of you are sitting out there going, “Man, is He talking about that election stuff?” The answer is, “Yes.” Before the foundation of the world this plan was laid out in place, that humanity would sin and Jesus would pull from all the mass of sinful humanity to be His very own possession. He would be the one who initiated it and He would be the one who did all the work, that he would be the one who opened their eyes. If it’s any other way, it is not grace.

If you’re a Christian and you think back on your own conversion, why is it you trusted Jesus? Is it because you were so smart? It was because you finally figured it out or because you were so good that you thought it was a good moral thing to do? I’m reading Charles Spurgeon’s autobiography again. He talks about his own conversion. He starts asking questions. “How was it that I came to faith?” He said, “Well, I believed.” He said, “Why did I believe?” He keeps working himself back to the very moment in time when he thinks, “The only way I could have believed, the only thing that would have changed my heart is if God had come and opened my eyes.” I say that every week in worship. “God always initiates with sinners, it’s not the other way around.” Jesus says, “I know my sheep, my sheep know Me.” Now, who are His sheep? Remember He’s talking to the Jewish leaders. Is it just sheep from among this Jewish flock? That’s what we talked about last week. Jesus said, “I’m coming to draw sheep out of this flock of Judaism.” But Jesus says here that it’s a lot bigger than Judaism. He says, “I have another flock that I must draw from as well.” Let me read that to you.

*<sup>16</sup> And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. (ESV)*

So when Jesus says, “I have other sheep that are not of this fold,” I assume He’s talking about Judaism. Did you notice the certainty of His language there? It’s easy to miss. He says, “I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice.” Did you notice what He didn’t say? He doesn’t say, “I have other sheep that are not of this flock, and I have to try to bring them in, and I hope they listen to My voice.” There’s no uncertainty here. Jesus didn’t say, “I’m going to try my best and I’m going to go to all the rest of the world, and then the rest of the world, if I can be persuasive enough, maybe they will listen to My voice.” Jesus doesn’t say that. Jesus says, “I have other sheep that are not of this flock and I must bring them in. I have to.” Jesus Himself doesn’t have a choice because He has covenanted with the Father to save all that God gave Him. Because God gave them to Him Jesus must bring them in. He said, “They will listen to My voice.” To what end? He says, “So that there will be one flock and one shepherd.” One flock and one shepherd. So, Jesus has said, “I’m drawing sheep from the Jewish world and I’m drawing sheep from the Gentile world.” The ultimate goal is that they would have one flock and one shepherd. It doesn’t matter where they came from. It doesn’t matter whether they’re black or white, or as with Jacob, if they’re striped or they have spots. What makes them one flock is that they have the same shepherd. Christians forget that too often. Do you see yourself as a Presbyterian or a Baptist, or do you see yourself as one of Jesus’ flock? Anyone else who is also one of Jesus’ sheep is part of that flock because they have the same shepherd. For no other reason. It’s not because they worship the same way or they act the same way. What binds us to each other and what binds us to everyone else who calls themselves a Christian, no matter what their race or nationality, is the fact that we all have the same shepherd. That shepherd is drawing sheep from all tongues, tribes, and nations. If you look at the book of Revelation, that’s the most glorious thing because it says, “The kings of the nation come into the city of God and they all bring their glory.” People from every tongue, tribe, and nation are singing the praises of Jesus – that Jesus has in fact determined to save people from every place and every situation.

Some of you are sitting there going, “I know. I guess we don’t have to tell people about Jesus then. Right? If Jesus is the one who knows His sheep, if Jesus is the one Who is going to pull His own sheep out, then why do we have to do anything?” The answer is just this: you and I are the means that God uses to draw Jesus’ sheep to Himself. We’re the ones that God uses. It’s our lives and it’s our preaching that God uses to draw His sheep unto Himself. That should give us great confidence, not put us off. What gave the apostle Paul confidence to plant churches all throughout the Ancient Near East? Was it the fact that he thought he was so persuasive? In Paul’s letters, Paul wasn’t persuasive. Was it because the apostle Paul was such a great preacher? In the Books of First and Second Corinthians, they’re criticizing him up and down regarding the fact that he’s not a good preacher. He’s not a persuasive preacher. Apparently he wasn’t very much to look at as well. So why would the apostle Paul have any confidence at all that when he went into cities that God would actually use him to draw people unto Himself? The answer is just this: God Himself does all the work. In Acts chapter 20, Paul is getting ready to go to Corinth and he’s afraid. From the context, he’s afraid of getting beat up again, or he’s afraid of getting stoned, and God comes to him in a dream and says, “Paul, do not be afraid to go into Corinth.” Why? “Because I have many people in this city.” Have you ever thought about that? Paul has not been there yet. The Gospel had not been preached in Corinth yet. But the way God encourages the apostle Paul to go plant the church is not because Paul is so wise or such a good preacher or such a good looking guy. The thing that motivates Paul is that God already has sheep in that city. God tells him, “Paul, I already have many people in this city. Your job is to go and tell them the good news of Jesus, and I will do all the rest of the work. You just leave it to me.” At the end of the apostle Paul’s life he’s sort of answering questions, “Paul, why would you suffer all these things?” In Second Timothy he said, “I willingly suffer all things for the elect.” The apostle Paul knew that God had sheep out there and his job was to seek them out. The question is, “Are you a seeker of sheep?” If it’s all God’s work you should never have to be afraid to tell anyone about Jesus. You shouldn’t be afraid whether they’re going to be offended or not, assuming you’re not just an offensive person. Generally speaking we should be able to talk about Jesus to anyone, and if they don’t respond, well God is the one who does the work. It’s His responsibility. He gladly takes it.

That leads us to the next point. You have the shepherd’s love. You have the shepherd’s sheep. You also have the shepherd’s confidence. Notice that Jesus is talking here to the religious leaders who will crucify Him. Listen to what he says,

*<sup>17</sup> For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” (ESV)*

What is Jesus saying here? On one hand the text seems a little tricky. He said, “For this reason my Father loves Me, because I lay down My life.” Is He saying there that the only reason God loves Him is because He lay down His life, that God was out there saying, “Jesus, if you do it, I will love you and if you don’t do it, I won’t love you”? It’s more complicated than that. Before the foundation of the world the Father knows the Son, the Son knows the Father. The Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father. They have what theologians call this “covenant of redemption.” That out of mutual love and respect the Father will choose sheep (people) unto Himself. The Son Himself will go and give His life as a ransom for those sheep. The Father loves the Son because the Son is completely and utterly obedient to His will. Jesus didn’t have a choice as to whether to die for us because before there was a choice laid out there He actually volunteered. Jesus volunteered for the job.

Book three of “Paradise Lost,” is my favorite passage in the whole book. Some of you are wondering, “Why’s he coming up with Paradise Lost?” I was comfortable enough with my masculinity in college to study Renaissance drama. In “Paradise Lost,” Adam and Eve have sinned in the garden, and God comes and calls this council of all the heavenly host, “all of the angels, everyone in heaven come before me.” He lays out the situation. “Man has sinned. Die he must. Justice must be served.” He says, “Which of you will stand in his stead?” The next line says, “and all the

heavenly host stood mute.” “Which one of you would give your life for all of humanity, heavenly host?” “All the heavenly host stood mute.” Man would be lost had not the Son of Man stepped forward and said, “Father, I will go.” “I for them, them for me. On me let thy justice wreak all its rage.” Jesus knew what He was getting into. Jesus didn’t come to lay His life down as an example. Jesus didn’t come to just give us a good thing to follow. Jesus came with the intention of laying His life down, and the crucifixion and the cross didn’t surprise Him because He knew it was coming. Not only did He know it was coming, He came in order to bear it. Do you know how much that would take? It’s hard to get some people to answer the phone. Yet, before all of eternity Jesus stands up and says, “On me let death wreak all its rage.” The reason He has confidence to say that is because He believes in the promise of His Father. He says, “I have the authority.” The other word you could use there is “power.” “I have the power to let you take it and I have the power for it to be raised up. This charge I receive from my Father.” It is God the Father Who is behind the whole thing. God the Father has sent His Son in order to die for our sins. When you finally start to get the idea that He volunteered for it, it changes everything.

Several years ago when I first became a pastor I got a phone call. I had been a pastor for about a month. A woman in our church called me and said, “Tommy, my father is dying in the hospital and you’re the only one he’ll meet with.” I said, “How can I be the only one he’ll meet with when he doesn’t even know me?” She said, “Well, he’s not a Christian. He is a pretty bitter person and he’s a retired Marine colonel. He wouldn’t talk to a pastor, and finally I was desperate and told him you used to be a Ranger. Would he meet with a Ranger?” He said, “I guess so, for five minutes.” So I went to meet with him and we hit it off and he eventually became a Christian. He was in the hospital for about three or four weeks. We used to always have debates. What would Jesus be? Would Jesus be a Marine or would Jesus be a Ranger? He would always say, “Well, He would have been a Marine because he could walk on water.” I’d say, “Well I think he’s a Ranger because you couldn’t kill him.” “You could try, but he would always come back.” As we continued to banter, we finally came to a synthesis that He would have been both. Why is that? He’d have been a Ranger because the motto of the Ranger Battalion is “Su Esponte.” It means, “you volunteered.” So whenever things would get hard and miserable and you’d think, “Man, this is the most miserable I’ve been in my life,” your buddy could look at you and say, “Su Esponte.” You volunteered. Jesus volunteered. On the other hand he might have been a Marine. Remember the Marine motto, “Sempre Fidelis” always faithful. When you look at Jesus, He volunteered, but He’s also always faithful. Now, I can’t leave it on a Marine note. He’d have been a Ranger. You know why? Because the third stanza of the Ranger creed says, “Never will I leave a fallen comrade to fall into the hands of the enemy.” Never. Leave no man behind. You see, Jesus has His sheep, He knows who they are and His promise and His guarantee is just this: that not one of them will be left behind. Not one. You know what, that’s the Ranger’s motto, but sometimes they just can’t do it. Sometimes it’s impossible. With Jesus, He has the power, and the authority, and the desire to do exactly that. Think about that.