

John 10:11-15; Heb. 13:20,21; 1Pet. 5:4

Christ the Shepherd of His Sheep

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep – v. 11

Our text presents to us the 4th of 7 *I AM* statements by Christ. The first of these statements is found back in 6:35 *I am the bread of life*; We noted in our studies of that chapter how the Jews took Christ literally instead of spiritually. The next *I am* statement is found in 8:12 *I am the light of the world*. To sinners sitting in darkness who come to know the truth of their sin and the salvation Christ provides, they can certainly say *Amen* to Christ being the light of the world. Then we come forward to the chapter we've been studying – Jn. 10:7 *I am the door of the sheep* which is very closely followed by the words of our text today *I am the good shepherd*. We have 3 more *I am* statements that we can anticipate in future studies. Christ says in 11:25 *I am the resurrection* — 14:6 *I am the way, the truth, and the life*. And then in 15:1 *I am the true vine*.

When I went through these “I am” statements some time ago in our prayer meetings, I included an *I am* statement that not everyone includes in the list but I think should most definitely be in the list; it's the *I am* statement of 8:58 Jesus said unto them, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am*. Perhaps this statement is not included in the list with the rest because the *I am* stands alone without any designation that follows but in this statement you find yet another strong affirmation of Christ's deity made by Christ Himself. He's saying that He was and is *Jehovah God* in that statement. He's identifying Himself the same way *Jehovah* in the book of Exodus was revealed to Moses in Exod. 3:14 *And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you*.

Now when we come to the *I am* statement of our text this morning, we're dealing with a statement that magnifies the tender loving care of Christ to His sheep. You may remember from our study last week that I pointed out to you that when sheep were brought into the sheepfold at night they were brought in with other sheep from other shepherds. In the morning the shepherd would show up and enter the gate to the sheepfold and the only way his sheep could be distinguished from the others would be that his sheep would recognize the sound of his voice and they would not respond to any other voice but the voice of the shepherd to whom they belonged. The reason for this is that the sheep know their shepherd. In fact good shepherds were so closely connected to their sheep that they had names for them and so they could call them by name and the sheep would recognize the shepherd's voice and would follow accordingly.

So when Christ designates Himself as the good shepherd of the sheep, He's doing so because of the intimate knowledge that He has of His sheep and that His sheep have of Him. He knows them and they know Him. This is exactly what Christ says in v. 14 *I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine*.

How appropriate then that we focus on Christ, the shepherd of His sheep around this communion table. This is a time of intimate fellowship with Christ, the good shepherd of

His sheep. And when we read from our text how the good shepherd *giveth his life for the sheep*, then the text becomes all the more fitting for communion as we think on the way the good shepherd gave His life for the sheep by the breaking of His body and the shedding of His blood.

What I'd like to do this morning in preparation for our time around the Lord's table is to look not only at this statement in Jn. 10:11 that speaks of Christ as the shepherd of the sheep, but I'd like to focus on the designation that's given to Christ in this text as the *good shepherd*. And then we'll look at Heb. 13:20 where Christ is designated as *the great shepherd*. And then we'll think some on 1Pet. 5:4 where He's designated *the chief shepherd*. Each one of these designation brings out some truth about Christ our shepherd that is appropriate to remember around the Lord's table this morning.

Christ the Shepherd of His Sheep

That's our theme this morning. Let's begin by thinking on:

I. Christ the Good Shepherd of His Sheep

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep v. 11 reads. The very fact that Christ would identify Himself as a shepherd and that His followers are designated as sheep is very telling. The connection that's made between sheep and the people of God is brought out famously, you might say, by that familiar verse in Isa. 53:6 *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.*

It's probably with this verse in mind that Peter writes in 1Pet. 2:25 *For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.* Turning to our own way is perhaps the most concise way to describe what happened when man fell into sin. Adam and Eve certainly turned to their own way when they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They went astray at that point and turned to their own way by determining that they would decide for themselves what they would and wouldn't do and what would be right and wrong.

We studied this matter recently when we looked at the shorter catechism question that described the fall of man from the estate wherein he was created. And from that point on, men have been turning to their own way, living for sin and living for self. Men have been lost in this condition. They've been without a shepherd in this condition. And they've been deserving of the sentence of death in this condition of high-handed rebellion against God.

But instead of leaving men to their own devices, and leaving them without a shepherd and committing them to their just deserts, instead we read in Mt 9:36 with regard to Christ that: *when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.* How gracious of our Savior to view lost and helpless and rebellious sinners with compassion. Do you begin to appreciate why He's called *the good shepherd*?

His goodness encompasses His grace and compassion. He would not leave men in such a condition. He would instead come for them. He would become one of them that He might represent them to His Father. And as our text goes on to say *the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep*. Here is love that defies comprehension. Paul states it so well in Ro 5:8 *But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

Here is goodness magnified many times over – the good shepherd giving His life for the sheep. Do you see the idea of substitution in our Savior’s words? His sheep had the sentence of death over them but Christ would subject Himself to that sentence in their place. He would die that they might live. He would be condemned that His sheep might be justified. He would endure the fury of His Father’s wrath that His sheep might know the blessing of His favor. He would be cut off that His sheep might be reconciled and hence could know lost communion restored and forfeited life regained.

How our hearts should be filled to overflowing this morning in our remembrance of all that this designation *the good shepherd* brings to our minds. The bread testifies to the truth that He took to Himself a true body and a reasonable soul and hence He was able to give His life for the sheep. He could not die as God, but He could die by becoming a man. And by becoming a man He could empathize and sympathize with all our infirmities and trials.

So we read in Heb. 4:15 *For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as [we are, yet] without sin.* And earlier in the epistle to the Hebrews we read in 2:17 *Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto [his] brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things [pertaining] to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.*

Do you see how He had to become like us in order to represent us, and in order to die for us? This is the compassion of Christ, the good shepherd. Oh how much is packed in those words Christ spoke when He said *I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep*. May the truth of His goodness and the length and breadth and depth and height of His love be yours in increased measure this morning as you remember Him around His table in the way He’s ordained.

Aren’t you glad you can affirm what Peter writes when he says in 1Pet. 2:25 *For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.* It may be that you’ve drifted away from Him this past week. There’s a sense, you know, that each time we partake of these elements around His table, it affords us the opportunity to return to Him again. You’re able to say to Him in partaking of these elements: *Just as I am without one plea but that thy blood was shed for me and that thou bidst me come to thee, O Lamb of God I come.* Or perhaps your condition reflects the words of the 3rd stanza: *Just as I am, tho’ tossed about With many a conflict, many a doubt, Fightings and fears within, without, O Lamb of God I come.*

Am I getting carried away the way some do who use this hymn as an invitation hymn at the end of the service? *Just as I am, Thou wilt receive, Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve; Because Thy promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come.*

It would almost seem that the words of our text are inadequate to do our shepherd justice when they merely say He's the good shepherd of the sheep. Perhaps this is why in Hebrews 13:20 the author of that epistle finds himself compelled to dial it up a notch when he refers to Christ as that *great shepherd of the sheep*. And this leads to our next consideration this morning. In John's gospel we find Christ as the good shepherd of the sheep. Let's consider now:

II. Christ the Great Shepherd of the Sheep

Listen to the words of this very rich benediction near the end of that epistle to the Hebrews. Heb. 13:20,21 *Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

In prayer meeting this past Wednesday we looked at that designation *the God of peace*. I borrowed from A.W. Pink's analysis of that title and pointed out that this designation *the God of peace* is both a forensic title and an experiential title. It's forensic in the sense that it speaks of a legal truth – you are at peace with God by virtue of the declaration of the judge that you're justified. And it's experiential in the sense that it's something you know and enjoy in your heart.

Now it's true and we can't and shouldn't deny it – that we don't always enjoy this peace to which we're called. The world and the flesh and the devil all conspire to rob you of your peace and like the disciples that were nearly panic stricken when they crossed the stormy sea, we too know about the storms of life. This table calls us back to that experiential peace that is sometimes lost.

And this text serves to call us back to that peace by directing our attention to Christ as *the great shepherd of the sheep*. There is, of course, the reminder of His blood in this text. It's *through the blood of the everlasting covenant* that we have peace with God. And there's the reminder that all Christ did both in terms of His life and His death was done in connection with that covenant between Him and His Father. It's an *everlasting covenant*. It was forged in eternity past between the Father and the Son and it looks ahead forever to life everlasting, life lived in the presence of Christ with the light of His countenance providing the light of life.

But the thing that stands out in this text that references Christ as the great shepherd of the sheep is the greatness of His power. *Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep*. Do you see the power being referenced in this verse? It's the power of Christ's resurrection. I love the way the hymn-

writer describes it when he writes: *Death cannot keep his prey, Jesus my Savior! He tore the bars away, Jesus my Lord! Up from the grave He arose, with a mighty triumph o'er His foes. He arose a Victor from the dark domain, And He lives forever with His saints to reign. He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!*

There's something, you know, that needs to be kept in mind when we remember Christ around His table. Were it anybody but Christ, our remembrances focus on men and women – loved ones that have gone to their graves and remain in their graves. You may visit the grave of a loved one that's gone before you and during that visit you may remember the blessings that you enjoyed with that loved one in days gone by. And you miss that loved one and you mourn the loss of that loved one. And there's nothing wrong with doing that.

When it comes to Christ, however, that's not the way we remember Him. We remember Him because He's no longer in the grave. We remember Him because He's alive today. We remember Him because He rose from the dead. Indeed we meet on this first day of the week because it was on the first day of the week that He arose. And His resurrection vindicates His identity as well as His work.

He was *declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead* (Rom. 1:4). In His resurrection He vindicates His atoning death. He proves the words that He announced from Calvary's cross that *It is finished!* He proves that it was indeed finished and that His giving of His life as an atonement for the sins of His people was accepted by His Father. It's because He is risen that we know we're at peace because we have assurance that we're truly justified.

And this is the power – the greatness of His power, that works in you and through you to sanctify you. *The God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus...make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

This resurrection power is the very thing that Paul prays that the saints of Ephesus would know in their daily lives. *And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places* (Eph. 1:19,20).

The Christ, the good shepherd reminds us of the goodness of His atoning death. *The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.* And Christ *that great shepherd of the sheep* reminds us of the greatness of His power – power that was manifested in His death, power that was manifested by His resurrection from the dead, and power that's been wrought in you, bringing you from spiritual death to spiritual life, power to uphold and sustain you in your daily walk; power that's renewed in you as you remember Christ's broken body and shed blood. It remains for us to consider:

III. Christ the Chief Shepherd of His Sheep

When the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away, Peter writes in 1Pet. 5:4. This is the only place in the New Testament that we find this Greek word (and it's a single compound word) that's translated *chief shepherd*. It certainly reminds us, doesn't it, that when Christ returns, He'll be the One in charge.

It's interesting to see how the work of a shepherd is used to describe Christ as the judge of all the earth. Listen to these words from Mt. 25:31,32 *When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.*

The reality of that coming day is a fearful thing to contemplate, but the fact that you have returned the shepherd and Bishop of your soul means that you have prepared yourself for that day. On that day men will be judged by their works and those who are not joined to Christ will be condemned for their sins.

I once worked with a man who held to the mistaken and silly notion that since he didn't believe in hell there was no way he could go there. His mentality indicated that he thought he was the one in charge of the universe. But Christ is the Chief Shepherd of the sheep and all such naïve and rebellious notions will be swallowed up on that day.

But in the case of the believer, he had seen and believed in the Lordship of Christ before that day. And the thing that comes out in this text that is truly amazing is that the chief Shepherd will actually reward His servants on that day. *And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.* The specific application in this text is to elders that Peter is exhorting in this section of his first epistle.

The application, however, is applied to all that love and anticipate the appearing of the chief Shepherd. So Paul writes to Timothy in 2Ti 4:8 *Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*

When our chief Shepherd comes again our sanctification will be completed. 1Jo 3:2 *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.* Oh what grace and power and love by the One who has had all authority committed to Him. There's a couple of verses in Colossians that have been tremendous sources of comfort and encouragement to me. Listen to these words from Col. 3:21,22: *And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled 22 In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight.*

There is an aspect of the Lord's supper, you know, that we probably don't think about as often as we should. In those words of institution we read each time we meet around the Lord's table we find a reference to Christ's return in the words of 1Co 11:26 *For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.*

So let's think on the blessing of having Christ as our Shepherd as we partake of these elements this morning. He has shown by His grace and love through His atoning death that He is the good shepherd of the sheep. And by the power He demonstrated in His resurrection and by that same power that works in us and through us He shows Himself to be the Great Shepherd of the Sheep. Thank God, Christ is coming again and when He comes He'll be known beyond all doubt to all men as the Chief Shepherd of the Sheep. May the Lord be pleased to bless these meditations to our hearts as we think on Christ, the Shepherd of His sheep this morning.