

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (5-9-1999 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

John 10:1-13  
The Good Shepherd

Introduction

There is no more loved picture than Christ as the Good Shepherd. Even people with only a smattering of Bible knowledge have heard phrases like “The Lord is my shepherd”, “I am the Good Shepherd”, and the parable of the Lost Sheep is so often part of childhood that lingers in the memory.

Shepherds and sheep are deeply woven into the language and teaching of the Bible because they were at the heart of life in ancient times in Israel. Shepherds and sheep were everywhere. One would see shepherds on the moors, often sleepless, far-sighted, weather-beaten, leaning on their staff watching their sheep. Each sheep was close to the shepherd’s heart, and he would guard them from their enemies.

It is the most natural thing in the world to give spiritual meaning to these things and transfer them to God and spiritual realities. So Jesus as the Good Shepherd appeals to every generation, appeals to the depths within man. Even city dwellers sit up and take notice when this picture is given. Going to look at the Good Shepherd and His relationship to His sheep. Another week we will consider the gifts the Good Shepherd bestows on His sheep.

Jesus the Good Shepherd

**I am the good shepherd** (John 10:10) is a simple phrase full of rich meaning. It tells us such a lot about Jesus. He is claiming a lot, if we read between the lines. He is claiming to be a member of the Godhead, because so often in the Old Testament God was seen as the Shepherd. **The Lord is my shepherd** (Psalm 23:1). **We are His people and the sheep of His pasture** (Psalm 100:3). **He shall feed His flock like a shepherd** (Isaiah 40:11). He is claiming not only to be God, but also the Messiah, Saviour, and Deliverer He would send into the world. **I will set up one Shepherd over them and He shall feed them, even my servant David** (Ezekiel 34:23).

In the New Testament, the theme continues in the parable of the Lost Sheep, this statement by Jesus here in John 10, and in the epistles, e.g. **That great shepherd of the sheep** (Hebrews 13:20), and **When the Chief Shepherd appears** (1 Peter 5:4). When Jesus and His apostles say Jesus is the shepherd, they are saying He is God, a member of the Godhead, the promised Saviour who was to save and gather together people of God.

The Greek word *καλος* used for “good” in this verse means attractively good, as opposed to *αγαθος*, which means intrinsically good. Some translations say “beautiful shepherd” to impress the beauty, attractiveness, loveliness and drawing power of Jesus. He was also upright, virtuous, genuine and trustworthy. He was unlike the hirelings, who were just in shepherding for the money.

He was also in contrast to thieves and robbers – the Pharisees, religious leaders and false messiahs, with their trickery, hypocrisy and evil living. Jesus was genuine, true, dependable and lovely. He was One who was sent straight from God Himself.

Then, as a shepherd, His people are His wealth. He cares, provides, guards and undertakes responsibility. He carries them on His shoulders. Putting all this together, Jesus is a member of the Godhead, the promised Messiah, He is attractive, genuine and reliable, devoted to His people because they are His property.

How this all quickens our senses and warms the heart. This is the One who invites us to trust Him, enjoy His many gifts, save our souls, guide us through life, sustain and defend us, look after our interests, be our companion, carry responsibility for life on His broad shoulders, offers us the tenderness of His heart. He is not only a picture of strength and power, but also loveliness.

*“Was there ever kinder Shepherd,  
Half so gentle, half so meek,  
As the Saviour who would have us  
Come and gather round His feet.”*

#### Perfect knowledge of His sheep

Need to stress the difference between eastern and western shepherds. The eastern shepherd goes in front of the sheep, rather than driving from behind. He lies down in front of the opening in the fold and acts as a door. His sheep are kept for years, because they are used for wool rather than meat. So there develops a special intimacy between shepherd and sheep. Travellers often speak of the loving regard between the two. To the passing stranger, the sheep are all alike, but the shepherd knows each one, and often has pet names for each sheep, and talks to them. And despite their dumbness and limited intelligence, the sheep know their shepherd, and are not deceived by a stranger. If a stranger dons the garment of the shepherd and calls the sheep, they will turn and flee, since it is not the voice they know.

Traveller H.V.Morton described a scene near Bethlehem. Two shepherds sheltered in a cave during the night. Their flocks intermingled. How were they to be sorted out? One shepherd stood some distance away and gave his own special call, which only his sheep knew. His flock separated themselves from the rest because they knew his voice. Jesus takes this important factor, so well known to His audience, to explain the relationship between Himself and His people.

He knows us with perfect knowledge. His knowledge is as detailed and intimate as the way the Father knows Him and He knows the Father. His detailed knowledge of us includes our names, families, homes, income, circumstances, past history, trials, worries, health, needs, job, secret fears, what we worry about, secrets, sins, failures and future. His is not just a cold intellectual knowledge, but it involves love, affection and concern. We are accepted by Him, dear to Him, and precious to Him. He is able to provide for all our wants, bears patiently with our weaknesses, guards and provides. Of those given Him by the Father, He will at last be able to claim He had not lost one.

H.C.G.Moule said, “I was conscious of being in the grasp of the absolute master, and of having grasped in Him the supreme secret of peace and life and victory. I would not be free and independent again. I have no rights and make no conditions. My confidence came when I realised it is in the Master’s interest to provide His slave’s every need – physical, moral, mental and spiritual. Then His people, in their turn, know Him by trust and confidence. Here is the other side of the coin and what a miracle it is – I can know him. Blind, deaf, stupid, wayward me. I have broken His law, and tried His patience times without number, yet I can be accepted, blessed and come into personal knowledge.” [Not clear where this quotation ends.]

This does not mean having a head stuffed full with Bible facts and figures. It is not about being thoroughly acquainted with learned tomes of theology. But it is all about a personal knowledge of a living personal Saviour. Knowing His power in life. Recognising His voice in His word. Experiencing His direction in the life. Knowing Him by union, communion with Him, love and trust. Hearing His voice, following Him, and being led by Him.

Spiritual instinct can be developed. **You have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth** (1 John 2:20). We need to attain a point of spiritual discernment that is not deceived by the voice of strangers. As the acquaintance grows, so does love, knowledge, discernment and so does experience of God.

#### Sacrifice made by the Shepherd for His sheep

**The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep** (John 10:11), the greatest act which the shepherd performed for His sheep. This was literally true in ancient times; many times a shepherd would lose his life defending his sheep. David, keeping his father’s sheep, had to contend with lion and bear. There was also the threat of thieves and robbers, equally capable of killing.

In Christ we have another Shepherd and another death, one of far more profound importance. The centre cross at Calvary bore the Shepherd dying for His sheep. He was bearing their sin, enduring the penalty of death, paying debts that were not His own, satisfying God’s justice, rescuing believers from eternal hell. Not an act of oppression by evil men, not a tragic martyrdom. Not one of the mysteries of this upside down world where the innocent come off worst. This was deliberate – **God so loved the world that He gave His only Son** (John 3:16).

*“Who yielded his life, an atonement for sin,  
And opened the life gate that all may go in.”*

There are many wonders about Calvary’s Cross. It is an inexhaustible mine. But must emphasise this one point – it was purely voluntary. Christ was not a victim of circumstances, nor was it an awful tragedy. **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** (John 10:18). Christ was the complete master of the situation. **The Son of Man came to give His life as a ransom for many** (Mark 10:45). **Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and He will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?** (Matthew 26:53). When the soldiers and officials came to the Garden of Gethsemane with torches and weapons, when Jesus revealed and

yielded Himself to them, they drew back and fell on the ground, helpless (John 18:5,6).

He did not lose His life, He gave it. He was not killed, He chose to die. The Cross was not thrust on Him, He willingly accepted it. He did this for His sheep. It was effective. He did it to save, to benefit His sheep, His people. And His Father was delighted when, at the same time, He bore God's wrath for our sin. How do we explain it all? We cannot. It was love for us. Why did He love us so? An even greater mystery. **The Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me** (Galatians 2:20). The Lord of glory, the eternal Son, gave Himself for vile, rebellious sinners. This is amazing, glorious, unique, and incredible. It leaves us speechless to dwell on who Christ is and the greatness of His love, the greatness of His sacrifice, these great eternal issues.

Yet some people are not interested. Their blind, ungrateful and evil hearts are untouched by such unspeakable love and sacrifice.

### Conclusion

The divine, beautiful shepherd. He has perfect knowledge and concern for His sheep. How great is our privilege in knowing Him. He voluntarily gave His life for the totally worthless.

Do you belong to His flock? His sacrifice was effective for every case. Did His blood avail for you? Do you know Him? Hear His voice? Follow Him? Listen to His call? Are you at His disposal? Do you lean on Him? Submit to His guidance? Enjoy the privileges of being in His care? Know Him to be the best of masters?

He is pleased to be our shepherd. Are we pleased to be His sheep? We have a blessed Christ who knows, loves and leads us. It is our privilege to know and love Him too.