

# The Good Shepherd – *John 10:10-21*

**Introduction** – This passage completes our Lord’s discourse with the Pharisees, following their affliction of the man to whom Jesus had given sight. It is important to remember that this is not a peaceful interchange nor a sweet idea from Jesus to His followers. Jesus is the good shepherd, and He is speaking to and contrasting Himself from the thieves, robbers, and wolves who seek to exploit, steal, and destroy, along with the hirelings who will not protect the sheep. In addition, we ought to keep in mind that we are the sheep in this passage, not an entirely complimentary status, to be sure. Nevertheless, Christ is the Good Shepherd, confident of who His sheep are, what He does for His sheep, and how this plays out in the intimate knowledge of the Father and Son, and the Shepherd and His sheep. This is Good News for dirty, wandering, forgetful, petty, dumb sheep.

**Abundant Life from the Good Shepherd** (vv10-13) – Two stark contrasts are made between Jesus and the Pharisees. First, they come like thieves to kill and destroy, while Jesus came to give abundant life. Second, they are like hirelings, only seeking for what they can get out of it, unwilling to protect the sheep, while Jesus is a faithful shepherd Who lays down His life for His sheep.

This assessment by Jesus is true of all false religious leaders. Those who teach that salvation is based on good works or religious rites and performance, those who refuse to call sin by its name and instead tolerate and celebrate it, those who twist the gospel to attract followers – these are the wolves. Jesus said that He is the door, the only door, the only way of salvation (v9). And that way would be His act of laying His life down for His sheep (v11). Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is full of life and grace and peace for all who hear His voice. He feeds His sheep (Psalm 23:1-2). This is in stark contrast to the Pharisees, who’s religion is full of devouring the sheep in their hypocrisy (Matt 23:13-15).

Jesus came that we might have life and have it more abundantly (v10). Certainly, there is some application to blessings we enjoy in this life as we walk faithfully in His ways, but this is no promise of a “health and wealth” gospel. Primarily, He is talking about eternal life instead of eternal damnation, of being released from our slavery to sin, to the chains of guilt and misery from sin, from the grip that it had on us in our old nature. Instead, we enjoy freedom from sin, forgiveness from our trespasses, fellowship with our Lord, mercy and grace by His Spirit to obey and enjoy God and direct access to God the Father through His Son Who constantly makes intercession for us.

***“The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep”*** (v11b, – ESV) – This phrase, “*lays down His life for the sheep*” (also in 15, 17-18) is a prefiguring of the cross and is the means by which He gives us life and life more abundantly. The laying down of His life was a vicarious sacrifice, a substitutionary atonement. In other words, Jesus did not simply give His life so that we did not have to lose our lives. He wasn’t “substituted” into our lives like someone being sent into the game off the bench. He bore our sins as our representative, federal Head, and received the just wrath of God on our behalf. Headship is the glad sacrificial responsibility taken for those under you.

***“I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own”*** (v14) – This “knowing” refers to the covenantal union between the sheep and Jesus, along with the definite work of His atoning sacrifice. Jesus even knows that there are many more for whom He would die (v16). Verse 16 promises the one flock from many sheepfolds which prefigures the salvation of the nations. Many sheepfolds, but just one flock (Psalm 2:7-8, Rev 7:9, Eph 2:14-18). “*Many people are troubled by the presence of denominations, but Jesus does not say that there will be only one sheepfold; He says that there will be only one flock*” (Pink).

***“...and they will hear My voice”*** (v16) – Even those, like us in the twenty-first century, who are His sheep but would come to Him long after He ascended to His throne, hear His voice. We hear His voice in ministry of preaching and witnessing the Gospel of Christ (Rom 10:14-17).

**The Purpose and Will of the Father and the Son** (vv15-18) – The covenantal love that the Shepherd has with His sheep is an outpouring of the covenantal love (“knowing”) that the Father has with the Son and the Son with the Father (v15). The Father doesn’t withhold His love until Jesus agrees to lay down His life. Rather, the eternal love of the Father and Son is linked with the unqualified obedience of the Son to the Father. The Father loves the world and sent His love, His Son (John 3:16). The Son loves the Father and lays down His life for the sheep (v15). This covenantal love includes the giving of the nations to the Son and so the end is not simply the death of Christ, but His resurrection from the dead, prefigured here in vv17-18. Jesus was “*declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead*” (Rom 1:4). This was always the purpose and will of the Father and the Son (Phil 2:9-10). His death would not be that of a martyr, overwhelmed by His enemies, but the death of a triumphant conqueror (Col 2:13-15). He knew that in dying He was winning for Himself and His people a kingdom and a crown of glory (Ryle).

**The Words of the Good Shepherd Divide** (vv19-21) – “*Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword*” (Matt 10:34). A shepherd brings peace by beating up the wolves. The shepherd who will not fight the wolves does not love the sheep. Jesus doesn’t cause the division but He is not afraid to reveal the division. He speaks in such a way as to reveal the antithesis; His truth-telling causes discomfort. But the fault is not in His character or His doctrine. It was in the carnal mind of the Pharisees. “*The carnal mind is enmity against God*” (Rom 8:7). We must not think it strange if we experience similar responses, “these Christians are crazy...” This can tempt us to water down the message. But we are called to make a clarion cry and that with the bold love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father, of the Father’s love for the world and the Shepherd’s love for His sheep. For as Paul would write from prison, “*For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for His sake*” (Phil 1:29).

**A Word to the Sheep** – It is possible to listen to these lessons on the Good Shepherd and about “*hearing His voice*” and wonder if you really believe. There is a way to ask that question and find yourself trying to look deep within for pure faith. Be careful about becoming too introspective – it’s dark down there (Jer 17:9). Remember, we are sheep. Sheep wander. Sheep are dumb. Sheep follow other dumb sheep into all kinds of trouble. The question is not how good of a sheep are you. The question is do you hear the voice of the Good Shepherd. What happens to you when you encounter His Word? Do you hunger for more? Do you want to follow that voice? Don’t look into your heart to find your authentic self – that is modern secularism. Rather, listen to the voice of Jesus – and follow His call.

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