

The Good Shepherd

He said, "I Am"

John 10:11-21

March 18, 2018

Welcome again to worship today.

Of course, most of us know that it's March Madness. Every year, it's exciting, crazy and inspiring. It is also disappointing when your team loses and your hopes are dashed. This year, for the first time, a 16th seed – which is a team that barely got into the tournament, or if they did, they are never expected to win. Anyway, this year for the first time, a 16th seed beat a #1 seed. University of Maryland in Baltimore County – players who couldn't play for the real University of Maryland team – beat Virginia.

One of the fun things about March Madness is filling out a bracket, trying to pick who will win. Myra and Kevin always fill out brackets. Even Max the Pug had a bracket – his picks were made by a coin flip. (Kentucky vs. the 6th grade basketball team from Valley View. Max picks... the 6th grade Valley View team.)

How many of you fill out brackets? How many of your brackets are blown up, a mess? Do you know what that means? Keep your day job. You are probably more suited for what you do know than picking winners and losers.

During Lent, we are in a series called "He said, 'I Am.'" We are looking at the incredible day job statements Jesus made of Himself using the Greek words *ego eimi*.¹ We translate them, "I Am." *ego eimi* is the Greek equivalent to Yahweh, the Hebrew name for God. Jesus is saying, "I am God" by saying *ego eimi*.

So far, Jesus has said, "*ego eimi* the way, the truth, and the life." He said, "*ego eimi* the light of the world." He said, "*ego eimi* the bread of life. Today we are going to look at another of His incredible statements about Himself. I invite you to turn to page 5 in your bulletin as we look at another very well-known passage, from John 10:11-21.

"I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep. "I am the Good Shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd. "The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded." When he said these things, the people were again divided in their opinions about him. Some said, "He's demon possessed and out of his mind. Why listen to a man like that?" Others said, "This doesn't sound like a man possessed by a demon! Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"²

"*ego eimi* the Good Shepherd." There are scores of paintings and pictures of this imagery, of Jesus as the loving and compassionate shepherd watching and caring for

¹ εγω ειμι

² John 10:11-21 (NLT)

His sheep. They help us feel good, to know that He loves us, and will not leave us alone.

When we were in the Holy Land, I was amazed at the environment shepherds had to deal with when tending sheep. It is nothing at all like what we see here in the Midwest, where there is green grass almost as far as the eye can see, and gentle hills, where a shepherd could lean up against a tree and barely have a care in the world. In the Holy Land, the ground is barren – no green whatsoever – and the hills can and do fall off like a cliff. We passed several different Bedouin communities – shacks really – with a shepherd boy moving the flock from one place to another, and I was thinking, “I don’t see enough grass to satisfy a cat with a stomach ache.” I realized that if there is any chance for a herd of sheep to survive – and for a family to live – you needed a good shepherd.

So when Jesus says, “I am the Good Shepherd,” His audience knows what a Good Shepherd looks like. Then Jesus takes it to a new level. In fact, in the Greek, it literally says, “I am the shepherd, the good one.” The Vulgate, which is the first translation of the Bible in Latin translated by St. Jerome in the 4th century (Holy Land folks, we saw his tomb in Bethlehem under the Church of the Nativity). In the Vulgate, this passage is translated *pastor bonus*.³ Jesus truly is a pastor bonus, a Good Shepherd.

This passage tells us 5 things about this Good Shepherd.

First, the Good Shepherd sacrifices for me.

Verse 11 reads,

*... The Good Shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep.*⁴

When evening settled over the land of Palestine, danger lurked. In Bible times, lions, wolves, jackals, panthers, leopards, bears, and hyenas were common in the countryside. The life of a shepherd could be dangerous.⁵

When David was trying to convince King Saul that he could go and defeat Goliath, he said:

*I have been taking care of my father’s sheep and goats...When a lion or a bear comes to steal a lamb from the flock, I go after it with a club and rescue the lamb from its mouth. If the animal turns on me, I catch it by the jaw and club it to death. I have done this to both lions and bears...*⁶

Jesus said in John 15:13:

*There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.*⁷

1 John 3:16 reads:

*We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us...*⁸

Our Good Shepherd has sacrificed for us. He gave His life – sinless and perfect – for sinners and failures like you and me. That’s a Good Shepherd.

Second, the Good Shepherd cares for me.

³ Word Pictures in the New Testament, John 10:11

⁴ John 10:11b (NLT)

⁵ The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty, John 10:11

⁶ 1 Samuel 17:34-36 (NLT)

⁷ John 15:13 (NLT)

⁸ 1 John 3:16a (NLT)

Among the ancient Jews, some kept their own flocks, while others hired shepherds to keep them for them. But it is obvious that every owner would naturally have felt more interest in the preservation of his flock than the hireling could possibly feel. The one that is hired thinks chiefly of what? The money.

Jesus said:

*A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep.*⁹

The hireling is in it for the money; he doesn't care about the sheep. But Jesus thinks of us as His own, and why He shouldn't. He created us. He has watched us from the very beginning, longing to have a relationship with us. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who so loved His sheep that for their safety He would risk, and one day give, his life.¹⁰ All because He cared.

Third, the Good Shepherd knows me.

Verse 14:

*I am the Good Shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me.*¹¹

As a little girl, Myra grew up on a farm. Now, it's hard for me to imagine that, to be honest. She just doesn't come across as a farm girl. So the other day, I asked her, "What did you do on the farm?" She said, "My papaw gave me a job. I was responsible for giving a name to all his calves. When one was born, it was my job to give it a name, and papaw would register that name for that calf." I think I blurted out, "Really? Is that it?" "Pretty much. But I knew those calves."

Jesus says, "I know my own sheep, and they know me."¹² The Greek word is used here to indicate that Jesus knows His sheep are His means He knows their hearts, their wishes, their purposes, their circumstances; and He approves of them.¹³

In contrast with a hired workman, the Good Shepherd has an intimacy with and personal interest in the sheep. When He says, "I know My sheep," He stresses His ownership and watchful oversight. "My sheep know Me" stresses their reciprocal knowledge of and intimacy with Him. This intimacy is modeled on the loving and trusting mutual relationship of the Father and the Son.¹⁴ "Just as my Father knows me and I know the Father."¹⁵ So imagine that. The Father and the Son knows each other completely. Jesus is saying as the Good Shepherd, He knows us just as well.

Fourth, the Good Shepherd is searching after me.

We remember the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15, where 1 sheep out of a hundred goes missing, and the shepherd leaves the 99 to brave the dangers to find 1 sheep.

Verse 16 reads:

⁹ John 10:12-13 (NLT)

¹⁰ Barclay's Daily Study Bible, John 10:11

¹¹ John 10:14 (NLT)

¹² John 10:14 (NLT)

¹³ Adam Clarke's Commentary, John 10:14

¹⁴ The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty, John 10:14-15

¹⁵ John 10:15 (NLT)

*I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.*¹⁶

Who are the other sheep? You and I. We were not part of God's chosen nation, Israel. We are Gentiles, pagans, who knew nothing of the mercy and justice of God. We are the other sheep who heard Christ's voice and became part of the one flock with the one shepherd because He came searching for us.

Finally, the Good Shepherd has power for me.

Verse 18 in the NLT says:

*No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again.*¹⁷

The Greek word here¹⁸ is not an easy word to translate; it could be translated right, authority, power, privilege. John 10:18 in the NRSV reads:

*No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again.*¹⁹

Jesus has power of His life, and the power to change your life, to lead you as a Good Shepherd, *pastor bonus*.

There once was a shepherd that lived in the Scottish highlands. This shepherd had a daughter and he would take her with him when he went out on the moors to take care of the sheep. The thing that the little girl liked best was to hear the call of shepherd. His voice sounded so free and beautiful as carried across the valleys of the moors.

As the years passed the little girl became a beautiful young woman and went off to the big city. It was there that she was determined to build a life. On her arrival, she would write back home to her parents every week. But as life began to take her by the hand, her letters soon dropped off in their frequency and soon there were none.

Rumors begin to filter back home to that shepherd and his wife that their daughter had started hanging out with some unsavory characters and they were having a very negative influence on her life. One day, one of the boys from back home ran into her in the city streets and she acted as if she did not even know him. When the old shepherd heard this, he gathered a few things together and dressed in his rough shepherd's clothes went to the city to find his daughter.

For days on end he looked for her. He looked everywhere; the slums, the rows of houses, the markets, the taverns, and everywhere in between to no avail. So after all of this searching, he became very discouraged with the thought that he had lost his daughter to the evil city.

As he started the long trek back home, just as he was on the outskirts of the city, he remembered that his daughter had always loved to hear the voice of the shepherd calling out to the sheep.

So he turned around, and on this quest motivated by his sorrow and his love, he began to stalk the streets. His voice rang out the shepherd's call. The citizens of the city all looked at him as if he had lost his wits. It wasn't too long as he walked the streets of one of the degraded neighborhoods that inside of one of those houses, his daughter, sitting among the vermin who had led her astray, heard his voice. With great

¹⁶ John 10:16 (NLT)

¹⁷ John 10:18 (NLT)

¹⁸ Exousian (εξουσιαν)

¹⁹ John 10:18 (NRSV)

astonishment on her face, she heard that call of the voice of the shepherd, the voice of her father calling out to her. She leaped up and rushed out to the street and ran into the arms of that old shepherd, her father. It was then that he took her back home to the highlands of Scotland and brought her back to God and to decency and modesty.

This is a moving example of what happens to those who can hear the voice of a shepherd.²⁰

²⁰ From a sermon by Philip Harrelson, The Voice of the Shepherd, 8/6/2010, downloaded from sermoncentral.com