

The Good Shepherd

Isaiah 53:4–9, John 10:1–11

This morning we had the privilege of hearing a young man profess his faith in Christ and be added to the church. This is an encouragement to the body of Christ. Some of us have known Greg for many years and have witnessed a dramatic change in his life. God has humbled him and given him a love for the Bible. Jesus said that there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth—surely the angels in heaven are rejoicing today!

A couple months back, when we received another fine young man, I preached on the topic “Welcome to the Flock.” I emphasized how the church is Christ’s flock, and its members are his sheep. The focus was on the flock. Today we will focus on the shepherd. Christ is the good shepherd! As I preach this morning, I have a special message for Greg: Greg, by confessing Christ today, you have put yourself under the control and care of Christ, the good shepherd. You will never regret this, Greg; Christ will never disappoint you. All of you who have confessed Christ have likewise put yourselves under the Savior’s control and care.

Christ is the good shepherd. This is one of the most memorable metaphors for Christ. In the Bible it is found only in John chapter 10. In this chapter Christ twice says, “I am the good shepherd.” This will be our first point this morning:

1. Christ is the good shepherd.

Note that this is something that Christ says about himself. He says, “I am the good shepherd.” This is a metaphor. A metaphor is an implied comparison. The Bible has a lot of them. Psalm 18:2 piles seven of them into one verse: the Lord is “*my rock ... my fortress ... my deliverer ... my strength ... my shield ... the horn of my salvation ... my stronghold.*” Each of these metaphors expresses a truth to ponder about who God is. Here in John’s gospel we hear Christ say, “I am the *bread of life ... I am the light of the world ... I am the door.*”¹ Jesus is inviting us to consider who he is. In the present instance he says, “I am the good shepherd.” This is an arresting expression. He is “the shepherd of the sheep” (v. 2). There are two metaphors in this expression: “shepherd” and “sheep.” Christ cares for, feeds, leads and protects his flock—his church—as a shepherd cares for his sheep. If by faith you are one of his sheep, then you can rest assured that he cares for you: he comes to you in your time of trouble and ministers to your needs.

Christ is the *good* shepherd. There is a double meaning to the word “good.” First, Christ is the “good” shepherd in contrast to *bad* shepherds—“strangers,” “thieves” and “robbers” who break into the fold to harm the sheep. Our chapter

¹ There are seven “I am” in John’s gospel: “I am” the bread of life (6:35), the light of the world (8:12), the door (10:9), the good shepherd (10:14), the resurrection and the life (11:25), the way, the truth and the life (14:6), the vine (15:5). Christ also says, “before Abraham was, I AM” (8:58)—a bold claim to deity.

opens with Christ contrasting himself to false shepherds: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” Christ is the true shepherd, the only trustworthy religious leader. Any who lead you away from Christ are imposters and charlatans, and it is your duty to run from them. These men and women are followers of Satan, whose purpose it is to destroy the sheep. This is strong language, but true. Any purported religious leaders who lead you away from Christ—no matter how smooth-talking, no matter how well dressed, no matter how impressive their religious institution might appear—are agents of the devil, and Christ’s true sheep must run for their lives. The religious leaders of Christ’s day rejected him; they rejected God’s Messiah, the one promised in the Old Testament. Christ came into the world perfectly fulfilling prophecy: the seed of the woman, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the virgin-born Son of God, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, the one who would be born in the little, obscure town of Bethlehem, the one who, when he came, would give sight to the blind, enable the lame to walk, cleanse the lepers, restore hearing to the deaf, and raise the dead. Jesus came and perfectly fulfilled all the messianic prophecies, yet the religious leaders in Jerusalem rejected him. They declared, “We will not have this man to rule over us.” They saw Jesus as a threat, a competitor. Instead of bowing before the Messiah when he came, they delivered him to death. They said, “His blood be on us and on our children.” Judaism in Christ’s day had a long and illustrious history. It was the faith that went back to Abraham—in fact, to Adam. Judaism in Christ’s day had the Levitical priesthood, the divinely-appointed sacrifices, an impressive temple. Yet it rejected Christ, and from that point on it became a false religion. Jesus called the religious leaders of his day thieves and robbers, false shepherds who had no business being in the sheepfold. They did not enter through the door but climbed in some other way. Here is a picture of wicked men carrying out a home invasion. If you have ever had your home broken into, you know what I mean. You feel violated, taken advantage of. You never again feel safe in your own space.

When guests come to my home, they come to the *door*. They knock on the door, and I invite them in. They do not try to come in through a window, or by breaking down a wall. Anyone who would try to do that is a “bad guy,” an evildoer, a lawbreaker. He is to be repelled by force. Christ says that false religious leaders do not come in through the door but climb up some other way. What does it mean to climb up some other way? It is, as one commentator has put it, to enter the sheepfold pretending to be a true pastor of Christ’s flock, “without the necessary prerequisites and qualifications, without first obtaining a saving acquaintance with

Christ, and genuine love to him; without being called to, and qualified for the work by him, [thus], without authority from him; who, influenced by unworthy motives, by a view to wealth, or honor, or ease, or a [regular salary] gets himself appointed a minister of Christ's church."² Here is a religious leader posing as a servant of Christ, but he (or she) is actually a thief and a robber. A thief or robber does not have your best interest at heart. He doesn't want to lead you to Christ. He doesn't want to see you in heaven. He (or she) wants your money, your tithes, your support, but he doesn't truly care about your soul. He wants to claim you as one of his followers, but he doesn't want you to go to heaven.

O my friend, Christ truly *does* care about your soul! He left heaven's glory to come to earth to save his people from their sins. He is the good shepherd who infallibly leads his flock to heaven, where the redeemed will be in the presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit forever, rejoicing with the saints. Christ is the *good* shepherd, in contrast to false shepherds who want to take you with them to hell. "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."

Yes, Jesus is the good shepherd, in contrast to all religious charlatans. But there is another way in which he is good: he is *morally* good; he is absolutely good, supremely good, sinless. All the fallen sons and daughters of Adam have "sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23); all of us fall short of God's standard of absolute perfection; as a consequence, we are excluded from heaven without a mediator. But Christ is morally upright, pure and good. He is "Jesus Christ the *righteous*" (1 John 2:1), the virgin-born Son of God. Inheriting his humanity from his mother, he did not have a biological human father; he did not descend from Adam "by *ordinary* generation,"³ through the physical union of two human parents; he did not inherit original sin. Christ is the good shepherd; he is morally pure and upright, the sinless one, alone qualified to go to the cross and die for his people. If you come to God through him (Heb. 7:25) he will save you; he will shepherd you through this life and lead you to glory. He is the only one who can do this. No other human can save you. Your parents cannot save you, your church cannot save you, you cannot save yourself. The only way you can be saved is through him who came into the world to save sinners.

This morning we heard a man profess that he believes the Bible to be the Word of God, and its doctrine of salvation to be the true doctrine of salvation. There is no

² Benson Commentary, John 10:1 (Bible Hub)

³ "Did all mankind fall in Adam's first transgression? The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity; all mankind, descending from him by *ordinary* generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression" (Shorter Catechism 16).

other way to heaven than through Christ. The gospel is: “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom. 10:13). I invite you in Christ’s name to call upon him today and be saved. Will you do that? If so, then you will be able to say with the Psalmist, “The Lord is *my* shepherd” (Ps. 23:1). Second, consider:

2. Christ feeds his sheep, leads his sheep, protects his sheep.

What is the job of a shepherd? It is to feed his sheep, lead his sheep, protect his sheep. His sheep are his livelihood, and it is to his advantage to care of them to the best of his ability. Sheep are valuable animals. They are valuable for their wool, for their lanolin, for their meat. If a shepherd properly cares for his sheep, then he will prosper.

Christ is the good shepherd, and as a shepherd he feeds us, leads us, protects us. He feeds us spiritual truth through his written and preached word. He declares, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). There are lots of people who don’t believe. This time of year there are always stories in the news that cast doubt upon the truth of the resurrection, that claim that Christ *didn’t* rise from the dead. But the child of God born-again by the Holy Spirit hears the Shepherd’s voice and recognizes it to be the infallible word of God. “*My* sheep hear my voice,” the Savior said. In a world with all kinds of conflicting truth claims the born-again Christian intuitively knows that only the Christian worldview makes sense. If the world is purely the product of chance, rather than the purposeful creation of the all-powerful God, then there is no truth. No one’s perception of reality is any better than anybody else’s. “Love your neighbor”? Why do that? It’s survival of the fittest, dog-eat-dog, every man for himself. Why be good? There is no objective good and evil; all there is is opinion, without Christ.

Christ feeds us with the truth of his word; he feeds us with the truth of himself. He is “the true God, and eternal life” (1 John 5:20). As the prophet Isaiah foretold some 700 years before his birth, “He shall *feed his flock like a shepherd*: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently *lead* those that are with young.” Christ leads his sheep, and his sheep intuitively follow. He puts forth his own sheep and goes before them. He calls his sheep by name. He has planned out the best life for each one of them. Even the trials and setbacks of this life are planned out in advance by our wise and faithful heavenly Father. We may not experience our best life now, but we know without a doubt that we will experience our best life forever. Our earthly life is over in an instant. We all fade as the flower of the field. Eventually we die. Every one of us must one day die. But the Captain of our salvation will infallibly lead us to glory. He will lose none of his elect. They are all important to him, and he will preserve them.

There is a Christian satire website called the Babylon Bee. In 2017, when Hurricane Harvey battered Houston, Texas, causing record flooding, the Babylon Bee satirically spoofed televangelist Joel Osteen with a headline that read: “Joel

Osteen Sails Luxury Yacht through Flooded Houston to Pass Out Copies of *Your Best Life Now*.” The article went viral, prompting a fact check from Snopes.⁴

So which is it? Your best life *now*, if you follow the religious charlatans’ health-wealth “gospel,” or your best life *forever*, if you follow Christ? Jesus says, “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” He who knows the end from the beginning tells us his truth, and the truth is that if we follow Christ, we will be with him forever. This is not “pie in the sky, by and by,” this is gospel truth. In this world we will have tribulation, but as followers of Christ we can take heart: he has overcome the world. At his death Satan fell like lightning from heaven, his doom was forever sealed. Those who are born again by the blessed Holy Spirit know that there will come a day when God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away—a day when all the elect will hear Christ’s commanding voice: “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev. 21:4–5). Thirdly,

3. Christ goes after lost sheep.

Our Old Testament text, Isaiah 53, tells us that “All we like *sheep* have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Here, the inspired prophet liken’s God’s people to sheep. This is not a flattering comparison. Sheep are not particularly bright. They cannot care for themselves. They cannot find their way back when they are lost. They are totally dependent on shepherds.

As Jesus said, “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.” Jesus is the good shepherd. If a human shepherd goes to such lengths to go after a lost sheep, then surely Christ the good shepherd goes after lost sheep as well. Peter writes, “We were as sheep going astray, but have now returned to the shepherd and bishop of our souls” (1 Pet. 2:25). How have we, as sheep running away from God, returned to the shepherd and bishop of our souls? Through the power of Christ’s Holy Spirit. Christ said, “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” The risen and exalted Savior sends his Spirit to the farthest corners of the earth to regenerate spiritually-dead hearts and draw his elect to himself. As the Psalmist said, “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power” (Ps. 110:3). Christ’s redeeming work is perfect. Out of all whom the Father has given him he will lose nothing, but raise it up at the last day. The good shepherd goes after lost sheep and brings them to himself. We had an example of this in our midst this morning, when Greg, a lost and needy soul wandering far from Christ,

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Babylon_Bee, accessed 4-9-22

who formerly wanted nothing to do with the gospel, was compelled to acknowledge Christ as his Savior and Lord, and to profess faith in Christ his Savior. Greg did nothing to deserve God's favor—and neither did we. All the glory must go to the good Shepherd who specializes in going after lost sheep.

Christ indeed uses means. He raises up preachers of the gospel to herald forth his truth. He raises up men and women to give out Bibles, and other men and women who support them. He motivates his followers to live for him and testify for him. But in the end it is Christ who goes after lost sheep. To him be the glory! Finally,

4. Christ is the chief shepherd; the elders of the church are under-shepherds.

The elders of the church are shepherds. Peter instructs the elders of the church: “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers . . . being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (1 Pet. 5:1–4).

How significant that Peter does not address himself as “the first pope,” or even as “the apostle.” His attitude is one of humility: he is simply “a fellow elder”—one among many. There is a plurality of elders in a biblically-faithful church. Christ is the “Chief Shepherd,” and by implication “the elders who are among you” are undershepherds. “God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble,” as he will say in the next verse. The obvious application of this truth is that church elders are undershepherds who lead men and women, boys and girls, to Christ. If anyone leads poor souls *away* from Christ, he is in no sense an undershepherd; he is an enemy of Christ. Oh, dear people, wherever you go in this world, you have a responsibility to be part of a faithful flock that follows Christ, the good shepherd. While you are here, be a faithful member of *this* flock, and help to build it up to be a thriving community of God's people. But if God should call you elsewhere—whether to get an education or advance in your career, or to be closer to family, or to take care of aging parents, or whatever—then be a part of a faithful flock. Christ is building his church—his visible kingdom on earth—and he wants you to be a part of it.

I came across the following in an alumni magazine. It is from a young woman who works in youth ministry at a church in our area. She graduated from the church's leadership school and is pursuing her “pastoral credentials.” Here is a woman seeking ordination to the Christian ministry. The denomination of which her church is a part ordains women as pastors. This is contrary to Scripture. The Bible says, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence,” as well as the requirement that a pastor be “the husband of one wife” (nothing is said of a pastor being “the wife of one husband.”)

The reason I bring this up is because of what this would-be minister advocates. Citing Matthew 28:19 (“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”) she says—and I quote, “To engage God’s world, we don’t need more pastors, more churches . . . What we need is people who love Jesus and love people to go out into all places and make disciples. You don’t need a title or a degree to engage God’s world. You can do it right where you are.”⁵

Incredulously, the young woman pursuing her “pastoral credentials” quotes a Scripture text that speaks of “baptizing”—something done only by churches and ordained men in the New Testament—and says, “We don’t need more pastors, more churches”! Christ told us he is building his church prior to his second coming, but this young woman is quite sure the church is unnecessary; all a person needs is love and zeal.

We have seen that Christ is the good shepherd. He feeds his sheep, leads his sheep, goes after lost sheep. He is the chief shepherd; the elders of the church are under-shepherds.

Christ does not leave his sheep to flounder. He enfolds them in his flock. He teaches them through the proclamation of his word. He truly cares for his sheep. He leads them to heaven. He will never leave them nor forsake them. Though they are vulnerable, his sheep are protected.

He is the good shepherd. He is not a thief or a robber. His purpose is not to *fleece* the sheep but to *feed* the sheep. Amen.

⁵ *Pilgrim Journey*, spring 2022, p. 16