

I am the Good Shepherd - John 10:11-18

Sheep are interesting creatures, not because they possess anything great, but for precisely for their lack of greatness. In the animal kingdom their intelligence is at the bottom of the charts. Sheep are known to wander aimlessly, to walk away from food rather than to it, to walk into danger, rather than from it, they walk into fires and off cliffs and into the desert. They are defenseless and helpless, timid, scared, anxious, and stubborn. If anything characterizes them, it's their absolute need for protection and provision.

Can anyone relate to sheep this morning? Not the sort of animal you aspire to be. You want to be a tiger, not a sheep. But the interestingly thing is in the Scriptures we are often compared to sheep. Like Isaiah 53, "We all like sheep have gone astray." Though you may not aspire to be a sheep this morning, can you relate to them? We are dumb, stubborn, weak, scared, anxious, helpless, defenseless, in desperate need for someone to care for us, protect us, and provide for us. Incapable of doing anything for ourselves. If we are honest, that's where we find ourselves this morning.

But the good news is that we are not sheep without a shepherd. In John 10:11, Jesus says, "I am the good the shepherd."

This morning we are going to look at this radical, self-disclosing statement that Jesus makes, and my hope is that we are drawn to deeper understanding of who Jesus is, what He's done for us, and be led to greater levels of trust, delight, and worship.

3 Characteristics of the Good shepherd. The good shepherd cares for His sheep, enters into a loving relationship with His sheep, and is on a global mission for His sheep.

Before we get going, I want to first draw your attention to the main thread that flows through this discussion of Jesus as the good shepherd. The word good here in the good shepherd is moral goodness, beautiful, and useful, but is more significant than that, its a word that more closely resembles authentic, true, genuine shepherd.

It's almost an elaboration of what has come before, that Jesus has come to give life and life abundant, but now the focus shifts towards the cost. It's a theme of sacrifice. 4 times in these 8 verses our Lord's sacrificial death is referenced. Verse 11, "The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." Verse 15, "I lay down my life for the sheep." Verse 17, "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life..." Verse 18, "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord."

My point is that a discussion on the good Shepherd and characteristics that we will look at this morning, all wrap themselves around, and and informed by the sacrificial death of Jesus. So that's the angle we are taking with each of these characteristics.

1. The Good Shepherd cares for the sheep

11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 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. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

We got to understand a little context here. Jesus is in battle with these Pharisees, the religious leaders of His day, as He continues to reveal who He is, He is at once also also rebuking who the Pharisees think they are. We've seen this with the other I am statements, we see it here. Jesus is contrasting Himself with them. We've also seen that these statements are loaded with OT allusion,

When Jesus says I am the good shepherd, he would be drawing to mind Ezekiel 34, listen first to this rebuke...

Ezekiel 34:1 The word of the Lord came to me: 2 “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? 3 You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. 4 The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. 5 So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. 6 My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.”

These shepherds, the Jewish authorities, can't do it. They have failed over and over again. They aren't taking care of God's people, they are hurting them. God gives them this serious rebuke, but then God gives the answer, He's going to take matters into His own hands...Listen to all these "wills" of God...

11 “For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. 12 As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. 13 And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. 14 I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. 15 I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. 16 I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

So when Jesus comes to them and says, I am the good shepherd, this is a serious statement, this is saying, I am God. I am the One yall have been waiting for.

Jesus then gives clarity to how he would shepherd his people, this is fascinating. He contrasts two types of shepherds in how they react in the same situation; which is, the sheep are in danger, there's a wolf coming. The hired folks see the wolf, and they run, and what happens to the sheep. They are eaten by the wolf and the rest of the flock scatters. Why do these shepherds run away, He tells us, because they don't care for the sheep. Jesus contrasts this with Himself, who, as the good shepherd, who owns the sheep, responds very differently in the face of a danger. The Shepherd sees the wolf coming and instead of fleeing, He steps in between the wolf and the sheep. But more than that, it says He lays down His life for the sheep, in other words, He's eaten by the wolf.

Wouldn't you think the good shepherd would be the one who kills the wolf. How's that caring for the sheep? I mean, once the shepherd is gone, the sheep are stranded and scattered, right?

This is why you don't press analogies too hard. The truth Jesus is actually relaying is that by His death He will destroy the enemy. And by His death He will save the sheep. The translation might be better rendered, instead of for the sheep, "on behalf of the sheep". He dies in the place of the sheep, His death that they may have life. And why does He do this? Because He cares for the sheep.

Isaiah 53. Our enemy is the Devil, our flesh, our danger is that we are sinners deserving of Judgement. Christ became the sacrifice for our sin, He is the lamb led to the slaughter and the sheep before its shearers was silent.

They are His own. He's tied to them. He will give His life for their protection and safety. Apart from grace, It doesn't make sense that a human shepherd would die for the sheep, and neither does it make sense that God would die for man. This is grace, God dying in the place of man.

This morning I want you to know that there is a divine shepherd, name Jesus, who cares for you, so much, that He would die for you. In His death He has secured for you protection from your greatest enemy and safety for all eternity. What is the enemy doing to you this morning? The good shepherd is here, you are protected.

The Second characteristic of the Good shepherd...

2. The Good Shepherd enters into a loving relationship with His sheep

14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

It would be incredible if all we got from the Shepherd was protection and safety, that would enough, but Jesus goes a step further, He gives us Himself in a loving relationship. That's what this word know means. It's multifaceted word that has the idea of affection and intimacy.

The grounds for this, the basis for it, He says, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. Unreal. There is unity, love, and the fullness of joy between the Father and the Son, and that's what Jesus says we are invited into and have if we are His sheep.

The good shepherd does not just take care of the sheep in a sort of cold, business-like, manner. That's what the pharisees were doing. They were in it for their own gain, not because they actually cared about the people, there was no relationship there.

It's like the distant dad that pays the bills and puts bread on the table, but the family hardly knows him. The kids grow up with their needs taken care of, but there's no relationship. Jesus isn't like that, He supplies the basic needs, but He gives what is ultimately most valuable, Himself in relationship. He says, I know my own, and my own know me.

"How great the love of God that we would be called children of God."

Then He says again, "and I lay down my life for the sheep." Drawing us once more to the sacrificial theme of the good shepherd.

God loves you so much that He dies for you, and in dying for you, He loves you. It's His death that is evidence of His love for us and the means by which we are brought into right relationship with God.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever should believe in Him, shall not die but have everlasting life."

Our enemy, is the devil, or... it's ourselves, it's our flesh, that has sinned against God. We've broken His commandments, in so doing, we have separated ourselves from God. We get the horrible picture of this when Adam and Eve sin and they are kicked out of the garden, out of the presence and relationship of God. But God still loves humanity and is determined to rescue them, the price, the death of His Son. It is through the shed blood of Jesus that forgiveness of sins is made, that reconciliation is made, that we might be brought back into right relationship with God.

What this also means is that God is not asking for you to just check off all the boxes and pass the multiple choice exam, He's wanting relationship with you. He doesn't want you to go through life not "feeling" Him. I got to be careful here, because feelings can get us into all kinds of trouble, we walk by faith, not by feeling. But God is meant to be felt. Joy is felt. It's a real relationship to be had. God knows us and we know God, that's got feeling and emotion and awareness all over it, it's pointing us toward the experiential side of christianity.

But you need to also know that God is interested in a vibrant relationship with you. He doesn't want auto-pilot, just going through the motions, He doesn't want cold indifference emotionally, He wants experiential

relationship. That's what walking with God is like. If all I ever did to my wife Ashley was "do stuff" but never "feel stuff", that is, there's no heart in what I'm doing. Here's some flowers, honey, I know this is what I was supposed to do for you... uh, that wouldn't work.

If you are a nonbeliever, this is what God is holding out to you, an eternal relationship with Himself. Christianity is not a bunch of rules, at its core is a loving relationship that you enter into. Trust in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for you. Don't get to the end of your days, appearing before the judgement seat of Christ and have Him say, "depart from me I never knew you." Believe in Him today, get to know God today.

The good shepherd cares for us, is in loving relationship with us, and third,

3. The Good Shepherd is on a global mission

16 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. 17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 18 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."

This might initially sound confusing of what Jesus is talking about. Sheep that are not of this fold? What's that talking about. Jesus is addressing the Jewish religious leaders, and the fold that he's talking about are the Jews, and the other sheep that are out there, they are the Gentiles.

His emphasis here is that He is a global shepherd on a global mission. God's purpose from the beginning was to redeem the whole earth, but by this time the Jewish leaders had perverted the plan of God and turned inward on themselves. Their disobedience had rendered them incapable of fulfilling God's plan that they would be the blessing to all nations.

Like we read earlier, God's solution is Himself.

God completely owns the mission at this point. And how He fulfills this mission is in the person of His Son, Jesus. Jesus is the True, Good Shepherd to come. Jesus is the answer. He is the one in whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed, Jew and Gentile. And once more, how does He do this... through the laying down of His life, as Ephesians 2 says that through His cross Jew and Gentile are reconciled together.

So the Good Shepherd is on a global mission to create one flock. What does that mean for us?

1. You aren't too far from God to be saved. Gentiles represent the worst of the worst sinners. Because God is a global God, there is no sin that can separate you from God that His grace can't cover.
2. We have to drop our pride and prejudices. We are in the flock because of grace, and, hear me, no other reason. There's nothing you can point to in yourself, no achievement, no ethnicity, no demographic, or status, that gets you anywhere with God. And if that doesn't get you anywhere with God, than it surely doesn't put you ahead or above anyone else. Our culture is ripe with all kinds of tensions right now. CNN posted a headline asking, How can America be healed? There's only one answer, it's Jesus.
3. We can joyfully and confidently live on mission. We need to feel the thrust in this text that God is creating this flock. It's not dependent on us, but He's chosen to involve us. How does God go get and call more sheep. He does it through the gospel message. He speaks AS we speak. As we go He is sending His church across the globe. "They will hear my voice"
 1. Our confidence is not in a dead Savior, but a risen Savior who is sovereign over all. It says He has authority to lay down His life, and in order that He may pick it back up again. Why did Jesus die? Ultimately, it's because He chose to die, He wasn't a martyr. He says He lays down His life willingly, in perfect freedom and obedience to the Father.

2. This shows Jesus' authority and sovereignty. We go forward on mission under His sovereign provision and power. We go forward on mission against a defeated foe. We go forward on mission to claim those that already, in God's sovereignty, belong to Him. Therefore, we go, and we go joyfully and confidently.
3. Are you going this morning? With joy, with confidence? Let's go, to your family, to your workplace, to the coffee shops, parks, restaurants and grocery stores.

Listen to how Jesus ties His mission to us... He says in

Matthew 9:36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Jesus is the good Shepherd. He is everything and more that we could ever want in a Shepherd. He provides our basic needs for protection and safety, and He gives us Himself in a loving relationship. In Shepherding us, however, those blessings don't terminate on us, but are aimed to pass through us into the lives of others. And He has accomplished all this through His sacrificial death. Trust Him, Delight in Him, Worship Him,

Rev. 7:9 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" 11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" 14 I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

15

**"Therefore they are before the throne of God,
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. 16
They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;
the sun shall not strike them,
nor any scorching heat. 17**

**For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."**

Let's pray.