



John 10:11-21
I Am
The Good Shepherd

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This morning's message continues the series we're in looking at the "I am" statements of Jesus, and is sort of a continuation from last week.

Last week we saw Jesus give a teaching that's a metaphor about his relationship with those who follow him. The metaphor was about sheep in a sheep pen, and how they follow the shepherd because they know him and his voice. At the end of it we're told that the people listening to the story didn't get it. So Jesus explains the teaching in two stages. In the first stage he explained how he is the gate to the sheep pen. A shepherd in that day would oftentimes function as the gate to a sheep pen – literally laying down across the entry to the sheep pen. And for Jesus, it's such an important role for him as our shepherd that twice in verses 7-10 he says, "I am the gate" and teaches about what that means, as it's own separate piece, apart from the rest of what it means that he is the good shepherd.

Now, "shepherd" was a common occupation in their day, and as a result there were a lot of sheep. Or maybe the sheep came first, which resulted in lots of shepherds. I don't know...it's a chicken and egg thing but with sheep and shepherds. But it really was like Old MacDonald's farm, "Here a sheep, there a sheep, everywhere a sheep, sheep." And everyone knew a shepherd, or had a shepherd in their family somewhere, and undoubtedly knew the general duties of a shepherd. And so in today's passage Jesus continues explaining what it means for him to be the shepherd.

Now, this shepherding has deep roots in the Jewish faith and culture. You can go all the way back to Genesis 4:2, where we see that Abel tended to flocks. Later, there was at least one very famous shepherd who lived 1,000 years earlier than Jesus, and that's King David. When he was younger, he tended his father's sheep. He wrote a Psalm about God, using this very same metaphor. We know it as Psalm 23. Without question, this is the most famous Psalm of all. And the opening words of Psalm 23 are (read with me), **"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" (Psalm 23).**

I guarantee you that as Jesus taught about himself as the good shepherd, every single person listening to him knew that Psalm, and was familiar with the Biblical metaphor of God as shepherd not only from Psalm 23, but from other passages as well.¹ So Jesus is saying here that he is that Good Shepherd. He sticks around because he is 100% committed to the sheep. He will not fail them or abandon them. And that's why he is “good.” It's not that he's simply morally good, though he is, but that he's committed to the flock. He won't abandon them; he's dedicated; he goes on to say that he will lay his life down for the sheep.

Jesus says in verse 14 that he knows his sheep. This is not a casual “knowing” of the sheep. He knows them as his heavenly father and he know each other. That can be either really comforting, or really intimidating. There are parts of my life that I'd like to pretend that Jesus doesn't know anything about – like when I accidentally tune into a country radio station for a moment. 😊 Of course, more serious stuff, too. We all have stuff in our lives that we'd probably just as soon forget, and wish that God didn't know about us. But we're deceiving ourselves if we think that we can hide something from Jesus, because he knows us better than we know ourselves. **But this is actually is good, because he couldn't care for us very well if he didn't know us.** If he didn't know that some people struggle with alcohol addiction, or pornography, or if he didn't know that our marriage was in trouble, he wouldn't be able to care for his flock very well. His Spirit wouldn't prompt us in certain ways to give us a sense of conviction about our sin and therefore lead us toward holiness; or couldn't lead us into a relationship where healing from past hurts might happen. So it's good that he knows us that well, even if there might be a part of us that would just as soon keep some things from him. So Jesus knows his flock. He knows you and me.

He also says that his sheep know him. **How well do you and I know Jesus?** Do you feel like you know him well? I think one of the fundamental problems in churches today – and more broadly in society – is that we don't know Jesus very well.

And I don't say this as someone who's king of knowing Jesus here. There certainly ways I do get to know Jesus: I spend time with Jesus every week

preparing sermons. And I spend time conversing with him in prayer almost every day. I'm in a Bible Study that meets every week. I'm in two worship services most every Sunday where the songs and the prayers always help me to know Jesus better and sometimes even the sermon helps, too....But that doesn't mean I know Jesus very well...or at least I certainly don't know him as well as I could. I've got a lot of growing to do there. And my guess is that a lot of us Christians really could know and love Jesus more.

For instance, take knowing Jesus through knowing the Bible. I think we would all agree that one big way we understand God and know who He is, is through reading our Bibles. But sometimes we treat the Bible like a woman treated some letters she once received. This woman met a man and they fell in love. Soon after this, he had to go overseas away from her for a few months. While they were apart, he sent her letters regularly and told her in them how much he loved her. When he finally was able to come home, he asked her if she received the letters. "Uh-huh," she said. "Oh, good. I hoped you kept getting them, but I wasn't sure because I didn't hear back from you." "Oh, yes, I got them all right here in a box." "Great, I hope you learned from them how much I love you." "Oh...yes, I did." "What, is something wrong?" "Well, there were some inconsistencies in your letters." "Inconsistencies?" "Yeah. So I've sat down and analyzed them to try to understand them better." "You've analyzed them?" "Uh-huh. And out of that, I've got some questions for you..." Clearly, she got sidetracked from the main point of the letters: that this guy loved her deeply.

So often we see the Bible as something to be examined under a microscope, to analyze, pick apart, and critique, not as a love letter from God to us, so that we would know him and how much he loves us and wants us to be engaged with him in our daily lives and hear his voice in our lives.

I once heard of a guy who was in prison who studied the Bible. He knew it so well that he knew how many words there were, how many chapters in the books the Bible...he even knew exactly what word was smack dab in the middle. But he died never knowing Jesus. He never understood how much the Good Shepherd cared for him. Do you really know the Good Shepherd

and how much he loves you? **Jesus says his sheep know him, much as he knows his heavenly father.** That's an intimate knowledge and understanding, based on ongoing and clear communication. Do we know Jesus that same way? Do we know his voice when he calls us? If you don't, he wants you to know him that way.

And notice that Jesus always speaks of his relationship with the flock...with a group of sheep. There's something about being connected to the body of believers (being a part of the flock) that from Jesus' perspective, is necessary. So Jesus invites you and me to know him deeply, and to do so in the context of a flock of believers. Certainly, this word, "flock" refers to the world-wide, across time, collection of believers. That's the Church, with a capital "C." Within that, a local church is the most common expression of the flock, of course, but it helps so much to be a part of an even smaller subset of the flock of sheep as well – whether that's a Bible Study group, a class, or some other section of the larger flock that helps nurture us in your relationship with the Good Shepherd, so we would know Him better. So, how well do you know the Good Shepherd? Jesus invites us to know him deeply, much as He and His heavenly Father know each other.

Jesus continues on in verse 16, saying, **"I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd" (John 10:16).** Now, remember that Jesus was speaking to a group of Jewish people. They understood themselves to have this special relationship with God that no one else had. And by and large, they saw that as exclusively theirs and theirs alone. Spreading the good news far and wide was not high up on their list of duties in their faith, even though they were supposed to be a light to the nations. Salvation comes from God, and in their minds it was extended only to them. It was exclusively theirs.

The exclusivity of the Christian message is also that salvation comes from God, through faith in Jesus Christ. But it is *not* exclusively for any one group of people. It's for anyone who would confess their sin and follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior...as the Shepherd of their lives. And that's the point Jesus is making here. There are other sheep – what people in his

day would have called “Gentiles” – who are outside the Jewish sheep pen, and Jesus says, “I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice.”

But anyone who follows the voice of Jesus Christ in their life is then a part of his flock. And Jesus doesn't say that these other sheep will come into the same sheep pen. He says, “There will be one flock and one shepherd.” He doesn't say, “There will be one sheep pen.” You see, no one church, no one denomination has the exclusive path to Jesus Christ. **Christian unity is not based on a unified church system or unified theology (beyond the Christian basics). Christian unity is based on a unified sense of brokenness and belief that Jesus heals that brokenness and that we need Him in our lives.** Our unity is not in believing exactly the same thing down to the smallest detail. I shared a story several years ago that illustrates this well. It's a story about two men were on a cruise ship together and struck up a conversation. Finally one of them asked, “Do you believe in God?” The other guy said, “Yes.” And the guy relates the rest of the story like this:

So I asked, “Are you a Christian or a Jew or something else?” He said, “A Christian.” I said, “Me, too!

I asked, “Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox?” He said, “Protestant.” I said, “Me, too!

“What denomination?” He said, “Baptist.” I said, “Me, too!

“Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?” He said, “Northern Baptist.” I said, “Me, too!

“Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Moderate Baptist?”
He said, “Northern Conservative Baptist.” I said, “Me, too!

“Are you of the Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region, or Northern Conservative Baptist Eastern Region?” He said, “Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region.” I said, “Me, too!”

“Are you of the Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council

of 1879, or Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912?” He said, “Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912.”

I said, “Die, you heretic!”ⁱⁱ

If that were the way we understood what it means to be a Jesus follower, we’d each just have our own church. Now, there are some fundamentals that we all have to agree on, yes – that God reveals himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that God created everything seen and unseen, Jesus is God come to us in the flesh, He’s the Son who lived, was crucified, and buried, and then raised back to life on the third day and shortly after ascended into heaven... We believe in the forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus, the hope of eternal life because of His resurrection, the presence of the Spirit in those who follow Jesus, the Bible as God’s Word to us, and so forth. Those are some of the essentials of the Christian faith across the globe...but they help us understand what it means to follow Jesus as one of his disciples and take him seriously. They point us to Jesus. And so we’re all a part of this one flock, but in different sheep pens, following the voice of Jesus the Good Shepherd. Our unity comes through following and knowing Him. Our unity isn’t about or because of us...it’s about and because of Jesus. This is why it’s so important for us (and this gets us back to the first couple points) to know the Good Shepherd...to know Jesus deeply, and to be known by him. To be loved by Him and love Him back.

In the last few verses, we see Jesus giving a window into the sacrifice he will make on behalf of the sheep, and the resurrection that will follow. In verses 17 and 18 He talks about laying down his own life...that no one lays it down for him, but he does it on his own...he has the authority to lay it down, and to take it up again. He said the same thing in verse 11, where he says quite bluntly: **“The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11)** That was not a regular occurrence for shepherds, and when a shepherd did lay his life down for a sheep, it wasn't on purpose. He didn't lay it down of his own accord. A shepherd is only useful to the sheep when he's upright and breathing; the sheep need their shepherd to stay alive. So no shepherd willingly gave their life for the sake of the sheep. So for Jesus to say, “I lay it

down of my own accord” is totally out of the box for them. No shepherd willingly lays his life down for the sheep.

But Jesus isn’t an ordinary shepherd, and he isn’t tending ordinary “sheep.” His mission is different than any other shepherd, and his flock is different than any other shepherd, so his shepherding is different. And yet, he’s the shepherd that we all need.

Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for you and for me; For his flock; For anyone who will listen to his voice and know him. How well do we know the Good Shepherd? He invites you to join the flock. He wants you to know him and know his voice just as he knows you. He invites us to follow him, to listen to his voice, and to grow deeper in knowledge and understanding of him, to grow deeper in faith, so that we would have lives filled with abundance, as we looked at last week. So we would have life to the full – both here and now, and in eternity. So let's deeply know the Good Shepherd and know how much he loves us, and rest in the green pastures and quiet waters that he leads us to. Even in the storms of life, he will bring us to those places, and give us rest. As we sang (at the first service) a few minutes ago: “You gave your life/to give me mine, you say that I am free, How can it be?” How can it be?: Because Jesus is the Good Shepherd. And he gave His life, and was raised back from the dead, not because he had to, but because he wanted to. And he did it for you. I hope and pray we would each know this Good Shepherd deeply in our lives, and follow Him wherever He leads. Let's pray...Amen.

ⁱ For example, Jeremiah 31:10, Amos 3:12 and Micah 5:4.

ⁱⁱ I can't remember where I got this from, but it's not original with me.