

*Jesus, The Good Shepherd, a Master/Teacher; a loyal and true friend*

#4 in Seven Faces of Jesus John 10:11-42

Text reading John 10: 11-18:

*<sup>11-13</sup>"I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd puts the sheep before himself, sacrifices himself if necessary. A hired man is not a real shepherd. The sheep mean nothing to him. He sees a wolf come and runs for it, leaving the sheep to be ravaged and scattered by the wolf. He's only in it for the money. The sheep don't matter to him.*

*<sup>14-18</sup>"I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own sheep and my own sheep know me. In the same way, the Father knows me and I know the Father. I put the sheep before myself, sacrificing myself if necessary. You need to know that I have other sheep in addition to those in this pen. I need to gather and bring them, too. They'll also recognize my voice. Then it will be one flock, one Shepherd. This is why the Father loves me: because I freely lay down my life. And so I am free to take it up again. No one takes it from me. I lay it down of my own free will. I have the right to lay it down; I also have the right to take it up again. I received this authority personally from my Father."*

This is the fourth "I am" statement of Jesus that we have examined in this series. Like the other I am statements we've looked at: I am the bread of life; I am the light of the world; I am the Sheep Gate—I am the Good Shepherd is a metaphor. Just to be clear, a metaphor is a symbol, a personification, a figure of speech used by Jesus to suggest that he resembles the qualities of a shepherd and more specifically a good shepherd.

In a similar vein if we sing "A mighty fortress is our God" we are singing a metaphor. God is not literally a fortress, but a mighty fortress represents or resembles something that is true about who God is.

So we are all clear on what a metaphor is? The reason I present this to you again is to really is my own OCD style of Bible study—I so want to understand what the bible is saying in what it says and not make it say something it is not saying that I always follow a procedure. One of the first questions I ask is, what am I reading? What kind of expression is this? I won't do this in the same detailed fashion as last week with I am the Sheep Gate, but here we have new text and another metaphor.

And right out of the gate we have a challenge to understanding this metaphor, I am the Good Shepherd. What do you think that challenge might be? Does anyone here know a real live shepherd? Has anyone here seen a real life shepherd up close? In the absence of shepherds as a common part of our daily lives we have to use our imaginations when it comes to what a shepherd is like and what makes a good shepherd. Could you tell me one word that describes your imaginary shepherd?

Joel M. Hoffman holds a PhD in theoretical linguistics and has a particular interest in bible translations and mistranslations. One of his blog posts is titled *The Lord isn't the Shepherd you Think, [or Don't mess with Shepherds]*. He suggests that the English word hides the realities of the ancient imagery. What pops into his mind with the word shepherd is a scrawny man-- sort of a Woody Allen body type—dressed in rags who spends more time with sheep than with people—an ill-dressed lonely loner.

Hoffman contends that the notable shepherds of the Bible were anything but scrawny loners—they were fierce, regal, and romantic.

- **Fierce**
  - In Exodus 2:16-20 Moses comes upon seven daughters of Midian priests being harassed by some not-so-good shepherds, and as a good shepherd he defends the women and fights them off.
  - Shepherds go up against lions, bears, marauders to protect and save their sheep
  - Shepherds are fierce—not people you mess with. Hardly a Woody Allen type.
  - As a metaphor a Shepherds symbolizes might used to protect, defend, save
- **Regal**
  - The most famous OT shepherd is King David. This is very much in the tradition in the ancient world that the best general often became the king or queen.
  - A fierce warrior shepherd who becomes King. Both Micah and Nahum, minor prophets in the OT era, speak of Israel's shepherd king defeating the Assyrian threat
  - As a metaphor a shepherd also symbolizes nobility and the ability to rule because they know how to protect, defend, and save the sheep
- **Romantic**
  - Hoffman's third OT image for a shepherd is a romantic—better said—someone who knows how to love.
    - The shepherd lover in the Song of Songs is someone who
      - Knows how to wait and endure—does not arouse love before its time
      - Knows how to covenant—only has eyes for one

- Knows how to love in the covenant—with love that is stronger than death; with love that is unquenchable in its fire
- Nurturing
  - The shepherd images are not just male—there is also a strong feminine nurturing image to the Biblical shepherds
    - Isaiah 40 uses antithetical parallelisms to contrast the masculine image and the feminine image in successive verses: [Isaiah 40:10-11]
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*See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power,  
and his arm rules for him.*

*See, his reward is with him,  
and his recompense accompanies him*

*The LORD cares for his nation,  
just as shepherds care for their flocks.  
He gathers the lambs in his arms,  
And carries them close to his heart  
while gently leading the mother sheep that have young.*

Surely when Jesus said I am the Good Shepherd to the Pharisees, his disciples, and the onlookers while he was walking in the temple courts in the area known as Solomon’s colonnade during the Feast of Dedication or Hanukkah, they heard him say

- I am the brave, fierce, and mighty Shepherd who knows how to save and protect sheep like I just did with rescuing the blind man from where you confined him in your rustler’s pen
- I am the noble, regal Shepherd who can rule justly and defend the flock—better than David
- I am the loving Shepherd who knows how to love the flock with a love stronger than death

And the subtext would be—“you will not have your best day if you mess with this Shepherd”

You can tell how powerful a metaphor is by how it connects. Everyone got it. Our casual reaction to “I am the Good Shepherd” suggests that we don’t get it the way those who heard Jesus during that Hanukkah celebration got it. Listen to the reactions:

*<sup>19-24</sup>This kind of talk caused another split in the Jewish ranks. A lot of them were saying, "He's crazy, a maniac—out of his head completely. Why bother listening to him?" But others weren't so sure: "These aren't the words of a crazy man. Can a 'maniac' open blind eyes?" ...*

*The Jews, circling him, said, "How long are you going to keep us guessing? If you're the Messiah, tell us straight out."*

*<sup>25-30</sup>Jesus answered, "I told you, but you don't believe. Everything I have done has been authorized by my Father, actions that speak louder than words. You don't believe because you're*

*not my sheep. My sheep recognize my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them real and eternal life. They are protected from the Destroyer for good. No one can steal them from out of my hand. The Father who put them under my care is so much greater than the Destroyer and Thief. No one could ever get them away from him. I and the Father are one heart and mind."*

*<sup>31-32</sup>Again the Jews picked up rocks to throw at him. Jesus said, "I have made a present to you from the Father of a great many good actions. For which of these acts do you stone me?"*

*<sup>33</sup>The Jews said, "We're not stoning you for anything good you did, but for what you said—this blasphemy of calling yourself God."*

*34-38 Jesus said, ...why do you yell, 'Blasphemer! Blasphemer!' at the One the Father consecrated and sent into the world, just because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I don't do the things my Father does, well and good; don't believe me. But if I am doing them, put aside for a moment what you hear me say about myself and just take the evidence of the actions that are right before your eyes. Then perhaps things will come together for you, and you'll see that not only are we doing the same thing, we are the same—Father and Son. He is in me; I am in him."*

*39-42 They tried yet again to arrest him, but he slipped through their fingers. He went back across the Jordan to the place where John first baptized, and stayed there. A lot of people followed him over. They were saying, "John did no miracles, but everything he said about this man has come true." Many believed in him then and there.*

They got it-- Pharisees, crowd, and disciples—very different responses, but they got it. I believe God wants us to get it to. We haven't yet said what Jesus meant when he called himself the Good Shepherd. He gives two nuances to the metaphor in verses 11-16. The first is in verse 11.

*The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own 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. <sup>13</sup> The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.*

There is a relationship of good shepherd to sheep that surpasses any work for pay relationship. For Jesus you are never just a job; you are never just a project; He will never run away if you something happens to you which makes you less desirable/valuable—like contracting some disease common to sheep—like pizzle rot; or chronic copper poisoning; or Epididymitis.

There is a relationship of the good shepherd to the sheep that surpasses any threat from any source. Jesus will not simply stand by and allow you to become somebody else's BBQ. Jesus will not take a holiday and allow you to be cut you off from the main flock--scattered you so that you are easy pickings for whomever might pass by.

What makes Jesus the Good Shepherd? He is willing to lay down his life for the sheep. This is an absolutely unique metaphor of the Shepherd and not found clearly in the OT shepherd language. We have to go to Isaiah's image of the Suffering Servant to find one willing to die others.

Why would the Good shepherd die for the sheep—to remove any and all threats that would interfere with the sheep having a full life? Jesus is so desirous that you have a full life with God, that you are nurtured in good pasture; that you are led out of the confinement of the pen to full life—he is not only bread, light, the gate—but will give his life for you.

In the next paragraph Jesus makes it clear that he isn't just waiting around for some threat to materialize; or biding his time until some bad apple employee abandons his post. He says:

*This is why the Father loves me: because I freely lay down my life. And so I am free to take it up again. No one takes it from me. I lay it down of my own free will. I have the right to lay it down; I also have the right to take it up again. I received this authority personally from my Father."*

A literal translation would be *I lay my life down in order to take it up again*. That is what is known as telic grammar from the Greek word *telos*—meaning a purposeful end. Jesus purposely lays down his life for the sheep in order that he may purposely take it up again. The resurrection is the completion of Jesus' purposeful death.

Why would Jesus have a purposeful death for his sheep? You might say "in order to take away the sin of the world"—and you would be partially right. Jesus purposely laid his life down and took it up again not just to take away something that threatens your life—but positively to give you life. Jesus laid down his life and took it up again so that he could give to you the gift of the Spirit—He cares for you that much. Jesus laid down his life and took it up again so that you could have your own life with God and not be dependent upon whatever spiritual wind happens to be storming its way through our culture.

There is one more reason that Jesus is the Good Shepherd

<sup>14</sup> "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—<sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.<sup>16</sup> I 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.*

Jesus is a good shepherd because he knows the flock. He knows his sheep by name; He knows where they have come from. He knows their heritage. He has watched them since before their births since he also knew their parents. He knows their family of origin issues. He knows where the good pasture is. He knows the dangers on the way. He knows how to lead his sheep on redemptive paths through the dangers. He knows.

And as we said last week, the sheep who stop and listen here their name—and when they hear their name, they know when it is Jesus calling. They can distinguish his voice from other voices. In this text we get an additional explanation—Jesus and his sheep know each other in the same way that the Father knows Jesus and Jesus the Father. One of the basic human needs is to be known and understood. If that is what you are looking for, then there is a good Shepherd who has a track record of doing that.

This text also gives us another explanation about the Good Shepherd—just as he lays down and takes up his life purposefully, He and the Father have a purpose for the flock. First of all they like big flocks and one of their goals is to bring the Hebrew flock and the gentile flock together so that there is one flock and one shepherd.

The Good Shepherd metaphor is loaded with meaning that escapes us today. I do think that if Jesus came to our culture he would not use the good shepherd metaphor. It is not a metaphor I relate to easily. Years ago when I taught this passage I talked about the cattle drives I'd gone on in Wyoming with my friends. There are lots of similarities between herding cattle and herding sheep, and one big difference—you drive cattle; you lead sheep.

Back in the days of my counselling training with Paddy he queried us in one session “What is your metaphor for growth?” His encouragement was that we identify our metaphor for growth in life and live the metaphor. He also encouraged us to assist clients in finding their metaphor for growth and help them live their metaphor?

The bible is loaded with metaphors for the life of faith

- Being planted by streams of living water in Psalm one
- The river of life in Ezekiel 47 and John 7:38
  - <sup>38</sup> *Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.* <sup>39</sup> *By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.*
- Running the race—in Hebrews 12

Back then my metaphor for growth was being a student—because I love learning. Now my metaphor has changed. I am so far removed from the agricultural/ranch world that the metaphor of being a sheep does not have the power it had for Jesus hearers. I take all I know of the good shepherd and put it into a new metaphor.

The metaphor that works for me is that of a Master and apprentice. To learn counselling, to learn music; to learn woodworking; to learn to dance; and more—I've always sought out Masters who can teach me the craft. The most exciting learning environments I've been in are when Masterful practitioners are walking with me encouraging me and critiquing me. To learn about grace and love and life and forgiveness I want to apprentice myself to a Master practitioner. Jesus, the good Shepherd in his day is the Master/teacher to me. My metaphor does not stop there. The full metaphor would be a Master/teacher/friend.

I tend to have a small circle of friends. In that small circle I trust those friends with my life because they have demonstrated they want the best for me. I will sacrifice lots for those friends as they sacrifice for me. It is within that circle I feel loved the most. But friend alone is an insufficient growth metaphor for me. If I add a Master/teacher to friend I have the relationship and the wisdom needed for growth. This is how Jesus has showed himself to me.

And there are two texts which give credence to the Master/Friend/Apprentice/metaphor—First is John 5:19ff where Jesus uses Master/Apprentice language about his relationship with the Father.

*I tell you for certain that the Son cannot do anything on his own. He can do only what he sees the Father doing, and he does exactly what he sees the Father do.* <sup>20</sup>*The Father loves the Son and has shown him everything he does*

The second is where Jesus uses the language of Friendship in place of Shepherd language when he is with his disciples and not in the temple arguing with the Pharisees:

*John 15: 13-17 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.<sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command.<sup>15</sup> I no longer call you servants, because servants do not know their master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.<sup>16</sup> You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit.*

The invitation today is to live your part of the metaphor Jesus is calling you to. Jesus is already living his part. Be it Good Shepherd or Master/Friend/Apprentice—step into the metaphor and get on with the living your life with Jesus.

We have the privilege today to hear about Jesus' life with Amy Wilson—how he has called her by name; how he has led her into life. When Amy finishes and after we sing, I will ask if any of you care to share with us your metaphor for your relationship with Jesus and how he is leading you into life.