**I AM the Good Shepherd**

 September 27, 2015

John 10:1-18

Key Verse 10:11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

We have been studying “I AM” statements of Jesus. It caused a division among the Jews. Many of them said, “He is demon-possessed and is insane; why listen to him?” Others said, "These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?" Jesus is insane or he is God. Verses 17-18 says, “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.” Nobody can say, “I have authority to take it up again.” If you are dead, you don’t have any authority to be undead. You can’t undead yourself. But Jesus said he could. So he’s insane. Or he is not a mere mortal man. Everything in your life depends on what you believe about Jesus.

In this passage we want to think about Jesus the good shepherd. The people of the world are miserable, not because they have no money, but because they are like sheep without a shepherd. But when they have the good shepherd Jesus, they can have life and have it to the full. Here “good” means, “ideal, worthy, and excellent.” Jesus is all of these because he lay down his life for the sheep. May God bless each of us to have Jesus as the good shepherd. May God help us to learn how to be a good shepherd like Jesus so that we can shepherd many Toronto students.

Look at verse 11 first. “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” If Jesus is our shepherd, we have to begin by recognizing that we are his sheep. I don’t like that analogy. They say that sheep are the most stupid animals on the face of the earth. They are dumb and they are dirty. They are defenseless and helpless. They do not have any horn to protect themselves. They are also timid and fearful. If one sheep runs away because of one strange noise, other sheep run away also before finding out what it is. They are also very stubborn. They stubbornly follow the same grazing path until they eat even roots of the plant and destroy the field. That is why the sheep is never a mascot of a sports team.

Like sheep, people are stubborn; we are near-sighted, we can’t see things beyond our noses, we are feeble creatures – and sometimes our only defense is to try to run away from our problems. Isaiah 53:6 says, “We are all like sheep who have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.” God is telling us that we are sheep. That is not compliment. It hurts our pride. But if we are really honest with ourselves, we know it is true. I know that I lack wisdom and strength. I am inclined to be self-destructive due to stubbornness. I know my tendency toward self-indulgent individualism, going my own way and doing my own thing. That’s me. I’m a sheep.

If Jesus Christ is to be my shepherd, I have to admit that I need one. It is difficult, but that is where we must start. Admitting our helplessness hurts our pride very much. However once we admit that need, we discover that we are under the care of God and we shall not be in want. Even though King David was a figure of the coming Messiah and a man after God’s own heart, he acknowledged God as his shepherd. He said, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures...” (Ps 23:1,2). David was indeed a happy man, not because he was the king of the united kingdom of Israel, but because God was his shepherd. God knew him very well. God had led his life step by step. David loved his shepherd God more than himself. He loved his sheep like his own children.

What are the characteristics of a good shepherd?

**First**, a good shepherd meets the needs of sheep. The basic needs of sheep are grass and water. They are happy when they are full. Psalm 23:2-3a says, “He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.” Here is the very picturesque scene of sheep lying in green grass, having eaten their fill and now totally satisfied, and then being led by quiet waters. They say that sheep are afraid of running water; they will drink only from a quiet pool. A good shepherd knows where the watering holes are. A good shepherd should be very diligent in order to find watering holes and green pastures.

The counterpart in our lives is obvious. It is God who restores our soul through his word. Jesus said in John 6:35, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” Therefore a good shepherd, first and most of all, feeds sheep with the word of God. Usually sheep are rebellious and lazy and they don’t want to study the Bible. But a good shepherd must teach them the Bible faithfully. Not only that, a good shepherd should study the Bible deeply in order to feed sheep according to their needs. Each sheep is different and each sheep has his or her own needs. This brings us to the next.

**Second**, the shepherd knows his sheep’s name (3). To the Hebrew people, one’s name represented one’s whole man: his character, integrity, virtue and vice, and so on. Verse 3b says, “He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” A good shepherd must know his sheep’s name. It means that the shepherd must know everything about the sheep so that he can shepherd him according to his needs. To the stranger, sheep look a lot alike, but the shepherd knows them personally. In fact, He knows them by name. If we look closely, we notice that each sheep has its own peculiar traits and markings. One may walk a little sideways; one may be missing a patch of wool on its back; one has a small black mark under its eye. These are not just sheep; they are Limpy, Patch, Blackie, and so on. The shepherd names his sheep and he knows them by name, but the only way a shepherd can get to know his sheep – is to live with his sheep. That’s what Jesus has done for us. He came from heaven to earth to live with his sheep. And Jesus, the Good Shepherd, knows our peculiar traits and markings and he know us by name.

Shepherd always knows his sheep. They also know him. He calls them by name and the sheep follow because they know his voice. Verse 5 says, “But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” This should encourage all you Bible teachers: You’re not going to lose any of God’s sheep to the false teachers that you battle. They won’t follow. They know their shepherd’s voice.

Look at verse 4. “When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.” In this verse, the words “goes ahead” have two spiritual meanings. First of all, the shepherd must be faithful. Since the sheep have no sense of direction, if the shepherd neglects to lead his sheep even one time, the sheep go astray. The shepherd must lead them to green pasture every day without fail. The shepherd must be faithful. There is no lovelier image of Jesus than the image of the good shepherd. Many people have hung the picture of the good shepherd and his sheep on their walls (Ps 95:7). The phrase, “go ahead of the sheep,” has another spiritual meaning in it. The shepherd has to be an example to his sheep. Jesus is the good shepherd to all mankind, not only because of his excellent teaching, but also because of his good examples which have influenced the world down through the ages.

**Third**, a good shepherd must give sheep a sense of security. Look at verse 7. “Therefore Jesus said again, 'I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep.’” In this passage, there are two kinds of sheep pen – the first type was a community sheep pen, large enough to hold several flocks, it was fairly substantially built, and was cared for by a gatekeeper. The second kind was often little more than a rough circle of stone and the shepherd himself lay down across the opening and entrance into the sheep pen. The shepherd himself was the gate. No sheep could get out and no enemy could come in except over his body. In a very literal sense, the shepherd was the gate. There was no way in or out except through him.

The gate is a symbol of security. As I said before, sheep are extremely fearful animals. They don’t lie down unless they feel safe. A good shepherd makes sheep feel safe. When sheep see the shepherd at the gate, they feel safe and can rest. King David sang in Psalm 23:4, “Even 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.” A good shepherd knows how to make sheep feel safe under God’s protection.

But none of us wants to be merely safe. We were not created merely to be safe. The human heart wants infinitely more than safety. Safety is basic and necessary. We want to be protected from what can destroy us. We want life. But we want more than mere life. We want abundant life. Overflowing life. Deep life. Joyful life. We don’t just want to survive. We want to thrive. At every level of our human being. We were made for this. That is why Jesus said in verse 10. “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” In Jesus, we have deep soul satisfaction. Abundant life is not about having stuff. It's about having peace. Having Joy. Having God.

**Fourth** and most importantly, a good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Look at verse 11. “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” Jesus contrasts himself with a hired hand in verses 12,13. “The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. The wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.” The hired hand resembles the shepherd. He feeds sheep when it is safe. But when his life is in danger, he reveals his true character. He abandons the sheep and runs away, like a 100 meter sprinter. He cares nothing for the sheep and only cares for himself. Though he looks like a shepherd, he is not a shepherd. His motive in feeding sheep is to get a pay check. The hired hand is similar to the thief in the sense that they use sheep only for themselves.

King David was a good example of a good shepherd. When he was a boy shepherd, he would see a bear or lion attacking his sheep and carrying off a sheep from the flock. David would go after the sheep and risk his life to save it. Running after a big bear or lion is so dangerous that it would better to lose one's sheep than one's life. But David went after the bear and fought it, rescuing sheep from its mouth. When David was a good shepherd for his sheep, God promoted him to be King, a shepherd for his people Israel.

While Jesus was in this world, he served all kinds of sinners. He welcomed prostitutes and tax collectors and taught them the word of God. Jesus saved a woman who was caught in the act of adultery and forgave her sins and gave her new life. Jesus healed the lepers and demon-possessed men with his compassion and Messianic love. Jesus healed the hopeless thirty-eight year old invalid man and opened the eyes of the man born blind. Jesus does not snuff out a smoldering wick and nor does he break a bruised reed. Jesus bore all our sins and weaknesses and healed our wounds caused by sin. So many times we had gone astray, but our good shepherd Jesus searched for us and restored us. Finally Jesus gave up his life for us. He shed his blood on the cross to save us from our sins and give us eternal life. Once we were demon-possessed men, paralytics and corpses. But through our shepherd’s love, we were healed and made whole. By his love, we are what we are. Mark 10:45 sums up Jesus’ life. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many.” Praise Jesus the good shepherd, who laid down his life for us.

The risen Jesus commanded Peter, “Feed my sheep.” That means that Jesus wants us to be good shepherds like him. Also 1 Peter 5:2-4 says, “Be shepherds of God’s flock under your care…and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.” What an awesome responsibility to “shepherd God’s flock”! We are to be Christlike shepherds for the flock. We literally shepherd God’s flock as under-shepherds under Christ, who is the Chief Shepherd. Then when Jesus comes again, we will receive the crown of glory.

Look at verse 10b again. “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” The main purpose of Jesus’ coming was to give us abundant life. He did that by dying on the cross. It was the only way. May God bless you to have abundant life in Jesus the Good Shepherd. May God help us to be good shepherds like Jesus so that many Toronto students may have abundant life.