

## **The Good Shepherd. What Christ As Our Good Shepherd**

Text: John 10:11-16

Suggested Hymns:

617, 391, 607, 297, 387

1) Has Done For Us

2) Is Still Doing For Us

3) Will Do For Us

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 10:11-16, <sup>11</sup> ***“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> “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. <sup>13</sup> “The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. <sup>14</sup> “I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. <sup>15</sup> “As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> “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.*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

***“I am the Good Shepherd,”*** says Christ, the Good Shepherd, that Shepherd of whom the Prophets have spoken. David sang of Him, ***“The Lord is my Shepherd.”*** Isaiah said, ***“He shall feed His flock like a shepherd.”***<sup>1</sup> His fore-fathers after the flesh were shepherds. A large number of His hearers were shepherds.

So how appropriate it is that Christ so frequently speaks of Himself as the Shepherd! He is the Shepherd ***“sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”***<sup>2</sup> Jesus is the Shepherd who takes pity on the sheep that were ***“scattered because there was no shepherd”*** as we read in Ezekiel 34:5.

The Good Shepherd ***“goes after the one which is lost until he finds it. And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.”***<sup>3</sup>

Finally, we read in Matthew 25:31-32 that on the Last Day <sup>31</sup> ***“When the Son of Man comes in His glory ...” All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.***

So the Church loves the picture of Christ, the Good Shepherd. The oldest existing pictures of Christ show Him as the Shepherd carrying a lamb on His shoulders.

Here again it is evident that Christ is Soul and Centre of divine revelation. We read in Acts 10:43 that <sup>43</sup> ***“To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.”***

Christ is the theme of all the Apostles' preaching. To the Corinthians St. Paul writes, ***“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”***<sup>4</sup>

Christ is the Centre of Christianity. What makes a man a Christian? Not the fact that he tries to follow Christ, takes Him for his Model and Example, but that he appropriates Christ, and all He has done for mankind, and in faith clings to Him as the Saviour who leads to heaven.

It is certainly true what Christ says, ***“Without Me you can do nothing.”***<sup>5</sup> He illustrates this when He calls Himself the Vine, and His disciples the branches. A branch cannot live when it is cut off from the vine. No man can have or retain spiritual life, no man can be a true Christian, unless in faith he is united with Christ.

In calling Himself the Shepherd, the Lord is impressing on us how totally dependent we are on Him. The sheep, more than any other animal, is dependent on the shepherd. Likewise we must depend on Christ or cease to be Christians. This is what we should learn from our Gospel Lesson today. We know it well; yet the tendency to forget it is so great that we must again refresh that knowledge.

So today's Gospel gives us again the picture of Christ, Our Good Shepherd. Let us consider this in more detail. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. What Christ As Our Good Shepherd Has Done For Us**

***“I am the Good Shepherd,”*** Christ says. ***“The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep.”*** Jesus shows us the difference between the shepherd who owns

the sheep and the hireling, or the paid servant, who tends the flock only because he is paid to do so. Can you expect such a hireling to risk his life when the wolf comes? When danger threatens, his first thought is not how to save the flock, but how to save his own skin.

The hireling flees, he runs as fast as he can, while the wolf catches the sheep, tears them apart and kills them, and scatters the rest of the flock far and wide. But the good shepherd faces the ferocious beast, risks his own life to save the flock. Hence Jesus says, ***“I am the Good Shepherd ... I lay down my life for My sheep.”***

How and why did Christ give His life for the sheep? The flock of Christ, humankind, was led astray, scattered by the wolf, Satan. Since the Fall, men are like sheep who have no shepherd, running astray, seeking food in the desert of the world, eating of the poisonous herbs which destroy their soul.

And behind every bush and rock lurks the wolf, driving them further away and waiting only for their death to cast their soul into hell. The Good Shepherd, however, did not run when the wolf came. He faced him and gave him battle. He won the battle, although it cost Him His life. He did not only risk His life, He gave His life. He died on the Cross. How great the love that drove Jesus into death!

Jesus gave battle to the old evil Foe, although He knew it would cost Him His life. An old poet said that ‘God in His wisdom hides the future in darkness.’ That is true.

If we knew exactly what the future has in store for us, many of us would lack the courage to live. Jesus knew all that was before Him. A shepherd, even a good shepherd, although he is willing to risk his life, yet hopes to get away with a few scratches. Jesus knew it meant the Cross and the grave. Yet of His own free will He gave His life.

All men must die so the term “life insurance” is a misnomer. There is no life insurance. Every living head must bow under the stroke of death. Christ alone was sovereign Lord of life and death. He alone could say in John 10:18, <sup>18</sup> ***“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.”*** Jesus really gave His life. And He gave it for His sheep, not in self-defence, not in trying to save Himself, but to

save His sheep. He actually did and carried out to the bitter end all that divine justice could demand of Him.

## 2. What Christ As The Good Shepherd Is Still Doing For Us

But Christ is the Good Shepherd now as well as He was in the past. “*I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.*” The Lord knows His own. Not all people are His sheep, but only those who follow His voice. And those people He knows. Not one does He overlook, even if the person thinks that he is small and unimportant.

On the other hand, Jesus counts no one a sheep of His flock merely because he mixes with the sheep. He knows His sheep. Not only does He know who His sheep are, but He acknowledges them as His sheep and treats them as His sheep. He loves them. He gave His life for them.

Do you think that the love which impelled Jesus to bring this great sacrifice would now stop? Certainly not! Does Jesus not continually give evidence of His love? Yes, not only does He know His sheep, but He is known by them. They know Him. They do not merely recognise Him when they see Him, but they know Him as their Good Shepherd. They have such proofs of His love and care that they cannot doubt He is their Good Shepherd.

What are these proofs? Firstly, He leads His sheep in green pastures. They know that He is their Good Shepherd because He leads them in green pastures. He feeds their soul and strengthens their spiritual life by His Word. His Word is the true bread. His Word is spirit and life. In His Word there is strength to do, to dare, to die.

In this Word, Paul found strength *to count all things as rubbish that He might gain Christ.*<sup>6</sup> In this Word, Luther found strength to face Pope and emperor and to scorn their wrath. In this Word we find strength to serve God in righteousness and purity forever. Jesus proves that He is our Good Shepherd by leading us to the green pastures of His Word.

Secondly, He protects His sheep. Again, the Good Shepherd has put the wolf to flight; yet the beast is not dead, but he walks around seeking whom he may devour. So the sheep are in need of protection. And the Good Shepherd protects them.

Jesus says in John 10:28, <sup>28</sup> ***“And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.*** Today it is rather a tame occupation to be a shepherd. Especially in our country there are few wild beasts that might endanger the shepherds life. In Bible times and locations it was different. Wild animals were numerous. Murderous robbers infested the country, and a shepherd needed both courage and physical strength.

David said to Saul, ***“Your servant used to keep his father’s sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, <sup>35</sup>I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it. <sup>36</sup>Your servant has killed both lion and bear.”***<sup>7</sup>

So the Good Shepherd guards and protects His sheep, and again He does it by means of His voice. The times are dangerous. The Lord foretold that there would be false prophets who come in sheep’s clothing, but within they are ravening wolves; false prophets who ***“show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”***<sup>8</sup> In this Babel of conflicting voices His sheep hear His voice and follow Him. They continue in His Word and so are His disciples indeed.

A traveller relates that one day he came to a well at the time when the shepherds watered their flocks. Many different flocks came there at the same time. The sheep of the various flocks mingled, and no attempt was made to keep them separate. He thought the shepherds would have a tedious and difficult job to separate them. But when the time came, each shepherd went his way calling his sheep, and lo, every sheep followed its shepherd. Every sheep of Christ knows and follows His voice.

Thirdly, A good shepherd keeps his sheep clean. So the Lord washes and cleanses His sheep by His Word and the Sacraments, and although their sins ***“are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.”***<sup>9</sup>

A good shepherd sends his dogs to drive his sheep back when they stray to dangerous places, and the dogs bark and snap, but they do not bite and harm the sheep. So the Lord sends the dogs of the Law, of cross and affliction; and their barking sounds like ruin and destruction, but they do not harm His sheep, they

only drive them back from the dry desert of security and the abyss of perdition. Indeed, to this day the Lord proves that He is the Good Shepherd.

### 3. What Christ As The Good Shepherd Will Do For Us

Jesus ends the lesson, saying, ***“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.”*** This is a prophecy referring, in the first place, to the heathen. They were the other sheep which were not of the Lord’s first fold, Israel. It also refers, however, to all who do not yet acknowledge Jesus as their Shepherd. These Jesus will bring, He will do all He can to bring them into His flock, and this implies that He will keep them with Him in the future. They shall not go astray. His flock will not be destroyed. He will keep it, and He will enlarge it by His voice.

These words of Christ have been greatly misunderstood. They are used to prove things which Christ never had in mind, such as a general conversion of the Jewish nation before the end, a universal Christianising of the heathen world, the union of all visible churches into one, the millennium in which all people shall become Christians.

Such texts are now used to favour so-called Inter-church World Movements, striving for an external union of all denominations.

But Christ’s words are clear. He tells us what He means: one flock, those who hear His voice, those who believe in Christ and follow Him as their Shepherd. Every true Christian who seeks forgiveness with Christ is a sheep of His flock. There is only one thing that can make him a member of Christ’s flock, faith in the Saviour, no more, no less.

Faith alone makes me a sheep of Christ’s flock, no more. But no less. It is a snare of the devil when people say, ***“No matter what you believe, only live upright, and be sincere in whatever you believe.”*** The heathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone. People may torture themselves and even sacrifice themselves to death but that does not save him. The Lord says in Mark 16:16, <sup>16</sup> ***“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”*** Jesus says, ***“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”***<sup>10</sup> Faith in the Son of God saves, no more, no less.

The last service which Christ, the Good Shepherd, renders to His sheep is that He saves them utterly and finally. For when He says, "*there will be one flock and one shepherd*" He points to the last gathering of all His sheep on that day when the great separation shall take place.

On that day Jesus will gather all His true sheep, which now live scattered all over the world. No person knows them all. Here on earth they are not found in one flock only. It happens that some of His sheep in ignorance stray into a wrong pen and cannot be persuaded to leave. A sheep is a stubborn animal, and some of Christ's sheep share that characteristic while they live here in the flesh.

But as long as in true faith they cling to Christ as their Saviour, they bear the brand of the great Good Shepherd, and His eyes see it. On that day He will place them all on His right side and say to them, as we read in Matthew 25:34, "*Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*"

And now let us make the application to ourselves. The Lord here shows us a clear picture not only of Himself as the Good Shepherd, but of His true sheep as well. Do you recognise yourself in that picture? Do you know Him, your Saviour, by actual experience, or do you know of Him only because others have told you about Him?

Do you hear His voice in His Word and follow Him, or do you think of other things when He is speaking? Do you perhaps even close your ears against His Word, or do you deliberately stay away from the place where He speaks to men, His Church and His Word, the Bible?

Today He calls you and me again. He holds up to us in this text the past. We can see the Cross on Calvary, where the Good Shepherd gave His life for us.

We hear the echo of the present, How wonderfully He leads us to bring us into His flock!

And He shows us the picture of the future, All people gathered before Him; but His sheep alone are saved.

Make sure that you are one of their number. And may Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, give effectual power to His Word today that on the Last Day none of us may be barred from Christ's flock. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 40:11

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 15:24

<sup>3</sup> Luke 15:4

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:2

<sup>5</sup> John 15:5

<sup>6</sup> Philippians 3:8

<sup>7</sup> 1 Samuel 17:34

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 24:24

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 1:18

<sup>10</sup> John 14:6