

Mark D. Reichert

Easter 4 – John 10:11-18 – Jesus is *Your* Good Shepherd

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Every parent knows that when a child is scared – no matter if they're alone in the dark at night or lost in a crowd in broad daylight – there is only one thing that can comfort them: hearing their parent's voice. It's really a remarkable effect. For a child who doesn't know how to be on their own, their parent's voice is that one thing they know they can trust; so when their parents speak, they wholeheartedly listen and believe.

That's a picture that's maybe a little more familiar to us than a shepherd with his sheep, but for the people Jesus was speaking to, it would've meant just as much. See, sheep are very naïve animals, with very little sense or ability to take care of themselves. They need shepherds because otherwise they have no one else to look after them. And so just like children with their parents, sheep grow to know their shepherd's voice and trust it completely. When their shepherd speaks, the sheep listen, because they know that this is the person who truly cares for them.

And that's why this picture Jesus uses here is so meaningful for us. This is how it is between us and Jesus – like the relationship between shepherd and sheep. See, this world is a dangerous place – physically, yes, but especially spiritually, and so we need someone we know we can trust – someone selfless who loves us and guides us and protects us from everything out there that can harm us. Well thankfully, we have Jesus. Here's what he says to you: *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The 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. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”*

Now of course, if Jesus is *your* Good Shepherd, then that means you are *his* sheep... But you know that in many ways that's not a complement, right? We have to swallow our pride a little here, because sheep are not highly respected for their smarts and self-preservation skills, they usually don't know what's best for them, and they get themselves into trouble more often than not. A lost sheep can't find its way home, and usually seems to have a knack for only getting more lost and stuck in situations it can't get itself out of. If a sheep stumbles and falls and rolls over on its

back, it's helpless to right itself and stand up again. And of course, a sheep doesn't have any way to defend itself against a hungry predator. Basically, sheep are helpless without a shepherd.

And who of us, if we're being honest with ourselves, can really say this isn't an accurate comparison? There's a wolf after us and we're powerless to stop him, but lots of times we can be just as prone as naïve sheep to go astray from our Good Shepherd. That wolf with devil horns is always looking for opportunities when we make ourselves vulnerable to drag us away from Jesus and devour us. You take a second look at someone who isn't your spouse or take a few too many drinks at the wrong “watering hole,” so to speak, and Satan's got you. You think to yourself that God's Word is just a little too controlling and outdated and controversial, and the more you think that, the more you wander away from your Good Shepherd's care and right into the clutches of the wolf pack.

Or maybe instead we tend more toward the hired hand that Jesus talks about when we see the same things happening to others. *“The 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. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”* We can see others going astray from their Good Shepherd, going down wrong paths, and we can see the wolf prowling... but we keep silent. We don't want to ruffle anyone's feathers, don't want to disrupt our relationships, don't want to seem judgmental, so we compromise faithfulness to God and His Word. We know what's right, what's truly loving, but still we let our brother or sister go to the wolves.

See friends, this is exactly why Jesus came to be *your* Good Shepherd. We need a shepherd to save us and guide us, because left to ourselves, we'd be lost, helpless, and eternally hopeless.

So hear again your Savior's voice: *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”* You know, to our minds, it makes a lot of sense for the shepherd to turn tail when danger comes, just like the hired hand did. After all, the shepherd is worth more than the sheep, and the sheep – they can be replaced. But that's exactly what makes Jesus *your* Good Shepherd, because he didn't run when the devil came looking to snatch you away for death and hell. No, he looked at you and said you are *irreplaceable*, that you are worth fighting for, that he

would never want to be apart from you or any other precious soul for whom he was willing to pour out his blood and die. The Good Shepherd voluntarily laid down his life to save you from sin and death – to save sheep that only ever got lost and in trouble and tried his patience. That’s what your Good Shepherd was willing to do for you to make you his own, because that’s how much he loves you!

Jesus laid down his life for a purpose – not just to protect his sheep from the Wolf for a while, but to save his sheep from the Wolf for good. See, when Jesus died on the cross, he crushed Satan’s head. Jesus’ death was the devil’s death-blow. Jesus’ sacrifice meant total victory. The sheep were safe and the wolf was defeated forever. Salvation was won once and for all when our Good Shepherd laid down his life for sinners like us.

But that isn’t all – Jesus laid down his life with the purpose of taking it up again. When Jesus rose again from the dead, he proved that he was the perfect sacrifice to take away the sins of the world and open heaven for us to live with him there forever. By his death and resurrection, sin, Satan, and even death itself were completely destroyed.

So now here’s why that means Jesus is *your* Good Shepherd: what Jesus did means everything for you. Jesus died and rose again to secure your relationship as Shepherd and sheep, and his resurrection means that your resurrection is a certainty, too. We’re all going to rise from the dead on that Last Day and live forever with Jesus in the eternal safety and security of heaven’s green pastures and quiet waters. It’s only a matter of time. The devil can’t rip you out of his hands, no matter how hard or how much he continues to try, because our Good Shepherd laid down his life to save us and took it up again to bring us to live with him in his flock forever.

So now, that means the relationship between the Good Shepherd and his sheep transcends time and space and blood relation. In fact, there is no closer, more intimate relationship in all creation than the relationship between Shepherd and sheep, Savior and saved. And here’s what that means for you now: *“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.”*

Your Good Shepherd cares for you deeply and *knows* you, through and through – there is no one who knows you better and no one who cares about you more. Yes, Jesus knows how weak we can be and how helpless we are on our own; that’s exactly why he came to help us and save us. He

knows all your needs, your wants, your strengths, your weaknesses, your desires, your cares, your anxieties, your fears, your innermost thoughts that you don’t want anyone else to know and your deepest, most intimate feelings that you might not even be able to put into words. Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves, and that’s a good thing – because lots of times we can act just like sheep who don’t know what’s good for us.

But if there is one thing we know, it’s our Shepherd’s voice. We may not always know what’s good or bad for us, but we know that our Savior loves us and cares for us, because he’s told us and shown us and continues to show us every day. No, being a sheep might not always be flattering, but it is endearing, because we trust our Good Shepherd absolutely and unwaveringly, and there is nothing he loves more than that. When we hear his voice, in Word and Sacrament, we do as sheep do – we listen and believe. We know that what he speaks is reliable and we can totally depend on it to keep us close to him and build us up in our faith. So we follow where he leads through the ups and downs of this life, because he knows what and where is best for us. He will never abandon us, and he promises that he will finally guide us along the narrow path of salvation to the safety and peace of his eternal sheepfold. Then, just like he has always wanted and worked for, our Good Shepherd will finally have that one flock that follows him to heaven forever, and *more* than ever in that day, it will be true for us:

*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.*

You know, there’s a reason this Psalm is so close to the hearts of so many believers. Because our Savior-God is our Good Shepherd, there is nothing we need. There is nothing we fear. We have the highest confidence that as long as we are in his arms Jesus will surely provide for us, protect us, and lead us safely to our heavenly home, and so that means we have rest, peace, and contentment unlike anything we could find anywhere else. So,

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. God grant it, for the sake of Jesus, your Good Shepherd. Amen.*