

John 10:11-18 - What Makes Jesus Such a Good Shepherd?

Fourth Sun of Easter: Good Shepherd Sunday - 25 April 2021

TEXT

¹¹*"I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

¹²*The hired man, who is not a shepherd, does not own the sheep. He sees the wolf coming, leaves the sheep, and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them.*

¹³*Because he works for money, he does not care about the sheep.*

¹⁴*"I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me ¹⁵(just as the Father knows me and I know the Father).*

And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I also have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. Then there will be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it up again. This is the commission I received from my Father."

INTRODUCTION

Calling our Lord the Good Shepherd is used several times in Scriptures and a comforting theme for us Christians. It is traditional to focus on this theme during the Easter season since it is an aspect of the joy we have in celebrating his resurrection. We just heard the twenty-third Psalm, which has been comforting believers for centuries, even millennia. We have before us a Gospel reading that emphasizes some different aspects of this picture.

Of course in these pictures, we are the sheep. While that is quite idyllic, it also pictures us as quite vulnerable and not very smart. While sheep may be sweet bundles of wool, they also are quite vulnerable. They have no fangs or claws or any instinct to fight off predators. They can easily stray from the flock and end up in a situation where they can't free themselves. They follow one another, and when they come to know a shepherd, follow that person, wherever they might lead. Part of learning to follow Jesus involves recognizing that we are lost, helpless creatures; another part is learning to accept that Jesus is the Good Shepherd we need. We want to learn more about that today as we consider Jesus' words about himself as the Good Shepherd.

WHAT MAKES JESUS SUCH A GOOD SHEPHERD?

I. Jesus the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep

II. Jesus the Good Shepherd knows his sheep

I. JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP

A. Sheep need a shepherd to protect them from predators

There are many pictures in God's Word that give us comfort and hope. This is certainly one of them. One reason is because we do face a very powerful predator, the devil.

In this picture, there is one predator that particularly preys on sheep: the wolf. The wolf is a powerful predator and can take down an animal much larger than itself. Sheep are particularly easy prey for the wolf. Left unguarded

sheep will be attacked, killed and eaten by wolves that find them. It becomes one of the main jobs of a shepherd to protect the sheep from wolves. In explaining to Saul how he could take on Goliath, David related how he killed a bear at one time and a lion at another time to rescue the sheep from their clutches. He put himself between the predator and his sheep, risking his life to protect the sheep. These are scenes the people of Judea in Jesus' day would recognize.

B. Jesus lays down his life—and takes it up again for his sheep

Jesus says he is ready to lay down his life, and did lay down his life, for the sake of the sheep, to rescue them from the wolf. But the picture of the shepherd and sheep falls short of telling the whole story. An ordinary shepherd giving up his life for the sheep would do them no good. Jesus laying down his life was different—it ransomed people from sin, death, and the devil. He laid down his life as a ransom for all people. Now just as sheep are powerless to save themselves from a wolf by themselves, so are we, as sinful human beings powerless to save ourselves from the eternal punishment our sins have earned for us. We can say the devil is there, ready to take us into his clutches, ready to take us to hell for an eternity of suffering, just like he is facing. We can do nothing to stop him. But Jesus put himself between us and the devil, suffered the very pangs of hell on the cross when his father forsook him because he was carrying our sins, and gave himself over to death to finish the payment. Then he took up his life again, broke free of the clutches of the devil and death. This saves us the sheep, the sheep that follow him and believe in him. The devil cannot snatch you, death cannot hold you, the Good Shepherd has freed you and will raise you from the dead to eternal life.

C. There is no other Good Shepherd

Any spiritual leader who does not point to Jesus as the Good Shepherd is like the hired man in our text. This person will lead you astray, leave you to the devil. They are only interested in themselves. We need to learn to recognize those “hired men,” those false teachers and stay away from them.

What Now?

Jesus as the Good Shepherd is the only one who can save you from death, the only one who can rescue you from the devil's power, the only one who laid down his life to pay for your sins, and certainly the only one who can take up his life again and give you life again. Admit you are a sheep, powerless, sinful, vulnerable, in need of his saving. Trust only him in his word. Flee from anyone who would in any way turn you away from him, would turn you to your own efforts, would put conditions on being saved by Jesus, would try to teach you anything that conflicts with what he has revealed about himself in his word. You can trust him completely because

II. JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD KNOWS HIS SHEEP

A. Jesus knows his sheep in every way

We have seen how powerful Jesus is—he took up his life after laying it down in death. He goes on to show us another power he has, also for our benefit—he knows his sheep, he knows them all, every one of them, inside and out. A good shepherd will learn to know every one of their sheep, which ones are weak, which ones have a tendency to wander, which ones often get sick and need special attention. Not only is he being caring, it is a way of maximizing the profits of owning a flock of sheep, the kind of attention that only the owner of the flock will give to the flock. The hired man does not learn the flock that way, is only concerned with caring for the flock in a way that satisfies his employer so as to get paid.

Jesus knows every one of you in his flock, vastly many more sheep than an ordinary shepherd, knowing his flock as humans, who are more complex than sheep, knowing his flock deeply. He knows your faith, he knows your sins; he knows your strengths, he knows your weaknesses, he knows your thoughts, he knows what you are going to say before you say it. And that knowing goes on to caring, goes on to doing what is necessary to bless you and to keep you in the faith (he once again states that he lays down his life for the sheep). He knows when special blessings will help you in your life of service to him. He knows certain troubles and hardships may be needed to guide you, correct you, and call you to repentance. When blessings come your way remember to thank him and ask him to help you use them to his service and glory. When troubles come into your life accept them as working some good in your life and ask him to show you what he wants to teach you through them.

B. Jesus provides his sheep with what they need if they listen to him

Because not only does he know you, you know him. He says, “*I know my sheep and my sheep know me.*” We as Jesus’ sheep have come to know and trust him as our Savior, as our Good Shepherd, from the holy word our Lord has caused to be written about him. There is no other way to listen to Jesus. While the four gospels tell of the birth, life, work, death, and resurrection of Jesus, actually all of Scripture is about Jesus. We can learn to know Jesus in any part of Scripture. Jesus himself said, “*You search the Scriptures...They testify about me*” (Joh 5:39). While some connections are easier to see than others, there is blessing in seeking to see Jesus in all of Scripture. Knowing him better keeps us closer to him, gives us more reassurance of his good shepherding. The believer who knows Jesus less well has more fear and consternation as things come that aren’t comfortable and according to their plan; the believer with a stronger faith accepts these things with peace and tranquility. This is what Jesus can give us as we listen to his word.

C. Jesus wants other sheep in his fold

There are many who are not part of Jesus’ flock. He laid down his life for them also because he laid down his life for all people. They can benefit from

hearing Jesus' words and coming to believe in him. Jesus wants to gather them in. Many are most likely to respond to a friendly believer telling them about Jesus the Good Shepherd. That "friendly believer" could be you. Since we have come to know Jesus as our Good Shepherd and the blessings that knowing gives us, we will certainly want others to know him too.

CONCLUSION

Jesus is a shepherd like no other. He is in an absolute sense the Good Shepherd. He not only is ready to risk his life to stand between us and those who prey on us, including the devil, he did actually lay down his life to rescue us from the devil and sin. Then he took up his life again to break the reign of death over us. And now he knows us, our thoughts, our needs. He uses his power to give us what is good and necessary in our lives, even if it doesn't always feel good. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep and knows them and cares for them. For this we thank and praise him. Amen.