

The Good Shepherd

I Am

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If you would, please, take your Bible with me and let's turn together to the New Testament Gospel of John. John's Gospel, chapter 10. I'm going to be reading verses 11 through 18. Last week we looked at verses 1 through 10 and in verse 10 Jesus spoke about life and having it more abundantly and that's why tonight we are going to come back to that because, to put it simply, the question is what does Jesus mean by life and more abundantly? What does he mean by that? And for the last 100 years we've had a version of what it means that I'll leave to you to ask does it match up to what the Scriptures say. So we'll look at that tonight, but today we are looking at verses 11 through 18. Verses 11 through 18.

Verse 11, Jesus is speaking and he says,

11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

This is God's word.

Holy Spirit, may you add your blessing and help, anointing, to proclamation of the word to myself and to every hearer today. In Christ we pray. Amen.

Something that would be helpful to remember is that in the book of Exodus, in the Old Testament book of Exodus, God called a man named Moses and called Moses to go to

the Egyptian pharaoh and tell him, "Let my people go." To let the Israelites go. They were in Egyptian bondage and God said, "Moses, I'm going to send you and I want you to go and I want you to speak to the pharaoh and tell him to let my people go." However, Moses had some questions and he was concerned, "Who should I say is sending me?" So he says to God, "If I come to your people and say the God of your fathers has sent me and they ask what is his name, what shall I say?" And God's response is quite helpful here, he said, "I AM has sent me to you." I am. And that's important because God is answering the question, "Who should I say? What's your name? Who should I say?" And he says, "I AM. I AM." Then when we get to the New Testament, we have Jesus saying, "I am," and we find that what he is doing is he is not only identifying with God, he is identifying as God. And his hearers know it because down in verse 33, and we did not read it but look at verse 33, "The Jews answered him, 'It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.'" You see, his original hearers understood that when he said, "I am the door, I am the good shepherd, I am the bread of life, I am the light of the world," they knew he was identifying as being God in the flesh.

That is why we have been examining the "I am" statements of Jesus that are found in the Gospel of John, and today we will examine the "I am" phrase, "I am the good shepherd." In verse 11, Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd." Now, why didn't Jesus just say I am the shepherd? Why didn't he say that? He said, "I am the good shepherd," why did he put it that way? Well, maybe this will help. Back in 2007, Kathryn and I had an opportunity to go on vacation and we went to Hawaii. That was back in 2007. While we were there, Kathryn found a store, a ladies store where they sold Coach purses. Okay, so you ladies are probably familiar with that, Coach purses. She noticed that they were reasonably priced and she found one she liked and she thought, "You know, this is so much cheaper than at home so I'm going to get it." She got it, brought it home. About two months later she was in a drugstore somewhere and she happened to notice a lady across the way who had a Coach purse also and she thought, "That looks just like my purse. It looks just identical to it." So she got a little bit closer and she began to notice some differences. She noticed that on this lady's purse, it just looked different, but then she looked at her own, she looked at her own Coach purse, and she noticed that instead of a "C" for Coach, it was a "G." It was a little slight difference and so she came home and she said to me, "Man, I don't have a Coach, I have a Goach!"

Now, what she found out was she did not have the genuine. She did not have the genuine Coach. And so I say that because of this: Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd." What he means by that is, "I am the genuine shepherd." Others have come, others are here, we looked at this last week, others have come and they are not the genuine shepherd. Why? Because back in chapter 9, remember the religious leaders, the shepherds of Jesus' time, they cast out, they cast out the blind man after Jesus healed him. They weren't that good shepherds but Jesus said, "I am the genuine. I am the good shepherd."

Now, we need to ask the question: why sheep? Why in the world does Jesus refer to people as sheep? Why doesn't he use, you know, animal husbandry like chickens? Why doesn't he say chickens? Why doesn't he talk about raising horses or something? No, it's

sheep. Over 300 times in the Bible the word "sheep" is used and it's used more than any other animal in the Bible. Now, why does God want us to understand that we are like sheep? Why?

Well, some observations. Sheep are the most helpless of all animals. Sheep are the most helpless of all animals. Also, sheep are stubborn and they are prone to stray. They are prone to break away and to go off in some other direction. You see, other animals, say a chicken or a horse or a dog, whatever, they may break and run, you can just see the horse running and breaking all its shackles and running through the field singing, "Born free," but then there are other animals that break away and they decide, "Home. Home. I want to go home." They come back. That's not sheep. Sheep break away and they can't find their way back and they are going here and then they run here and then they run here and they are just jumping all over the place, you see. One of the reasons is sheep have poor eyesight. Sheep have poor eyesight and they tend to follow other sheep without thinking about it.

The Washington Post back in 2005 had an interesting story of some shepherds who were eating breakfast outside a small town in the country of Turkey when suddenly they saw a lone sheep, one lone sheep jumped off a nearby cliff and fell to its death. Amazingly, they were stunned to see when the rest of nearly 1,500 sheep followed the one sheep over the cliff. And not all of them died because, you know, it finally gets kind of fluffy down there, it's not so hard, but 450 sheep died that day because of following one sheep. And the families, this was amazing, they calculated their loss, \$100,000 for 450 sheep. You see, sheep are incredibly expensive animals, which we will get to in just a moment.

So what do you think, you don't have to say this out loud but what do you think Jesus is saying when he refers to us as sheep? What do you think? Well, I think it's pretty clear in a culture, in our culture that teaches just the opposite, we need to know that Jesus is saying, "You are completely dependent. You are non-self-sufficient. You are spiritually helpless." That's what Jesus is saying to every generation when they read these passages about being sheep, "We are absolutely spiritually helpless. We need a good shepherd." That's what Jesus is saying here and thank God there is a good shepherd. He said, "I am the good shepherd."

Now we're going to look at a few amazing things about the good shepherd and the first one is this: the good shepherd knows his sheep. Look in verse 14, "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me." Occasionally I'll have somebody stop me at the back door and they say, "Brother Van, I met someone last week who knows you," and immediately I go, "Uh-oh." First off, "When did they know me? Did they know me prior to coming to Christ or was it after?" It's kind of disconcerting when somebody knows you. They know you. You see, we think we know ourselves, right? I guarantee you're here today and you're saying, "I know myself pretty well." You see, the problem is we're not aware that we are constantly either overestimating ourselves or underestimating ourselves. You see, we overestimate ourselves and so we make decisions that kind of mess up our lives, or when we underestimate ourselves, we make decisions that mess up our lives. I heard it put this way some time ago. Our present self looks back at our past

self and says, "Boy, I was such a jerk back then." Let's say you are here today and you're 16 and you're looking back at your 13 year old self and you go, "I was such a jerk then." What you think as your present self, you think that you are over being a jerk. You think you've gotten over it. You think you're cured, you see, and what's going to happen is your future self, listen, your future self is going to look back at your present self now and you're going to say, "I was such a jerk. Back in 2016, you know, I was such a jerk."

You see, we don't know ourselves really well. We really don't but there is one who knows us, right? The good shepherd knows us. He knows us, what? To the bottom. You see, he knows, he sees the real you beneath all the swagger. You know what swagger is, don't you? You're at work and you want everybody to think a certain thing about you. Or you're at school and you want everybody to think a certain thing about you, the way you carry yourself and the way you talk and all that stuff. You're not fooling the good shepherd at all. He knows you to the bottom. He knows you beneath all the swagger. He knows all the stupid decisions you've made. You see, we've kind of kept those quiet, we keep them under wraps, but he knows. He knows all the stupid decisions we make and he sees the pile of stupid stuff we haven't acted on yet, right? He does. I guarantee you, here's what we do: we place demands on other people that we don't place on ourselves, right? "You ought to be... They ought to be... They ought to be..." You see, we place all kinds of demands on other people and that's stupid.

So Jesus, the good shepherd, sees that pile of stupid stuff that we haven't done yet and in spite of that, in spite of that, he loves us. Here's what I'm saying: he knows our sheepness. The good shepherd knows our sheepness. Isaiah 53:6, notice this, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned--every one--to his own way." Do you understand your sheepness today? Do you understand it? God understands it, do you understand your sheepness today? Romans 5:8, "but God shows his love for us," God shows his love for us sheep, "in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Let that sink in this morning. Let that sink in. He knows our sheepness and while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. I say think about that because most assuredly, most likely there is someone here today, you hate yourself. Now, you don't talk about it to anybody. You don't talk about it to anybody. You might share it with a close friend, you might share it with a therapist, you might share it with somebody, but maybe you just kept it under wraps that you hate yourself. I was with someone this week and they were sharing with me about a young girl who made a very bad decision and, I mean, she's extremely fragile right now and she made this statement, she said, "I hate myself. I hate myself." You can understand when you've done something and you feel like that there is no recovery from it. You know, you just feel a sense of like, "I've done this. There is no hope for me. There is no way to come back. There is no recovery." I've felt that way before. I was about 14 years old and I'm not going to go into the story, you've heard it before, but I felt that way before with my parents. I felt like, I've done something, I've done something so bad, there is no hope for me, there is no way back.

But I want you to see a picture, something I was reading about this week. I want you to see a picture on the overhead. That is a picture of a burned out forest but notice the little

flower there. I love that picture. I'll tell you why: it's because forests can be destroyed by pollution or by fire as was the case some years ago at Yellowstone National Park. Sometimes only black soot remains where once there had been a beautiful forest. However, listen, however given enough time, the rains will come, the sun will shine, and slowly vegetation emerges. Flowers come back, the trees begin to grow, and the beauty returns.

Isn't that amazing? If God made nature in such a way, that it could go through this horrifying scorching and then in time the rains come, the sunshine comes and all of a sudden a little flower begins to peek through. If God can do that in nature, don't you know there is hope for you? Don't you know that? I want you to know that today. Maybe you've made the decision, you've done a stupid thing and you think there is just no way back for me, understand if God has made nature in that way, there is hope for you. Remember the woman at the well? He knew her to the bottom. She was trying to put on her swagger and all that kind of stuff and he said, "Bring your husband. Hey, you've had numerous husbands. You've been sexually involved with a number of different men." He knew her to the bottom, but still he reached out to her and she came to believe in him. Because Jesus is the good shepherd, there is hope for every one of us in this room. Listen, we hear this often: come as you are and, yes, absolutely you can come as you are but Jesus loves you too much to leave you the way you are. His grace is a transforming grace.

He knows his sheep and to know, listen, to know involves intimacy. It involves relationship. In verse 14 he said, "I know my sheep and my sheep know me." It is not a one-sided relationship. You see, you might be here today and you say, "Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm a Christian, you know? I live in America and I'm a Christian and I really think the world of Jesus and everything," but do you have a relationship, do you have a saving relationship with Jesus? In other words, do you know him in a saving way? Do you know him for who he has revealed himself to be? Do you know your sheepness and do you know his saving power? But does he know you? You see, does he know you because in Matthew 7, this is absolutely essential. Jesus will one day say, "And then I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness." When Jesus said, "I never knew you," it is to say, "I never had a relationship with you." So while we say, "I know Jesus," does he know you? Does he know you? Does he have a relationship with you? Will he say on that day, "Yes, I know you. Yes, come on in. Come on in. I redeemed you. I saved you. You've trusted me. Come on in." Or will he say, "Go away, I have never known you. I don't know who you are."

So Jesus knows his sheep and his sheep know him, but the second amazing quality that we want to see in these passages is this: the good shepherd owns and cares for his sheep. Look at verses 12 and 13 with me, please. "He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees," that's the hired man, "he flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep." Now, this is quite interesting. You've hired this person and they're going to watch over the sheep for you. They are a hireling, they are a hired hand, but notice the distinction: they do not own the sheep. The hired hand does not own the sheep.

Now remember we said a moment ago, sheep were expensive animals. In fact, the owner of a flock, his flock was his bank account. It wasn't like he had this flock of 40 sheep and then he had half a million in the bank. No, his flock was his bank account. His flock was his treasure. He looked at his flock and he said, "This is my treasure. This is my all in all." You see, the hireling, it wasn't so for the hireling. The hireling was hired to do his work and receive his pay but when danger came and his own skin was in danger, he abandons the sheep. Why? Because they are not his. He doesn't own them. They are not his treasure, you see. So the shepherd owns the flock, they are his, it's his treasure, but the hired hand, Jesus said there is a hired hand who doesn't own the sheep and when the wolf comes, he runs off. Why? Because he doesn't own the sheep. And it is Jesus saying to us that he owns his sheep. They are his treasure.

Notice these verses with me in 1 Corinthians 6, "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price." Now do you understand what Jesus is saying here? He's speaking this to the church. "Christian people, Christian men, Christian women," he's saying, "you're not your own anymore. You've been bought. You've been purchased. You've been redeemed. You don't own your life anymore. Christ owns your life." If you're here and you're a Christian today, he owns you. You have been bought. And we find this in Acts 20, Paul says to the elders in Ephesus, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God," notice this, "which he obtained with his own blood." Okay now obtained, purchased, bought. So there is that same emphasis. The church has been bought. The church has been purchased by the blood of Jesus. But then notice in 1 Peter, "knowing that you were ransomed," that's a different word, "ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." Notice we are ransomed. We are ransomed, what? Some teach we are ransomed from the devil. No, no, no, we are ransomed from the futile ways inherited from our forefathers. We are redeemed from sin's bondage.

What we are seeing here is this: a price was paid for you. If you are in the flock, if you belong to Jesus, a price was paid for you and it was the price of the life of Jesus Christ. It was his death, his blood that brought you, okay? So you're not your own, you are bought, you have been purchased with a price, now what does that all mean? It means this: when Jesus talks about the hireling, the hired hand, and says he sees the wolf coming and he runs off, why? Because he doesn't own the sheep. Why does the shepherd stay? Because he owns the sheep and they are his treasure and so what Jesus is saying is this: the hireling ran but when Jesus saw the wolves, he faced the wolves. Why? Because his sheep are his treasure. Do you ever think about yourself that way? Do you realize that when Jesus speaks about us as being his sheep, it's another way of saying, "You are my treasure. You are my treasure." Wow.

You see, when the wolves came, Jesus said, "I wasn't like the hireling." He did something different. He became a sheep himself. We find what Jesus is thinking in Isaiah 53, notice these words, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a

lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth." You see, the hireling saw the wolves coming and ran. Jesus the good shepherd saw the wolves coming and he said, "I'll become a sheep. I'll stand in between. I'll become a sheep." And he did it, why? Because the sheep are his treasure.

Now how can we apply this? You may hear that today and say, "Oh, that sounds so good. Oh, I'm so glad. That is so wonderful. I love to hear how much he loves me and cares for me. I love this." Well, here is what it's meant to bring about in our lives. All of this points us to a basic principle for Christian living. As Christ's sheep, we are not to live for ourselves. We have been saved by grace. We are not our own. We have been bought with a price. Paul put it very well in 2 Corinthians 5, notice these words, "and he died for all," that's the purpose, "he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."

That's one of my favorite verses. Do you know why? Because it gives you the instructions for basic Christian living. Basic Christian living. You see, some people think, I hate to put it this way but I see this so often, they are kind of ticking off the boxes. "I prayed the sinner's prayer. Tick. Be baptized. Tick. Join a church. Check. Now go and live the rest of my life doing what I want to do. It's my sex life, my money, my decisions to make." And you see what has happened is you are just not at all understanding why Christ died. He died that we might no longer live for ourselves but for him who for our sake, for our sake, died and was raised. This is the Christian living that we are called to, living for his sake who for our sake died and was raised.

So the good shepherd owns us and he cares for us. We are his treasure. But finally, one third amazing thing about the good shepherd we find in these verses is: the good shepherd will lay down his life and take it up again for his sheep. Look at verse 15 with me, "just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep." Look at verse 17, "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again." As the good shepherd, Christ does not merely risk his life for the sheep. You see, an average shepherd might be willing to fight off a bear or a wolf but never with the intention of dying. You know, a shepherd gets up in the morning and he's aware there might be a wolf today, there might be a bear, and I'm ready. I'm ready and I'm ready to risk it. I'm ready to get out there. But he really doesn't get up that morning with the intention of laying down his life. There is a credible difference, okay?

Some of you are pet owners, right? Imagine now that as a pet owner your pet falls into a raging furnace. Are you going to jump in and get it? Now, I know you love your pet but I'm talking a raging furnace. I'm not talking about it fell off the porch, okay? It falls into a raging furnace, I mean, most likely you're not going to jump in, right? You love, you love, you love your pet but you're probably not going to jump into a raging furnace to save it. Here's my point: Jesus here is absolutely giving us a mind-blowing example. You see, we've been looking at the metaphor of a shepherd and a sheep and the shepherd watches over the sheep, a bear comes, a wolf comes, fighting them off, willing to risk his life, but really not with the intention of dying, but what we see here is the good shepherd intentionally lays down his life. That's what Jesus is saying, "I lay down my life." He

doesn't say, "I'm risking my life." No, "I'm intentionally laying down my life for the sheep."

Look at verse 15. This is amazing, "and lay down my life," do you see the word "for"? It is a Greek preposition in the original language, the Greek preposition that means "in the place of." Uh-oh, what Jesus is saying is, "I lay down my life in the place of the sheep." Intentional. Purposeful. You see, this is not somebody throwing himself off a cliff. Let's say you're walking along with a friend, you're walking along and all of a sudden your friend just jumps off the cliff and says, "See how much I love you." You look over and go, "What in the world was that all about?" No, this is not that at all. What you've got here, the good shepherd is seeing his sheep in mortal danger and while rescuing the sheep, he goes over the cliff and then we say, "See how much he loves us." See how much he loves us, to lay down. He laid down his life for us.

That's why we find in Ephesians 5 these words, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." We could talk about that different ways but what I want you to see is how Christ loved the church. How does Paul tell us Christ loved the church? He gave himself up for her, the church. The church, the ekklesia, those who have answered the call of the Gospel. And I just want to ask you: how can a person who professes to be a Christian, who says, "Oh yes, I love Jesus. He has redeemed me. He saved me from my sins," how can a Christian give so little attention and devotion to that which Christ loved and died for? Think about that because this week, this week you're going to run into people who say, "You don't have to be a Christian to go to church. You don't have to go to church to be a Christian," and all this kind of business. Look, it absolutely boggles the mind to think that someone can claim to know Christ and love Christ and to be loved of Christ but they do not love what he died for.

But not only did he die and lay down his life, we find that he also takes it up again. He said, "because I lay down my life that I may take it up again." The death of Jesus was not an end in itself. His death has the resurrection in view all along. It wasn't like he died, he's in the tomb and he says, "Oh boy, I hadn't thought about this. What are we going to do now?" No. No, he knew all along. Resurrection was always in view. He died in order to rise and by rising to proceed toward his ultimate glorification and ultimately the pouring out of the Holy Spirit so that others like you and I might live.

So how do we apply this today? Two people that I want to talk to, two groups of people. Let's say you're here today and you've been looking into Christianity, maybe you've been coming over the last few weeks and you've been hearing the Gospel and you've been thinking about this and things are beginning to come in focus and so I want to ask you this morning: do you see your sheepness? Do you see your sheepness? That's just another way of do you sin your sinfulness? Do you see your brokenness? In using this metaphor of sheep, Jesus is saying, "Look, you are spiritually bankrupt. You are spiritually bankrupt. You need a shepherd. You need somebody to rescue you." Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. Do you see your sheepness? Do you see your neediness? Are you coming to grips with that? Are you being convinced, being persuaded, "Look, I'm a sheep. I'm needy. I'm lost without Christ." Are you seeing that?

Also, do you see the incredible value Christ has placed upon you that he would give his life to save you? Is that beginning to dawn on you? Are you beginning to think, "That's amazing"? It's one thing to see your sheepness and your neediness but then it begins to come into focus more and now you're beginning to say, "Wait a minute, he values me that much that he would lay down his life? While I was still a sinner, he would die for me?" Is that beginning to come in focus? I pray that it is today because this is the good news that is proclaimed. Around this world, that is why we support missions. That is why the Gospel is being proclaimed around the world. It's the shepherd. It's the shepherd today through these words calling, coming for you, you see? To say, "Do you know your sheepness? Do you know your neediness? Do you know you need a shepherd? Do you see the value that has been placed upon you by Christ dying for you?" And hearing this today, hearing this today is just the shepherd calling. Calling. Notice it said, "I must bring them also." I must bring them also. Jesus has an evangelistic thrust, "I must bring them also."

So today will you hear the call of the shepherd? Will you come to grips with your neediness, your sheepness? And then finally, the group that's here today who are believers, who are sheep following the Good Shepherd, and this is going to be important that you listen to because undoubtedly there is someone here today that says, "Brother Van, I am one of his sheep. I love the Lord. I love the Lord. The Lord knows I love him, but I'm a little troubled because if he cares for me, if he loves me and cares for me, then why is all this stuff going on in my life? Why does my life seem to be kind of out of sync right now? Why am I having trouble in my marriage? And why am I having trouble at work? Why am I facing these health problems? What's going on? If he really loved me, if he was the shepherd that you're talking about, why don't I feel his care more?" Well, do you remember we said a moment ago that sheep run around in a panic? Kathryn and I have a little puppy. Pretty much now the puppy knows us and I can say, "Paisley, come here, come here, come here," and she'll come or she'll see me and she'll run to me or she'll see Kathryn. But that's not sheep. Sheep are not that way at all. Sheep run around in a panic. The shepherd finds the sheep. The sheep is over there so the shepherd is saying, "Come here. Come here." The sheep, no, the sheep is running to and fro. He won't. The sheep never will say, "Oh, good shepherd, there you are, finally." It won't do that. It just runs around and runs around. So what does the shepherd have to do? Oh, you know, don't you? The shepherd has to tackle the sheep, slam it to the ground, tie up its feet, throw it over his shoulder and bring it back to the fold.

Now let's suppose you're that sheep for a moment. You're running around and just scampering every which way and all of a sudden, boom! He grabs you and throws you to the ground and he's tying up your feet and surely you're going, "What's the shepherd doing to me? I thought he loved me? I thought he cared for me? What's going on here?" And he does love you and he does care for you but what is the shepherd doing? He's rescuing the sheep from danger. And we could go on and on with the metaphor but here's what I want you to understand: we must trust and follow the Good Shepherd. He's the Good Shepherd. He's the genuine shepherd. He's the authentic shepherd. He's the Coach and not the Coach.

We must trust him and follow him. He said, "My sheep will hear my voice and they will follow me." And so you may be thinking, "Boy, the shepherd just doesn't...." Look, he understands. He knows. He knows what he's doing. Trust him. He knows what he's doing. Follow. Trust and follow him for he is the Good Shepherd.

Let's bow our heads.