

## I Am the Good Shepherd John 10:11-18

Around 593 BC the prophet Ezekiel began prophesying. He lived during the time when the Southern Kingdom of Judea had been conquered by Babylon and many Jews like Daniel were deported from Palestine to Babylon. One of his prophecies in Ezekiel chapter 34 was directed against the religious leaders, the shepherds of God's people. I'm going to read selected portions of Ezekiel chapter 34 because they set the stage for what we're going to learn about Jesus today. Read Ezekiel 34:1-6.

"It's a lot harder to shepherd people than it is sheep. Still, many of the leaders of Israel were poor shepherds. They cared more about lining their money bags than guiding the people in the ways of the Lord, or protecting and caring for them. Because of the failure of the human shepherds, Yahweh made some promises to his people. Read Ezekiel 34:11-15. God promised that he would personally come and shepherd his people. Finally, he made this promise: Read Ezekiel 34:23-24. God meant not the David of the OT, but the one for whom David was the prototype, the Messiah. The Messiah would come and shepherd the people of Israel.

A little over 600 years later, Jesus Christ said, "I am the Good Shepherd, the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

Pastor Mark told me that you have been going through a sermon series covering verbal pictures Jesus provided for himself. I am going to speak on what it means for Jesus to be the Good Shepherd. I invite you to turn in the Word of God to John chapter 10 verses 11-18. John is the fourth book in the New Testament. John 10:11-18. Let's read that passage. Read.

Jesus is your good shepherd because he lays down his life for his sheep. If you haven't figured it out yet, God's people are his sheep. If Jesus is our shepherd, then we are his sheep.

Sheep have some enemies, animal and human. In the times of Jesus lions, bears, wolves, panthers, and even hyenas roamed the countryside looking for a defenseless sheep to eat. Robbers and thieves also posed a threat to the sheep. A shepherd can usually handle between 50 and 100 sheep. If he had more sheep than that and no brothers or sons or family members to help, then a shepherd would have to hire men to help watch the sheep. However, these hirelings often had no true loyalty for the sheep. So if danger appeared in the form of a wolf or other wild animal the hireling would flee and leave the sheep at the mercy of the predator.

A good shepherd will risk his life to protect the sheep, whereas a worthless shepherd will leave the sheep unprotected when danger appears. Of course, our threats today are not wolves or lions or bears. The threats to God's people come in the form of persecution, false teachers, swindlers who would cheat people out of their money and possessions with corrupt financial scams, or preachers who would twist the Scriptures to get God's people to give them sexual favors or money or control their lives. Pastors in hard places like Syria, Iraq, Iran, North Korea, and China have sometimes faced the excruciating decisions of whether to flee for their lives or stay with their church members and face whatever suffering will come.

For Jesus, the wolves were members of the Sanhedrin, both Sadducees and Pharisees who saw him as a threat to their power and position. Those religious leaders led the people away from pure devotion to God and his Word by adding all sorts of laws and regulations which they said were necessary in order for people to be righteous before God. Jesus said those leaders traveled far and wide to make one proselyte and when they did, they made him twice as much a son of Hell as themselves. They were blind guides leading the people astray.

Jesus said that he was the good shepherd because he knew his own sheep and his own sheep knew him. Have you heard the voice of Jesus calling you to follow him? You become his sheep by following him. He knows you. He has always known you.

He also said that even as the Father knows me, I know the Father. Think about that statement for a minute. God knows everyone intimately. He knows their every thought, he has observed their every moment in time, he has seen their every action and reaction, and he knows all their motives and desires. That is how the all-knowing God knows us. Jesus claimed that he knew God to the same extent as God the Father knew him. That is a claim to deity. How can anyone know God as thoroughly as God knows them? Only God has that thorough a knowledge. Jesus is claiming to share the same attribute of all-knowing that the Father possesses. He is claiming to be the fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy that God himself would come and shepherd his people.

Jesus said in verse 16 that he had other sheep in another fold. He would bring them and unite them with the sheep in this fold and they would become one flock with one shepherd. He was referring to the Gentiles and his plan to unite Jewish believers in Jesus with Gentile believers in Jesus to form the one flock of God, the church. Jesus would heal the main division in mankind between Jew and Gentile that existed throughout the whole OT, by bringing disciples from both groups into one living flock of God known as the church. God's church is open to and includes believers from all nations and people groups. Jesus is the shepherd for all God's people.

Jesus emphasized to his disciples that he voluntarily sacrificed his life for us. No one forced him to die. It is true that the Romans arrested Jesus and ultimately crucified him, but Jesus says that only happened because he allowed it to happen. Jesus said that no one took his life from him. He laid down his life on his own initiative. Jesus had a commandment from the Father that only Jesus had the authority to lay down his life and only Jesus had the authority to take it up again. You see, if Jesus had decided not to die for us, no one would have been able to kill him.

When Jesus was arrested he told his disciples to put away their swords because if Jesus did not want to be taken captive, he could ask the Father to send twelve legions of angels to protect him (see Matthew 26:53). On a number of occasions people tried to kill Jesus or take him captive and they were not able to do so. The people of Nazareth tried to throw him over the cliff but the Bible says he simply walked through their midst. The religious leaders tried to arrest him in the Temple but they could not. It was impossible for anyone to kill Jesus until Jesus was ready to be killed, until he was ready to lay down his life for his sheep.

Why do we celebrate Christmas? It is not Jesus' birth that changed history and the destinies of men. It is Jesus' death that changed history and the destinies of men. His birth signaled the arrival of God to be the shepherd of his sheep. The death of Jesus opened the door to heaven for each of us. His death became the way for us to escape God's judgment.

The Bible teaches that not only is Jesus the Good Shepherd, he is also the Passover Lamb, the lamb who takes away the sin of the world. His death paid the penalty for all our sins and became the means of our deliverance. We celebrate his birth because it made possible his sacrificial death and our salvation. It made it possible for us to be reconciled to God. Jesus died for you so that you might live forever with him. He came to be your shepherd. The apostle Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:25, "Read."

It is no coincidence that the first people who heard the good news about Jesus and came to visit him were shepherds. I think that was a little bit of professional courtesy on God's part. He allowed shepherds to be the first to witness their namesake.

Will you let Jesus be your good shepherd? Will you follow him? Will you recognize him as your master and that he owns you? Will you entrust your life to him, both in this world and in the world to come? It's as simple as saying, "Jesus, I trust you with my life both now and in the future. You're my shepherd and I will follow you the best way I can." If you do that, you will have a very, merry Christmas and many happy years. Let's pray.