

March 6, 2023

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I AM The Good Shepherd

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you in the name of God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Well, this Lenten season we are dealing with the I AM sayings of Jesus. The first week we heard that He is the I am. In other words, He's everything. He's the very state of being of the entire creation. In our next week we saw that He is the resurrection and the life; and that life is the life that has no more death; and it's done with a double negative to just assure us there is no death never ever, ever, ever again once we're with our Lord. Last week we heard that Jesus is the light, the light who overcomes the darkness of this world and leads us on the path to heaven.

Tonight, we hear Jesus saying in John chapter 10, I am the Good Shepherd. And when He does this, He's speaking the language of the people of Israel. Because they had a rich history of shepherds. Consider where we've been in our Sunday sermon series. Abel, what did he do? He brought the first born of his flock; not herd, flock. What's that mean? Abel was the first shepherd.

Of course, then there's King David, the shepherd boy who Samuel anointed after David's dad, Jesse brought all his older brothers in to be anointed as king. But none of them were the right one. It wasn't until young David, who was out taking care of the sheep was brought in, and he was anointed.

And then we read about David the shepherd later on, who took some food to his brothers who were in the army, and he heard the boasting of Goliath, that great Philistine warrior, the giant. He heard Goliath proclaiming that he wanted to fight anyone from Israel. And David's response? 'Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?' Of course, his brothers were upset with him - you young whipper snapper; "why don't you just keep your mouth shut?" kind of thing. But King Saul heard about it that there's someone in the camp talking about Goliath this way. So. King Solomon called David.

David went to him and told King Saul flat out, I quote, ‘Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.’ Of course, Saul comes back with but you're young, you're a youth. You can't even wear armor yet. And this Philistine, Goliath, he's been a man of war since his youth. And David's response? Yeah, I'm ready. I'm a shepherd. You know if the lion comes and snatches that lamb, or if a bear comes and snatches a lamb from my flock. Well, I go after him, I strike him, I kill him, and I deliver that lamb. And then listen to what David says, and here is the critical part. He's just said he goes after the lambs; he goes after the lost sheep. Then he says, “The Lord,” (and yes, he uses Yahweh there.) “The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will deliver me from this Philistine.” I have this funny feeling you know the rest of the story. David went out armed with some smooth stones taken from the Kidron Brook. And he let them loose before Goliath ever got close to him, killing the giant.

Then of course. When it comes to shepherds. Well, that's what a whole bunch of the prophets were. In fact, my favorite was also Pastor Berner's favorite-Amos, the fig picking, Shepherd from Toccoa. And so, when Jesus says “I am the Good Shepherd,” this would resonate with the people of Israel. He's talking their language. They have a history of shepherds. And yet it begs the question. What makes a shepherd a Good Shepherd?

Well, first and foremost. That he lays down his life for the sheep. And Jesus makes that point, and then He does a contrast between the shepherd who owns those sheep, and the hired hand who does not. And what is it? Well, the hired hand is not good. The hired hand sees the wolf coming and he leaves the sheep, and he flees. Because he knows wolves travel in packs and he, himself might become food. But ultimately, why will he flee and leave the sheep? Jesus says very simply and bluntly, ‘he cares nothing for the sheep.’ He's there for a paycheck, end of story.

And I think we probably can sympathize with that to a certain extent or understand it. I know I, myself have a couple times experienced being in a store where someone just walks out without paying for anything. And I look at the cashier and ask ‘are you just going to let that happen?’ And

it's like, yeah, you know we're not supposed to do anything. I mean, what do I do if they turn around, they want to fight or they pull a gun, you know? They have no skin in the game, but the Shepherd does.

And that's why He's a Good Shepherd. When Jesus says I am the Good Shepherd, He makes several points. First, is that He is good because He lays down His life for the sheep. But then the second point He makes is 'I know my own and my own know me.' Sheep really do know their shepherd. And shepherds really do know their sheep. If you ever watch a shepherd dealing with his sheep, the shepherd will start to move, the sheep will follow. It is totally different than you know growing up in Bishop, the mule capital of the world. Almost everybody wears cowboy hats, they're all Cowboys. Not many shepherds there. But what do Cowboys do? They drive. They push the cattle. Not a shepherd, a shepherd leads, and the sheep follow.

Then we have the "I lay down my life for the sheep." And like David. Jesus lays down His life for the sheep. He goes to war to save them. But unlike King David, who's slew the lion. No, Unlike David, our Lord the Good Shepherd, He lets the wolf win. Not by killing His sheep. Oh no. The shepherd lets the wolf, Satan, kill him.

Which leads to number three, "I have other sheep." This is Jesus bringing you and me in, bringing the Gentiles in. He continues and says I must bring them also and they will listen to my voice. Which means we will follow Him. When He says come along my sheep, we go. So, when he says, "come and worship, we go, we follow Him. Come to communion with me, we go, we follow Him. Open my book, we go, We join Him in Bible study. And why is there all of this that Jesus is talking about? Well, it just flows naturally to the next point. There will be one flock and one shepherd.

I remember Pastor Burner talking with me one time and he ran me through a series of questions and some dialogue? It truly was some good rabbinical teaching. And it started with the question of, "If Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and if the Church, the body of the Christ are His sheep, then who or what is the pastor? And I know some of you have heard me

say this many times before, but the answer is the dog. A Good Shepherd has a dog, or more than one dog, and those dogs also know the shepherd's voice. In fact, they know the shepherd's whistle. And the shepherd will have the sheep, and they're out grazing, and one starts falling off and the shepherd will whistle a little whistle. And the dogs will look, and he will point and the dogs go after the sheep or after that lamb.

I kind of saw that last week, and it really brought a smile to my face. It was up at Valley Springs and good folks from Shepherd of the Hills were joining us and there was Pastor Marty after the service. Everybody was sitting down having soup, some outstanding soup, having some really good cake. And Pastor Marty was just like a sheepdog. He was running around and taking care of his sheep, giving them food, picking their stuff up, cleaning stuff off. He was busy, busy, busy, busy, busy. It was like the Lord was saying, now go and do this, this, this, this. Meanwhile, the sheep were right there at the table. All was well.

So, let's make this very clear. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and He really hammers it home at the very end. When He says "I lay down my life of my own accord." Again. He lets the wolf win; He lays down his life. Why? Well, He tells us Himself. "So that I might take it up again."

Which leads us to the three R's. The first, of course, is Resurrection. Jesus rose. He overcame sin, death, and the devil, so we never have to deal with that battle, that wolf. But second, when he rose, he redeemed us. He brought us back. And he did that to Restore us. Restore us to a right relationship with God the Father Almighty, a relationship like Adam and Eve had in the Garden where they could walk with Him, they could talk with Him. And so we too now can talk with God at any time. And we know He is with us always until the very end of the age. And why else does He take His life back up again? He tells us. No one takes it from me. Once He wins, it's over! And it is. It's over for Satan. No one takes it from me.

If you would, just join me in a little trip down memory lane. During the Lent season, we talk about Jesus going to the cross, He goes with Peter, James and John to the garden of Gethsemane, prays their

fervently, drops of blood, hematidrosis form on His forehead. When the Roman soldiers come, what does Jesus do? He steps between the soldiers and His sheep. And He says, “who do you seek?” ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ “I AM He.” Do you remember what happens? They all get knocked down. Why? Jesus was making it very clear to them and to us. No one takes my life from me. I Give it up of my own accord because I am the Good Shepherd.

So, bringing it all together, we look to Matthew 18. Jesus talks about the Good Shepherd. He says the Good Shepherd leaves the 99 sheep to go after the one was lost. And if you take a look at the Gospels, that's what you see Jesus doing over and over and over. Whether He goes Zacchaeus or the woman who touched His robe, or the man who couldn't get in to the pool of Siloam quick enough. He goes after them one by one. Then again, we see there on the night that He was betrayed. He protected all twelve of His disciples and keeps them safe.

And it's the same shepherd who goes after us individually, each one of us, the billions, in His flock. The Road to the Cross is the Good Shepherd going after us. And then it's Him leading us to the green pasture He describes as... Well, I'm going to leave it there. So that you can come back next week and hear how He says it.

In our Savior's Name, Amen.