

Seven Sayings of Jesus: I Am...The Good Shepherd

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[0 : 00] Good morning and welcome here for this Sunday, May 28th. My name is Kent Dixon and it's my joy to be the pastor here. It's good to see you all here this morning and whether you're joining us here in person today or you're listening on the podcast or the sermon phone line or however you're connecting with us, welcome. We have many different channels and ways of connecting and so we're happy to have you with us in whatever way that happens to look like.

This week we're continuing in our sermon series called Seven Sayings of Jesus, I Am. In this series we've been considering Jesus' identity, what he said about himself and then how we can better understand our identity in light of that context and that truth.

And Jesus said a great deal about himself. He says a great deal about himself, his identity, his mission throughout the New Testament. And prophets also said a great deal about the coming Messiah in the Old Testament.

And guess who the coming Messiah turned out to be? Jesus himself. But in this series we're going to be exploring some of the ways Jesus identifies himself specifically in the Gospel of John.

As we consider some of these statements that are often known as the I Am statements that Jesus makes. And we looked, last week we looked at the statement, I Am the gate or the door of the sheep.

[1 : 32] And as we looked at that, I mentioned that that was actually the first half of an extended discussion that Jesus has on sheep and shepherds.

And he presents that in John chapter 10 verses 1 to 30. The fourth I Am statement that we're going to consider together this morning is found in John 10 verse 11 where Jesus declares, I am the good shepherd.

And John chapter 10 verses 11 to 18 is our focus for this sermon. And so let's look at that a bit together and I'll read it for you or you can look it up in your Bible and follow along.

Jesus says, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep.

So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

[2 : 37] I am the good shepherd, Jesus says. I know my sheep and my sheep know me just as the father knows me. And I know the father and I lay down my life for the sheep.

I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen and I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

The reason my father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.

I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my father. As we considered last week in Jesus' day and even today in some parts of the developing world, the relationship between sheep and the shepherd is something very special and often quite personal.

And as we reflected on, an individual shepherd wouldn't have thousands of sheep that they cared for. They would have 20 or 30, 50, at the most 100 sheep.

[3 : 51] And the shepherd would have known each of them personally. He would have known their personalities. He might have named them. He would have known their challenges. He would have known the ones that were compliant and the ones that were difficult and the ones that were

complacent.

And they would have known his voice. The sheep would. And they would have followed him. Last Sunday, we reflected on Jesus' words, I am the gate for the sheep.

So, continuing this morning in our two-part sheep-themed or sheepish study, what does Jesus, why does Jesus refer to himself specifically as the good shepherd?

Jesus doesn't say, I'm the bad shepherd. I'm the okay shepherd. He says, I'm the good shepherd. So, what's some Old Testament background for this? Well, the Jews knew all about bad shepherds. The Old Testament prophets called out many of Israel's rulers for being bad shepherds, for specifically being that. They were more interested in feeding and caring for themselves than for God's people.

[5 : 00] And we hear about people like that in the book of Jeremiah in chapters 23 and 25. In the book of Isaiah in chapter 56. In Ezekiel 34.

So, there are bad shepherd examples throughout the Old Testament. And the people of Israel longed for the promised messianic shepherd. A shepherd who would embody, who would physically come and represent in person God's love for the people.

And in their minds would have been the prophecy of Isaiah. And we read this in Isaiah 40 verse 11. It says, He tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart.

He gently leads those who have young. So, when Jesus said, I am the good shepherd, his listeners would have known he was claiming to be the Messiah.

He was claiming that he himself had come so that God would be more imminent, more personal. And he was saying, essentially, folks, things are going to change.

[6 : 12] The people knew what bad shepherds did. So, what Jesus goes on to say describes what the good shepherd has come to do. And so, we actually recognize three things about the good shepherd from what Jesus says.

And I'll just list them quickly and then we'll go into more depth. The good shepherd gathers his sheep. The good shepherd guards his sheep.

And the good shepherd gives everything for his sheep. So, first, the good shepherd gathers his sheep. John chapter 10 begins with the shepherd calling out his flock.

And we discussed the context for this last week. We recognize that more than one flock might be kept in a sheep pen overnight. So, there could be, because these flocks were smaller, 20, 30, so on, there could be more than one flock and more than one associated shepherd with a sheep pen. So, then in the morning, the first shepherd would arrive at the pens to call out to his sheep. And his sheep would separate from the others and follow him.

[7 : 23] And the sheep would only have responded to the voice they know and the voice that they trust. So, essentially, the other sheep would be deaf to any other master than their own.

And, in fact, they might run from the sound of someone else's voice because they would be scared. It would be unfamiliar. Then in verse 16, Jesus says, So, in Jesus' context, the other sheep to which he refers, the other sheep that he would want in his flock would be Gentiles.

And these folks would be the ones that the apostles, after Jesus' death and resurrection, Jesus would give them the task, give the apostles the task, of going to reach these other sheep.

And today, the other sheep are essentially you and me. But there are also people who don't know Jesus yet. Jesus has lots of sheep in our world that he still wants to reach.

Jesus' ultimate vision is of a new people of God, the church as a whole. And the church would be, in God's vision, made up of Jew and Gentile as one flock under one shepherd.

[8 : 52] So, that reminds us that, ultimately, Jesus was a missionary. I don't know if you've ever stopped to think about it that way, but that's the reality. Because he was sent to the Jews to bring them back to God, to make a way for them to be saved from their sin and receive eternal life.

And Jesus went to the Jews, the chosen people of Israel, God's people, to bring them back to God. He went to them first.

But the plan was always to include believing Gentiles within this new people of God, within this greater flock. And so, this missionary task Jesus gave to his disciples after his resurrection was to preach the gospel to the whole world.

And we read about that in Matthew 28, verse 19. But we need to recognize, folks, that the Good Shepherd has also given us this task.

He's shown us his great love in dying on the cross for our salvation. He constantly watches over us. And then he has also given us the task of telling others about the Good Shepherd.

[10:03] Because he wants to include them in his flock as well. So, second, the Good Shepherd guards his sheep. This section of John's Gospel we're studying begins with Jesus saying that the Good Shepherd gives his life for the sheep.

But most of what follows there in this little section speaks of the Good Shepherd's care and sympathy for the sheep. So, Jesus refers to bad shepherds as hired hands.

And he says that they care nothing for the sheep. And you'll remember, as I read it before, if a wolf comes, they'll abandon the sheep and run away. They're more interested in their own safety, their own interest, than that of the sheep.

But then, in contrast, the Good Shepherd knows each one of his sheep, and they know him as well. There's a relationship there.

There's a connection. There's a real deep sort of meaning to that relationship. And in wonderfully assuring words, Jesus says, My sheep listen to my voice.

[11:11] I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.

Isn't that deeply encouraging and comforting? I don't know if you've ever thought of that, but Jesus declares that no one will snatch you out of his hand. And we can notice here all the personal pronouns, and you know me, I'm an English major, and I love language.

But all the personal pronouns in this section. The Good Shepherd says, I know my sheep. The sheep know my voice.

I came that they may have life. I lay down my life for them. They follow me. No one will snatch them out of my hand.

It's so personal. This bond of love between the Good Shepherd and his flock is profound and personal and strong. And so, friends, once we have a relationship like this with our Shepherd, with Jesus, why would we ever want to break or lose it?

[12:21] Why would we ever want to neglect it? Especially when Jesus declares that from his perspective, he will never let us go. He will never stop caring.

He will never stop loving. He will never stop chasing after us. And when the going gets hard and doubts begin to fill our mind, I believe this is a wonderful assurance that the Good Shepherd loves and cares for us much more than a parent could ever care for any child.

That's so powerful. So third, the Good Shepherd, another point we recognize, the Good Shepherd gives everything for his sheep. And Jesus begins this passage we've been studying by saying, I am the Good Shepherd.

The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Jesus isn't mincing words here. That's a pretty clear message, right? Unlike bad shepherds who only look out for themselves and their interests, the Good Shepherd is willing to give everything, even his own life, for the sheep, to sacrifice it all. Every one of his sheep is precious to him, and no price, no sacrifice of any kind, is too great for him to make for them, for Jesus to make for us.

[13:44] And in the parable of the lost sheep that we read about in Luke 15, the shepherd leaves 99 of his sheep in the pen, so they're safe.

He's not abandoning them recklessly. He leaves them in safety, but he leaves them to go out at night to search for one sheep who's lost.

That's how much his individual sheep mean to him. That reminds us how much a shepherd, or to the extent to which, a shepherd could care for his sheep.

But then Jesus' picture of the Good Shepherd goes even further. He was willing to sacrifice his own life for his sheep. And Jesus is, of course, allegorically referring to the cross.

He's referring to the place where he, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, literally gave his life for the sheep, for us, for you, and for me, and for those who have not even received him yet, who have not even recognized him yet.

[14:49] And friends, the cross represents many things, but above all, it speaks to God's love, this horrible place, this horrible event, that meant the terrible death of Jesus, the shame, and the torment, and the agony, and ultimately his death.

All of this speaks to the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ, revealed in the Good Shepherd. Because God loves us so much, that as I said a moment ago, no sacrifice is too great.

No price is too high, to win our salvation. And even more than that, Paul says these powerful words in Romans 5 verse 8.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were sinners, Christ died for us. So God's love, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, forecast the people who had yet come to know him, the people who were in their sin, who would one day turn to God in their need, would one day ask for forgiveness, would seek a relationship with Christ.

God knew of these people from before we even existed. And so, I don't know about you, but if we really believe this, we would, we should, love the Good Shepherd almost to the same degree that he loves us.

[16 : 23] We should be, we would be, should be forever thankful for our salvation. And we should want to please and serve Jesus. So friends, there's obviously a great deal to learn from this passage that we've looked at today.

And in some ways, we've only scratched the surface. We've recognized that the Good Shepherd gathers us as his sheep. And he's always seeking others, other sheep, to join his flock.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, guards his sheep. He watches over and protects us. And he's willing to give everything for us, everything for each one of his sheep, sacrificing his own life to secure our eternal hope and salvation.

That is the character of the Good Shepherd. So friends, let's close this morning by reading the words of Psalm 23 together. And then we'll dismiss.

Psalm 23 says, and you probably know these words and can say them. Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.

[17 : 36] He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul. He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his namesake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. My friends, trust that the Good Shepherd is with you. The Good Shepherd is watching over you and will protect you.

Listen for his voice and follow. Amen.