

# I am the Good Shepherd

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Amen. Wonderful job. Wonderful special. Thank you, orchestra. You may be dismissed.

Would you turn to John 10 with me? John 10.

The good shepherd. Christ is the good shepherd.

The “I am’s” of the book of John, “I am the bread,”<sup>1</sup> “I am the light,”<sup>2</sup> “I am the door,”<sup>3</sup> was the first 10 verses we looked at of John 10. This evening we want to look at several more verses in the chapter. “I am the good shepherd.”<sup>4</sup>

What does it mean that Jesus is our good shepherd?

Look at verse 11 of John 10.

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh 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 commandment have I received of my Father.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John 6:35, 41.

<sup>2</sup> John 8:12, 9:5.

<sup>3</sup> John 10:7, 9.

<sup>4</sup> John 10:11,14.

<sup>5</sup> John 10:11-18.

Agoraphobia is defined as the fear of public or open spaces. And though it is manifest in many ways, the worst case scenario of agoraphobia is becoming a prisoner in your own home where you are so afraid of the outdoors you spend all of your time inside. In fact, in extreme cases of agoraphobia people have been known to stay locked in their houses for 15, 20 years at a time with a fear to cross the threshold into the outside. They describe it as living in an invisible prison.

And, at times, people with this disorder will convince themselves that they are going to go outside where freedom lies. They look out the window. They see the sun shining. The birds are chirping and they just have such a desire to step outside of the house. And with determination they walk right up to the door and they grab the handle and pull the door and they go to cross the threshold and this gripping fear overcomes them and often times they reconsider and step back into the house. They are prisoners living in an invisible prison.

The only thing that separates them from the outdoors is the door. But they refuse to cross the threshold where freedom awaits.

Jesus is talking to a group of people with a strange form of agoraphobia here. This crowd has been in prison to an invisible prison of sin. And Jesus stands before them and says, "I am the door. I am the threshold. I am the way of true freedom."

And look at verse nine. He says, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."<sup>6</sup>

In other words, "I can bring you this freedom. I can bring you this liberty if you will only come through the door, if you will only cross the threshold."

The crowd here has a very strange form of agoraphobia where there is freedom on the other side. Jesus Christ is standing there and he is saying, "Cross into faith. Cross the line. I am threshold. All you have to do is enter into me and you can have spiritual freedom."

We have two pictures in John 10, a picture of the door and a picture of the shepherd. He says, "I am the door"<sup>7</sup> and "I am the good shepherd."<sup>8</sup> When he says, "I am the door,"<sup>9</sup> he is saying, "I am the way to spiritual freedom. I am the way to salvation." When he says, "I am the good shepherd,"<sup>10</sup> he is saying, "Not only am I the way of salvation, not only am I a door, but if you cross that threshold I will be like a shepherd to you. That is the relationship we can have.

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<sup>6</sup> John 10:9.

<sup>7</sup> John 10:7, 9.

<sup>8</sup> John 10:11,14.

<sup>9</sup> John 10:7, 9.

<sup>10</sup> John 10:11, 14.

When he says, “I am the good shepherd,”<sup>11</sup> he says, “If you will cross the threshold into faith I will take care of you. I am the door. I am the way. I am the good shepherd. If you come through me, you will never regret it. I will be to you like a shepherd.”

You see, the good shepherd metaphor here in the last part of chapter 10, he is telling them why they should come through the door, why they should cross the threshold.

Some of them stand there and they have their hand on the doorknob and they have the door open and there is something keeping them from crossing over into spiritual freedom and Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. I lay my life down for the sheep. Don’t you see it is in your best interest to cross that threshold into faith? I will be there for you.”

This evening let me give you just three reasons. Number one, if you are contemplating crossing this line into faith, why you should cross over and receive Jesus as your Savior. And if you have already become a Christian, if you have already crossed this line, let me give you three things that you can enjoy in Christ or three things that Jesus is to you as the good shepherd.

Number one, the most obvious thing is in verse 11. Jesus, as the good shepherd, sacrifices for his sheep, sacrifices.

“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”<sup>12</sup>

Now let’s stop right there. This is not a normal sheep shepherd relationship, is it? I mean, this is a little bit different. Because under normal conditions the sheep exist for the good of the shepherd. The shepherd does not exist for the sheep. See, some of you may become dog walkers or veterinarians because you love animals. Nobody goes into shepherdry, you know, because they love sheep. They are not that desirable as animals.

The sheep serve a greater purpose to the shepherd than giving the shepherd here cuddles or something like that. They are there for the good of the shepherd. They are his substance. They are his way of life. They are his clothes, obviously the wool. They are food, a form of meat. They are also a form of currency. You would sell sheep. You would gain money from them. And probably even more than that they are a sacrifice at the temple.

So when you boil it all down the sheep are there for the shepherd. The shepherd is not there for the sheep.

And by what Jesus says here it is almost the opposite of what we expect. See, under normal conditions the sheep are called to lay down their life for the shepherd. But here the shepherd says, “I am going to lay down my life for the sheep.”

The good shepherd is going to do the opposite of a normal shepherd.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> John 10:11.

“Normally you exist to serve the shepherd. I have come to minister to you.”

That is what Christ is saying.

Notice several things about Jesus in his sacrificial death. Number one, I want you to notice this is a vicarious or a substitutionary death. Look at verse 11.

He says, “I am the good shepherd: [and] the good shepherd giveth his life...”<sup>13</sup> Look at the word “for.” Circle it. “...for the sheep,” on behalf of the sheep. This is accomplishing something. This is an atoning death. It is sacrificial. When Jesus Christ died on a cross it accomplished something great in the life of a sheep. It brought them into fellowship with God. He propitiated the wrath of God, appeased the wrath of God.

Jesus is saying in verse 11, “I am going to die and that is going to be the payment for the sheep’s ransom.”

How did he do this? How did he give his life for the sheep? Not just in a traditional way. I want you to notice something a little deeper. Look again at verse 11. How is he going to give his life?

“The good shepherd giveth his life.”<sup>14</sup> Look at that word “Life.”

The Greeks had several words for life. You had the word βίος (bee’-os) where we get our word “biology.” ζῶη (dzo-ay’) was another word. Both of those communicate a physical life. Here the Greek word is ψυχή (psoo-khay’) where we get our English word “soul.” And Jesus chooses this word. He says, “I am going to give my soul. I am going to give my all, my whole person.”

When Jesus says, “I have come to give my life for the sheep,” he is not just saying, “I am going to die for the sheep,” he is saying, “I am going to give everything for the sheep. I am going to pour out my entire person, my body, my soul, my inner man, my whole life.”

What Christ is saying in verse 11 is this. “Every waking and every sleeping moment is for you. It is a sacrifice for you. Every second of the 33 years I have on this earth is a living and a dying sacrifice for the sheep.”

When you and I think about Jesus giving his life for the sheep, most of us think about the last couple of chapters in the gospels, don’t we? We think about Jesus on a cross. Some of us extend it to the whole passion week. But Jesus is saying so much more here. He doesn’t just want us to see his death. He wants us to see his life, all 33 years, the entire life was a sacrifice.

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<sup>13</sup> John 10:11.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

And, by the way, that word “give” there, that is in the present tense. Do you see what he is saying? The good shepherd is giving his life for the sheep. He is already doing it.

You know, it is interesting. The writers of the gospels include things about Jesus that you and I see... they seem irrelevant, but they are so relevant to the sacrifice of Christ. Let me give you an example.

Do you know what the writers record? They record that Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day. Now why does that mean anything to you or I? Why should we be concerned with what happened to Jesus on the eighth day? He is not going to be crucified for 33 more years. Big deal if he is circumcised on the eighth day. Why would somebody tell?

Well, the reason is: Even in the circumcision he was acting as a sacrifice for us. That was Christ fulfilling the Mosaic law at eight days old. He was the perfect sacrifice for us.

We find him as a young boy, away from his parents, teaching in the temple. He taught with authority. The picture there is he had doctors around him and scribes and they were listening as he was teaching them with authority.

And finally his mother and father caught up to him and he looked at his mother and said what seems to be a little irreverent to us, but it really wasn't. He said, “I must be about my Father's business.”<sup>15</sup>

What was Jesus saying? As a young boy he was saying this. He is saying, “I am serving all righteousness.” He was serving God with his entire heart. He was a living, righteous sacrifice for us. The good shepherd is giving his soul for the sheep. He is pouring himself out completely.

And, by the way, this is also talking about a spiritual death that he was suffering, not just a physical. I am giving my ψυχη (psoo-khay'). I am giving my inner man.

Think of it this way. There have been a lot of people who have probably suffered more physically than Jesus did. I mean, you know, let's just assume this to be true. I mean, you read about the death of the martyrs and, you know, a lot of them would watch their wives and their children be tortured. Then they would dress them up as sheep and the lions would come and eat them, too. Which is worse? Is that worse than a cross? They are both pretty bad, right?

Some of the martyrs were tortured in prison and only killed years later. When it comes to near physical death, you know, some may have suffered as much as Jesus physically. Do you know what the difference is? Jesus didn't just suffer physically. Jesus suffered spiritually. Their death was near physical. In the hour of their death the grace of God was

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<sup>15</sup> Luke 2:49.

holding the hand of the martyr. But in Jesus' death the grace of God released the hand of Christ and took on the sin of the world.

Do you know what Jesus? Jesus said something that no martyr could have ever said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"<sup>16</sup>

No martyr in the history of the world could have said that, but Jesus said that. Why was he sweating. Why was he fainting in the garden? Was it because of the mere physical death? No. He was taking on the sin of the world.

The good shepherd pours out his life for the sheep.

Do you know why you should cross the line into faith if you are not a Christian? If you are playing church, do you want to know why? Because this is the only one, this is the only shepherd whose primary goal was to live and to die for you. He gave himself for you. Nobody has ever done this for you except Jesus. Your spouse has never done this. Your friends have never done this. Your parents have never done this.

Let me share with you the cold reality of sin. This is the reality of sin. Every relationship you have ever had, anybody you have ever been in any kind of relationship with, at one point or another has tried to take advantage of you. That is the cold reality of sin.

Jesus Christ said, "I am giving my life entirely for you. My motive is for you. I want to see you redeemed. I want to see you brought into the flock, into the fold. You should cross the line of faith to see a sacrifice for you."

Notice something else here also, number two. Jesus as the good shepherd loves the sheep with an everlasting love. He loves them with an everlasting love.

I want you to notice in this passage it was his joy to give his life for the sheep. Look at verse 15, right at the last phrase.

"I lay down my life for the sheep."<sup>17</sup>

Verse 17. "Therefore doth my Father love me, [why?]because I lay down my life, that I might take it again."<sup>18</sup>

Verse 18. "No man taketh 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."<sup>19</sup>

Jesus says four times in John 10, "I have the power to lay it down and I have the power to take it up."

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<sup>16</sup> Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34.

<sup>17</sup> John 10:15.

<sup>18</sup> John 10:17.

<sup>19</sup> John 10:18.

Do you think he is trying to communicate something to us? Absolutely. Do you know what he is saying? He is saying, "My death was voluntary. This happened on purpose. Nobody stole my life. Nobody made me go to the cross."

It was his joy to go to the cross for us. It was willing. It was voluntary. It was not an accident. It was not a tragedy.

Do you know what I have discovered? The most common response to the death of Christ for most people is pity for Jesus. They feel sorry for Jesus as if this cross was a tragedy in his life. We hear about the Son of Man being beaten and whipped and crucified and we are moved with pity for Jesus. We feel sorry for Jesus.

Hundreds and thousands of people turned out to see the *Passion of Christ* and, you know, I am sure some came to faith with the movie, but I personally didn't see it, but I was told that, you know, people would... there wasn't a dry eye in the room.

Let me ask you this. Do you think that was because everybody was repenting of their sins? I don't think that was it. Do you know why? Everybody was moved... everybody felt sorry for Jesus. Why is this man being beaten? He is so innocent, as if this was an actual tragedy in the life of Christ.

I mean, a response to the cross for a lot of us is the same response we have watching a documentary on a concentration camp. We are moved with pity. We feel bad for people.

Do you know what Jesus is saying here? Don't feel bad for me. I am [?]. Feel bad for yourself. Weep for your own sins.

The death of Jesus was not a tragedy. It was a victory.

Think about this. It was Jesus' joy to die for you. It was his joy to redeem you. It was of his good pleasure to love you on this scale.

Isaiah 53 says, "It pleased the Father to bruise him."

In fact, Luke tells us and we have talked about this. On the road to the cross where you had a group of ladies crying who felt very sorry for Jesus and Jesus turned to them and said, "Don't weep for me. Weep for yourselves and weep for your children."

Do you know what he was saying?

"My death is not a tragedy. My death is a victory. Don't feel sorry for me. Feel sorry for yourself in your own condition."

He voluntarily and joyfully laid it down.

I picture Jesus on the cross and that famous statement, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”<sup>20</sup>

Do you know what he was saying at that point? Jesus was not in the mood to receive pity. He was giving pity even to those that were crucifying him. He is saying, “Don’t you see? I lay it down and no man can take it from me.”

The death of Jesus is not tragic. Do you know what is tragic? The sin of man. That is what is tragic.

Now I hope the Jesus moves me to tears, but let it be because you feel sorry for your own sin, not because you feel sorry for Jesus. He joyfully laid down his life.

As tragic as the death of Christ seems to the outside, to the insider it is the way of salvation.

You know, Hebrews 12:2 says, “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.”<sup>21</sup>

It was not begrudging. It was voluntary.

Matthew 26:53 he said, “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?”<sup>22</sup>

At any time he could have brought to end what was happening, but it was his joy to redeem mankind.

Now let me ask you a question. Why is Jesus telling us that this is a voluntary death? What does it...? Notice this. He is not just telling you that he died for you. He is telling you that he willfully died for you. He is not telling you, “Look, I died. Come receive me.” He is saying, “Look at how I voluntarily laid down my life.”

What does that mean to you?

It should mean this. When somebody does something for you, do you feel more loved when they do it out of obligation or when they do it out of joy? Which one? Obviously when they do it out of joy.

I mean, look, take a husband and wife. You know, picture your spouse comes home and it is your anniversary and he comes in with a handful of flowers and he has got a beautiful pearl necklace and he hands these. You meet him at the door. And later that night you thank him for these things and he says, “Well, you know, I just want to get you off my back, you know? You know how you get when I forget these special days, right?”

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<sup>20</sup> Luke 23:34.

<sup>21</sup> Hebrews 12:2.

<sup>22</sup> Matthew 26:53.



Look, does that communicate love? Does that communicate, boy, this person is really falling all over himself? No, that communicates obligation. But when someone comes and they sacrifice out of joy, that communicates something special. That communicates a voluntary love. This is what Jesus did. He wasn't coerced. He wasn't obligated. It was willing that he went.

One of the things you will find in the Bible is Jesus does not just want you to know he died for you, he wants you to know he died for you in a willing manner.

Is this not what Paul told Onesimus the slave? He said, "Look, look Philemon. I want you to receive back your slave, but don't just receive him back. Do it for love's sake. Do it for the right reason."

Now, let's take it a step further. Why did Jesus love you this much? What is it about you or what is it about the sheep that caused Jesus to lay down his life in a voluntary way? Well, the answer is in verse 12.

"But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep."<sup>23</sup>

Verse 13. "The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep."<sup>24</sup>

In other words, Jesus is the owner of the sheep. God is the owner of the sheep.

Do you know why it was Jesus' joy to lay down his life for the sheep? Because he is the owner of this flock. He is not a hireling. He is not paid staff.

You know, verse 12 and 13 are not supposed to be negative. They are supposed to be true. A hireling was one that simply watched after the flock. They paid him a certain amount of money to care for the flock. We kind of look at the hireling in verse 11 and 12 and 13 and we say, "Boy, that must be somebody wicked."

That is not somebody wicked. That is just paid staff. That is a reality of life. Let me put it to you this way. If I am a paid employee watching sheep and the wolf comes along or the lion comes, I am not only going to run. I will round them up, but I will light the charcoal for the wolf. I am fine with that, ok? The owner of the sheep has a completely different attitude. The owner of the sheep cares for the sheep much more than the paid staff.

David says this in the Old Testament when he says, "I fought off a lion and a I fought off a bear for my flock."

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<sup>23</sup> John 10:12.

<sup>24</sup> John 10:13.

You know, when you go and check out a new neighborhood or you are going to buy a new house in a different neighborhood, one of the first things you do, if you have bought a house, you have done this. You go into the neighborhood and you want to know if most people in the neighborhood are home owners or renters, don't you?

You say, "Why does that matter?"

Well, it really matters for this reason. Statistically, home owners are far more likely to care for their property than are renters statistically.

Now that may be a sad commentary on the sinful nature of man. It is nevertheless true. Statistically owners care for their property better than renters. And, therefore, you can usually walk into a neighborhood and you can see, yes, many people rent here. You know, there is mattresses in the front yard and if you have one, that is fine. That is between you and your neighbors. But, you know, listen. Let me put it this way. The truth is, you know, your kids are far more likely to care for their own toys than their friends' toys, are they not? You know, let me put it this way. If you want your 16 year old son or daughter to take better care of your car, do you know how you can do it? Just transfer the lease into their name. That is how. They are far more likely to care for something that is their own than yours. That is how people are universally.

The picture we have here in John 10 is the owner of the sheep cares for the sheep in a different way than the paid staff. Jesus says, "I am not paid staff. I own the sheep and therefore I am going to lay down my life for them."

When danger comes, the hireling runs, but the shepherd stays.

I have always thought it a bit strange when people have refused to evacuate their neighborhood, you know, when a level four or five hurricane is coming through. It is kind of interesting watching people attach themselves to their property and they won't leave. They are ready to protect their homes from nature, protect it from thieves and robbers. One thing I am fairly certain of, probably most of them are home owners and not renters because when a renter sees a storm coming, rightfully, he flees.

Do you know why Jesus loves the sheep so much? Do you want to know why he laid down his life voluntarily? Because he is the owner of the sheep. He is not a hireling and he is saying this. "Cross the line. I love you this much. I am not one that runs. I am laying down my life for you. Nobody will ever love you the way I love you."

He sacrificed for us. He joyfully loves us and here is the third thing. And this is in regard to you and I as [?] in Christ. The good shepherd is a unifier of the sheep, a unifier.

Verse 16 here, a famous verse.

“And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.”<sup>25</sup>

A lot of us think of Christianity in terms of a personal relationship and that is true. At the heart of Christianity is God reconciling an individual to his Father, to the Father. You know, but the truth is when God reconciled you to himself he was also reconciling you to brothers and sisters already in the faith. The ministry of reconciliation is not just you to God, although that is what it primarily is. There are sheep who are not of the flock, he says. “I am going to bring them in. We are going to be one fold, under one shepherd.”

Let me put it to you this way. When you were born to your mother and father at the same time you became a sibling to the rest of the family. And when you become a Christian, you cross that threshold into faith, you are uniting not just with God, you are uniting with other brothers and sisters in Christ. One flock, one shepherd.

Listen, friends. The gospel is intended to bring great unity not just between God and you, but between you and other believers.

Who are the sheep in verse 16?

“I have sheep who are not of this fold.”

Who are they?

Well, you know, every cult wants you to believe it is them, right? I saw an advertisement recently for a cult and they used this verse referring to themselves, right? Everybody does.

Well, who are these sheep? Who are really the sheep that are not of this fold?

Well, it is very obvious from the text. Jesus, talking to a group of Jews and he says, “I have sheep who are not in this fold.” Obviously it is to who? It is the Gentiles. It is the non Jews.

Verse 16, if you want the correlation, is in Romans 11 when he talks about the Gentile being grafted into the body. And here is what Christ is saying. He is saying, “I am going to bring very different people from different backgrounds together. Some religious, some not, some speak one way, some speak another way. Some have a strong Christian history. Some are going to have a broken history, but I am going to tie all of them together, one fold, one shepherd. They are going to live as my people.”

You see, this is what I love about this. This is unity and diversity, one fold, one shepherd, but they are other sheep. They are not of this fold. They are not of your background. There is incredible diversity in the Church and there is incredible unity in the Church. The body of Christ by design is supposed to be remarkably diverse. I mean a lot of us

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<sup>25</sup> John 10:16.

want a cookie church. Everybody acts the same. Everybody talks the same. Everybody is supposed to like the same things. Everybody has to be a clone of this teacher or of this pastor or of this deacon.

You know, I have been in churches where the people that like opera think the hockey fans are sinners, you know? I have also been in other churches where if you don't know anything about sports you don't feel like you are really part of the church.

Jesus says this. He is saying, "Don't you see? It is by design that you are going to be very diverse."

There is great diversity, but there is even a greater mark of unity. And I will tell you. If you are looking for a place where everybody is supposed to be exactly the same, some kind of uniformity, you are in the wrong place. Isn't this what the first church council was about? Isn't this what Acts 15, the Jerusalem Council was all about?

Do you know what the Jews said? They said, "What do we do with these new sheep? They don't act like us. They are a little bit different. They eat different things than us. They do different things with their children."

Do you know what the answer was? Do the Gentiles have to act like the Jews? Do you know what the answer was? No. They don't. But be considerate of them, but don't bind them to your laws.

God is not glorified in uniformity. You know, God does not expect, nor is he glorified when all of us act exactly the same. His people are supposed to be diverse. I am not talking about sin. I am not talking about one is a different kind of sinner. I am talking about general characteristics of humanity.

You know, if you are a mother or a father and you have two or more kids, you really understand this, don't you?

Five months ago my son was born and we have a daughter Reagan and a son Rock and, you know, just watching these two and how different they are has really illustrated this to me. I love that my two kids are fully opposites. They act completely differently. I love that. That brings a degree of honor to my wife and I.

My daughter is this high energy. She is full of life. She is this free spirit. She is three and a half years old and recently we signed her up in the Greer County soccer league and this is new to her. I don't even know if she knew what soccer was. We thought we would put her in the grass and kind of see what happens, right?

And I am kind of preparing her for this new experience. And I said, "Now, Reagan, there is going to be kids there that you don't know. Don't be afraid to get right in." And I have this picture of my daughter attaching herself to my leg and not wanting to go and play, right?

Well, you know, weeks ago we get there for the first practice and she just runs away from me and kicks the ball into the net, the first thing she did.

And, you know, then she turns to another three year old and says, “Hi, I am Reagan. What’s your name?” And they start holding hands, you know? And, you know, just the opposite of what, you know, I am thinking, you know, she is going to be shy.

This is terrible. Two weeks later I am carrying her to the field and we are about, you know, 50 yards from the field and she says, “Daddy, put me down.” And, you know, like I am embarrassing her or something, you know? And, you know, I am thinking, “You are three. You don’t even have a reputation,” you know?

So but she is this free spirit.

And then there is my son Rock. You know, he just loves to hang out. You have seen him. He is attached to momma, isn’t he? He is laid back. He is reserved. He is taking it all in. They are so different already. I love that about them. I don’t want clones. I don’t want them to think exactly the same. They don’t have to be exactly the same. Their diversity brings a high degree to my wife and I. And do you want to know what?

I need to go on and encourage diversity in them. As a father do you know what else I appreciate? As a father I want them to appreciate the differences in each other. I don’t want one of them to think the other one is less than because they are a little quieter or they are a little louder. One of them will have different gifts and different talent and of them may even have quirks. You know, they may pick something up from me that you have already seen and I want them to appreciate the differences, not take advantage of the differences, you know?

In the body of Christ we ought to appreciate the diversity that we have. That is what God wants here, amen?

I tell you. Let me put it this way. Here is when you will turn the corner in ministry. Here is when you will stop being frustrated and start loving other people, when you start to appreciate the diversity in the body.

This is when I started to appreciate my brother and sister, my brother and sister in the flesh, Nicky, Kenny. I mean, you know, we grew up and we are very different from each other. But in the last several years I really appreciate their differences. My brother is this high energy, you know, salesman. And he is this big bear. You just want to go up and give him a bear hug and I love that about him. He is very different than my sister.

And learning to appreciate things about them has really brought us into unity as a family. Jesus here says, “One fold, one shepherd.”

Now listen. We are unified now just because we appreciate diversity for diversity's sake, but because of what? Because we worship a common Savior. That is the unity.

I will put it to you this way. See, the world wants unity and diversity. They want this. But they can't have it. Do you want to know why? Because it is an empty unity. It is a blind acceptance of each other. The only thing they have in common is they all believe in diversity. But here in the church it is a strong unity because we worship a common Savior.

How unified should you be? How much should you be reaching out to other brothers and sisters in Christ? You want to know how much? John 17:11 how much.

"That they may be one," Jesus says, "as I and the Father are one."

That is unity.

Jesus says, "If you really want a pattern of unity, look at how I interact with the Father. Look at how I interact with the Father. Look at how the Spirit interacts with me. That is what I want in my body, one fold, one shepherd.

Let me just close with a couple of thoughts here.

Number one, don't expect everybody to be the exact same. I am not talking about sin. You know that. Don't expect everybody to be the same. It is ok that people are different and that is a good thing. Not everybody comes from the same background in the body of Christ. Not everybody comes from the same race. Not everybody comes from the same family or the same roots and upbringing. Some of you are white collar. Some of you are blue collar. You know? Some of you are Laker fans. Some of you are Celtic fans. It is ok.

And let me say this. If you are a different person and you know what I mean by different person, there is a place for you in the body of Christ and don't let anybody tell you there is not. God wants to use your uniqueness. You may be the only one of your kind in this room of 400 right now. Do you want to know what? God has got a place for you. He wants you here. He wants you ministering and serving.

Don't you feel like you don't have a place because you are not exactly like anybody else. This is where God wants you, in the body.

Thirdly, let's rally around Christ and not superficial differences. Let's rally around one shepherd. Look at the Lord. That is where our unity is.

And let me give you one last exhortation and it is this. Let's be honest and let's get practical. Today most Christians do not practice what I am saying. I mean, you know, most of them do not reach across the aisle to people that are different than them. Jew, so to speak, does not reach out to Gentile, nor does Gentile reach out to Jew.

And here is my... listen. Why not let it start with you? Why wait for someone else? You should be reaching out to people in this body that are completely different than you. You ought to be reaching across the aisle.

Do you know what Matthew 18 talks about? You know the passage about Church discipline. Do you remember the first part of that where Jesus says if your brother has a problem, you go to them?

In the New Testament we are always supposed to take the initiative in unifying with other believers. You go to them.

Now here is what we do as pastors and we talk of... this is actually our game plan. We talk about this in staff meeting. When we walk into the building here we look for people that just look like they are out of place. That is our ministry. We try to find people and shake hands and encourage them and along the way we meet a lot of people who are, you know, think a lot like us and, you know, have a lot in common with us. But we have tried to make it a practice to look for sheep that do not feel in place.

One fold, one shepherd, this ought to be your ministry that when you come into the building you are looking for people who appear uncomfortable, even look by themselves. Wednesday night comes. If someone is sitting by themselves, you ought to at least invite them into your group. At least extend an invitation, especially if they don't know anybody else in the room.

Broaden your ministry. Seek out the sheep that are obviously different from you. Don't just seek to fellowship with people that are exactly like you. One fold, one shepherd. Jesus is the great unifier of the sheep and I want to close with this.

If you are not a Christian, this is what you are missing out on. You are missing out on the greatest unity you will ever have in this life and in the life to come. You cannot have this kind of unity with any other group. You can't. Because you will never have in common what we have. And do you know what that is? It is Jesus Christ and him crucified. He is the great unifier. Cross the threshold. Cross the line.

Let's pray.

*Father, we thank you for your grace.*