

PP I Am: The Good Shepherd

Text John 10:11-18

10/15-16/2016

PP George Adam Smith, OT scholar described Israel's shepherds as, *"sleepless, far-sighted, weather-beaten, armed, leaning on his staff and looking out over his scattered sheep, every one of them on his heart"*

Keep that image in your mind as we return again to **John 10**

If you are just joining us, we are in a series that is looking at 7 **'I am'** statements Jesus made in the gospel of John, each of which is followed by a metaphor

'I am the Bread of life'; 'I am the light of the world'; 'I am the door of the sheep' and now, in **John 10:11**, **'I am the good shepherd'**

PP Each time Jesus does this, He is revealing a facet of Who He is, His character, as well as a part of His work as the Redeemer and Savior

You may remember last week, there was a man born blind, healed by Jesus, and when he gave credit to Jesus the Pharisees expelled him from the synagogue, a big deal to a Jew

They believed this cut a person off from God and the blessings of Israel

Jesus heard about this (**9:35**), goes to find the man, and affirms to Him that God, Jesus Himself, certainly loves him, and that He will bring justice to the false leaders of Israel

To underscore this, Jesus preached a message on how He is the **'good shepherd'**

But, *What does that mean and how does it impact us today?*

PP 1-We have a good shepherd

"I am the good shepherd." **10:11**

How easily we flit over the word **'good'** when we read this, and I want us to pause for a moment

PP **'good'** means here, desirable and pleasing to God, which puts the description of the character of Jesus in a vertical light...Jesus pleased God

How often do we, when describing something as 'good', define that in a vertical direction?

With that little thought, now look at 'shepherd'

PP In Hebrew language, **'Shepherd'** was of course a word that meant to feed or lead to pasture and care for a flock

But the word was also used for *companion* or *friend* that you cherish and take pleasure in

PP ***"the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend."*** **Ex. 33:11**

Taken together, the 'good shepherd' was a desirable companion, whom God was pleased with
Looking at the life of a shepherd, it is easy to see why Jesus is this good shepherd to us

Nowhere in scripture is this made clearer than in **Psalm 23**

PP ***"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters."*** **Psalm 23:1-2**

Sheep are incredibly nervous animals, easily frightened, and in order for them to lie down, they must be free of all fear, and the mere presence of the shepherd has a calming affect

Sheep constantly struggle for dominance with each other, head butting and pushing each other

They will not lie down if there is any friction from any of the other sheep

They will not lie down if they are being tormented by flies or parasites, nor if they are hungry

We are similar, the sheep of God's pasture, unable to rest when we are at odds with each other
 How easily afraid we can become, how uneasy we are when our spiritual enemies torment us
 How anxious we are, grazing at the grass of this world which never seems to fill us up

PP Jesus promised His sheep, ***"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."*** **Matthew 5:6**

Jesus fills our souls with satisfaction, strengthens us to overcome our enemies, is constantly present with us to calm us in frightening times

Moving, deep water is a threat to sheep with their long hair so the shepherd will often dig and divert water into a shallow pool so the sheep can drink from ***'still water'***

Yet sheep can go months without water because they rise early to eat and the dew-drenched grass Listen to where the soul-satisfying dew comes from for the Christian

PP ***"May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, like gentle rain upon the tender grass, and like showers upon the herb."*** **Deuteronomy 32:2**

PP ***"He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake."*** **23:3**

A concern to shepherds are cast sheep, the name given as a heavy sheep lies down in a hollow in the ground, rolling on its side, shifting its center of gravity, making it unable to get up Gas can quickly build up, its circulation cut off, and if it is hot and sunny, it can die within hours When he finds a cast sheep, he must roll it over and lift the sheep onto its feet, holding it upright, rubbing the limbs to restore circulation, until it can walk again

Christian, when we fall down in sin, doubt or discouragement, Jesus comes to us in tender care to help us, revive us, being always aware when we are in trouble

PP ***"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."*** **Isaiah 41:10**

Sheep have a constant tendency to wander

PP ***"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."*** **Isaiah 53:6**

But they will also walk the same path into a rut, and will devour a field until it is desolate

The shepherd must lead them onto different paths, and into different fields

How similar for us as patterns of sin are so easily rutted, running after the things of this world

Our Good Shepherd leads us out of the ruts of our lives to paths of righteousness and green fields

PP ***"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me"*** **23:4a**

Israel's shepherds led their sheep to high meadows and fields in summer and back to the lowlands for the winter

The months of traveling to, and grazing in those high meadows were fraught with dangers, so the shepherd lived among the sheep in the country, in close, protective contact with them

We often talk of mountaintop experiences where we draw closer to God

But as in shepherding the way to the spiritual heights is through the valleys of trials

But our ***'Good Shepherd'*** never leaves us in the valley, He leads us as we ***'walk through'*** them

And while we journey through these difficult times, our ***'good shepherd'*** is right there with us

Even as we walk through the valley of death, on our way to the high meadow of eternal glory

PP ***"Your rod and your staff, they comfort me."*** **23:4b**

In biblical times, in the high country, shepherds carried both of these

PP (Rod pic) A shepherd's '**rod**' was a stick with a round knob on one end, carved from a root or tree joint

It was used to protect sheep, discipline them and count them as He brought them into the fold

The rod was used to part the sheep's oily fleece to check for wounds or infections

The rod powerfully symbolizes the Word of God that the Good Shepherd uses in our lives

PP (Staff pic) The long, hooked '**staff**' was used to lift newborn lambs and bring them to their mothers if separated, pulling timid sheep close for examination, or out of a crevice or stream

He would often lay the hook of the staff against the side of the sheep to guide them onto the right path or through a gate, sometimes leaving the staff against the sheep as they walked

The staff was a symbol of the Holy Spirit in the Good Shepherd's hand, guiding His people into fellowship, showing the way of life, rescuing us from difficulties we have fallen into

PP "***You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.***" 23:5a

As the snow melts, shepherds of Israel led their sheep to the high meadows, what we call the tablelands in our southwest, a flat high meadow of rich green grass

The shepherd walked the journey in Spring before leading His sheep there, looking for washouts, or predators, or anything that could harm flock

Once to the high meadows, he'd pour salt onto poisonous plants, look for poisonous snakes

Our '**good Shepherd**' has gone before us, overcoming the dangers to His people, taking care of the Serpent, defeating the predator of death...all to keep His flocks safe

PP "***You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.***" 23:5b

The summer heat brings with it nose flies, which can lay eggs in the damp noses of sheep

When they hatch in the sinuses of sheep, the sheep will beat their heads against trees and rocks, the irritation maddening and intense

When the flies come, the flock skittishly races back and forth to exhaustion, refusing to eat

The heat also increases the presence of '**scabs**', parasites that bring contagious diseases

Sheep are affectionate and often rub heads with each other and it spreads this disease

In biblical times, a sheep without blemish, mainly meant a sheep free of this scab disease

But the shepherd is prepared, taking out a flask of oil, spreading it on the head of each sheep to ward off the flies, and massaging it into the skin to bring eventual healing from scab

Oil in Scripture was a symbol of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus gives us this oil abundantly

The flies of fear, worry that rob our peace, rest, and contentment are dealt with

The worms of bitterness and unforgiveness spread from one gossiping, slandering Christian to another, and it can affect the health of an entire church

Our **Good Shepherd** knows this, giving us the oil of the Holy Spirit, building our unity, restoring to us the joy of our salvation, overflowing us with His blessings

PP "***Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life***" 23:6a

Shepherds sometimes had sheepdogs which ran behind and beside the flock as they traveled

Our **Good Shepherd** has 2, their names '**goodness and mercy**'

And thankfully they follow us all through our lives, there every single morning when we wake

PP The sheep didn't worry that they might not complete the journey to the high meadows and we can have that same confidence of David, *"I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever."* **23:6b**

Our good shepherd will not lose even one of His sheep, He will bring them to the high meadow Jesus Christ, *'the Good Shepherd'* loves and cares for each and every one of His sheep!

PP 2-We have a good shepherd Who has given His life for us

"The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." **10:11**

5 times in this passage Jesus repeats this point... *'the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep'*

He will personalize this in **verse 15**: *'I lay down My life for the sheep'*

PP This is the great mission of Jesus, *"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* **Mark 10:45**

Sheep were more than a commodity, they personally belonged to the shepherd, and he had a name for each, cared for each

Shepherds knew by the way a sheep walked if it was injured, by its behavior if it was anxious

But notice that Jesus said in verses 11, 15, 17, and most clearly 18, He voluntarily gave His life This isn't Someone whose life was taken against His will but gave it willingly to save His people

PP Christian, *"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends...I have called you friends"* **John 15:13, 15**

How different is the one hired to watch the sheep, who is not the owner, or the shepherd

"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. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep." **John 10:12-13**

He is indicting the Pharisees and false teachers of Israel referring to them as a *'hired hand'* who *'cares nothing for the sheep'*

They should have cared for God's sheep as David cared for his father Jesse's, even killing a bear and lion to get his sheep back, but they ruled over them rather than cared for them

But the good shepherd, Jesus, laid down His life for His people, so that they could live

PP 3-We have a good shepherd Who has given His life for us and gathers His flock

"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." **10:16**

Jesus began His ministry going to *"the lost sheep of the house of Israel."* **Matthew 10:6**

But in John He made clear that He had lost sheep in another fold, the Gentiles

Gentiles are non-Jewish people, and the racial divide between Jew and Gentile was massive

They despised each other, yet from each are people written into the Lamb's book of life before the world was even created

These sheep will hear the voice of Jesus calling them to salvation and they will come

And He will take those who believe from among both sheepfolds and bring them into one flock

The only hope our racially divided world has is Jesus Christ and the salvation He gives

And the church universal must reflect that glad, joyful diversity among the races of the world

As I close, let me draw some important conclusions for us

PP i. Have you responded in faith to the good shepherd's call and followed Him into salvation? Odds are that there are many listening to this message who have yet to do this

PP ii. Do you have the humility that must come when you see yourself as a sheep of the good shepherd?

Sheep are completely helpless without a shepherd, and the older you get in Christ, the more you should see the truth of that, and fall onto your knees in humility

PP iii. Is your life marked by one of increasing obedience as you follow the good shepherd?

PP iv. Is your love for your good shepherd increasing as you see Him more clearly in your life?

Amen?

Pray **Psalm 23**

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever." Psalm 23:1-6