

April 29, 2012  
Easter 4

*"Jesus Is Your Good Shepherd"*

### **JOHN 10:11-18**

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*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. <sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep 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> 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. <sup>17</sup> The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life —only to 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 authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.*

Of all the images the Bible gives us of Jesus, the most gentle and comforting is the image of the Good Shepherd taking care of his sheep. The words of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm are rich in comfort. "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want" are words that help us when death is staring us in the face. They are also words to comfort us when we face the rigors and challenges of life.

Even though we live in an agricultural community, we seldom see flocks of sheep. We may see cattle grazing a few blocks from our church, but we seldom see sheep. And if we see a flock of sheep, it is usually quite large and behind fenced fields.

At the time of Jesus sheep were everywhere, especially in the Judean hills surrounding Jerusalem. They were small flocks of sheep where the shepherd knew each one of the sheep almost the way you know your pet cat or dog. The sheep were able to survive and thrive because they were dependent on a shepherd who cared about them.

No one loves you more than Jesus. He is your good shepherd. He knows you better than you know yourself, and you are privileged to know him.

### **The shepherd knows you**

Jesus knows how much you need him. He says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Notice Jesus does not say, "I am a good shepherd." He says, "I am the good shepherd." The positioning of the words in the Greek language is very forceful. A very literal translation would read: "I am the shepherd, the good one." With these words Jesus is claiming for himself that he is the shepherd of Psalm 23 of whom we confess, "The Lord is my shepherd." With these words Jesus is claiming he is the shepherd of Jacob who said, "'The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life until this day.'" With these words Jesus is claiming he is the shepherd of Psalm 100 of whom it says, "we

are the sheep of his pasture and the people of his fold.” And how did the Jews respond to this claim of Jesus that he was the good shepherd of Psalm 23? They said he was demon possessed and they wanted to kill him.

1 Peter chapter five tells us that Jesus is our chief Shepherd “And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.” The Jesus who is the Good Shepherd is Jehovah God. He is the Great I am, the King of kings and Lord of lords. He knows you better than you can ever begin to know yourself. He knows how much you need him to give his life for you.

Your shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. No one is more loyal and more faithful to you than Jesus. The hired hand sees the wolf coming and he runs. He runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. Jesus sees the danger you are in. He sees the sin that will send you to an eternity in hell. He takes on our sin. He gives his life for us on a cross to take the punishment we deserve. Isaiah 53 tells us of our lost condition, “We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way: and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

David once risked his life to defend his sheep from a bear and a lion, but that is nothing compared to what Jesus did for you when he laid his life down for you. The dear heavenly Father asked his beloved Son to become our shepherd and lay down his life for us. Jesus describes this loyalty and love for us with these words, “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 the Father.” The Father loved Jesus his Son from all eternity, but he also loved his Son for his willingness to be a shepherd who lays down his life for sheep that love to wander. Jesus said, “I have authority to lay it down.” Our loving and loyal Shepherd willingly accepted the sin that was placed on him, and willingly was punished by his heavenly Father in our place. He used his power and authority to raise himself to life again as the supreme evidence he had done the job his Father asked him to do. Because of this amazing loyalty and love, we are told in 1 Peter 2, “For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

I am holding in my hand a needlepoint of the shepherd carrying the sheep on his shoulders and there is so much joy reflected on the face of the Shepherd. Jesus did not give his life for you reluctantly. He gave his life for you willingly and joyfully. He says, “I lay it down of my own accord.” The book of Hebrews says, “For the joy set before him he endured the cross and the shame.” In the parable of the lost sheep Jesus says, the shepherd goes after the lost sheep and when he finds it he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. If you could look behind the needlepoint of this picture that reads, “The Lord is my shepherd,” you would see a tangle of knots. There are days when life is a tangle of knots and so confusing. But in the worst of days, the love and loyalty of your shepherd is still the same. Goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our lives.

Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep.” It is extremely unflattering for us to be called sheep. We are not talking about the wild sheep that live in the Rocky Mountains that have the ability to climb the heights and escape the grizzly bears and mountain lions and wolves. We are talking about the domestic sheep that love to wander off. They wander off into dangerous places where they cannot get back to safety on their

own. They drink putrid, polluted puddles of water. They nibble on nasty, noxious weeds that can kill them. They waddle more than run. A pregnant mother sheep can be rolled over and not be able to get up again. The words of Ezekiel describe how lost we are without a shepherd to rescue us, "My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them."

What does the sheep do when it is in trouble? It bleats and bleats and bleats. Bah. Bah. Bah. That bleating sound echoes through the valleys and bounces off the cliffs. It is a dinner call for the wolves and the coyotes and the mountain lions. Satan the hellish wolf sees you wandering off away from the Lord doing your own thing as our first parents did when they ate the forbidden fruit. The wolf enjoys killing the sheep, not just one but as many as it can. Jesus said Satan is a murderer from the beginning. He is the hellish wolf who accuses us before God's throne day and night.

Why do sheep survive throughout the world, not be the thousands, but the millions, maybe even billions? The sheep are taught by the shepherd to become dependent on the shepherd for food and water and protection. Jesus is your Good Shepherd. He knows you. He knows me. He came to you and taught you to depend on him to free you from the sin that condemns you. He calls to us and says, "Give up thinking you can make it on your own. Realize how lost you are. Look at me. Believe in me. I have given my life for you." He pursues over the hills and down into the valleys. He climbs down the cliff. He creates in us a total dependence on his death and his resurrection to rescue us. He picks us up in his loving arms with the nail prints still in the hands. He knows exactly what to do to save you. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast." We boast not in ourselves but in the shepherd who gave his life for us.

### **You know the Shepherd**

The shepherd knows you and you also know the shepherd. As Jesus says, "I know my sheep and my sheep know me." You know Jesus. You know how committed and loyal and faithful he is to you. The one who gave his life for you also keeps you close to him. Later in this chapter he says, "My sheep listen to my voice and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them from my hand." The sheep learn to recognize and love the voice of the shepherd. He speaks his word to us and draws us closer and closer to him. That is what Jesus was doing in this tenth chapter of John. He was speaking these words to the Jewish people who did not believe in them. He was calling out to them to come and believe that he was their Shepherd who wanted them to come into his kingdom of love.

Jesus spoke about other sheep believing in him. "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." In these last days in which we live people all over the world are reading the Bible and being led by the Shepherd to become dependent on him for their forgiveness and peace with God, not on themselves.

Oh, my dear Christians. We were once sheep that have gone astray, but now we have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. You know the Shepherd. You know

his love and loyalty to you. You know that as your Shepherd he has already prepared places for you where he will lead you to see how much he loves you and cares for you. You know he is planning to take you to the high mountain valleys where there are pastures lush and green. You he will lead you to mountain springs to refresh you with the best tasting water in the world. You know he has shaded places where you can rest and grow even more in his love for you. You know his rod and staff will protect you when you go through the dangerous places or when you hear the hellish wolf howling. You know he will be there for you when you walk through the valley of death. You know he will spread a table out for you in the presence of your enemies so you can feast with him and laugh with him in the middle of the worst problems in life that you ever faced. You know He will pour oil on your head to let you know how special you are to him. You know the Jesus who gave his life for you will never change his goodness and mercy for you. You know that the best is yet to come when you will live in the house of the Lord forever. Jesus is and always will be your good Shepherd. That will never change. Amen.