

I AM the Good Shepherd

March 14, 2010 - John 10:11-21.

What do you think Jesus looked like? If you had to draw a picture of Him, what would you draw? In the past 500 years, many artists have taken up this challenge. Michelangelo sculpted Jesus lying dead in His mother's arms after the crucifixion. Leonardo Da Vinci painted the Last Supper with Jesus at the center.

Perhaps the most famous painting of Jesus in protestant circles is this one done by Warner Sallman. He painted this oil version called "The Head of Christ," in 1940. It has adorned Sunday School classroom walls and homes in the 70 years since that painting. A Christianity Today article states "for many people, this image of Jesus, looked like the serene "best friend" they wanted in their Savior.

Now this painting might have served many Sunday School teachers and parents well in introducing their children to Jesus. But if we limit ourselves to whatever picture of Jesus this paints in our minds, we can get an unbalanced view of Him. In fact, if this image is all that people know about Jesus, they might view Him as a kind friend who helps the weak. But He has little or nothing to offer in the real world of school, business or the high tech life. We might even think Jesus is a wimp.

The wimpy Jesus image can gain strength when we consider Him as a shepherd. One commentator puts it this way: "Many people in the industrialized west (except Australians!) think of shepherds as sentimental beings, perhaps somewhat effeminate, with their arms full of cuddly lambs." So Jesus is great for women and little kids. But for "real men" or "with it" youth or "active families," Jesus the shepherd is at best irrelevant and at worst a loser.

But is He? Might our view of shepherding need some serious correction? Might our view of ourselves need some serious correction?

As we approach Easter, we have let Jesus speak for Himself. We've listened to His claims. He's said – I am the Bread of Life. I am the Light of the World. I am the gate for the sheep. Today we're looking at the next major statement: "I am the good shepherd." But this will mean little or nothing if we adopt the wimpy shepherd/wimpy Jesus image. Thankfully, Jesus Himself describes what good shepherding involves. Its way more than cuddling lambs. It requires courage, in the face of danger, great personal cost and ended with the

most remarkable work in all history. Last week, we looked at going through Jesus, the door, to find the highest quality life. Today, we're going to meet the highest quality shepherd. We'll ask why Jesus is the highest quality shepherd. Then we will examine if our view of ourselves needs serious correction. Then we'll meet the shepherd at His table.

Text John 10: 11-21 continuing the discussion with the Pharisees after the healing of the man born blind.

John 10:11-21 (NIV)

¹¹"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

¹⁴"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

¹⁹At these words the Jews were again divided. ²⁰Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?"

²¹But others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

Why is Jesus the Highest Quality Shepherd?

He willingly laid down His life for the sheep. (11-13)

Jesus gave up His life for His sheep. Jesus died for His sheep. Verse 11. "I am the good shepherd and the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Notice another claim to deity with this statement.

Remember the divine name of God is "I AM?" So I AM the good shepherd meant a lot more than Jesus role playing. In fact, portraying Himself as a shepherd brought to mind an Old Testament understanding that God shepherds His people.

- Isaiah 40:11 – He tends his flock like a shepherd: he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.
- Ezekiel 34:12 – As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness.
- Ezekiel 34:23 – I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them and be their shepherd.
- Ezekiel 37:24a– My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd.

Jesus is the ultimate Shepherd. He is the ultimate David who shepherds His people. But Jesus adds another element. He the shepherd will die for the sheep.

Have you ever thought about a shepherd dying for his sheep? Why would they do that? If it happened, something threatened the sheep. Sheep are not predators. They are prey. Meat eaters like wolves love sheep. So a good shepherd stays with the sheep even if they're threatened.

That's quite different than hired hands. They get paid to do a job. But if a wolf comes around, they don't stick around. They might go "shoo, shoo" to the wolf for 5 seconds. But when the wolf decides it's still coming, the hire hand thinks "I'm not going to risk my life for a bunch of dumb sheep." He runs out of there because he doesn't really care about them. He cares more about the money. The wolf pounces on the defenseless flock.

But the Good Shepherd sticks around. It's kind of like the difference between a small business owner and his/her hired hands. Most hired help does what's necessary to get a pay check. The owner does what's necessary for the betterment of the business. The hired help watches the sheep only during safe times. The Good Shepherd stays with the sheep even through danger.

But if such a shepherd died protecting his sheep, his death would not be intentional. He would try to fight off the wolves and survive. Maybe a pack of wolves attacks. He kills a couple of them. But he couldn't hold them all off. He dies of his wounds. He was still a good shepherd. He would be a quality shepherd. But his death was not intentional.

But what does Jesus say about dying for the sheep. "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd *is willing to die if a threat comes?*" No. "The Good Shepherd *will fight to the death* for His sheep?" No. "The Good Shepherd lays down His life for His sheep." He intends to die. He willingly lays His life down. So this death of the shepherd will be no accident. It qualifies Him to claim that title "Good Shepherd." Unlike other good shepherds who might accidentally die defending their sheep, Jesus intends to die for His sheep. Jesus is the highest quality shepherd because He lays down His life for the sheep. Why else is Jesus the highest quality shepherd?

2) *He and His sheep know each other through close personal relationship. (14-16)* Jesus knows His sheep and His sheep know Him. Jesus is the Good Shepherd because He really knows His sheep and they get to know Him.

Our first response to that might be “big deal.” Lots of shepherds, farmers and ranchers know their animals. Some name every animal. They get to know each animal’s habits and preferences. How is Jesus’ knowledge different?

Well, Jesus draws us into the uniqueness of this knowing relationship by making a comparison. Verse 14 and 15. “I know my sheep and my sheep know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.” God the Son and God the Father know each other intimately. They have known one another for eternity. In that glorious yet puzzling doctrine of the Trinity, they are individual persons yet one in essence. No one knows another person better than Jesus and the Father know each other.

So think about the people in your life? Who would be the people you know best? Who are you closest to? Who understands you? Who has walked with you in companionship or friendship for many years? You know that person or those people very well. Jesus and the Father know each other in an infinitely deeper way.

And Jesus knows His sheep in a similar way. In fact, Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves. If we are His sheep we are getting to know Him more and more. This is not talking primarily of information about Jesus. Knowledge about a person is important. But the Hebrew understanding of knowing was more experiential. God doesn’t just know about us. He knows us. It’s the difference between reading a person’s resume and talking with them face to face.

This is reflected throughout Scripture.

- Ps. 1:6 – For the Lord knows the way of the righteous.
- Nahum 1:7 – The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him.
- 1 Cor. 8:3 – But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.
- 2 Tim. 2:19 – But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: “The Lord knows those who are his.”

Jesus the Good Shepherd knows His sheep.

Notice the result of Jesus knowing us. Starting in verse 14 again. “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.” Now here comes the result – “and I lay down my life for my sheep.” So as a result of knowing His sheep, Jesus knows He has to lay down His life for them. He knows we are in desperate need of His sacrifice. He knew only by laying down His life could His sheep actually know Him and His Father. So He identifies their needs and acts on it. This Highest Quality Shepherd knows that the sheep need Him to lay down His life for them.

But if a shepherd died, that would spell disaster for a flock. It would be heroic. But when the wolves realize the protector of the sheep was dead, they’d be back. There would be no one to protect the flock. They would be at the wolves mercy, unless the shepherd could come back to life. That’s exactly what Jesus did.

3) He’s the only shepherd who died for His sheep and resurrected Himself to life to care for His sheep. (17-18)

Verse 17. “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again.” The death of Jesus is the Father’s will. Because Jesus and the Father live in perfect harmony, Jesus will go forward to His death. But it is a death with resurrection already in view. “I lay it down only to take it up again.”

So imagine the picture. Jesus takes His life and lays it down like an ancient worshipper might lay an animal sacrifice on an altar. The sacrifice really dies physically. The spirit leaves the body. But then the spirit of that sacrifice comes back to the body. It puts life back into its own body then joins with the body to come back to life. Here Jesus resurrects Himself. Did you even think about who raised Jesus from death or by what power He was resurrected to life? In fact, the New Testament gives each person of the Trinity credit for resurrection. Here the Son resurrects Himself. In Acts 2:32, God the Father raises Jesus. Peter says, “God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.” In Romans 8:11, the Holy Spirit gives the power for the resurrection “And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.”

But here in John, the Son lays down His life and takes it up again. This goes totally with this Gospel. Remember the beginning of this Gospel? “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing

was made that has been made. In him was life.” Jesus is the author and originator of life. In him was and is life. He has the authority and power to lay down His life and take up His life. This is no ordinary shepherd!

Then comes John 10:18 which you need to know for anyone who claims Jesus was confused about His purpose. Or Jesus was a victim. Or Jesus died a tragic death. Verse 18 – No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. One commentator states “Nowhere is John’s view of Jesus in complete command of every situation brought out more strongly than here. The Lord’s death does not take place as the result of misadventure or the might of His foes. He lays it down. He takes it up. It’s all linked to the Father.

So this is no wimpy shepherd. Jesus is the highest quality shepherd because He willingly dies for the sheep. He knows the sheep so well He will die for them so they can know Him well. He’s the only shepherd in history who can die for His sheep and then resurrect Himself for the sheep.

So, hopefully the wimpy shepherd view has been put to death. But what about our view of ourselves? How might we need to view ourselves differently?

We need to see ourselves as sheep in need of a shepherd. Some of us might have no problem acknowledging this. We’re very aware of our need for guidance, protection and saving. But some of us might not really like the sheep image. Sheep are vulnerable, dumb and easily scattered. Some of us like to be known as lions or beavers or strong bulls or loving mother bears. But sheep?

Yet Jesus laid down His life for His sheep. On judgment day, Jesus will separate His sheep from the goats. Whatever our personality, we must all adopt the reality of our sheepness if we want to receive the highest quality shepherding in the universe.

Some of you have never acknowledged this.

To receive the highest quality shepherding and to join Jesus’ flock, you must come to Him as Savior. You must put your trust in Him. You must recognize who He is – Bread of Life, Light of the World; the Door to God, the Good Shepherd, the Resurrection and the Life; the Way the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Him. But you must not only know about Him, you must come to know Him. That

happens when you put your faith in Him as your Savior. Then God floods your soul with His gospel and you become His beloved sheep. You will be under the Good Shepherd's care for eternity.

Some of us need to turn from other shepherds or ourselves back to the Good Shepherd. Call out to Him again. Many need to continue to entrust themselves to the Good Shepherd. He laid down His life for you. He knows you better than you know yourselves. He wants to you to know Him more. Worship the shepherd who is the divine Son with authority over His own life and death. Let's come to Him now at His table.