

Exalting Jesus Christ

"The Good Shepherd"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. In the gospel of John, Jesus painted a word picture of the Good Shepherd and made it a portrait of Himself.
 - A. To understand the immense beauty of the relationship we have with Jesus as our Shepherd, let's take a moment to look at the shepherds of Palestine.
 1. The geography of Judea stands in marked contrast to the rest of Palestine.
 - a. While Galilee and the Jordan River plain were prime areas for agriculture, it was not that way in Judea.
 2. The main part of Judea is a high plateau about 35 miles long and between 14 to 17 miles wide.
 - a. The ground, for the most part, is hilly and stony – making it more fit for grazing flocks than for agriculture.
 3. Unfortunately, the geography also made it a dangerous place for shepherds and their flocks.

- a. On either side of the Judean plateau the ground dipped sharply down through rocky crags and narrow valleys to the desert below.
 - b. Since grass and fresh sources of water were not always plentiful, there was an ever-present danger of sheep wandering off from the flock and falling to their death or becoming trapped in some remote, almost inaccessible spot.
 - c. Wild animals, especially wolves, threatened to attack and devour the sheep, and thieves who were intent on stealing sheep also posed a continual threat to the flock.
 - d. Shepherds had to keep constant watch, and on many occasions risked their own lives to protect their sheep.
- B. Because Palestinian shepherds spent their entire lives with their flocks, they formed a unique bond – mainly because sheep were raised for their wool, not for food.
1. It was not uncommon for shepherds to give each sheep their own name: a name the sheep came to know, and to which they would respond.
 - a. When flocks would intermingle while grazing, the shepherds would simply go to opposite sides and call their sheep, and the sheep would respond accordingly.

2. Shepherds never drove the sheep before them, but walked in front, and the sheep would followed along behind.
 3. In Palestine, most shepherds owned their flocks.
 - a. But other shepherds, known as "hirelings," were employed for a set amount of money per day.
 - b. They were only in the business of shepherding for the money.
 - c. When danger came, they would often flee for his own safety, leaving the flock defenseless.
 - d. But the shepherd who owned his flock would lay down his life to defend them.
- C. The equipment of the shepherd was very simple, but most effective.
1. There was a staff, which was a long stick with a large curved hook on the end.
 - a. When a nearby sheep showed signs of straying, the shepherd would reach out and gently pull it back.
 2. He also carried a rod which was a club about three feet long.
 - a. It was used to drive off wild beasts, or defend the flock against robbers who often tried to steal sheep.
 - b. At times, when the path to fertile pastures led through dark, narrow valleys where wild beasts and thieves often waited,

the shepherd was constantly alert and ready to use his rod and his staff.

3. Every evening, the shepherd would gather the flock into the fold, a large circular corral made from stones or bushes clumped together.
 - a. As each sheep entered the fold, the shepherd stretched his rod across the narrow entrance, making each sheep pass "under the rod."
 - b. This allowed the shepherd to quickly examine each sheep to see if it had suffered any injury during the day.
 - c. Ezekiel portrays Jehovah's loving care for his people, when he hears God say, *"I will make you pass under the rod,"* **(Ezekiel 20:37)**.
 - d. Once the flock was safely inside the fold, the shepherd would lay down across the entrance so no sheep would get out, and no threat could enter.
 - e. In this way, the shepherd literally became a door.
- D. It's no wonder that the psalmist David – the shepherd boy turned king – spoke fondly of the relationship between himself as a sheep in the fold of the Lord.
 1. We know it as the 23rd Psalm:

- a. **Psalm 23** – *"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. 3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. 4 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. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. "*

E. It's also no wonder that Jesus also took the picture of the shepherd and made it a portrait of Himself.

1. The shepherd had a deep love for his sheep, and would go to any extent to protect them from harm, even if it meant having to lay down his own life for their safekeeping.

II. As we come to the 10th chapter of the gospel of John, in our studies entitled "Exalting Jesus Christ," we find one of the most beautiful and most meaningful teachings of Jesus – Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

- A. The Jews of Jesus' day were intimately familiar with the 23rd psalm of David, and looked upon Jehovah God as the Shepherd over His people Israel.
 - 1. But Jesus, in taking the picture of a shepherd and making it a portrait of Himself, was making another not-so-subtle claim to deity.
 - 2. However, Jesus went one step further.
 - a. Jesus boldly claimed to be the only one through whom we enter into a relationship with the Lord as our Shepherd.
- B. As we look closer at the teaching of Jesus in the 10th chapter of the gospel of John, we want to take special notice of three things.
 - 1. First, we want to look at the setting during when these events take place.
 - 2. Second, we want to examine the initial teaching of Jesus.
 - 3. And finally, we want to look at the mixed reaction to the message of Jesus.

BODY:

- I. Following the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus chose to remain in Jerusalem despite the threats to His life.

A. And while there Jesus gives one of the most touching and moving descriptions of Himself.

1. Speaking to His disciples, Jesus said: **John 10:1-5** – *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."*

B. Unfortunately, the Lord's disciples were confused by this teaching (as we see in verse 6), and so Jesus patiently offers a simple explanation.

1. **John 10:7-15** – *Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."*

11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. 12 But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. 13 The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. 15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.

- II. To understand the significance of what Jesus is saying here, let's look at these verses more closely.
 - A. During the warm summer months, shepherds in Palestine spent their days and nights with their sheep in the high pasture lands.
 - 1. Therefore, it was necessary to construct a sheepfold into which the sheep were herded every night. This was done for their safety.
 - a. As I said earlier, a good shepherd would literally lie down at night across the entrance so no sheep could go out, and nothing that would harm the sheep could enter without the shepherd's notice.
 - b. A good shepherd literally became the door of the sheepfold

2. Jesus made it clear to His disciples that He alone is the door - the only way into the sheepfold where they is peace and safety.
 - a. No one can enter the sheepfold – or enter into a spiritual relationship with Him – unless they enter the fold through Jesus Christ.
 - b. This is why He said, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep."* **(John 10:7)**
 - c. But the only way Jesus could provide us entrance into the sheepfold of God was to first give His own life for us.
 - d. No doubt, this is what prompted Peter to write: **1 Peter 2:21-25** – *For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 22 "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth"; 23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness — by whose stripes you were healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

- e. Therefore, Jesus once again affirmed: *"I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."* (**John 10:9**)
3. Jesus also made it clear that all who came before Him were not true shepherds; they were nothing more than false teachers – false Messiahs.
- a. Therefore, Jesus said: **John 10:8** – *"All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them."*
 - b. These *"thieves and robbers"* had only one purpose in mind – to steal the Lord's sheep – to draw away disciples after themselves and form their own following of misguided disciples who would believe in them and trust them.
 - d. Fortunately, those who recognized these false Messiahs for who they were refused to follow them.
 - e. But, sadly, those who did suffered terrible consequences because, Jesus said: **John 10:10a** – *"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy."*
 - f. Those who blindly followed the false Messiahs suffered death and destruction – sometimes literal death and destruction, but always spiritual death and destruction.

4. But Jesus, because He is the true Shepherd, came to do something no one else could do.
 - a. He said: **John 10:10b** – *"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."*
 - b. Not only does our Shepherd give spiritual life, He gives it abundantly.
 - c. No doubt this is what the apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote: **Ephesians 1:3** – *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...*
 - d. To put it simply, there is no "life" outside of Jesus Christ, let alone an "abundant life," because He alone is the source of all spiritual blessings.
 - e. That's our Shepherd – the One who loves and cares for His sheep by not only giving us life, but gives it even "more abundantly."
 - f. Or as the apostle Paul put it: **Ephesians 3:20-21** – *Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.*

B. But in contrast to the Good Shepherd, Jesus warned against the "hireling."

1. **John 10:11-13** – *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. 12 But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. 13 The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep."*
2. Hireling shepherds were those who were occasionally hired to tend the sheep of another – especially at times when the shepherd was not able to tend his own flocks.
 - a. But there was a problem with "hireling" shepherds – generally speaking they had no vested interest in the sheep other than the salary they receive to watch over another man's flock.
 - b. That wasn't always the case, however. Sometimes those entrusted with safeguarding the sheep of another flock would sacrifice their own lives to safeguard those sheep.
 - c. But not the "hireling." When danger threatened the flock, it was not uncommon for a hireling shepherd – because he was a "hireling" – to flee for his own safety, leaving the flock alone and defenseless.

3. It's not difficult to spot a "hireling."
 - a. You can always spot a hireling when trouble arises – when the peace and safety of the Lord's flock is threatened.
 - b. The hireling does nothing to stand and defend the flock.
 - c. Instead, he cowers in the face of opposition and danger, leaving the flock to the mercy of the ravenous wolves.
4. Unfortunately, there will always be dangers that threaten the Lord's sheep.
 - a. Jesus warned His disciples: **Matthew 7:15-16** – *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits."*
 - b. The apostle Paul warned the elders at Ephesus: **Acts 20:28-31** – *Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.*

- c. And Paul gave the evangelist Timothy this solemn charge: **2 Timothy 4:1-5** – *I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: 2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

5. Elders who bravely stand against those who would threaten the peace and safety of the Lord's flock, and gospel preachers who boldly preach the Word – regardless of the consequences – are not "hirelings."

- a. They're men of courage and conviction – like the elders at Ephesus, and like the young evangelist Timothy.

C. But then Jesus made a statement that must have come as a shocking revelation to His disciples.

1. **John 10:16** – *"And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.*
2. Jesus was clearly referring to bringing Gentiles into the fold of God. The Lord's church would not be for Jews alone, but for Gentiles as well.
 - a. In a prophecy referring to Jesus as the "Root of Jesse", the Lord speaking through the prophet Isaiah said: **Isaiah 11:10** – *"And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; for the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious."*
 - b. Through the prophet Malachi, the Lord said: **Malachi 1:11** – *"For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations," says the Lord of hosts.*
3. This is why the apostle Paul, in writing to the churches of Galatia, said: **Galatians 3:26-29** – *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek,*

there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

- a. Glory be to God the Father and to the Son Jesus Christ for loving us enough to bring you and me as Gentiles into the fold of God.

D. Finally, Jesus said this about His role as the Good Shepherd.

1. **John 10:17-18** – *"Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. 18 No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."*
2. Jesus told His disciples that He must lay down His life so that He can take it again – a clear and unmistakable reference to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
3. We need to remember that the story of the Good Shepherd is not the tragic story of a victim, but the triumphant story of a victor – one who secured His victory by voluntarily laying down His own life on our behalf.
 - a. Do you remember when Peter tried to protect Jesus with his sword at Gethsemane? Jesus told him: **Matthew 26:52-54** – *"Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will*

perish by the sword. 53 Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? 54 How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?"

b. And do you remember when Pilate tried to intimidate Jesus by saying he had the authority to release Him or crucify Him? Jesus replied: **John 19:11a** – *"You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above."*

4. Jesus didn't become trapped in some political web from which He could not free Himself.
5. Rather, He voluntarily gave up His own life, to accomplish the will of God, on His own terms and at His own time.
6. And He did this for us – to allow us the opportunity to follow Him as our Shepherd and enter the safety of His sheepfold.

III. As we might expect, the reaction of those who heard all these things was mixed.

A. No one could have possibly misunderstood what Jesus was saying here.

1. He was making another clear and unmistakable claim to deity.

- a. Just as Jehovah was the Shepherd of Psalm 23, Jesus is the same Good Shepherd to His people.
- 2. **John 10:19-21** – *Therefore there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings. 20 And many of them said, "He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?" 21 Others said, "These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"*

CONCLUSION:

- I. There is no more beautiful portrait of Jesus in the New Testament than the portrait of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.
 - A. We live in a different time and come from a different culture, and because of that, we can't truly relate to the closeness and intimacy between a Judean shepherd and his sheep.
 - 1. But some who heard Jesus that day describe Himself as the Good Shepherd understood.
 - a. They saw in Him a loving, merciful, compassionate Savior who came as the Good Shepherd to nurture and care for the sheep of His fold.

- b. And they also saw Him as the Good Shepherd who would eventually lay down His life for His sheep – as any good shepherd would do.
 - 2. But others couldn't understand why anyone would bother listening to this man from Galilee.
 - a. At best, they saw Him as a misguided, delusional Messiah.
 - b. At worse, they saw Him as a demonically possessed reprobate and blasphemer.
 - 3. Two completely different reactions to the same Jesus, and to the same message.
- II. All throughout this series of studies we've been asking how you see Jesus.
 - A. The gospel of John was written for only one purpose.
 - 1. John wrote: **John 20:30-31** – *And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.*
 - 2. Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?
 - a. It's the only way you can have life – not only an abundant life now, but also eternal life after this life ends.

- B. As we've said before, how you see Jesus will determine what you do in the next few minutes.
1. If you believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and yet you've never come to Christ in obedience, surrendering your life to Him, then you will take this opportunity to change all that.
 - a. You will come to Him this morning in faith, repenting of your sins, confessing your faith in Him before others, and be baptized into Christ for the remission of all your past sins.
 2. And if you believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and yet you've wandered away from the Good Shepherd – as sheep do from time to time – then you will also take advantage of this opportunity.
 - a. You will return to the Shepherd and Overseer of your soul, repenting of your sins and confessing them to God.
 3. And if you believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God – if you believe that Jesus is truly the Good Shepherd – and you need the Shepherd's tender touch to heal wounds in your life, you will also take advantage of this opportunity.

- a. You will come requesting the prayers of the righteous on your behalf to ask the Shepherd of our souls to heal those wounds, and to comfort and reassure you with His loving care.