

## I AM: The Good Shepherd

John 10:11-18

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Dan Hoffman

When people look for a new place to live one of the questions they ask is what is the neighbourhood like? Is it full of renters or owners? And while there may be nothing bad about having a renter next door, and in fact some renters are exceptionally good at taking care of the property, in general owners and renters view their residence differently – it's just human nature.

And Jesus understood human nature. In fact He used the difference between renters and owners to contrast His commitment to His sheep with those of a hired hand. You see Jesus is an owner, and Jesus loves His property!

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Today we are continuing our series looking at two simple words that keep popping up throughout the book of John – I AM. These seemingly insignificant words find themselves on the lips of Jesus seven times and each time the power of the statements that follow and the response of the people around cause us to realize that there is something momentous about these words.

If you have been with us over the last three weeks you know what that significance is. These are the words that God used to introduce Himself to humanity at the burning bush in Exodus 3 – I'm the God Named I AM, I am "YHWH".

A Name that became so sacred to the Jews that whenever they come across it in the text they say *Adoni* – "Lord" instead of YHWH.

And yet Jesus used these words. Jesus came right out and spoke this name, but more than that He uses it to refer to Himself! And the people who heard Him were left reeling in disbelief. Many crazy men have claimed to be God over the years, but none of those men restored sight to the blind, cured lepers or raised the dead!

And so we, along with the audience Jesus first spoke to, find ourselves asking today: "what do we do with the words of Jesus?"

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This morning we are going to be heading back to John chapter 10 and I would encourage you to open your Bibles and follow along.

The thesis that we are going to be using to guide us is as follows: **The Good Shepherd's ultimate passion condemns the hired help and commends the Christ-proclaimer.**

## CONTEXT:

Just to set the context for you, two weeks ago we looked at the beginning of chapter 10 and the cryptic words Jesus speaks there. Just after healing a blind man He said to the Pharisees:

"Very truly I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them. (John 10:1-6)

As the text notes, these are hard words and Jesus' listeners don't understand. And so verse 7 starts with a "therefore". Because they didn't understand Jesus therefore told two more parables.

But the important thing to note here is that Jesus doesn't give these two follow-up parables to be an explanation as though He was trying to get more people to understand what He was saying. Quite frankly Jesus isn't concerned that many people don't understand what He is teaching. Instead these two parables are an extrapolation of the first parable. The result is that those without faith are left further behind, while those with faith are strengthened.

We see this in verse 19 where after Jesus has finished the second of these parables we read:

The Jews who heard these words were again divided. Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?"

But others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?" (John 10:19-21)

When people actually see Jesus their responses are strongly polarized. Some see Jesus' words as the evidence He is crazy, while others, in faith and amazement, acknowledge He must be from God. The one position you don't see is people taking is one of nonchalant ambivalence.

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Friends, have you met Jesus? Not, have you been to church, not have you heard about Him, but have you met Jesus? If you have, the evidence is that you are a polarized person. You are either someone who has given yourself whole heartedly to His worship, spending your energy expanding His glory, or you hate Him. If you find yourself in the middle between those two extremes I urge you today to wrestle with whether you've really met Jesus.

[Let's Pray]

So today we are looking in at John 10 and Jesus' claim: I AM the Good Shepherd. Let's start with verse 11.

[Read John 10:11]

If you've been a Christian for any amount of time perhaps you've heard people attack Christianity by saying that Jesus never actually claimed to be God.

The argument is made that it was the Apostle Paul and the church that turned Jesus into God, and this was never Jesus' intention from the beginning.

Now, while it is true that you don't find the words "I AM God" on the lips of Jesus, the statements we do have from Jesus about who He is were unmistakably clear to Jesus' original audience. And one of the most blatant claims Jesus made comes to us in verse 11. I AM the Good Shepherd. In this short sentence Jesus' audience heard Him claim to be God.

As we have stressed for the last several weeks it is the I AM in these sentences where the emphasis lies. Jesus here isn't claiming to be just any shepherd; He is claiming to be I AM. And this claim divided everyone who heard Him, and it was this claim that got Him crucified in the end.

So the argument that Jesus never claimed to be God is one that can only be made by people who don't understand the Jewish context of the Gospels and so they can't grasp the significance of Jesus' words.

But here is where Jesus' current statement, "I AM the Good Shepherd" goes beyond any of His other statements to date.

Not only was the analogy of the shepherd a familiar one in the first century, but it was one well known for describing God. By the time Jesus made this statement YHWH had already been known as the Good Shepherd since King David penned the words of Psalm 23 around a thousand years earlier.

The LORD *is* my shepherd;  
 I shall not want.  
 He makes me to lie down in green pastures;  
 He leads me beside the still waters.  
 He restores my soul;  
 He leads me in the paths of righteousness  
 For His name's sake.  
 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
 I will fear no evil;  
 For You *are* with me;  
 Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. (Psalm 23:1-4)

You will notice that the word LORD in the first line of this Psalm is all capitalized. That means the Hebrew here reads “I AM is my Shepherd.”

And God is the ultimate Good Shepherd. And it is for that reason that the words of this Psalm are as familiar as they are, and why most people on their death beds ask for this Psalm to be read.

It’s incredibly comforting to think that we belong to a Shepherd God whose staff and rod comfort us in the midst of the worst this world of sin can throw at us. Amen?

And so when Jesus says “I AM the Good Shepherd” He is making a double claim at divinity, and the power of this claim was not lost on His listeners. And they began to divide into two camps.

And here we get to the second part of our thesis. **The Good Shepherd’s ultimate passion...**

At the first words of verse 11 the jaws of everyone in the crowd would have dropped – those with faith and those without. But Jesus doesn’t stop. In the second half of verse 11 He next defines what being the Good Shepherd means. Jesus says the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep...

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What? You’ve been in church too long if that doesn’t sound crazy. Good shepherds care for their sheep sure, they would even fight to defend them if necessary. But die for them? That’s way over the top? If you heard of someone dying for their animals we would say that was a really foolish idea. There is no scripture about any shepherds dying for their sheep – Jesus certainly didn’t get this from Psalm 23.

So we have to ask “What are you talking about Jesus?” What kind of shepherd are you? Why would you lay your life down for your sheep? Why would God lay His life down for His sheep? Why would God lay His life down at all?

Jesus knows what He has said will be difficult to accept and He wants people to be absolutely sure of what they heard. So He repeats Himself in verse 15: “Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and *I lay down my life* for the sheep.” And then He repeats Himself again in verse 17: The reason my Father loves Me is that *I lay down my life.*” And then in case people missed that He repeats Himself twice in verse 18: “No one takes [my life] from me, but *I lay it down* of my own accord. I have the authority to *lay it down* and the authority to take it up again.”

Are you picking up what Jesus is saying here? In Mark 10 Jesus says  
No one is good but God alone (Mark 10:18)

But here, referring to Himself He says, the Good Shepherd lays down His life – Jesus says this is what shows He is Good – this is what shows He is God.

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Is that right? Is it Jesus' laying His life down that shows He and the Father are one?... I think the answer is "yes", but here we need to be careful. If Jesus is God then He and the Father need to be exactly aligned in their goals and passions.

Look with me again at verse 17

[Read John 10:17]

Now the wording is a bit tricky here. Taken by itself this line appears to imply Jesus is earning the love of the Father through His death and so can not be one with Him. But in John 17 Jesus prays:

*"Father... you loved me before the creation of the world. (John 17:24)*

So Jesus' death obviously doesn't earn Him the Father's love as He had it from before time began. So what is Jesus saying when He speaks of the Father loving Him because He lays down His life?

Here we need the help of John 3:16

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son... (John 3:16)

The Father has a double love. The love that exists between Jesus and the Father is one that predates time itself. But God has another love; a deep love for the world He created. God is an owner and God loves His property.

And that is why He sent Jesus – look at the bottom of verse 18.

[Read John 10:18]

God loved the world so much that He commanded His son to die for it. Now here is where this gets really sticky. Can you wrap your brain around a love that big? Can you imagine loving something so much that you would send your son to die for it? To die hanging on a cross?

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When put like that it sounds absolutely wrong. I can not picture Elliana on a cross. There is nothing that valuable! There is nothing in the world that is worth the sacrifice of my child... let alone the sacrifice of the Son of God. No one here is worth that to me.

And God would agree. Now hear me out. The primary reason God sent Jesus to die was not for the salvation of humanity. We aren't worth that much to Him and that's a good thing. Let me explain...

The salvation of humanity is God's secondary concern. It is actually the byproduct of God bringing His first concern into reality.

And God's first love, His first passion, is His own glory. And we get this message all over the Bible. Consider God's words in Isaiah for example:

For My own name's sake I delay my wrath;  
for the sake of My praise I hold it back from you,  
so as not to destroy you completely...  
For My own sake, for My own sake, I do this.  
How can I let Myself be defamed?  
I will not yield My glory to another. (Isaiah 48:9-11)

Or listen to these words:

'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel [and I would add Christians of the Church], that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of My holy Name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone... Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes... I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign LORD. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, people of Israel! (Ezekiel 36:22-24,32)

We are not God's ultimate passion, and that's good news for us... But maybe you're not convinced.

Does God being passionate about His own glory sound funny to you? This isn't an easy thing to get our minds around. When we meet people who are fixated on themselves this is a blatantly terrible thing. Why would it be different for God? Shouldn't He be focused on those around Him?

Here is the problem with this logic. When people love themselves above everything else they attribute ultimate value to a non-ultimate being.

But God alone is a being of ultimate value. He is unique in the universe. "Everything else belongs to a class. We are human; Rover is a dog; the oak is a tree; Earth is a planet; the Milky Way is one of a billion galaxies; Gabriel is an angel; Satan is a demon. But only God is God... All else is creation. He alone creates. All else begins. He alone always was. All else depends. He alone is self-sufficient."<sup>1</sup>

And so, because God is the only ultimate being in existence God alone is worthy of His own ultimate love. And He is not an idolater – He has no gods before Himself. And that is a good thing for us.

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<sup>1</sup> Piper, John "Brothers we are not professionals" (Nashville, B&H Publishing), 2002. pg 12.

If we were God's ultimate passion then our rebellion would put us in a perilous place – God could give up on us. But because God's love for us resulting in our salvation is only a byproduct of Him loving and expanding His own glory our salvation is assured because it is not dependant on us at all. Do you see?

God's glory is God's ultimate passion. And the mystery of the Trinity is that Jesus, the Good Shepherd who lay down His life for the sheep, shares this love with the Father because He and the Father are one.<sup>2</sup> In John 13 He says:

Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will glorify the Son in Himself, and will glorify Him at once. (John 13:31-32)

This is what Jesus sought. And it is only out of this shared passion for expanding the glory of God, that Jesus was willing to die for us.

By laying down His life in order to increase the glory of God by enabling people to willfully worship the Ultimate Being Jesus demonstrated that He has the same passion as the Father. And so verse 17's statement that the Father loves Jesus because He lays down His life is actually a circular one.

The Father loves Jesus because Jesus loves what the Father loves because it is the same thing Jesus loves. And this is something They are willing to do anything to achieve – even die. God's glory is that important to Him.

This is why when speaking about His coming death Jesus said:

“Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” (John 12:27-28)

Jesus is an owner, He loves His property and His most valuable property is His shared glory with the Father. It is only because our salvation expands that glory that we become the sheep of His pasture and He lay down His life for us.

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So what does this mean for us? What does it mean for us to live under the care of the Good Shepherd?

In this text there is one other kind of person described and a commission given. And here we get to the last part of our thesis. **The Good Shepherd's ultimate passion condemns the hired help and commends the Christ-proclaimer.**

First He condemns the hired help. In verse 12 and 13 Jesus talks about the hired hand; the renter not the owner. He is one who sees the wolf coming and abandons the sheep because he doesn't own them.

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<sup>2</sup> John 10:30

And Jesus has no sympathy for this individual because it is Jesus' sheep that are being hurt and His glory that is being stolen. And Jesus loves His property!

So who is Jesus referring to when He says "hired hand"? Primarily Jesus is talking about His under-shepherds, those given the position of shepherding His sheep – that means the pastors or elders of the church.

But in this case they aren't following Jesus' example and instead are in the shepherding business for their own glory. Have you ever seen a pastor who was proud of the ministry he had grown up around himself? There is an incredible danger here. Because what can so easily happen is that the glory that should be directed towards God, the glory only the Good Shepherd is worthy of, ends up being given to a person.

And the result is that the sheep are scattered. They are drawn not towards God and His glory, but towards the ministry of a man or woman.

Brothers and sisters, fellow pilgrims and especially deacons of Fort George who have been chosen to provide spiritual oversight here; I plead with you, guard Jesus' sheep because Jesus loves His own property and will hold us responsible for it. As Fort George grows commit yourself to being a shepherd of these sheep. Even laying down your life to take care of them. Don't fall into the temptation of viewing your position lightly as that of a hired hand because Jesus condemns the hired hand.

But second Jesus commends the Christ-proclaimer. In verse 16 Jesus says:

[Read John 10:16]

Jesus did not die to draw a few sheep in ancient Palestine towards the glory of God; His mission was much greater than that. His goal was to draw people from every tribe and nation and tongue together in a single God-glorifying union under One Good Shepherd.

And Jesus invites us into His mission. In the famous words of Matthew 28 Jesus told us

All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." (Matthew 28:18-19)

And so Jesus' statement that He **must** bring in these sheep is not for Him alone but comes as a commission to anyone who would follow Him. And Jesus commends the man or woman who takes His mission up and joyfully joins Him in expanding the Father's glory.



Jesus has sheep in this neighbourhood and in your neighbourhood that you have been commissioned to bring in for the glory of God.

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As we draw this to a close we are faced with two questions. First are we Jesus sheep? Are you one of Jesus' sheep today? Not do you attend church regularly or did you pray the sinners prayer when you were a kid, but do you hear His voice? Friends the Good Shepherd says "I know My sheep and my sheep know me" – do you know Jesus?

Do not leave here without answering that question.

And second, when it comes to Jesus' sheep, are you a renter or an owner? Do you have in yourself the same attitude that was in Christ Jesus? Does your heart break with the things that break His? Is His ultimate passion your passion? Are you committed to bringing in sheep from the sheep pens near you to the glory of God? Or are you in this for your own preservation, your own salvation, or your own benefit?

The Good Shepherd's ultimate passion is His glory. This is a passion He invites you to participate in because He wants you to spend your life seeking the only thing that has ultimate worth. Don't waste yourself on anything less. And this passion condemns those who like hired help are just concerned with themselves, and it commends those who share His passion and proclaim the glory of Christ, thus bringing in His sheep from our neighbourhoods to His glory.

Brothers and sisters will you share your Good Shepherd's passion?