

The True Gate & the True Shepherd

The Life-Giving Shepherd

John 10.11-18

“I am the good shepherd.” The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own 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.

“I am the good shepherd; 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. 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.”

—John 10.11-18

The imagery of shepherd and sheep is one of the most prolific and profound Old Testament pictures of God in covenant relationship with His people. This imagery begins in Genesis with the patriarchs and continues through the prophet's birth announcement of the Messiah. A sampling of those passages include—

- ❖ Genesis 48.15, 49.24
- ❖ Numbers 27.17
- ❖ Psalm 23
- ❖ Psalm 80.1
- ❖ Isaiah 40.11
- ❖ Jeremiah 30.10

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace.

—Micah 5.2, 4-5

- ❖ I am the good shepherd
 - because a good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep
- ❖ I AM *the* Good Shepherd
 - I lay down my life for the sheep
 - the reason the Father loves me:
 - I lay down my life
 - No one takes it from me
 - I lay it down of my own accord
 - I have authority to lay it down
 - I have authority to take it up again
 - this command I received from my Father
 - I know my sheep and my sheep know me
 - just as the Father knows me and I know the Father
 - I have other sheep that I must bring in
- ❖ There will be One Flock and One Shepherd

Prophetic Contrast

“I AM the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep.”

The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them. “ ‘For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them.”

—Ezekiel 34.1-2, 4-6, 10-11

Prophetic Fulfillment

“I AM the Good Shepherd; 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 will save my flock . . . I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken. . . . You are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign LORD.”

—Ezekiel 34.22-24, 31

- ❖ Unapologetically and without qualification, Jesus presents himself as the fulfillment of messianic promise and anticipation and the exclusive access to salvation. He is unequivocal in declaring that there are no alternatives to his care and actions on behalf of the sheep. Thus, he declares himself to be the willing and vicarious sacrifice who came as the fulfillment of Ezekiel 34 and who is the singular means of salvation for the flock from the wolves that had plundered them and the worthless shepherds who had abandoned them.

The Salvation Mission of the Good Shepherd

“I will save my flock . . . I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David. . .”

“I AM the Good Shepherd . . . and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

❖ The **Savior-Shepherd**—

I lay down my life for the sheep.

❖ The Savior-Shepherd of the **Gentiles**—

I have other sheep that are not of the Israel sheep pen.

❖ The **Self-Sacrificing** Savior-Shepherd—

I lay down my life—

no one takes it from me;

I lay it down of my own accord.”

❖ The **Sovereign** Self-Sacrificing Savior-Shepherd—

I lay down my life [only] to take it up again.

I have authority to lay it down.

I have authority to take it up again.

Jesus, the Good Savior-Shepherd—

- (1) Died a **voluntary** death - *“I lay down my life . . . No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.”*

Jesus was not the victim of the plot of the religious leaders to kill him; his death was not the result of Pilate handing him over to be crucified. The death of Jesus was voluntary and intentional—*[I came] to give my life as a ransom for many*” (Mark 10.45). He offered himself intentionally and willingly, according to the plan of God, for the salvation of all who would accept His substitutionary death on their behalf.

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, my God.’ ”

—Hebrews 10.5-7

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.

—1 John 3.16

Jesus, the Good Savior-Shepherd—

(2) Died a **substitutionary** death - *“I lay down my life for the sheep”*

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

—2 Corinthians 5.21

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.

—1 Peter 3.18

One of the most significant aspects of the death of Jesus for us is that it was a substitutionary death: He took our place, accepted responsibility and penalty for our sins, and died a sinner's just death—*“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us”* (Galatians 3.13). We express this truth of substitution when we sing:

He paid a debt He did not owe,

I owed a debt I could not pay;

I needed someone to wash my sins away.

Jesus, the Good Savior-Shepherd—

(3) Died a **vicarious** death - *“I lay down my life **for** the sheep”*

The word “vicarious” means *“performed or suffered by one person as a substitute for another or to the benefit or advantage of another.”* The preeminent theologian, Karl Barth, was asked what word he considered to be the most important in the Bible. He responded with the Greek New Testament word *hyper*. The English word “for” is quite common and incidental in our everyday speech. It is the Greek word *hyper* that is translated “for” in Jesus’ declaration: “I lay down my life *for* the sheep.” In John’s gospel, this word *hyper* is always used in the context of death on behalf of or to the advantage of another. Jesus laid down his life for our benefit. (*Hyper* is not the only Greek word translated “for”—it all depends on the context.)

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

—Romans 5.8-10

Jesus, the Good Savior-Shepherd—

(4) Died an **all-sufficient** death - *“I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also.”*

The death of Jesus, as a payment for sin, was all-sufficient to atone for all the sins. The Apostle Paul expressed the all-sufficient work of Christ that makes us right with God when he wrote: *“. . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus”* (Romans 3.22-24). He wrote to the Colossian church that *“God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Christ, and through him to reconcile all things to himself . . . by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross”* (Colossians 1.19-20). The writer of the letter to the Hebrews presents the all-sufficient work of Christ in a manner that is so comprehensive and transformative that it reads as something too good to be true, but reveals the infinitely extensive accomplishment of his death—

And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. . . . when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God . . . For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

—Hebrews 10.10, 12, 13

Jesus, the Good Savior-Shepherd—

(5) Took up his life on our behalf - *“I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.”*

Laying down his life on our behalf was not the end of his shepherding; Jesus took up his life in resurrection and continues his work for us. The Apostle Paul wrote: *“Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us”* (Romans 8.34). The writer to the Hebrews contrasts the limited and ineffective work of the Old Covenant priests with the work of Jesus that continues and will continue until he returns for all who have trusted him:

Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

—Hebrews 7.23-25

Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

—Hebrews 9.28

Jesus, the Forever Savior-Shepherd—

Our Good Shepherd who laid down his life for us and took it up again to intercede for us, is also our forever shepherd. He is the One Shepherd of the One Flock (John 10.16) of all who have responded to his voice and have trusted in his work on their behalf. The *“life, and life more abundantly”* that we experience through him as our Shepherd now, is only the beginning. We have the promised expectation of his shepherding care throughout eternity: *“For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; ‘he will lead them to springs of living water’ “* (Revelation 7.17). This is the fulfillment of David’s trust and anticipation expressed in Psalm 23—

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

*Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*