

Grace to You :: esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time

I Am the Good Shepherd

Scripture: John 10:11–21

Code: 43-53

Turn in our Bibles again to the tenth chapter of John. And this really wonderful, and rich, and precious portion of Scripture in which our Lord identifies Himself as the Good Shepherd who cares for His sheep.

That particular metaphor, that simile, that word picture as it's called in verse 6 maybe needs a bit of an explanation for us as to context so that you know why it happened here. There's nothing sort of isolated in the ministry of Jesus. Everything of course had a context, a historical context. I think many people read the Bible as some kind of a spiritual book, as if it were detached from history, and events, and people, and consequences, and sequences. But this is all history. And all that we read in the gospels in terms of doctrine, and theology, and our Lord's great discourses were, in a moment and an event, a strategic point where this is what spoke to that moment, and what spoke to that crucial hour. That's essentially true of this.

Our Lord had been, in chapter 8, in a confrontation with the leaders of Israel. And they had rejected Him, and they had declared their hatred of Him, and they were on a course to kill Him. In fact, by the time you get to chapter 10, they've tried at least three times to bring about His death. There's no question what their view of Christ is.

In chapter 8, there was this conflict, this confrontation. And admittedly, He escalated it by telling them the truth. He said to them: "You're of your father, the devil." He's a liar and a murderer, and so you are liars and murders as well. We could say that, for them, the incident in chapter 8 ended on a very severe note. As a result, chapter 8 ends with these words: "Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him. Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple."

So He escapes a stoning; and on the spot, kind of vigilante mob violence execution. On His way out of the temple, He sees a blind man. And by now, He's absorbed in the crowd. And as He goes out of the gate, He sees a blind man, 'cause that's what blind men did. They sat at the gate to beg. And that's where He found this man. The man had been blind from birth and Jesus stops and heals him.

By then, His enemies, the Pharisees, had caught up with Him. They had slowed down the effort to kill Him at the moment, He being absorbed in the crowd and having drawn the crowd's attention by the miracle. They are, again, deeply distressed by the fact that He is having such popularity and that He has healed this man and drawn such attention to Himself. They had made a law. That law is indicated in chapter 9, verse 22 that if anyone confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, he was to be put out of the synagogue. Well, Jesus healed the blind man, and then the blind man came to faith in Christ.

As the story ends, we know down in verse 38 he said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped Him. So, the man was healed physically, and he was healed spiritually. And as a result of that, he violated their law. He has confessed Him as Messiah, Lord, and Savior. They throw him out of the

synagogue, and they are still completely intent on killing Jesus.

Chapter 9, then, features an extension of chapter 8 in the hostility of the religious leaders of Judaism toward Jesus. The healing of the blind man, in a sense, in the big drama of things, is somewhat incidental. Not incidental to the blind man, but the big picture here is that when Jesus does a monumental miracle that has no other explanation, because this is a man congenitally blind, and everybody knows it because he's a familiar figure there who has been begging a long time, it has no effect on how they feel about Jesus. They make no move in the direction of affirming something other than that He's satanic. Their hostility has passed the point of any return. They are, in fact, demonstrating themselves to be false leaders who, instead of acknowledging their Messiah, reject their Messiah, and want to execute their Messiah. They are, in a word, the false shepherds of Israel.

Shepherding was obviously a metaphor in the ancient world that people understood in an agrarian society. It was very common in the Old Testament as we read in Psalm 80. God was called the shepherd of Israel. Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd," and other places. They all understood that because the land of Israel was full of sheep and shepherds. Shepherds spoke of care and feeding and protection. These were men who appointed themselves shepherds of Israel, but they were false shepherds. Truth is: they were wolves in sheep's clothing.

So, in chapter 9, after the healing of this man, they surface again with the same hatred and the same hostility. The chapter closes, chapter 9 does, with Jesus pronouncing a judgment on them because of their blindness, because they are willfully blind to the truth. The conversation, specifically with them, ends with these words: "Your sin remains." You are anything but righteous. You are in your sin.

Now, He said that back earlier when He said to them, "You will die in your sin, and where I go, you will never come." Here He says, a couple of chapters later, "You remain in your sin." Your sin remains. So, here are the blind leaders of Israel, the blind leaders of the blind; here are the false shepherds of Israel.

As we come into chapter 10, He is still talking to them, still talking to them. They're still there. The blind man is still there. The disciples are there. The crowd of Jews is there by the location where the healing took place. And the Pharisees, scribes, are still there. Jesus then launches into a description of how a good shepherd conducts his life. That description is what we looked at last week, verses 1 to 10. It is, according to verse 6, a figure of speech, an analogy, a metaphor. And we looked at some of the details about that last week that help us to understand shepherding. A shepherd has his own sheep. He has his own sheep. He knows his own sheep. He not only has the right to lead and feed his own sheep, but he has the responsibility to lead and feed his own sheep.

At night, you'll remember, the sheep would come into the village fold and every shepherd would bring his sheep, and they would all be in the same fold. And then in the morning, the shepherd would come and call out his own sheep and call them by name. He knows his sheep. He calls them by name. The sheep know their master's voice, and they follow him. The sheep will not follow a stranger. We also learned that while they're in the fold at night, thieves and robbers may try to climb over the wall and fleece the sheep or even slaughter the sheep. And so, there has to be a guard set at the door to protect the sheep, 'cause there are always thieves and robbers. The shepherd is

committed to protecting them at night in the fold, and then in the morning coming and leading them out and, by name, one by one, to green pastures and still waters. The shepherd is even the door, because they have to pass by him to be identified as his own.

Beautiful picture of animal husbandry, but that's not its intent. That's the figure. The reality comes clear when you look at the language in verse 9. "I am the door; if anyone comes through Me, he will be saved." Oh, I see what we're talking about. This is a picture of the salvation provided by the true shepherd. The salvation. These are all pictures of salvation doctrine. The divine Shepherd has His own sheep. They've been given to Him by the Father. They've been chosen before the foundation of the world. He knows them all by name. He has the right to call them. He calls them by name. They know His voice. They follow Him. They will not follow a stranger. That's salvation. The elect are in the fold of the world. But the time comes to call them out, and the voice of the Shepherd calls, and they hear that voice, and they follow that voice. This is irresistible grace; this is the effectual call, the divine call to salvation.

They will not follow a stranger. They will not follow a voice that's unfamiliar. Yes, there are thieves and robbers, false teachers who try to climb into the fold and fleece and destroy the sheep - can come to destroy and kill - but the Shepherd provides protection for them from the false teachers. The Shepherd leads them, goes before them, and they follow Him. He takes them in a safe way to green pastures, meaning spiritual blessing; still waters, meaning spiritual blessings throughout time and all into eternity. It's a lesson on salvation. That's the figure.

Contrary to the false shepherds who are the strangers, who are the thieves, who are the robbers, and who we will see in verses 11 to 21 are the hired hands. The true Shepherd cares for His sheep. So, this picture, everybody would affirm. They would all say that's exactly what a shepherd does. He has his own sheep, he has the responsibility to care for those sheep, he puts them in a safe place, he calls them out of the fold, he calls them by name, he names them, they know his voice, they follow him, they don't follow a stranger, they have to be protected from the danger of thieves and robbers, they are led out by the shepherd to places where they can eat and drink. That's a good shepherd. That's a picture of salvation.

Who is the shepherd? Jesus is starting to give us a pretty good idea when in verse 9, as we saw last week, He says, "I am the door." Shepherds were the door. At night, the sheep would go in, and the shepherd would drop his rod and stop every sheep, every sheep, every sheep. Check them over for any kind of wound or any kind of problem, and then lift the staff and let them go in. In the morning, he'd call them all by name, and they had to pass by him into his care. The shepherd was the door. Jesus is saying this shepherd, this faithful shepherd, this is how shepherding should be done. This is how I do it. I am the door. That gives a pretty good hint.

We know He's speaking metaphorically because it is a figure of speech, and because in the same verse, He says He's talking about salvation. But then in verse 11, He says specifically, "I am the Good Shepherd." That Good Shepherd that I just described? That Good Shepherd that I just identified by the way He behaves Himself and conducts His life with the sheep? "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand" – or a hireling – "and is not concerned about the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.

I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”

“A division occurred again among the Jews because of these words. Many of them were saying, ‘He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?’ Others were saying, ‘These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?’”

So here, in verses 11 to 21, our Lord explains how He fulfills the identity of the Good Shepherd. He is the Good Shepherd. He is the One prophesied, as we saw last week in Ezekiel 34, the Good Shepherd that God Himself would send. And as I told you last time and I reiterate again, He launches into this particular figure of speech because the religious leaders of Israel were known as the shepherds of Israel, but they were false shepherds. And so, He distinguishes the false leaders from Himself. He is the True Shepherd of the sheep. They were blind. That’s how the conversation with them ended in chapter 9, verses 39 to 41. They were spiritually blind to the truth of God. They couldn’t lead anybody anywhere because they couldn’t see where they were going themselves. They are false leaders. They are, in fact, strangers, not shepherds. They are hirelings, hired hands who do what they do for money and have no concern for the sheep. They are thieves, they are robbers who want to fleece and kill.

Jesus was talking about them, in contrast to Himself. Did they understand it? No. Verse 6. They didn’t understand what those things were which He had been saying to them, which is proof of what He said in verses 39 to 41 in chapter 9. “You are blind. You do not understand.” He said that earlier. “Whatever I say, you don’t understand.” He actually went so far as to say, “Because I tell you the truth, you don’t understand, because you are of your father the devil, who is a liar.” If I lied, you would get it, but when I tell the truth, you don’t.

So this very *paroimia*, or simile, metaphor, is designed as an illustration not only of the Good Shepherd, but an illustration of the blindness of the false shepherds, because they didn’t even understand it at all. The false leaders, thieves, robbers, strangers, hired hands have nothing in mind but protecting themselves. They are not about to risk their lives for the sheep, as we read. They want the money, and if need be, they will become thieves and robbers to get it. They are strangers, not shepherds. The true shepherd, however, is described here as one who loves and cares for and nourishes, and lives for and dies for the sheep. And that, of course, is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ.

So let’s look then at these verses 11 through 21, and we’ll just kind of work our way through. This is the, by the way, the fourth “I am” in the gospel of John. There are a whole series of “I am’s” that our Lord gives, and “I am” is the Tetragrammaton in Hebrew, the *ego eimi* in Greek, the “I am,” meaning the name of God; so they are claims to deity as well in the context of each one. I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the door. I am the Good Shepherd. All affirmations of His deity bound up in the “I am” statement of it.

But here, He is the Good Shepherd. Let’s look at that a little bit. “I am the good shepherd.” Then He repeats it immediately, “the good shepherd,” again. Now, this is an important construction for us to understand. The emphasis here is this: “I am the shepherd, the good one.” Very important order

there. “I am the shepherd, the good one.” As if to say, “in contrast to all the bad ones.” I am the shepherd, the good one. But there’s two words in Greek for “good.” One is *agathos*, from which you get the word, “agatha,” or the name “Agatha.” *Agathos*, old name. *Agathos* means sort of morally good. Good, and sort of confined to moral goodness. It’s a wonderful word, a magnificent word, familiar in the New Testament.

But the other word is *kalos*, the opposite of *kakos*, which is “to be bad.” *Kalos* is to be good not only in the sense of moral quality, but it’s a more encompassing word. It means to be beautiful, to be magnificent, to be winsome, to be attractive, to be lovely, to be excellent on all levels, not just in that which is unseen in terms of character, but in all aspects. I am the shepherd, the excellent one. I am the shepherd, be it the lovely one, the beautiful one, as contrasted to the ugly ones, the dangerous ones.

He is not just another shepherd. He is the shepherd, the good one, the one who is preeminently excellent. He’s above all shepherds. The good one.

Now, the Jews had an idea about who was the best shepherd. For them, historically, it was David. It was David. David the shepherd boy who cared for his father’s flocks and defeated Goliath, and became the king of Israel. David was their great shepherd, historically.

But you do remember in chapter 5, Jesus claimed to be greater than Moses, and in chapter 8, He claimed to be greater than Abraham – “before Abraham was I am.” And here, He is shepherd far greater than any other shepherd including David, including David.

He is the shepherd who is the good one, the premier one. That is quite a claim to make, to say You are better than Moses, better than Abraham, better than David, and to say You are God? No wonder He had to back it up with miracles, right?

He was telling those Jews that He was God, because they knew Psalm 23, “the Lord is my shepherd.” They knew Psalm 80, the “Shepherd of Israel.” They knew what Isaiah the prophet said about God shepherding His people. He is saying: “I am the shepherd, the good one.” Again, another claim to deity.

Now, His true goodness as a shepherd is seen in three ways here in this passage. I’m not going to tell you anything you don’t know, but I am going to tell you what’s here. You can be grateful you do know this, because looking at this again is so rich and wonderful for us. This shepherd, this shepherd, the good one is marked by three particular ministries to His sheep. One, He dies for them; two, He loves them; three, He unites them. He dies for them, He loves them, He unites them.

Back to verse 11. The shepherd, the good one, “lays down His life for the sheep.” Shepherds were absolutely responsible for sheep. It was serious business. It was a man’s man’s job, and it was really kind of a lowly and humble job as well, because it was unskilled and it was high risk, and it was messy and dirty. But a shepherd was absolutely responsible for the sheep. If anything happened to the shepherd, he had to produce proof that it was not his fault due to dereliction of duty or rustling the sheep away for his own keeping, or letting a friend take one, or whatever.

Amos the prophet speaks about the shepherd rescuing two legs, or a piece of an ear out of the lion’s

mouth (Amos 3:12). They were in battle with beasts. There were wolves, there were mountain lions, there were even bears. David tells Saul how when he was keeping his father's sheep, back in 1 Samuel 17, David fought off a lion, and he fought off a bear. By the way, that's what made David such a heroic shepherd.

In Isaiah 31, Isaiah speaks of the crowd of shepherds being called out. When a lion attacked, they called the shepherds to go fight the lion. The law laid it down, Exodus 22:13, "If the sheep be torn in pieces, then let him bring a piece for a witness." If you don't have a sheep, if you lost a sheep, you have to account for that sheep to the ultimate owner. You have to bring a piece to prove that it was an animal.

To the shepherd, it was the most natural thing then to risk his life. It's what shepherds did. It's what they did. You could just take them to the grass and leave them there, I suppose, but why did the shepherd stay? Why those long, long, long hours of staying there? Because he had to be a protector.

There's an old book called the *The Land of the Book*, and the author of that historical look at Israel said, "I have listened with intense interest to their graphic descriptions of downright and desperate fights with savage beasts. And when the thief and the robber come, the faithful shepherd has often to put his life in his hand to defend his flock. I have known more than one case where he had literally to lay it down in the contest." Well, I mean, if you're fighting a wild beast, you could lose. So, there was risk and you couldn't just all of a sudden stop the risk. It could come to death.

He goes on to say: "A poor fellow last spring, between Tiberius and Tabor, instead of fleeing, actually fought three Bedouin robbers until he was hacked to pieces with their khanjars, and died among the sheep he was defending." It happened. But that's what a shepherd did. Talk about a man's man, talk about a tough job - low paying, low skill.

A shepherd who was doing what he should never hesitated to risk, perhaps even lay down his life. And it was voluntary, 'cause he didn't have to engage in that. That's why Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd, the shepherd who's the good one lays down his life." He lays down his life. Go down to verse 18. "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and to take it again."

Freely, voluntarily, Jesus gave up His life for the sheep. Some would say, "Well, that's no big thing. He's God, so He had a body, and He gave up the body and, you know, big deal." It's more than that. It's strange that the commentators would even say something like that. There was a lot more than that, and it's bound up in the word "life." He lays down His life. It's not the word *bios* or *zoe*. Those are the two words for "life" in Greek. *Bios*, biological life; *zoe*, that gets transliterated "zoology," the study of life.

It was neither of those sort of scientific words. It's the word *psuche*, which is the word for "soul," which speaks of the whole person. Not the outside, but the inside. The *psuche* is the inside. He gave up His soul, His whole person. He didn't just feel the pain of the nails in His body, and the pain of the thorns in His body, and the pain of the scourging in His body. His whole soul was tortured with sin-bearing anguish, suffering.

In Matthew 20:28, Jesus said, "The Son of man gives His soul a ransom for many." It translates "life," but it's *psuche* again. He gives His soul, His whole person, and He felt it in every part of His being.

Why did He do that? Why did He voluntarily lay down His soul? He says, "for the sheep," *huper*, "on behalf of, for the benefit of." That's exactly what it says in 2 Corinthians 5:21 where Paul explains: "He who knew no sin became sin for us" – "for us," "for us," "for us." *Huper* appears in a lot of passages that speak about the substitutionary atonement of Christ, that He took our place, that He died for us. An actual atonement, folks. He laid down His soul for the sheep. That's pretty narrow. For the sheep. It was an actual atonement, a complete atonement for the sheep whom He knew, and who, when called, would know Him.

He did it for the benefit of the sheep. From a natural standpoint, if this happened to the shepherd, that's the end of the sheep. If something's coming after the sheep and kills the shepherd, the sheep are going to be vulnerable. They're liable to be killed, they're liable to be scattered. Whether it's an animal or a robber or a thief, the death of the shepherd could really spell the end of the sheep.

But this shepherd? No. Because He laid down His life, verse 18 says He had the power to do what? "Take it up again." And on the third day, He came out of the grave and re-gathered His scattered sheep. Were they scattered? Yeah, they were. Smite the shepherd and what? The sheep are scattered. Zechariah promised, and they were. But He came back from the grave and re-gathered them, and He said this: "All that the Father gives to me will come to Me, and I have lost none of them."

So the death of the shepherd usually meant the death of the shepherd in some cases, but not in this case. Why did He die? Isaiah 53:8, "For the transgression of My people." Matthew 1:21, "You shall call His name Jesus for He shall save His people from their sins," His sheep. It's an actual atonement. It's not a potential one that you can sort of turn into a real one by believing. He actually paid in full the penalty for His sheep, whom He knew, and throughout human history is calling to Himself. Very unlike a hired hand, verse 12. "He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep."

The true shepherd, or the owner - and sometimes they were the same - he cares about the sheep. It's not a job for him. It's his very life. He has developed relationships with those sheep. They're known to him. They're loved by him. That's not true of hired hands. I like the old translation, "hirelings," "hirelings." A characteristic of a hireling, according to Zechariah 11:6, is that he makes no attempt to gather the scattered sheep. The world has always been full of hirelings; this is another word for the leaders of Israel: strangers, thieves, robbers, now hired hands, hirelings. I suppose it's better to be a hireling who runs than a thief or a robber.

But the end is the same. The end is the same. The sheep become victims of any of these. The world has always been full of this, and the flock of God is always attacked, and the world is always attacked by these false leaders who fleece and destroy the sheep, and who flee when real trouble comes.

And who is the wolf? The wolf is anything that attacks the sheep, anything. Anything satanic, anything satanically orchestrated through the world, anything, anything that comes against the sheep. There are many false pastors, false teachers, as there have been throughout history. They may say, "Lord, Lord, we did this, we did that," and He's going to say, "You depart from me. I never knew you." There are perverse men, Acts 20, who rise up within the church and lead people astray, as well as wolves from the outside.

But Jesus is the one who will risk His life and give it up for His sheep. A hireling is a mercenary. No impulse other than personal gain, and a coward in a crisis. And when the crisis comes, whether it's an attack on the outside or an attack on the inside, the hireling is going to protect himself. He's out.

There is outside danger. Outside danger, attack from the wolves. There is also the wolves dressed like sheep. Jesus said in Matthew 7, "There is inside danger, the false teachers, who instead of protecting the flock, flee when the danger comes." But the True Shepherd, He gives His life for the sheep, and then He takes it back again and gathers them as they have been scattered.

So, the church's first essential really in leadership is Christ-like shepherding, where you even put your life on the line, even risk your life for the sheep. You risk your life to be the one through whom God in Christ can call them out, protect them. When the danger comes, you don't run. When the danger comes, you stand up.

I was talking to one of the missionaries at the conference yesterday, and he was saying, "Where are the people who will stand up and speak the truth to protect the people of God? Where are they?" So hard to find any. We're all under-shepherds, 1 Peter 5, under the Great Shepherd, the Good Shepherd. We all have to be willing to risk our lives for the sheep.

So, the first characteristic, then, of the shepherd's relationship to the sheep is: he gives his life. Secondly, he loves his sheep. This is, of course, what's behind the giving of his life. Verse 14: "I am the shepherd, the good one, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep." This explains why He lays down His life voluntarily for the sheep, because He knows them.

You say, well, where do you get love? There's no love there. It's all know, four times, the verb *ginosko*, "to know." Well, let me show you something, just a little bit of a hint. "My Father knows Me," verse 15. "My Father knows Me." Verse 17, "the Father loves Me." That's the interpretive key. The word "know" here has the idea of a loving relationship. This goes all the way back to Genesis 4:1 where Adam knew his wife and she had a child. Cain knew his wife, and she had a child. Adam knows Eve again and another child, Seth. God actually says in Amos, "Israel only have I known." It doesn't mean the Jews are the only people He's acquainted with. What is it talking about? It says about Joseph that he was so disturbed because Mary was pregnant and he had never known her. What is that talking about? That's a euphemism for intimacy.

It's not about information. It's not about information. It's about love, and four times, that word "know" here, it implies this intimate relationship, this intimate, sweet, loving fellowship. This sort of consummated relationship.

In the 14th chapter of John, and verse 21, "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the

one who loves Me, and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and disclose Myself to him.” So there, the language is love, rather than knowing. Verse 23: “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him. We will come to Him and make our abode with Him.” So when you see the word “know” in this context, it’s the idea of loving, intimate relationship.

He loves His sheep. He knows them more than knowing their name, more than knowing who they are. He has an intimate relationship with them. He knows them intimately. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Depart from Me, I never” - What? - “I never knew you, but I know who you are.” It’s not about information. I know who you are. I don’t have any intimate relationship with you, any love relationship. He wanted to give His life for His sheep because He knew them, He loved them.

John 3:16. “God so loved the world that He” - What? – “gave His only begotten Son.” That’s why the Father gave the Son; that’s why the Son gave His life. He loves His sheep. He loves His sheep. This too is in stark contrast to the false shepherds who have no love for the sheep, no affection for the sheep that they claim to shepherd. He loves His own.

That love leads to a third aspect of the relationship. He unites the sheep. First with Himself, and then with each other. Verse 16. “I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.”

Now, what did I tell you about the fold in verse 1 last week? I told you the fold in verse 1 is Israel, right? The shepherd comes to the fold, calls out his sheep. The Lord is the shepherd; He comes to Israel, to the Jew first, and then He calls out His sheep by name, and they follow Him. But, He also has sheep which are not of the fold of Israel. I have to bring them also.

Who are they? Non-Jews. Anybody outside Israel. The Gentiles, the nations. This is stunning. This is unacceptable to the Jews. This is more fuel for their animosity because they resent Gentiles. They believe Gentiles are permanently outside salvation, the covenant, and the promises of God. And yet, in Isaiah 42, a messianic chapter, a messianic prophecy, we read verse 6: “I am the Lord. I have called You in righteousness.” This is God speaking to the Messiah. “I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You. I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations to open blind eyes and bring prisoners from the dungeon, and those who dwell in darkness from the prison.” There’s a messianic promise that the Messiah would take salvation to the nations. Another one of those is in 49 of Isaiah, verse 6. “Is it too small a thing that You should be My Servant” - the Messiah – “to raise up the tribes of Jacob to restore the preserved ones of Israel? I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” What about that?

He’s shocking them by saying, “Look, I have sheep not in your fold.” It’s why there’s a Great Commission. “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” Go make disciples of all nations.

And He will bring them all together as one flock with one shepherd, and that’s why Paul in Galatians 3 says, “In Christ, there’s neither Jew nor Greek,” Jew or Gentile. That’s why in Ephesians 2, Paul says, “The middle wall of partition is torn down, and we’re all one in Christ.” Jew, Gentile.

In chapter 11, verse 49, Caiaphas in making his inadvertent prophecy; he was high priest. He said to the people who were conspiring to kill Jesus, he said, “You know nothing at all, nor do you take into

account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, that the whole nation not perish. Now, he did not say this on his own initiative. But being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one, the children of God who are scattered abroad.” That was always His intent. He unites His sheep. He brings them together. To Himself, to each other.

So that is the relation of the Good Shepherd to the sheep. He gives His life because He loves them, and He brings them into intimate unity with Himself, and with one another. He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit, one with Him, and one with all others in the one body of Christ.

Secondly, and just briefly, the relationship of the Good Shepherd to the Father is in verses 17 and 18. “For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.” Let me give you a simple understanding of that. The Father gave a command. The command to Jesus was: “Lay Your life down and take it up. You have the authority to do that. I am commanding You to do it.”

It was a command, but “no one has taken it from Me. I lay it down on My own initiative.” That’s why the Father loves Me, because of My obedience. This is pretty profound. Yes, the Father chose Jesus to be the Lamb, the acceptable sacrifice. Yes, the Father is the One who killed the Son by the predetermined counsel and foreknowledge of God. He was the sacrifice.

But this is not fatalism. This is not something about which Jesus had no choice. I laid My life down. No one takes it from Me, including God. Jesus is telling us this was a perfect act of willing obedience. These are mysteries. He couldn’t sin. He had no capacity to sin. And yet, there’s a real struggle. Because in the garden, He says, “Father, if it’s possible” - Do what? Stop this. - “take this cup from me; nevertheless not My will, let Yours be done.” He voluntarily did what the Father commanded Him to do, and that’s how He demonstrated His love to the Father, and that’s why the Father loves Him. “The Father loves Me because I laid my life down that I may take it again.” That’s what the Father wanted Him to do; that was critical to the plan of salvation, to gather the redeemed into eternal glory.

He did it voluntarily. This was not fatalistic. This wasn’t something He had no choice about. He couldn’t make a wrong choice, but He voluntarily made the right choice. “I had a command given to Me. I voluntarily, willfully obeyed that command and thus secured the Father’s love.” “If you love Me,” Jesus said - Do what? - “keep My commandments.” That’s how you affirm your love.

There’s so much of this in the section we’re coming to in John 14 and 15, I won’t go into it now. But, His relationship to the Father was one of love and obedience, love and obedience. Two sides of the same thing. So that’s a model for us. “Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” The Father eternally loves the Son, of course. The Son eternally loves the Father. But in some unique way in the incarnation, the Son voluntarily, willfully, obeyed the command of the Father to give up His life out of love for the Father, and in so doing, sustained the Father’s love forever. Love and obedience.

There’s a final relationship here, the relationship of the Good Shepherd to the world, the relationship

of the Good Shepherd to the world. What is it? Well, it's in verses 19 to 21. "A division occurred again among the Jews because of these words." And by the way, if you go back to chapter 7, verse 43, back to chapter 9, I think it's verse 16, there are divisions. Jesus divided the crowd. The divisions, though, are not between necessarily believers and non-believers. There are divisions among non-believers and that's what you have here. A division occurred among the Jews because of what Jesus had said. Many of them, many of them, maybe the majority of them, were saying, "He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?" That would've been the mantra, of course, of the leaders. And the people would've bought into it. You know, He does what He does by the power of Beelzebub, Satan, as we read in Matthew 12.

So, at one pole in the division were the people who said Jesus is a maniac, He's a madman, He's a demon-possessed lunatic. We have people like that, people who don't mind cursing Jesus, saying blasphemous things about Him. But then there were the others, verse 21, saying, "These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed." I mean, that's pretty rational, isn't it? That's pretty rational. A demon can't open the eyes of the blind, can he? Demon-possessed people don't talk like that. They're not coherent, and they don't do that. They don't do those miracles. So whatever counterfeit things demons do, they don't look like this.

So these are the more rational people. I guess you could say the first are the irrational blasphemers, the second are the more rational people. They both end up in the same hell forever, 'cause it really doesn't matter whether you curse Jesus, or whether you think you need to treat Him more reasonably. That kind of hesitation gets you nothing. You either confess Jesus as Lord or die in your sins and occupy the same hell with the extreme blasphemers.

So we meet the Good Shepherd. In relation to His sheep, He gives His life for His sheep, He loves His sheep, He unites His sheep. His relation to the Father, He loves and obeys the Father. His relation to the world, He's rejected either by those who blaspheme Him in a kind of irrational way, or by those who rationally tolerate Him. But for us, we'll place ourselves among the disciples there that day, and we'll say with Him: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God, won't we?

And we'll say this for our benediction, Hebrews 13:20, "Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen." We declare Him to be the Great Shepherd of the sheep who came out of the grave. He is our Shepherd. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You again for loving us, giving Your life for us, uniting us, loving and obeying the Father, and so willfully being the sacrifice for our sins. Rising to raise us in justification and glory. We would be literally overwhelmed if we could even grasp what You have prepared for us in the future. But we acknowledge the thrill of even what You bestow upon us now. Fill us with gratitude and with blessing as we continue to serve You. We pray in the name of Christ. Amen.

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