

I AM the Good Shepherd

John 10:11-15

INTRODUCTION

As the story is told a famous actor was the after dinner speaker at a big function. When he stood up to speak, he invited his audience to choose a poem for him to recite. There was a long silence until a old white-haired retired pastor raised his hand and asked to hear the 23rd Psalm.

The actor was slightly taken back, but agreed to do so provided the pastor would recite it after him, which the pastor reluctantly agreed to do.

- The actor recited the psalm with great vocal inflection and eloquence. When he was finished, his audience gave him a standing ovation. Never had they heard it recited more beautifully.
- When the pastor recited the Psalm, no one made a sound. By the time he had finished, there wasn't a dry eye in the house. The silence continued after he was finished. The pastor wasn't sure what to do, so he stood motionlessly at the podium.

Then the actor came over to the pastor and embraced him. The actor turned to the audience and told:

The difference his version and my version is this: I know the 23rd Psalm but he knows the Shepherd."

The Lord is my shepherd. He is MY shepherd.

As a part of our Lenten series, I am using these Thursday night services to focus on the seven I AM statements of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel of John. Now, there are only four of these Thursday night services and there are seven I AM statements, so expect to see them show up in other services during this holy season. For example, on Easter Sunday I will depart from the standard lectionary to focus on:

I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die. (John 11:25)

I am also not taking these seven statements in the same order that John presents them. In fact, tonight is the 4th in the sequence of seven. But given our theme of:

Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)

This seemed like the best place to start.

These seven statements are powerful and insightful. They give to all followers of Jesus an insight into how He perceives His mission and calling. Each ties to an Old Testament description of the promised Messiah, so each should have reinforced in the ears of the listeners that Jesus was indeed the One for Whom they had been waiting.

But these statements were interpreted as blasphemy to the religious leaders in their audience. They heard – and heard correctly – that Jesus was equating Himself with God.

You may remember that when Moses was sent to lead the children of Israel out of captivity, he had a major concern:

Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, “The God of your fathers has sent me to you,” and they ask me, “What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them? (Exodus 3:13)

What did God say His name was?

This is what you are to say: “I AM has sent me to you.” (Exodus 3:14)

So sacred was that Name that no one ever spoke it. No one dared use it, for fear of using it “in vain.” Until Jesus.

- And then He had the audacity to use that Name to refer to Himself.

I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me. (John 10:14)

Let me make three observations:

OBSERVATION #1: THE

I am THE good shepherd... (John 10:14)

After a three year battle in the courts, in the summer of last year The Ohio State University was successfully able to trademark the word “THE.” I am a very big Ohio State fan, and I fully understand the need to protect your brand.

- But Jesus was using that trademarked word long before Ohio State came into existence.

Jesus is not just A good shepherd. He is THE good shepherd.

The word “good” here is “kalos.” It is a word that speaks to the high quality and dependability of the character inside that person. As THE good shepherd, this shepherd sets the standard for all shepherds.

- When the wolves and bears come to attack the flock, the good shepherd stays to protect and defend the sheep.
- When the sun beats down, when the winds blow, when the snow falls, the good shepherd will care for the sheep’s basic needs: food, shelter, health and so on.
- When the day is long, the good shepherd is never distracted. He watches over His sheep.

Jesus is THE good shepherd. The only one.

OBSERVATION #2: HE KNOWS HIS SHEEP

I know my sheep ... (John 10:14)

I find this truth to be most amazing. My shepherd knows my name.

When Jesus introduces the imagery of the Good Shepherd, He tells us of the shepherd’s intimate knowledge of his flock.

- In calling to his sheep, the shepherd does not utter merely a general cry for all of his lambs to come. Instead, he calls them by name. He has such deep love for and knowledge of his sheep that he calls for them individually.
- Jesus is not an aloof leader or distant figure who is barely aware of His people. Instead, our Good Shepherd knows us by name.
- No one, not even we ourselves, knows us better than Christ does. And just think of what a marvelous thing that is.
- Jesus knows us far better than we know ourselves, including the worst parts of us—and He still loves us.

In another passage of Scripture we are told:

Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.
(Luke 12:6-7)

When Jesus – the Lamb of God – took away the sins of the world, I believe that He didn't do it only in a general sense. I believe that in the marvelous ways that only God can know, Jesus knew my name and He knew my sins. And that is one of the reasons I can proclaim with confidence:

Jesus died for MY sins.

Our God know us individually. We are not just faces in a crowd. He knows us.

OBSERVATION #3: WE KNOW HIM

... my sheep know me. (John 10:14)

My life verse is Philippians 3:10:

I want to know Christ ... (Philippians 3:10)

There is more to the verse, of course. The entire passage is deeply meaningful to me. But there is a wonder about knowing intimately the God of the universe, the God who has come to take away the sin of the world. My sin.

Nobody likes simplistic answers, so please know I am not trying to provide one here. But it might sound like it.

If you really want to know Jesus, listen to His voice.

Earlier in this 10th chapter of John Jesus says this:

When (the shepherd) 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. (John 10:4-5)

The relationship between shepherd and sheep is established by listening to the shepherd's voice. You know Him by listening to what He says.

APPLICATION

This I AM statement reminds us that God is not a distant, disconnected God who lets history run its course and picks up the pieces afterward.

- But we have a loving, caring God – a good shepherd who became a sheep so that He could be the sacrifice for our sins.

Fifty years ago, shortly after God called me into the ministry, I started to build my personal library. One of the first books I bought was titled "Psalms Now." It is a contemporary rendering of most of the Psalms. Listen as I share the words of Psalm 23:

The Lord is my constant companion.
There is no need He cannot fulfill.
Whether His course for me points
 To the mountaintops of glorious ecstasy
 Or to the valleys of human suffering,
He is by my side,
He is every present with me.
He is close beside me
 When I tread the dark streets of danger,
 And even when I flirt with death itself,
He will never leave me.
When the pain is severe,
He is near to comfort.
When the burden is heavy,
He is there to lean upon.
When depression darkens my soul
He touches me with eternal joy.
When I feel empty and alone,
He fills the aching vacuum with His power.
My security is in His promise
 To be near to me always
And in the knowledge
 That He will never let me go.

Amen.