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"I Am the Good Shepherd"

(John 10:11-18)

There is a lot of talk about leadership in the capitol. We often comment on whether a legislator, elected official, division head, or supervisor is a "good leader". There is a great contrast between leadership in the capitol and the leadership of Christ and His followers. Earthly rulers "lord it over them" and "exercise authority over them". Jesus said we become great by becoming servants. He did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life for us. We go to Christ Himself to find the best description and expression of true leadership. Christ's leadership is vividly described when He says, "I am the Good Shepherd".

In our previous study we saw that Jesus used an extended illustration of sheep, sheepfolds, and shepherds to describe His relationship with His people. He speaks of how He leads, guides and cares for His people the way a good shepherd would care for His flock. In these words, we find a wondrous description of how Christ cares for us:

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. (10:11)

The Significance of the Good Shepherd

We should keep in mind the purpose of John's gospel is to prove that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. In order to do so, John records several of Jesus' miracles and His messages in which He claims to be the Son of God and the Savior of the world. The real significance of Jesus' statement "I am the Good Shepherd" is that He is claiming to be God. When His listeners heard this, they almost certainly would have recalled Old Testament passages that portrayed God as the shepherd of Israel. Psalm 23 is the best known of these. In Psalm 80:1 God is identified as **"the Shepherd of Israel"**. Isaiah 40:11 reveals that God **"...Will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom, And gently lead those who are with young."** Micah 5:4 says that **"God shall stand and feed His flock"**. Ezekiel 34 provides the clearest statement that God is the true shepherd as it contrasts the neglect and abuse of the false shepherds with the loving care of God, the real shepherd. (Read particularly verses 11-16.) It is these and other passages that surely would have immediately come to mind when Jesus' audience heard Him proclaim, "I am the Good Shepherd". That they recognized Jesus was

indeed claiming to be this same God was clear by their reaction. They once again sought to kill Jesus since they rejected His claim to be God. (10:31, 39)

The Description of the Good Shepherd

In this discourse, Christ gives us a wonderful description of how He serves as our Good Shepherd.

A. The Good Shepherd Gives His Life for His Sheep

A true shepherd is willing to sacrifice his own well-being for the good of his sheep. Jesus goes far beyond this since He was willing to actually die for us! Four times in this message Jesus speaks of laying down His life for the sheep. **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep"**.

(10:11) **"As My Father knows me, even so I know the Father, and I lay down My life for the sheep."**

(10:15) **"My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one 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."**

(10:17-18) Even as He claims to be God, He is letting His audience know that He is going to suffer and die for their sin!

B. The Good Shepherd Leads His Sheep

But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. (10:2-4)

Jesus seeks to lead His sheep. He calls us and leads into the pastures that will bring us abundant life. He speaks to us through His word, which is the means by which we learn His ways and follow Him.

C. The Good Shepherd Knows his Sheep

I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. (10:14)

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow me. (10:27)

A good shepherd is intimately acquainted with his sheep, even knowing each one of them by name. Jesus knows intimately each of His children. He will maintain a close, personal relationship with each of us as we seek to follow and obey Him.

D. The Good Shepherd Protects His Sheep

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand.
(10:27-29)

The most important job for a shepherd is to protect his sheep from strangers, thieves, and predators. In verse 12 Jesus speaks of the wolf that would attack and scatter the sheep. The "wolf" may represent Satan but likely it refers to any enemy that may attack the believers or the church. Jesus promises that as the Good Shepherd He would protect His true followers so no one can snatch them out of His Father's hand.

The Description of the Thieves, Robbers, & Hirelings

When Jesus proclaims Himself to the "Good Shepherd", He is clearly contrasting Himself with the religious leaders whom He is confronting. The Pharisees were the self-appointed shepherds of Israel. However, they led out of hearts of pride, self-righteousness, and selfishness, as demonstrated by their treatment of the blind beggar in chapter 9. Jesus is quite certainly alluding to Ezekiel 34. In verses 1-10 God severely rebukes the leaders, or "shepherds" of Israel for their selfish neglect and abuse of the people. Then in verses 11-16 there is a tremendous description of the loving care of the true shepherd.

There are many today who claim to be pastors and Christian leaders who are in the ministry for selfish gain and many reasons other than truly caring for the sheep. We can find protection from such "thieves and robbers" by seeking to follow Christ and knowing His word.

An Important Consideration

Pastors and elders are called "shepherds" in the New Testament. The word "pastor" is actually the same word as "shepherd". Pastors and church leaders have been given the responsibility to lead, feed, and protect the people of God as they serve under the "chief shepherd, Jesus Christ (1 Peter 5:2-4). There are many "pastors" or self-proclaimed Christian leaders, whether on TV, the Internet, or other arenas, who are leading people astray from the true gospel and the truth of the Word of God. Each of us needs to make sure we are part of a local church with a faithful "shepherd" who teaches the Word of God and sincerely cares for and looks after the sheep.

The Description of the Sheep

Comparing Christ's followers to sheep is not an altogether positive description. Sheep are needy, dependent creatures, relying solely upon the care of the shepherd for their survival. Spiritually, that is certainly true of us as we rely upon the care of our Good Shepherd.

The Sheep Hear the Shepherd's Voice and Follow the Shepherd

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. (10:27)

It is important to note that Jesus says that those who truly are His sheep "Hear my voice...and they follow me". Hearing Christ's voice and following Him give evidence we are truly His children. There may have been sheep belonging to several different shepherds kept in the fold. Each shepherd would come to the fold, use his own unique voice and call, and his sheep would follow him. Christ calls us to follow Him. He speaks to us through His word. If we truly belong to Him, we **will** hear His voice and we **will** follow Him!

An Issue of Belief

Once again we see the reactions of those who heard Jesus' message. Some believed His words. Many refused to believe He was the Good Shepherd who had come to save them. Do you believe Jesus is the Good Shepherd who came to give His life for you?

As followers of Christ, are we trusting Christ to find the peace and abundant life He has provided for us?

BIBLE STUDIES

Thursdays,

8:00 AM Governor's Conference Room (Sec. of State's Ofc)

12:00 Noon Treasurer's Conference Room (EB54,
Basement of East Wing)