

# The Good Shepherd

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- Psalter 381:1-3
- Scripture: John 10:1-21
- Text: John 10:11
- Psalter 220
- Psalter 55
- Psalter 53

Dear Friends,

A shepherd is often used in Scripture to portray the Lord Jesus Christ. We read in Isaiah 40, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."

The prophet Ezekiel also writes: "As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day."

A shepherd therefore, is one who gathers, cares for, and guides his flock towards green pastures with a kind and loving but firm sense of assured confidence. Christ as a shepherd gathers the dispersed and leads them in the paths of righteousness for His own name's sake.

Christ's people are often represented in Scripture as His sheep. The Psalmist extols God in the 100th Psalm, "Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture." Thus, whenever Christ is called Shepherd in Scripture we immediately form a picture in our minds of the close relationship between a shepherd and his sheep.

When we reflect upon the suffering and death of Christ, we would honor Him more if we would look to Him by faith and remember the excruciating suffering He was willing to endure for His flock as the Chief Shepherd. It was the Lord Jesus

Christ, the good and perfect Shepherd, who was smitten for the little ones as Ezekiel prophesied. It is this good Shepherd who gave His back to the smiters and endured reproach and spitting for His wandering sheep. It was this good Shepherd who was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, yet He opened not His mouth. With this in mind let us focus with God's help on the words of the suffering Savior from John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." We will contemplate:

### **The Good Shepherd**

1. Who this good Shepherd is
2. What the good Shepherd does
3. For whom the good Shepherd gives His life

### ***Who this Good Shepherd is.***

Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever is the good and chief Shepherd. The first words of this verse are "*I am.*" The whole gospel of John seems to revolve around these significant words: "*I am.*" Seven times in the Gospel of John, Christ sets forth His well-known "I am" statements. In John 6:35 He says "I am the bread of life." In John 8, "I am the light of the world." "I am the door, and, I am the good shepherd" in John 10. "I am the resurrection and the life" in chapter 11. "I am the way, the truth, and the life" in chapter 14, and in chapter 15 He says "I am the true vine."

Seven times Christ affirms His deity and seven times He affirms His timeless existence. The Jew in His day and the world today needs to hear that this despised Man from Galilee is the eternal God, the living Christ, the King of kings. Now just as a coin has two sides, and both sides are valid, so also Christ has two valid natures. As Luke primarily portrays Christ as Son of man in his gospel account, John's gospel is used to primarily portray Him as Son of God—as divine,

"I am" helps us to comprehend this more fully. These words are spoken with divine authority by the same eternal "I am" we read of in the Old Testament. In Moses' time the Lord revealed Himself as the pre-incarnate Savior when He spoke to Moses from the burning bush. The Lord had commissioned Moses to lead the children of Israel, Moses questioned the Lord asking Him: "But whom shall I say

has sent me?" And the Lord responded: "Tell Israel that the *I am* has sent you." He was not consumed in the burning bush. So also this good Shepherd would one day be in the fire of God's eternal wrath yet not be consumed as He hung on Calvary's cursed tree.

Now He is not just *a* shepherd, but *the* Shepherd. He is not merely, shepherd, but the unique, promised Shepherd of the Father. Many have come and gone claiming in one form or another to be a shepherd to lead us to greener pastures we are all seeking, but only this Shepherd's promises are true. There are many today who offer the formula of lasting peace with hollow promises from one kind of man-made gimmick or another. Especially affluent Western society is mesmerized with the power of the dollar, the fashion of the time, and the aesthetic beauty of the age. Millions today in America spend billions seeking peace from external things. But sadly, Western civilization also abounds with self-centered religion. Too often also religious America goes to church to see how much peace we can get out of religion. We ought rather to ask, "How can I most honor God in my life?" When that is our priority we will find spiritual peace the byproduct of resting through Christ in the Triune God. No matter where we live or which way we turn to try to fill the void within our sinful heart, nothing will grant us settled peace outside of Christ. He is the Prince of peace. Trust in this good Shepherd, my friend. Do not rest until you may walk in His abiding peace.

Christ also tells us that He is good. He is the *good* Shepherd. Christ's goodness is hinged inseparably to His special attribute of mercy. Christ's mercy is a manifestation of His goodness.

Scripture tells us in many different ways that the Lord delights in mercy, and justice is His strange work. Micah overflows with the message of mercy when he prophesies, "he retaineth not his anger forever because he delighteth in mercy" (7:18). Was it not His merciful grace bought through a way of great suffering that makes you contemplate His goodness, dear believer? Is this not what makes mercy so sweet, when we see His forgiveness contrasted against our just condemnation? When we see our black and sinful natures against the background of His spotless white righteousness, the stupendous nature of His wondrous love and mercy causes us to stand in awe.

It should humble our hearts when we see how willingly He suffered, the just for the unjust. In verse 10 of this chapter we read about the murderous thief, and in verse 12 about the delinquent hireling, thereby highlighting the goodness of this great Shepherd in contrast to thieves and renegades. We are all thieves and renegades. We have all stolen God's honor and turned into traitors, despising our original Paradise glory for an opportunity to be as wise as God. But this good Shepherd gives His life for thieves and renegades.

### ***What the good Shepherd does***

Let us consider next *what the good Shepherd does*. He giveth His life, our text says. The good Shepherd gives His life. In this one word is the whole gospel-He gives. Here we can feel the very heartbeat of God-*He gives*.

Jesus Christ was the suffering Servant; He came not to do His own will, but the will of His Father in heaven. He actively, voluntarily gives His all for His sheep.

His whole life on earth was a life of giving. He gave up the music of the angels in heaven to listen to the curses and slandering against Him on earth. He gave up His heavenly throne to sit with publicans and sinners. He gave up communion with His heavenly Father and was forsaken by Him as He cried out in anguish on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Oh, to what immeasurable depths Christ willingly suffered! Even His descent into hell was an act of giving, so all who by grace may put their trust in Him never will have to enter through those dreadful gates. But most amazingly, He gave His life's blood in great pain and anguish, so that sinners may receive that blessed exchange of blood for sins. The Bible tells us without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.

"He giveth" can also be rendered, to "lay down," as in verse 15 where we read, "I lay down my life for the sheep." His whole life was also a life of laying down. He lay down in Bethlehem's manger in our flesh. He lay down His life, having many despising and rejecting Him. He lay down and became a worm and no man, writhing in anguish, in Gethsemane's garden. He lay down His feelings as His own disciples forsook Him and fled. And when the brutal scourgings began-as the whips from the cruel tormentors tore into His back-He was silent. As a sheep

before His shearers is dumb He opened not His mouth!

He did this all to save sinners from their sins. He did it to justify sinners, to justify the ungodly. But what does that mean to justify, you may ask. In brief, it means to declare righteous. Only the perfectly righteous may enter heaven. We must earn that righteousness or another must do it in our place. We can never earn that perfect righteousness, but Christ has done so in His double obedience. He actively obeyed the law while in this life. And while on the cross He passively and obediently bore His Father's wrath. By this double obedience, Christ has merited salvation so He can credit that salvation to a sinner's account. And the sinner in turn receives this salvation by the empty hand of faith. This is what is commonly called justification. That is what Paul writes about in Romans 5, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

This is a profound truth and the heart of the gospel. It is a hard truth for our natural minds to grasp because it is in contrast to what we as fallen sinners tend towards. We give so half-heartedly, but this good Shepherd gives fully and freely, no strings attached

Now even though there is a parallel to the natural sheep/shepherd relationship, Christ's work far supersedes any human effort. A natural shepherd feeds his flock; this Shepherd leads us to green pastures: "he maketh me to lie down in green pastures" David writes. A natural shepherd heals the sick; this Shepherd not only heals but also restores and grants liberty: "He hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives," Isaiah prophesied of Christ in chapter 61. A natural shepherd tries to bring more sheep into his fold; this Shepherd adds daily unto His flock "such as should be saved" the Bible tells us. And a natural shepherd tries not to let any escape; this Shepherd will never let one of His perish, "neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand," Christ promises in John 10:28. David risked his life for sheep by killing the lion and the bear, but Jesus gives His life-willingly--for His sheep! That is almost past understanding for the believer at times, yet by faith we see what is written in 2 Corinthians 5, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." What an incentive not to spend ourselves on this world's passing pleasures! How we should desire to expend all of our energy for the sake of the

gospel!

Oh what a blessed Shepherd we have! Does this not encourage us to daily fight the good fight of faith, take up our cross, deny ourselves, and follow Him? He gave up His glory in heaven and assumed to Himself our human flesh, so that one day we may reign with Him forever!

*Above He left the harps and hymns  
And came to earth full of sorrows and sins;  
Though here below is death and pain  
We will one day with Him in glory reign.*

### ***For whom the good Shepherd gives His life.***

Finally, we are led to contemplate for whom this good and great Shepherd gives His life. He gave His life for the sheep, John says in this passage, all those who are His own. He has marked them with His indelible seal of divine election, Paul writes in Romans 8:29, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son."

Sadly, today the doctrine of particular atonement is largely despised, but if we would hold true to our biblical heritage, we do well to keep this doctrine in view. We may not, however, distort it by using it as an excuse for an indifferent attitude, saying, "If I'm elect, I'm elect, and if not, then I'm not." If we use this doctrine in this manner, we are continuing in the sin of unbelief, which is the mother of all sin, Election should not be a stumbling block to keep us from seeking the good Shepherd, but an encouragement to drive us out to His cross to where all the elect must, and *will* come.

God's divine election affords the believer much comfort for if it were not for election we would never be able to exercise the gift of faith to look to Christ for salvation. Furthermore, as John Calvin writes, "The doctrine of election is spiritually profitable for the true Christian." We are saved by faith in the good Shepherd and it is God's electing grace that is the source of that faith. This leads to comfort and assurance of faith and can never degenerate into fatalism or passivity.

We also see this in Psalm 135. We read in verse 4 that the Lord had chosen Jacob for Himself. This sovereign choosing causes the psalmist in verses 19 and 20

to praise and bless God's gracious name.

Nor does election suppress the mission mandate as others advocate. Rather, it should invigorate us to more mission work. We don't know who the elect are. Who would ever have thought ungodly Manasseh and persecuting Saul were both elect before they were saved? In Acts 13:48 we see Paul preaching to a mixed multitude of saved and unsaved and when he was done, we read, "And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed," You see, evangelism and election go together like a hand and a glove. How we should be zealous to spread the gospel to the unsaved, so more of the Lord's marked sheep may be gathered.

One other thing we should also keep in mind is that even though Christ's death was prophesied in early Old Testament times, yet He did not suffer and die just to fulfill doctrinal prophecy for the elect in the strictest sense of the word. He *gave* Himself lovingly for His sheep, with a shepherd's heart of desire for His sheep. Calvin put it this way, "He was not compelled by necessity, but was induced purely by His love for us." He suffered His painful life and death because He loved His sheep with an everlasting love. He was not just fulfilling a business contract for His people on the cross. His heart of mercy gushed open as He gave His life; His all, as the good Shepherd.

Christ's sheep are all those who trust in Him and who follow Him, and who know His voice, Christ says in verse 27 of this same chapter. Are we following the Lord Jesus Christ? Can you hear Him speaking to you through His Word? Do you know His voice? Do you desire to be made more conformable to this great Shepherd? He leads His flock through this wilderness, often stopping beside the still and peaceful waters of His Word to restore our souls.

Or does all of this sound strange to your ears? Has there never been times in your life when you have sorrowed over your sins committed against this good Shepherd, trusted in Him to forgive you, and sought to live a life of thankfulness unto Him? If not, then know one thing, dear friend: if you do not repent and believe the gospel, then as Christ suffered hellish agonies for His sheep, you will forever suffer them as an unbeliever! Oh dear impenitent friend,

*While He proffers peace and pardon, let us hear His voice today,  
Lest if we our hearts should harden, we should perish in the way;*

*Lest to us, so unbelieving, He in judgment shall declare:  
Ye, so long My Spirit grieving, never in My rest can share!*

While it is yet the acceptable time of salvation, harden not your heart. He still extends the olive branch of pardon and peace.

But maybe there is someone who says, "I do hate my sins, and am trying to flee from them, but still I don't possess a consciousness of wedded union to this great Bridegroom."

You are like the deliriously lovesick adolescent wandering through the field of life thinking about her love, plucking off one petal at a time from the flower in your hand, saying, "He loves me, he loves me not." My friend, throw away the weeds of doubt and look to the Rose of Sharon! Just as the eternal "I am" promised to deliver the oppressed and afflicted Israelite out of the land of bondage by His almighty hand through the leadership of Moses, so the Lord still promises faith, liberty, and assurance through the faithful exposition of His Word today.

Faith and the assurance of it comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Diligently and prayerfully attend the house of God faithfully, looking to the hills from where all your help must come. Use the means of grace prayer, Scripture study, and meditation upon this good Shepherd, so you may by the Spirit's blessing be assured in your faith.

One of the marks to know if we are one of His sheep is to examine our hearts to see if the pastures of this world give lasting satisfaction, or if we desire a better heavenly country. We desire to be with someone whom we love. If we love Jesus Christ in truth we will long sometimes to be with Him where He is.

When Jesus came down to earth, He left His heavenly abode, and for thirty-three years He suffered humiliation and degradation, especially at the end of His earthly stay in the flesh, but now He is risen and is home again. He was not home here, nor will any of His true sheep be at home in this world. There will be times of longing, sometimes more and sometimes less, for those greener pastures above, which will be ushered in when Christ shall appear the second time without sin unto salvation. Greatly blessed are you if you are among those that love His appearing! Then, dear believer, all sorrow and sighing shall flee away and there



will be no more night. There the streams of pleasure shall flow forever more. Oh, trust more in Him and His promises which all find their culmination in Him! Then one day we may be with that flock where the strong rams and the little lambs shall sing together: Worthy is the Lamb that was slain from the foundations of the world! Amen.