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John 10

Christ is Our Shepherd, We Shall Not Want

Psalms 23, the passage we began our corporate worship with this morning, is such an incredibly comforting Psalm. It ranks high in one of the most beloved psalms and Bible passages of all time; one of my personal all-time favorites. I often read it when visiting people in the hospital, or who are sick, suffering, or grieving. It begins with the sweet, poetic words, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” It brings incredible comfort and consolation to know that we can find rest and protection in the Lord, who watches over us as our shepherd, leading and providing for and protecting us, even in the presence of enemies or in the shadow of death. But there’s a flip-side to this that also humbles us: being shepherded requires us to recognize that we are *sheep* - and that’s not a flattering reality; it requires humility and cuts against our pride.

I saw a video one time of a sheep that was stuck in a pit and couldn’t get out. The shepherd came and worked hard to pick up the heavy, stubborn sheep and pull it out. And then what did the sheep do? It *immediately* jumped back into the same pit! The shepherd, who cares for his sheep, jumped back down into the pit and got it back down; and before he could steer it away, it jumped right back down into the pit again! He managed to move the sheep away and it ran and jumped into another hole, and kept doing that over and over again. Sheep are stubborn, foolish animals. They will follow each other blindly into danger, or stubbornly walk away from the rest of the flock and put themselves into peril. They’re weak, vulnerable, often foolish animals.

We might not like to think of ourselves like that - like sheep - but that’s exactly what the Bible says we Christians are: and we need a shepherd. We might not like to think of ourselves as sheep, since it cuts down our pride, but we must acknowledge that that’s exactly what we are - weak, vulnerable, foolish sheep that are prone to wander and be led astray, even to our own detriment and harm. We find ourselves lost on the mountain and don’t know what to do; we stray in our sin and make ourselves easy prey for wolves; we foolishly keep jumping back into the same pits again and again; we feel spiritually weak and hungry amidst the struggles of this life and desperately long for a safe pasture for ourselves to eat and rest in beside still waters. And that’s why we desperately need a shepherd - a good, true, faithful shepherd - to know, call, lead, convict, comfort, protect, and save us.

This is a rich theme all throughout the Bible, especially in the Old Testament. Israel's leaders were often shepherds, both literally and figuratively. Abraham and the Patriarchs were shepherds; so were Moses, the great prophet, and David, the great King. Kings and religious leaders were often referred to, metaphorically, as "shepherds" of the people.¹ Likewise, the people of God were pictured as sheep, the flock of God. One of the most powerful portrayals of this is in Ezk. 34, where God rebukes the "shepherds of Israel" for abusing the people, taking from them for their own personal gain while not actually caring for them. They're like shepherds who fleece and slaughter the choicest of the flock without actually caring, providing for, or protecting the flock. God insists that the sheep of Israel are *His* sheep, His flock, and that He *will* shepherd them. And this is most fully realized and fulfilled in Christ, the Good Shepherd - He is the great shepherd of our souls.

We see that right here in John 10. This passage shows us 4 glorious descriptions of how Jesus is the truly good shepherd that our souls desperately need. As we walk through them, my hope and prayer is that our hearts will be captivated with an even fuller and richer picture of how wonderful a shepherd Christ is, that we might love and trust and follow Him all the more.

I. Jesus, the good shepherd, is known by His sheep and He calls them by name (vv.1-9)

Jesus begins the section by contrasting the positive characteristics of the good, true shepherd with the negative examples of bad, false shepherds: the thieves and robbers. He begins, in vv.1-2, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep." Jesus is teaching by way of analogy, drawing on the imagery of shepherding, common knowledge for His audience. In the ancient world, including Jesus's day and age, shepherds would put up their sheep in a sheepfold, such as a pen, courtyard, enclosed pasture, or even a cave sometimes, with a shepherd serving as watchman. The shepherds who belong there, who own and tend to the flocks, of course have the full right and authority to enter the fold and gather their sheep: they have the key to the door into the courtyard; the gatekeeper will recognize them and open the gate. Anyone who *doesn't* use the door but climbs over the fence or wall instead is obviously up to no good and has no right to be there: only thieves and robbers do such, with the intention to come in and steal the sheep. Jesus is setting up a juxtaposition between the true, good shepherd - Himself - and false shepherds, thieves and robbers - false teachers who try

¹ See, for example, Jer. 3:15.

to lead people astray and away from God, such as the unbelieving Jewish religious authorities and Pharisees, who just rejected Jesus in chapter 9.

Jesus continues speaking about the true, good shepherd in v.3: “To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” Sometimes, multiple flocks owned by different shepherds would be put in the same sheepfold (such as a large enclosed pasture, pen, or courtyard), with a gatekeeper who knows which shepherds to let in. Then, when the shepherd enters the fold, he would call out for his sheep - and his flock would recognize his voice. Even though multiple flocks would be in there together, every time a shepherd came, only *his* sheep would respond and follow his voice; the voices of strangers - thieves, robbers, or even stranger shepherds of different flocks - they would ignore.²

I was up at the Wilcoxes’s farm one time, and they were showing us around the barn. The cows were all out to pasture, grazing and whatnot, so Kevin stuck his head out the window and called for them - and *immediately* the entire herd stopped what they were doing, got up, and came into the barn, just from him calling them. They knew the sound of his voice; they knew the voice of the one who feeds them, and they knew it was dinner time. At our church back in Tennessee, there was a church member who shepherded sheep, and he would do the exact same thing, sticking his head out the back door to call his flock to himself. They knew his voice and would come immediately. There’s a relationship between the shepherd and the flock; they know and recognize each other. The shepherd knows his sheep and they know him; he calls and they come.

That’s what Jesus is drawing on here - except he goes even further, and makes it even *more* personal. This good shepherd calls His sheep *by name*, in v.3, not just giving a whistle and calling the whole flock, but also calling out each sheep individually and personally. He knows each and every one of his sheep, even has a name for them, and calls out each one personally, by name, to ensure that each one is accounted for. This shows just how much the good shepherd cares for his whole flock, not just the flock as a whole, but each and every one of His sheep; He personally *knows* each one, *names* each one, *calls* each one, *accounts* for each one, every individual sheep. And of course, this is meant to show us the very heart of Christ, our Good Shepherd, and his love and relationship toward *us*, His sheep, His people! This shows the personal love, care, and knowledge Jesus shows to each and every one of His people! Jesus *loves*

² Carson, *The Gospel of John*, Pillar, p.382.

His Church, all true Christians; He loves His covenant people, those who belong to Him, whom the Father has given Him as His own! He loves us as His flock. And He doesn't just love us generally, but *personally and individually*! He loves each and every sheep! Brother, Sister, Jesus *knows* you and *loves* you *by name*. In fact, He doesn't just love you and care for you because you're in His flock, because you're a Christian; no it's even deeper than that: you are in Christ's flock, you are a Christian *because* He first loved you and knew you and claimed you as His sheep and went after you and *called you by name*, drawing you to Himself!

But how do we know if we are Christ's sheep, those whom He personally knows, calls, and cares for? The sheep are those who *hear* Christ's call, *know Him*, and *respond* to His call, coming to Him and following Him. "The sheep hear his voice" (v.3). Then in vv.4-5: "When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." Christ's sheep are those who repent, believe, and follow Him. V.6 tells us the crowd didn't understand Jesus's figure of speech so far, so Jesus explains further in vv.7-9: "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture." Jesus mixes metaphors here, for just a second: he was picturing himself as the true shepherd of the sheep, now he explains that He is *also* the *door* into the sheepfold. The only way to join the flock - the people of God - and enjoy the good, safe pasture of salvation from sin and eternal life is by coming in *through Jesus* - by believing and trusting in Christ alone! Christ's sheep are true Christians, those who are saved and enjoy the safety of the pasture of the Kingdom of God as the flock of God. And believing in Jesus is the *only* way of salvation, the *only* way to God! There are not any other ways; no other religion or faith will do. There is only *one flock* and only *one door*. Jesus is "the way, the true, and the love. No one comes to the Father except" through Him (John 14:6).

Christ's sheep are those who repent and turn away from the voice of every "stranger" - the world, the flesh, and the Devil and every thieving false teacher and false religion - the sheep reject these and instead listen to the call of Christ and believe in Him. All true sheep - all true Christians - show that they are really sheep by responding to Christ's call and following Him, showing that they know, believe, and love Him. This is how we *become* Christians! But here's something important we need to recognize in this chapter: Jesus also calls specific individuals

His sheep *before* they follow His call; they show they are His sheep by responding to His call - having faith - but that's not *why* they are His sheep; He first calls them *by name*. All throughout this chapter, the "sheep" of the Good Shepherd represent the elect, God's chosen people, whom God chose to be His own possession even before the foundation of the earth (individually, by name). Jesus says in v.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." He is speaking of all those who will one day hear the call of the call and respond *through faith* - not just in Israel but even among the Gentiles, among the nations - which is still true to this day! And interestingly, He calls them His sheep *before* they have heard and responded to His call. But He already knows *them*, and He will go after them, and effectually call them to Himself. When they hear His call through the preaching of the gospel, they will listen to His voice, recognize and know Him through faith, and follow Jesus. This is so because God the Father has already given them to Christ as His own. We see this later on, in v.29: "My Father, who has *given them to me...*" Each sheep, each individual Christian, was elected and given to the Son beforehand; Christ knows His sheep and goes after them, calling to each of us personally, by name, and effectually drawing us to Himself.

Christ, the Good Shepherd, knows His sheep and calls to us. The call of Christ goes forth through the gospel. The call goes out in all the earth: repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of your soul! Whoever repents and believes in Christ, whoever hears His call, recognizes Him through faith, and follows Jesus *will be saved*, and proves to be a true sheep! He is the door, and whoever enters by Him, through faith, will be saved! If you're not a Christian today, or are wondering whether or not Jesus will call you by name to be His sheep and personally know you, don't wait: enter by the door! Run to Christ and believe in Him! Ask Him to save you and bring you into His fold! Knock and He shall open; seek, and you shall find! And if you *are* a Christian today, see how much God loves you: Christ, your good shepherd personally knows and cares for you and has called you to Himself by name. And that's not all...

II. Jesus, the good shepherd, lays down his life to save each one of His sheep (vv.10-18)

Jesus, our good shepherd, loves us so much that He laid down His life to save each one of His sheep. Again, he contrasts this with the negative examples of thieves, beginning in v.10: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep"

(vv.10-11). The world is full of voices who promise us life and pleasure and prosperity and happiness - only they prove to be Siren songs that allure us into the water to dash us against the rocks. They are thieves that break in and lead us away from the good pasture of God's Word to steal, kill, and destroy us. Satan seeks to lure us away, like a ravenous lion, seeking to steal, kill, and destroy. The world, the flesh, and the Devil tempt and attract and allure us and promise us all kinds of pleasure, but it leads to our own misery and destruction. They are thieves and robbers. They say, "your life for mine," like a vampire seeking to suck the life right out of us. But Jesus is exactly the opposite. He comes to *give life* in abundance. He says, "My life, for yours." Jesus alone proves that He truly, completely, unceasingly loves us, to the bitterest end, proving so by paying the highest cost: giving up His own life for us on the cross. Who would not want to follow such a loving shepherd? Why would we ever abandon Him for a stranger?

Jesus drives the point home by shifting the scene slightly, now contrasting the good shepherd with a hired hand. The good shepherd lays his life on the line to protect his flock from the wolf, unlike a hired hand. We see this in vv.12-15: "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 because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep" (vv.12-13). The hired hand is just there for the money; if a wolf comes, he's not willing to risk his life for the sheep; he doesn't actually care about them. BUt the good shepherd *loves* His sheep; He cares for each one, knows them by name! So he fights to protect them; he puts himself in their place of danger, right between the wolf and the sheep. He risks his life to save them. Indeed, he *dies* to save them!

The shepherd does not die frivolously or arbitrarily. He does not die to show his sheep how much he loves him for no reason, or to set some kind of moral example only, or out of vague sentimentality. "The shepherd does not die for his sheep to serve as an example, throwing himself off a cliff in a grotesque and futile display while bellowing, 'See how much I love you!'"³ No, the sheep are in *mortal danger*. The wolf is at hand, they're about to die unless their shepherd saves them! By his death they are saved. Clearly, Jesus is speaking of His own death on the cross in the place of His sheep, His people, to save us from our sins. This passage makes clear that the only possible understanding of Jesus's death is *penal substitutionary atonement*. He died *to save* His sheep, namely, from our sins and the punishment we deserve, the eternal wrath

³ Carson, 386.

of God in Hell. He died to save us, dying as a substitute, a sacrifice, in our place. All human beings are born sinners and are in grave, mortal danger - all human beings physically die, and will stand before God in judgment, and face inevitable judgment in Hell! THis is a far greater danger than a wolf could ever pose sheep! And this is a danger that faces *every single person to ever live*. INcluding you. Yet Christ came to *save* His sheep, those who trust in Him. He palace Himself between us and the wolf, the danger: the punishment we deserve. He died to save us, taking our sin upon Himself and dying on the cross in our place! And this was no tragic accident of last resort, like a shepherd who tragically dies to protect his sheep. THis was the plan of God all along. Christ makes this clear in vv.17-18, stating that this is the charge the Father has given Him, and that He has the authority to lay down His life *and* “to take it up again” - to die *and rise*.

Christ willingly went to the cross to die for our sins and then to rise again on the third day to accomplish and secure salvation for us, His sheep. And make no mistake: this is a *definite* and *effectual* atonement: the shepherd dies to *actually save* the sheep; to *guarantee* the salvation of His people. Think how tragic it would be if a shepherd was fighting wolves to save his sheep, but then the sheep, whom he died to save, are slaughtered and eaten by the wolf! It would be a tragedy because he died for absolutely nothing! He failed! Can Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd fail? No, of course not! His death was not futile or for nothing! It’s not like Jesus died on the cross to save sinners, thinking, “I really hope this works and that someone out there in the future actually repents and believes so that they can be saved! I hope me dying isn’t for nothing!” No, of course not! He lays down his life with a purpose: to *guarantee* the effectual salvation of His sheep. He died to *secure* the definite atonement and salvation of His people.

And this means His atonement, His death on the cross, accomplishes a definite and *particular* redemption for *particular* individual people: His sheep, the elect, those whom Jesus knows and calls by name, those whom the Father has given to the Son. We see this in vv.14-15: “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.” When Jesus died on the cross, He died *for His people*, for His sheep, bearing the particular sins for each individual Christian ever to live, knowing each one by name as He died in each one’s place! Christian, if your heart has grown cold to the Lord, if you’re feeling spiritually dry or distant from God or wondering whether or not He loves you; meditate on this reality: *Christ loves you so much He died specifically for you!* Sometimes we might here that and shrug and say, “Yeah, I know Christ

loves me and died for me - but isn't that true of everyone?" There is a sense in which Christ died for the whole world; God loves the world and Jesus died on the cross so that whoever believes in Him, in all the world, will be saved! Jesus's death is *sufficient* for all - but it is *efficient* for the elect. Christ died *particularly* for His sheep, for each individual Christian. This is why, in John 17, Christ the High Priest prays specifically for all who will believe in Him the night before He goes to the cross, interceding for His people and making atonement for His people, as the true High Priest and final sacrifice, the true Lamb of God. He shed His blood for His people, His bride. On the cross, when Jesus died, the wrath of God against Christ's sheep was *satisfied*! If you are Christ's sheep, then 2,000 years ago, *every single* sin - from your past, present, and future - was laid on Christ, dealt with on the cross, and taken away completely! God is just; He will not commit double jeopardy and require a penalty to be paid twice! Brothers and Sisters, look to the cross and see the love of your shepherd who died to secure and guarantee your salvation: in the death of Christ we see the mercy and grace of God poured out on us! By His death He pours life abundantly upon us, forevermore! By His wounds, we are healed!

Christ knows His sheep, whom the Father has given and He calls each by name, so that they believe in Him; He died to guarantee the salvation of each sheep; therefore, this means each sheep, each Christian, can have *full assurance of salvation*. Which brings us to point 3...

III. Jesus, the good shepherd, gives and guards the eternal life of His sheep so that we can have *assurance of our salvation* (vv.19-29)

Verses 19-21 show how the crowds react: some still reject Jesus, but others believe. We'll see the same thing happen again at the very end of the chapter. Both of these scenes show Jesus's words in action: some believe because they are sheep; others don't believe because they aren't sheep. Jesus fleshes this out in vv.22-29. Time passes from the Feast of Booths to the Feast of Dedication, in the winter. But a discussion arises where Jesus once again uses sheep/shepherd language, and so John includes it here, thematically, to further show us a picture of our good shepherd. The Jews gather and ask Him to make it plain whether or not He's the Christ; He replies that He has made it plain, in words and deeds, they just don't believe "because you are not among my sheep" (v.26). He continues, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (vv.27-29). These are profound and powerful verses.

We've seen that Christ's sheep believe. But Jesus makes explicitly clear, yet again, that Christians believe *because* they are sheep: because they've been elected by the Father and given to the Son, whom He came and went to the cross to save, and effectually calls to Himself. Salvation, for each individual Christian, is purposed and intentional and carried out by God - from the very beginning, and all the way to the end. And this is *precisely* why we can have assurance of our salvation. Because we've been chosen, claimed, and called by Christ, we are His: and *nothing* can snatch us out of His hand! We've been given by the Father almighty, and *no one*, not in Heaven or Earth or Hell, can snatch us from His hand or thwart His sovereign purposes! Christians cannot lose their salvation because Christ cannot lose His people, whom He has bought and redeemed with His blood and whom He personally guards and protects. Assurance of salvation is possible because of God's *election* to salvation and Christ's *efficacious atonement* for our salvation: We can have assurance of our salvation precisely because it is rooted in God electing (choosing, initiating) to save us, and Christ carrying out and securing salvation on our behalf, from beginning to end.

We know that people *do* fall away after professing faith, but those who do not persevere in the faith show that they were never truly sheep and Christ never truly knew or saved them. On the contrary, those who *persevere* in the faith show that God has chosen to *preserve* their faith, as His elect sheep, His chosen and redeemed people. The sheep hear His voice. But we find assurance not by looking to ourselves but by looking to our Good Shepherd. Look to Christ and trust Him to save you, from beginning to end, and He will! Though our flesh fail us, He will never let us go. Though our wandering heart go astray, He will chase after us and not abandon us. Though trials arise, though Satan tempt and attack us, though the world entice us, though death itself threaten us, the Lord our Shepherd will not let anyone or anything snatch you out of His hand. He will hold you fast; His love will not let you go. He will lead you through this life, care for you, provide for you, protect you, all the way to good pastures of the promised land that await us in eternity. Christ will shepherd us with the very power of Almighty God, because...

IV. Jesus, the good shepherd, is God the Son, One with the Father (vv.30-42)

The Father gives the sheep to His Son, the Son accomplishes the charge of the Father to save the elect; they are of one accord. It makes perfect sense, then, that Jesus sums up by proclaiming, "I and the Father are one" (v.30). But this enrages the Jews. In vv.31-33, they pick up stones to kill him for blasphemy. He responds by quoting scripture in vv.34-36: "Is it not

written in your Law, “I said, you are gods”? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came - and scripture cannot be broken - do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God?’” He’s quoting Psalm 82. There are two main views for how to interpret that psalm: either God is talking to human beings - either judges, or Israel as a whole - or to angelic beings in His divine counsel, and calling them little g “gods,” before pronouncing judgment against them. For the sake of time, I can’t go into a full discussion of the psalm, but because of the language used there, I lean towards the view he’s speaking to angelic beings in His heavenly council room, at the beginning of the psalm, and then pronounces judgment on fallen angelic beings (such as demons). Either way, though, Jesus’s point is the same: if Scripture can speak of other beings, and call them little gods in some sense, then it is all the more appropriate for Him to speak of Himself as one with the Father, since He’s the Son of God!

There is only one, true, Creator, all-powerful God. Angelic beings are created beings. But God is One - and also three: there is one God who exists eternally in three persons: God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We call this the Trinity. And what we see here, yet again, is that Jesus is God the Son: fully human, yet also fully God, one with the Father, Ancient of Days. That is who our good shepherd is! That is why Christ fulfills Psalm 23: Christ, the Lord God in the flesh, is our Good and perfect Shepherd! And so we shall not want as we enter in through Him into the flock and pasture of God, for He calls us by name and has laid down His life for us and taken it back up in His resurrection to give us life abundantly: eternal life in the eternal peace and security of His perfect pasture, eternal Paradise! So let us heed His call as His sheep and believe.

If Christ has called you by name and you know Him as His sheep, then one way we get to show that we hear and follow Him is by coming to the Lord’s Table. If you’re a baptized believer in good standing with a gospel believing church, we invite you to come to the Table with us in just a moment. But if that doesn’t describe you, we ask you to remain seated because there’s a *different* way for you to respond: we invite you to hear the call of Christ and enter the flock of God through the door, Jesus Christ: repent of your sins, believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross to save *you* from *your* sins, so that you, too, can be saved! Then, you can show that you’re heeding His call to follow Him by being baptized. If that’s you, we’d love to speak with you after the service. Until then, let’s have a moment of silence as we prepare to come to the Table.