

**April 26, 2015 – John 10:11-18 (First: Acts 4:1-12 Epistle: 1 John 3:16-24)**

*Jesus is the Intimate Shepherd*

- *He stays with and give His life for His sheep*
- *He knows His sheep and His sheep know Him*

There are a lot of books on leadership and there are a lot of thoughts on what makes a good leader. You may have your own ideas as to what makes a good boss, or a good political representative.

In our text Jesus uses the image of a shepherd – someone who leads and takes care of a flock of sheep. Jesus points to Himself as being “*the good shepherd*” and explains why. He is the only good shepherd because He is the “intimate shepherd” – He stays with His sheep and gives up His life for them, and He knows His sheep and is known by them.

Jesus’ words here are very emphatic. When He says in verse 11 and in verse 14, “*I am the good shepherd*” He emphasizes both “I” and “good”. This can be somewhat awkward to get across in English: “I, Myself, am the shepherd, the good one.” But this emphasis is important. Jesus does not say here that His is merely *a* good shepherd, but that He, Himself alone, is *the* good shepherd. There is no one else like Jesus. He alone is the good shepherd because He gives His life for the sheep.

This is in contrast to the hired hand who is not a shepherd. The hireling flees when the wolf comes because he does not care about the sheep; they are not his sheep. The wolf then catches and scatters the sheep. But Jesus does not flee – He stays with His sheep and even gives His life for them.

There have been a number of religious leaders who have “given their lives” for their cause. But Jesus different from them all for a couple reasons.

First, Jesus gave His life *in place* of His sheep. He died *instead of* His sheep. This is something no one else has done or can do. When Jesus died on the cross, He died in our place. He took the punishment our sins deserve in our stead, so that we no longer face God’s condemnation and the eternal death and separation from God that our sins earn us. No other religious leader ever died as a substitute for his followers. Jesus is the only one who truly gave up His life for His sheep.

The second reason that Jesus is unique is that He not only laid down His life, but He took it up again. Someone may be able to die as a martyr for a cause, but no one, except Jesus, has ever died and then risen from the dead. To use Jesus’ picture here, what good does it do the sheep if the shepherd merely dies defending them? They would then be left alone without a shepherd and at the mercy of the wolf. Such a shepherd would be no better for the sheep than the hireling who simply fled. But Jesus not only laid down His life for His sheep but He took it up again by rising from the dead. He now lives to be with His sheep to continue to shepherd them. Jesus is the only one who has the power to lay down His life and the power to take it up again. Jesus is the good and intimate shepherd because He stays with His sheep through His death and resurrection.

In verse 16 Jesus talks of “*other sheep*” that He has. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints – or as they are commonly called, the Mormons – often cite this verse to support their story of Jesus coming to the Americas after His resurrection and appearing to descendants of the Old Testament Joseph who somehow came to the Americas six centuries before Jesus was born. But Jesus is not referring here to the Lamanites or Nephites of the book of Mormon, for whom

there is no archeological evidence<sup>1</sup>. Rather, Jesus is referring to the Gentiles – to those who are not Jews. Jesus is here speaking to the Jewish Pharisees (see John 9:40, 10:6-7) in the hearing of His Jewish disciples. The fold to which Jesus refers is the old covenant – the old testament – made with Abraham, and that was followed by the Jews who were faithful to God and the few Gentiles who joined themselves to the true God. This was the law given by God to preserve the descendants of Abraham for the coming of the Messiah Jesus, and to point them to their need for a Savior. It pointed to their need for the good shepherd who laid down His life in the place of His sheep and took it up again.

We are these “*other sheep*” whom Jesus has brought into the one flock by His death and resurrection. Notice that Jesus doesn’t say that He will bring these other sheep to “*this fold*” – meaning the Jewish religion. He is not saying that non-Jews must first become Jews in order to be His sheep. This was a question with which the first-century church struggled. The Jerusalem council in Acts 15 discussed this matter and came to understand that we all are saved through grace because of Jesus’ death in our place. We are saved apart from observing the law of God. There is now no distinction between Jew and Gentile (Acts 15:9, Romans 10:12). Here Jesus says that His sheep, both Jews and non-Jews, would form one flock – not in the old sheep fold of the Law, but under Himself, the one true good shepherd.

Jesus gives a second reason that He is *the* good and intimate shepherd. In verse 14 He says that He knows His sheep and He is known by them. The word that Jesus uses here goes beyond mere “head knowledge” – a knowing facts – to a knowledge based on experience and love. Jesus knows each of us intimately. Because He is God, Jesus knows everything about us, all our thoughts and all our actions.

This can be scary. We all have done and do things that God does not want us to do. And Jesus Himself said that thoughts of hatred or lust are just as sinful as acting on those thoughts (see Matthew 5:21-30). When we look at how God wants us to live, we see that we have fallen far short of the perfect life that God requires (Matthew 5:48). Because of this, it may not seem good that the shepherd knows everything about His sheep.

But here is the amazing thing: we are still His sheep! Not because He ignores our failings, but because He died to pay for them. Jesus laid down His life in our place even though we are such stinky, dirty sheep. For whom would you laid down your life? You might do so for a family member, or maybe for a close friend who has been good to you. But that is not what Jesus did. “*God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:7). And as verse 18 says, Jesus did this freely, of His own accord. No one took His life from Him, but He willing went to the cross of His own volition to suffer and die for us, and to rise again and be our good shepherd.

The reason we are His sheep is because He died in our place and rose again. By His substitutionary death and His resurrection from the dead He purchased us as His own Sheep and paid the ransom to free us from sin and death.

As His sheep, He not only knows us, but He makes Himself known to us, so that we know Him and hear His voice. And He gives us eternal life (John 10:27). We hear His voice through the Bible – God’s word – which the Holy Spirit caused to be written down for us. By hearing and

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1. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaeology\\_and\\_the\\_Book\\_of\\_Mormon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaeology_and_the_Book_of_Mormon) and <http://mit.irr.org/book-of-mormon-archaeology-condensed>

reading God's written word, we "*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" (2 Peter 3:18).

In verse 15 Jesus says that He knows us and that we know Him as the Father knows Him and He knows the Father. Both the King James and the New King James translations make verse 15 a separate thought, but it really isn't a separate sentence. It elaborates on how the Good Shepherd knows us and we know Him. I can understand why they wanted to make it separate thought. Jesus and the Father are one (John 10:30). They are both God, equal in glory and coeternal. We cannot fully understand the Trinity – One God in the three persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – but that is how God reveals Himself to us in His word and we take Him at His word. The knowledge the Father has of His Son, Jesus, and the knowledge that Jesus has of the Father seems so much higher than our knowledge of Jesus. It seems like it should be kept as something wholly separate. But Jesus uses it here to show how intimately He knows us and how much He wants us to know Him.

It is true that while we are here on this earth we only know in part, as if we are looking through a dim mirror. We do not know Jesus as intimately as He knows us. But that will not always be the case! When we see Jesus face to face we will know fully even as we are fully known (1 Corinthians 13:12).

So cling to Jesus. He is the only good shepherd. He is the intimate shepherd who has stayed with you and given His life in place of your own. Not only that, but He has taken it up again by rising from the dead so that He is with you forever. By His death and resurrection He has saved you from eternal death and damnation. And He is the intimate shepherd who knows you even better than you know yourself. He loves you and has made you His own, and He wants you to know Him as well as He knows you, for He is the good shepherd.

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