

On my desk sits an olive wood statue that I purchased from a shopkeeper in Israel. It's a shepherd standing with a sheep held on his shoulders. It's a constant reminder to me of two things. First, God has called me to be a shepherd, one who cares for His sheep. Secondly, and most importantly, it reminds me of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. In a dog-eat-dog world, it's great to know we have a Shepherd!

Twice in John 10, Jesus said (11, 14), "I am the Good Shepherd." There's a special relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. What kind of shepherd is Jesus? I am grateful for the opportunity to seek to answer that question, for there is no shepherd like Jesus! We'll find the answer in the green pastures of John 10.

Proposition: If we are to appreciate what it means for Jesus to be our Shepherd, we must see two matters in John 10:11-18.

- I. We must see the Contrast (11-13).
 - A. A shepherd thinks of his sheep (11).
 - 1. He's good.
 - 2. He gives His life.
 - B. A hired hand thinks of himself (12-13).
 - 1. He does what's natural (12).
 - 2. He does what's necessary to get by (13).
- II. We must see His Credentials (14-18).
 - A. He has a special relationship with His sheep (14-16).
 - 1. He knows us (14).
 - 2. He lay down His life for us (15).
 - 3. He makes us part of His flock (16).
 - B. He has a special relationship with His Father (17-18).
 - 1. He is loved by the Father (17).
 - 2. He is obedient to the Father (18).

Implications: What must we do?

- 1. Accept the Good Shepherd.
- 2. Appreciate the Good Shepherd.

I. We must see the Contrast (11-13).

This is our third week in John 10, and though we've sketched the setting already, I need to reiterate the context. Jesus spoke this shepherd illustration in a context of controversy. In John 9, He healed a blind beggar on the sabbath--a miracle which infuriated Israel's religious leaders. So much so that they excommunicated the healed man from membership in the synagogue, and turned their guns on Jesus.

The irony of it all was that these men were supposed to be the shepherds of God's people! They were the professed spiritual leaders. In that context, Jesus told a story about a shepherd, a thief, and some sheep (1-5). The leaders didn't get the point (6), so

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Jesus applied the story. He told them (7), "I am the door (the door was the way sheep could enter the safety of the fold)." He continued (8), "All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers (He had in mind the Jewish leaders sitting in front of Him).

In vv 7-10, Jesus contrasted Himself with the so-called shepherds of His day, and likened them to thieves. In our text today, beginning in v 11, the contrast takes a different twist--he compares the religious leaders to a hireling. It was a vivid contrast, one Jesus' listeners could not miss. There is a world of difference between a shepherd and a hired hand. Don't miss the contrast.

A. A shepherd thinks of his sheep (11).

Jesus speaks in v 11, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep." Shepherds were quite popular in Jesus' day. The shepherd's life was a hard life. When with the sheep, shepherds generally lived in tents made of water-repellent cloth woven from black goats' hair. Because of sparse rainfall, they had to move around in the summer months, often being away from home for days and weeks at a time.

A shepherd carried his own food, as well as a rod or staff. Some shepherds, like David, were skillful with slingshots. His was a lonely life, always on the move. He entertained himself by talking to his sheep, or by making music on a reed pipe.

Jesus uses this metaphor to teach us about Himself. Notice two characteristics.

1. He's good.

Someone has said, "It's possible to be morally upright repulsively." You've met people like that--people that have a "holier-than-thou" attitude. Not so with the Good Shepherd.

Jesus is not just a shepherd, but a GOOD shepherd. Yes, He is perfect and holy. But His perfection is attractive. The Greek language has two words for "good." The one Jesus uses here means "intrinsically good, beautiful, fair" (Wiersbe, 330). We refer to the "good doctor" in the same way. Jesus is not only "good" at what He does, but also kind and sympathetic. He's the ideal, the model, the standard. A second characteristic...

2. He gives His life.

Now we come to a key word in this section, a word Jesus repeats four times. "The good shepherd GIVES his life for the sheep." Don't ever think that Jesus' death was an accident. It wasn't. He came to earth to give His life, to die. In the Old Testament, the sheep died for the shepherd. In the New Testament, the Good Shepherd died for His sheep (Wiersbe, 330)!

Think about the differences between an eastern shepherd and the Good Shepherd. Typically, an eastern shepherd did not die for his sheep--death was rare. But the Good Shepherd came to die. An eastern shepherd planned to live for his sheep, but the Good Shepherd planned to die. If an eastern shepherd was killed by an enemy, his death meant disaster for his sheep. Yet because the Good Shepherd died, we can enjoy abundant and eternal life (Morris, 510)! We have a Shepherd who thinks of His sheep!

I read the following story of an event that occurred in the Civil War era (Treasury of Quotations, 401-2). A man was seen planting a flower on a grave at a soldier's cemetery in Nashville. When asked why, he answered, "I was poor, and had a large family of children depending on me for their daily bread, but as the war continued I was drafted; I was unable to find a substitute and made up my mind to go. After I had got everything in readiness, and was just leaving to report for duty at the conscript camp, a

young man whom I had known came to me and said: 'You have a big family, and your wife cannot support them while you are gone; I will go for you.' In the battle of Chickamauga the poor fellow was dangerously wounded, and was taken back to hospital at Nashville. After a lingering illness he died, and was buried there. Ever since hearing of his death, I have wanted to come to Nashville and see that his remains were properly interred. Having saved enough money, I came on yesterday, and have today found the poor fellow's grave." As the man ended his story, he took a small board and placed it on the grave. It bore only these words: "He died for me."

My friend, the Good Shepherd gave His life for us. Do you know why? Because a shepherd thinks of his sheep. What about a hired hand?

B. A hired hand thinks of himself (12-13).

Notice the strong contrast in v 12, "BUT he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd." Who is a hireling? He's the person who works with the sheep, but they don't belong to him. He works with the sheep for one reason--money.

Don't miss this. In v 8, Jesus warned us of "thieves"--sheep rustlers are dangerous for sheep. Now, in v 12, He warns us of the "hireling"--he's not an outright enemy, but just as dangerous. Which points out that the Church faces a double danger: Thieves can attack from the outside, and hirelings can cause trouble on the inside--both are self-seeking, and both are hazardous to the sheep.

What does a hired hand do? He has two instincts.

1. He does what's natural (12).

Watch the activity of a hired hand in v 12, "Whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees; and the wolf catches them and scatters the sheep." To the hireling, shepherding is merely a job. What matters to the hired hand is not sheep, but wages. So when the wolf comes, what does he do? He does what's natural--he flees and protects his own hide!

2. He does what's necessary to get by (13).

V 13 "The hireling flees because he is an hireling, and cares not for the sheep." I find the literal Greek translation of the final phrase intriguing. Speaking of the hireling, Jesus says, "It does not matter to him concerning the sheep." That's just the opposite of the literal rendering of 1 Peter 5:7, "Cast all your care upon Him, for it matters to Him concerning you." A hired hand does what's natural and necessary to get by.

There's a world of difference between Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and a hireling.

Religious hirelings have been around for a long time. In the Old Testament, God chastised Israel's leaders for failing to shepherd His people. For instance, listen to Isaiah 56:11, where God condemned Israel's leaders with these words, "Yea, they are greedy dogs that never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand; they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter." What was true of the shepherds in Isaiah's day? They lacked understanding. They used the ministry for what they could get out of it. They lived for pleasure, wine, and strong drink (12).

We find a similar assessment in Ezekiel 34. God said to Ezekiel in v 2, "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel...Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds: Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?" What were the shepherds doing? They took care only of

themselves (2). They failed to help the broken, weak, and injured (4). They let the sheep wander and didn't search for the lost (6).

The penalty for sheep-abuse was severe. God said, "I am against the shepherds, and I will require my flock at their hand (10)." Don't miss the prophecy in v 11--God said He Himself would be what Israel's leaders failed to be--a Shepherd: "For thus saith the LORD God: Behold I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out (11)." And in v 12, "As a shepherd...I will seek out my sheep." This was obviously fulfilled by Jesus.

In Jeremiah 23, God pronounced "woe" on Israel's shepherds who were guilty of destroying and scattering God's sheep. He predicted that one day, He would set up true shepherds that would feed His own (4).

Note: The word "pastor" comes from the Greek word "shepherd." In Acts 20:28, Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders, "Take heed to yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to feed the church of God." Peter exhorted the elders in 1 Peter 5:2-3, "Feed the flock of God which is among you...neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock."

May I speak candidly? God doesn't call Pastors to be CEO's of churches. And God expects a pastor to be more than a "preacher" who talks on Sunday. God sums up the job description with one word--a pastor is a shepherd. His task is to feed, lead, protect, and sacrifice for the sheep, just like the Good Shepherd did.

Listen, if you are thinking about pastoral ministry, don't miss this. Being a pastor is not a job. It's a calling. There are too many pastors on the payrolls of churches who don't have a shepherd's heart. Oh, some of them can speak eloquently, and sing marvelously, and administrate efficiently, but the sheep aren't on their hearts. Why is it that the average senior pastor stays in a church for only four years? He hardly knows his sheep in four years. A hired hand thinks of himself. A shepherd thinks of his sheep.

Well-known author and former shepherd, Phillip Keller, wrote this about a hired hand he knew (28-9), "The tenant sheepman on the farm next to my first ranch was the most indifferent manager I had ever met. He was not concerned about the condition of his sheep. His land was neglected. He gave little or no time to his flock, letting them pretty well forage for themselves as best they could, both summer and winter. They fell prey to dogs, cougars, and rustlers.

"Every year these poor creatures were forced to gnaw away at bare brown fields and impoverished pastures. Every winter there was a shortage of nourishing hay and wholesome grain to feed the hungry ewes. Shelter to safeguard and protect the suffering sheep from storms and blizzards was scanty and inadequate...

"In my mind's eye I can still see them standing at the fence, huddled sadly in little knots, staring wistfully through the wires at the rich pastures on the other side.

"To all their distress, the heartless, selfish owner seemed utterly callous and indifferent. He simply did not care. What if his sheep did WANT green grass; fresh water; shade; safety or shelter from the storms? What if they did WANT relief from wounds, bruises, disease, and parasites?

"He ignored their needs--he couldn't care less. Why should he--they were just sheep--fit only for the slaughterhouse."

The world is full of people who think only of themselves. But there's good news! There is a Good Shepherd who gives His life for us! Don't miss the contrast!

II. We must see His Credentials (14-18).

What is true of the Good Shepherd? In v 14, Jesus repeats His claim, "I am the Good Shepherd," and moves from contrast to credentials. Two credentials stand out about the Good Shepherd in vv 14-18.

A. He has a special relationship with His sheep (14-16).

Throughout the Bible, God uses "sheep" as a term to refer to His people. Take Hebrews 13:20, for example, "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep." Jesus is our Shepherd. We are sheep.

As sheep we enjoy three privileges in our relationship with the Shepherd.

1. He knows us (14).

Jesus said, "I know my sheep." The word "know" means much more than intellectual knowledge. It speaks of intimacy.

And don't miss the fact that the knowledge goes both ways. Jesus knows His sheep, and true sheep know Jesus. True sheep are on familiar terms with the Shepherd. Saint Augustine summed it up well centuries ago when he wrote (in Keller, 51), "O God! Thou hast made us for Thyself and our souls are restless, searching, 'til they find their rest in Thee."

Ponder this truth. If you belong to Jesus, He knows you intimately. He knows you, not just about you, but the real you. He knows your dreams, your fears, your past, your shortcomings, even your heartaches. By the way, the verb "know" is present tense in v 14. 2000 years ago, Jesus said He knew us! A second privilege...

2. He lay down His life for us (15).

Jesus unveils an amazing truth in v 15. He says our relationship with Him is similar to His relationship with His Father. He uses the same word "know"--"As the Father knows me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep (15)."

This is sacred. Jesus died that we might live! Jesus had His sheep in mind when He died--and don't miss this--He had ALL His sheep in mind when He gave His life.

V 16 is critical, "And other sheep I have that are not of this fold; them also I must bring...and there shall be one fold and one shepherd. Who did Jesus mean by "other sheep"? Those outside of Judaism, namely the Gentiles. That includes us.

3. He makes us part of His flock (16).

The word "fold" in the KJV is actually a poor translation based on the Latin Vulgate. The accurate term is "flock." There is only one Shepherd, and one flock. All who know and follow Jesus are sheep, and as sheep belong to the flock.

What's the point? V 16 is a great missionary text. Here is our motivation for foreign missions. We talk about the American church, and the Russian church, and the Korean church, but really, there is ONE church, one flock. Jesus Christ gave His life for His sheep 2000 years ago. He has given us the task of going out and bringing them in!

And in they will come. There is a note of certainty in Jesus' voice in v 16, "And other sheep I have...them also I MUST bring." The Shepherd will not lose one sheep for whom He died. Do you see that? Those for whom He died, He will bring into the flock.

Do you know why we must be a missionary-minded church? Because we have a missionary-minded Shepherd! World-wide evangelism is on His heart. Is it on yours? Do you give to missions? Do you pray for missionaries? Are you willing to go?

Next, Jesus highlights His second credential as the Good Shepherd.

B. He has a special relationship with His Father (17-18).

A relationship characterized by two marks...

1. He is loved by the Father (17).

V 17 "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again." Jesus loves His Father. And Jesus is loved by the Father. True love is linked to obedience.

2. He is obedient to the Father (18).

V 18 "No man takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." What commandment? Notice something. In this section alone, Jesus predicted His death four times, and His resurrection two times. Why did Jesus die and rise again? It was no accident. It was His Father's commandment, His plan for our redemption. Jesus obeyed His Father's plan to prove His love for His Father.

Jesus has the right credentials to be a Good Shepherd. He has a special relationship with His sheep--He is no self-seeking hireling--He loves His sheep, and gives His life for them. He also has a special relationship with His Father, a relationship marked by perfect love and obedience.

There is no Shepherd like Jesus.

Implications: What must we do with the Good Shepherd?

There are two simple, logical decisions we need to make.

1. Accept the Good Shepherd.

The Bible says we are all born into this world as sheep that have gone astray (Isa 53:6). We need the Good Shepherd. Have you ever accepted the Good Shepherd as YOUR Shepherd?

2. Appreciate the Good Shepherd.

It's a privilege to have a Shepherd like Jesus. It's a privilege to be a part of His flock, too. Christianity is not just a "me and God" thing--it's "us and God." That's why church membership is important. Lone, unattached sheep are in danger. They need to join the flock, and follow the Shepherd along with the other sheep. You may be a sheep that needs to think today about being baptized and joining this local assembly of sheep.

Unity isn't the result of putting sheep inside the same four walls. Unity comes from being close to the Shepherd. If we are to be a strong church, we each need to make a decision today--to be close to our Shepherd. Perhaps you've strayed. Come back. Appreciate the Shepherd.

If we appreciate our Shepherd, there's something else we must do. We need to get rid of the blinders. We are not the only sheep on the Good Shepherd's heart. He has "other sheep" too. I'm talking about the lost. There are sheep for whom Christ died that have yet to hear the Good News about the Shepherd. They're here in Wheelersburg and Portsmouth. They're in Eastern Europe and China and Central Africa, too. May the Shepherd give us His heart for the lost. Some of us are so wrapped up in our own lives, we hardly ever think about the lost. And that breaks the Good Shepherd's heart.

Some here need to accept the Shepherd. All of us need to appreciate Him more.