**“I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD”**

In John Chapter 10 we have this wonderful picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd leading His sheep. The Jewish religious leaders of Jesus’ day have demonstrated that they are, in fact, false shepherds of Israel who “steal, kill and destroy.” In contrast to them, Jesus, the True Shepherd of Israel, the Good Shepherd, gathers His own sheep which have been scattered. He saves them. He protects them. He leads them to green pastures and beside still waters. He provides for their spiritual and physical needs. He gives them abundant life, eternal life. Jesus cares deeply for His sheep. If you have professed Jesus Christ to be the Lord and Savior of your life, then you’re one of His sheep. And as one of His sheep, you follow the voice of your Shepherd, the voice of Jesus.

Toward the end of last week’s lesson the question was raised, “What does following Him (Jesus) look like in our lives (practically speaking)? I tried to answer that question though because we were short on time I probably didn’t answer it adequately. Doris mentioned Hebrews 10:16 which talks about how the Holy Spirit lives in us, how He convicts us, prompts us and directs us thru our daily lives. I want to spend just a few minutes up front this morning answering the question, “What does it mean to truly follow Christ?” This is such an important subject and one that hopefully we can spend more time on in the future. For now let me just share a few thoughts.

[article by Joseph Sowell from his book “Following Christ.”]

READ John 10:11-21

Jesus refers to Himself in this passage as the Good Shepherd. He makes the fourth of His “I AM” statements emphasizing that He is God.

READ John 10:11

Jesus is the “I AM,” Yahweh of the Old Testament. Remember, the Pharisees earlier (John 8) tried to stone Jesus while He was in the temple because of this very claim. As early as John 5 the Pharisees “were seeking all the more to kill” Jesus and one of the reasons John gives is that Jesus was “making Himself equal with God.” They knew He was claiming to be God and this infuriated them. They saw it as blasphemy. And here in John Chapter 10 Jesus says it again, twice, “I am the door” and, now, “I am the good shepherd.” He’s not backing down at all from His claim of deity. He is emphasizing it. In the Gospel of John He will make seven “I AM” statements, all of which are clear references to His deity. He’s God!

Jesus in v 11 is the good shepherd who was prophesied about back in Ezekiel 34 (a messianic prophecy). He is the one that God promised would come to shepherd the scattered sheep of Israel.

The Greek word interpreted as “good” here in this verse means “beautiful” or “excellent.” Why is Jesus the good shepherd, the beautiful and excellent shepherd? Well, Jesus gives us three reasons. The first is mentioned here in verse 11. Because “He lays down His life for the sheep.” In Matthew 20:28 Jesus explains His mission: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” The prophet Isaiah announced that when the Messiah comes He will bear the iniquities of His people (53:11). He will be stricken for the transgressions of His people (53:8). He will be crushed, put to grief and made an offering for guilt (53:10). He will bear the sins of many (53:12). Jesus came to save us, to be the atonement for the sheep, to pay IN FULL the penalty of sin for His sheep. Paul says that Jesus was “delivered up for our trespasses” (Rom 4:25). What Jesus is saying here is that He will voluntarily lay down His life. When will this happen? When He goes to the cross and dies in our place (substitutionary death)! So He is our Good Shepherd because He laid down His life for us. He paid the penalty for your sins and for mine.

Last week we saw where Jesus contrasted Himself, the True Shepherd, with the religious leaders, the false shepherds. He referred to them in v 1-10 as “thieves and robbers.” In the passage I read which we are looking at today He again contrasts Himself with the Pharisees. This time he calls them “hired hands” in the ESV (“hireling” in NASB and KJV).

READ John 10:12-13

These verses contrast the commitment of Jesus, the Good Shepherd with a hired hand who lacks commitment. The bottom line is that this hired hand has no vested interest in the sheep. He doesn’t care about them. At the first sign of danger, he leaves. The hired hand is representative of the religious leaders of Jesus’ day. They had no real investment in the sheep. The only thing they were interested in was themselves, their own power and prestige. What a contrast to our Lord who is willing to lay down his life for us – a Shepherd who loves His sheep that much!

In Zechariah 11 the prophet says that the false shepherds, again referring to the religious leaders of Israel, “have no pity on them” (the flock of Israel). They are referred to as “worthless” shepherds and “foolish” shepherds who desert the flock. That’s exactly the picture Jesus gives us here in these verses. As a result of the hired hand running away from danger (v 12 identifies this danger specifically as “the wolf”) – as a result the sheep are left vulnerable and will become victims, be killed by the wolf. The hired hand flees, v 13, “because he cares nothing for the sheep.”

READ John 10:14-15

Here Jesus gives us a second reason why He’s the Good Shepherd. He says, “I know my own…” The word “know” here in these verses is translated from a Greek word meaning “to know intimately.” In other words, there’s an intimacy in this relationship. Jesus knows His sheep personally, intimately. He loves the sheep. Do you want to hear something truly amazing? The love that Jesus has for us, His sheep, is the same love that the Father has for the Son and the Son has for the Father! Did you catch what Jesus said in v 15? “…just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father.” That same love and intimacy which has existed – forever -- between the Father and the Son is exhibited by Jesus, the Good Shepherd in the personal relationship that He and His sheep enjoy together. So the second reason Jesus is the Good Shepherd is His deep and abiding love for us. I love the words to that great hymn, O Love of God…“Oh, love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong! It shall forevermore endure—The saints’ and angels’ song.” Yes, that’s the kind of love that Jesus has for us!

READ John 10:16

Last week I gave you a sneak preview of this verse. Back in verse 1 of this chapter Jesus refers to the sheepfold which we said last week is the nation of Israel. Remember Jesus is talking to a Jewish audience, specifically He’s talking to the religious leaders of Israel. Now He says, “I have other sheep that are not of this fold…” This refers to non-Jews, those not of Israel. These are sheep from another sheepfold. These are the people Ezekiel prophesied about that the Lord would gather from the nations. These are Gentiles. This is us! Praise God! Jesus said, “I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” So here we see a the third reason why Jesus is the Good Shepherd – because He unites the sheep. Jesus is the One Shepherd of both Jews and Gentiles. Galatians 3:28 says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Despite our various backgrounds, national origins, races, experiences, political affiliations, and so forth, Jesus unites us in Him. In Jesus we find common ground. Ephesians 4 says, “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” In other words, we who place our faith in Christ are all one flock with one shepherd – the Good Shepherd, Jesus. Isn’t it awesome that you and I get to be included in God’s plan of redemption? Salvation is not proprietary for the Jews only. It’s for “**whoever** believes in Him,” (Jn 3:16) “that the **world** might be saved through Him.” (Jn 3:17) That really is GOOD NEWS!

READ John 10:17-18

These verses tell us that God had a plan to save the world. This was the ONLY plan. There was no Plan B. Remember, as Jesus is speaking these words He hasn’t gone to the cross yet. That’s still future, a few months away. But He knows the plan. This plan was set forth from the beginning of time. It called for the Son, the 2nd Person of the Triune Godhead, to leave the comfort of heaven, come down to earth, to fallen humanity, take on human form, dwell among us, healing, teaching, performing signs and miracles, ministering for 3 ½ years, preaching the Gospel message of salvation to all who believe, then go to the cross and die for the sins of the world (“lay down My life”). But that wasn’t the end of His mission. Then He will be resurrected (“that I may take it up again”). This was always the plan. Make no mistake. Jesus was no martyr. He wasn’t the victim of a gross miscarriage of justice. Jesus allowed Himself to be arrested, beaten and ultimately crucified. He had the power at any moment to have called ten thousand angels and wiped out all those enemies of His. But He didn’t do that. No, He exercised diving restraint and willingly laid down his life because He loves us – His oftentimes stupid, disobedient and ungrateful sheep! But praise God; He didn’t stay dead, did He? Here Jesus is prophesying about His own glorious resurrection. All of this was in God’s sovereign plan of redemption. And it was always the plan.

Philippians 2: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Jesus humbled Himself, obedient to the Father’s will – this is the charge Jesus received from the Father in v 18. Therefore, because Jesus was obedient to the Father and humbled Himself… “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:5-11)

So here’s Jesus standing in front of these Pharisees, many of whom will be in that crowd yelling “Crucify Him!” – here’s Jesus telling them “I lay down My life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from Me. I lay it down of my own accord.” And that’s exactly what will happen in a few short months.

It’s teachings like this separated Jesus from all the other rabbis. Jesus taught like nobody else. He taught that God is His Father; He taught that He had authority from God and said He would raise Himself from the dead. He even forgave people’s sins. So it’s not surprising that Jesus elicited the kind of response from the Jewish leadership that He did. And here it is…

READ John 10:19-21

Two groups here, both rejecting Jesus and His claims. The first group, the one that accuses Jesus of being crazy or demon-possessed, I call them “irrational.” It makes no sense after everything Jesus has said and done to prove He’s the Messiah sent from God that they could come to this ridiculous conclusion. The second group, who cannot fully explain Jesus, I’ll call them the “rational” group. Although they don’t know for sure about Jesus, it appears that God is somehow with Him. How else could He do the miracles He does? But even though the Pharisees are divided, neither of these groups, the irrational or rational, believes in Jesus. Neither group of Pharisees at this point believes that Jesus is their Messiah, that He’s God, that He’s the Savior. Therefore, despite their surface differences, both groups are headed the same direction. They’re headed straight for hell. Unless there is a change of heart about Jesus, unless they finally believe, they’re doomed for destruction.

And so for the moment Jesus departs the hard-hearted unbelieving Pharisees. But He will resume His conversation with them in v 22 and we’ll pick that up next week.

The whole reason that John wrote his gospel is stated in John 20:31: “These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” Application. Do you believe Jesus’ claims here in the Gospel of John? Do you believe that Jesus really IS the Messiah, the Son of God and that by believing in His name, by placing your faith in Him, He’ll save you? If you do then I can assure you, you are His sheep. So follow Him. Do you believe that Jesus really is the Good Shepherd who loves you and has your best interests at heart? He’s not going to lead you down the wrong path? Then follow Him. Do you love Him for who He is and all that He’s done for you? Then follow Him.