

#4 Series I AM

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Reading: John 10:11-42

Singing: 242:1-4 – (321:1 after the Law) – 55:13 – 135:1-5 – 221:1-3

Children, when your parents read a story to you, you enjoy looking at pictures along with the story, don't you?

It helps you understand the people and what is happening to them in the story.

The greatest Teacher, Jesus, used many pictures to tell us about Himself.

In the earlier sermons in this series, we heard Him speak about Himself as Bread, as Light and as the Door.

All those pictures are easy to understand, even if you are a young child.

In John 10, Jesus used the picture of the Shepherd for Himself and sheep for His people.

Jewish people were familiar with shepherds and the work of caring for sheep. Also in New Zealand, we are familiar with shepherds, how they work with their dogs, and various kinds of work done in caring for sheep.

But maybe when we think about shepherds in Bible times, we have in mind what we have seen in Bible picture books.

In picture books, the life of a shepherd looks so attractive. He is seen sitting on a rock with his staff in hand, watching over the sheep quietly grazing green grass.

This is not how we should imagine the work of shepherds, not today, and not in the Bible days either. Shepherds lived outdoors, battling intense heat, strong wind, bad weather and the constant threats of pests and prowling animals.

Many of the shepherds were outside day and night caring for the sheep.

It was certainly not as desirable a task as we think it is. It was a rough life.

How fitting is that picture when we think of the true and good Shepherd, Jesus Christ!

His life was far from easy. He suffered temptations and threats on His life.

He endured the heat of the day as He taught people who resisted and rejected Him. As the needy, sick, and sorrowing people streamed to Him, He had no moment of rest. At the end of a long day, the people went back to their houses, but the Shepherd often retreated to be alone with God. Undoubtedly, He then prayed for His sheep in those night hours.

When Jesus proclaimed Himself to be the Shepherd, He claimed Himself to be Jehovah. Especially when He claimed to be **the** Good Shepherd! He did not say that He was 'a shepherd,' as if he were one among many shepherds. Instead, He singled Himself out as **the** Shepherd.

This claim, in the Jewish ear, went too far. It sounded to them again as a claim to be God. And that was indeed the truth. Jesus Christ, the Son of man, is Jehovah, the I Am that I Am. Besides claiming to be Jehovah, the Shepherd, Jesus' words in verse 18 were also a claim to be Divine.

"No man taketh it (my life) from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."

It is one thing to claim that you have power to lay down your life.

But it is a sheer impossibility for any human to make him or herself alive again.

The reaction on these claims is a repeat of what we saw earlier.

First, His message caused division (verse 19) and slanderous accusation (verse 20).

Finally, it led to another attempt to stone Him (verse 31).

When Jesus asked them for what reason they wanted to do this, the answer indicates they understood well what Jesus claimed.

For in verse 33, they responded, *"For a good work we stone Thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that Thou, **being a man**, makest Thyself God."*

How sad that they did not marvel and fall down before Him!

They had God nearer to them as never before.

He stood before them not only with a loving heart, but also with all power to save them from their lost condition.

But instead, they rejected Him again.

But let us step away from considering the people and give all our attention to Jesus. The words in verses 11 and 14 are one of the sweetest pictures of the precious Saviour.

*"I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep.
I am the Good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine."*

Again, the Lord Jesus calls our attention to Himself. He deserves to be the center of attention.

He is the only One allowed to preach Himself, for in Him have our existence.

In Him alone is our salvation, our hope and expectation.

As the Good Shepherd, He stands in great contrast to the shepherds He calls 'hirelings.' Those hirelings were the religious leaders who were bad shepherds as the previous chapter illustrated.

There we can read how the leaders cared not about a blind man who was healed. Instead of rejoicing with Him in Jesus' miracle, they punished him for extolling Jesus. Sadly, the problem Jesus encountered with religious leaders in His days continues throughout the history of the world.

Numerous pastors in churches are not looking out for the well-being of their flock, but rather for their own interest.

It is therefore so necessary, congregation, that you all keep your pastors and other spiritual leaders accountable to their main task.

That task is not to build their own castles of comfort and status, but the promotion of the cause of Good Shepherd.

Aiming at that lofty purpose will always include sacrifice, even at times as far as the Good Shepherd did as He laid down His life for the sheep.

In that respect, let the Good Shepherd be our constant source of inspiration, strength, and example.

We will now consider the Good Shepherd with two simple points:

1. Why did the Lord Jesus choose the name *Shepherd*?

2. How is He the *Good Shepherd*?

I am the Good Shepherd.

The first reason is that Jesus wanted to restore the calling of the shepherd.

The image of the shepherd was a common picture of a leader over people.

In Ezekiel 34 the prophet called the kings 'shepherds of Israel.'

But here the former kings and now the Pharisees and scribes failed greatly.

They were feeding their own power-hungry hearts while neglecting the people.

Besides this utter failure of the Jewish leaders, there was a social stigma attached to the real shepherds in Jesus' days.

In contrast to Old Testament shepherds like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David, the New Testament shepherds did not have a good reputation.

You did not flatter yourself when you told others, "My job is being a shepherd."

Everyone knew that shepherds were not usually honourable characters.

They were suspected to be thieves and liars and therefore considered untrustworthy.

Still, the Lord Jesus chose purposely to name Himself Shepherd.

In doing that, the Lord began to restore honour to the calling of shepherds.

Jesus contrasted Himself with the leaders in chapter 9 who maltreated one of their members so badly.

Imagine that one of our members, who was born blind, and all his life shuffled into church, would be healed!

What a joy would fill us as we would watch him walking into church!

But that was not the case when Jesus healed the man born blind.

The leaders were offended with the miracle, mostly because He did it on the Sabbath Day.

Instead of being overjoyed with this man's eyesight, they could not get over the thought that Jesus had ignored and trespassed their understanding of the Sabbath commandment.

After a few hours of berating Jesus and the blind man, the Jewish shepherds chased the blind man out of church!

Think of it!

All his life he was excluded from entering the temple because he was blind!

Now, finally, he was allowed to walk into the temple to see the priests working at the altar.

But at once he is told by the leaders, "You are excommunicated from the church.

You are not welcome ever to put a foot into our temple again. Get out!"

Is it not clear that these men were not good shepherds?

They did not care about the sheep but only about their power, their control, their positions.

How different is Jesus the Shepherd! He cares about the sheep!

The second reason Jesus calls attention to Himself as the Good Shepherd, is because nothing is more important to a sheep than the shepherd.

A sheep would never survive on its own in the wilderness.

Though sheep are lovely animals, they are also foolish and stubborn.

They have the ability to destroy themselves in many ways.

If they are not shepherded, they can ravage the field they depend upon for survival.

They can easily get lost and will never find their way back.

They cannot defend themselves against predators.

But in panic, they may run into their very jaws.

Therefore, only through the dedicated, observant, able and faithful shepherd's care, will a sheep survive.

By choosing this name 'Shepherd,' the Lord Jesus gives us a message.

Do you hear what He is saying to you?

With this Name, He is saying, "I am the One that you need!

As a lost sheep,

as a prone-to-wandering sheep,

as a weak sheep facing the predator of Satan, self, and the sinfulness of the world,

you need Me!

I am **the** One, the **only** One Who can lead you back to what you lost."

For who can lead us back into communion with God which is like the green pastures?

As a lost sheep, you cannot find your way back to God.

All you do is wander in circles while straying farther and farther away.

Do you notice how easily you get sucked away with another excitement or another distraction?

Mindlessly, you allow yourself to be guided away and entangled with the brambles of earthly vanities.

Are you one of those sheep sitting at the feet of the numerous media shepherds?

Always clicking on another lead or listening to another voice?

Hearken to Jesus' voice: *"I am the Good Shepherd."*

My friend, He alone is able to deal with your predatory adversaries and lead your life safely!

Do not lose sight of the truth that the world around you is a wilderness filled with predatory animals.

There is not a single voice that is neutral. Everything you hear or read is spiritually charged.

Be aware that Satan has a multitude of agents leading people astray in subtle ways.

The Shepherd warns us in Proverbs 1:10-11, *"My son, my daughter, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us ... [dot, dot, dot]!"*

And what is filled in on the dots will differ according to what Satan sees as your weakness or your felt needs.

He is smarter than the Google technology which traces your habits on your electronic devices.

He will match his temptations with your personal needs, weaknesses and habits.

He knows how to reach out to your empty emotional tanks and stir exciting prospects.

As he sees you lonely, he may send someone to give you attention.

The friendly looking shepherd may turn out to be predator, only out to use you for his or her own selfish pleasures.

Other shepherds will suggest all kinds of solutions,

"Be yourself!"

or "Give it a try!"

or "Don't feel constrained by your parents or church: dare to be your own!"

or "Get a life and live it to the fullest while you are still young for you don't want to miss out."

But recognize, all these voices lead you to the same end Adam and Eve came to when they chose to follow Satan.

How subtly did he stir their feelings and fed their imaginations,
and tempted them to an action that hurled them the precipice of destruction!

Be aware that we all led by something or someone who feeds our mind and feelings.

Will you examine whether Jesus Christ is the One that you are following?

Are you being shepherded by His Word?

Are you setting yourself daily before Him, straining to hear His voice?

Or do you spend much more time letting the entertainers, news-anchors, radio talk shows, youtubers and trending social media feed your mind?

Or is your very lawful business pursuit shepherding you?

It is so easy to be captivated by your own work goals.

Or are the Pharisee-like teachers your shepherds?

It is so easy to be led astray in any of the varieties of 'self-help religion.'

Instead of looking to Jesus, we look to our law-keeping as the ground of salvation.

Over against all of them, Jesus declares Himself as the *only Good Shepherd*.

Only He is able to shepherd us back into the fold of communion with God.

None can restore the breach between God and us but Him.

Psalm 49:7-8 states clearly, "*None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him. (For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever).*"

But what we cannot do for ourselves or others, Jesus is able to do.

How can He do this?

Only because He is Jehovah Himself

Having come into human flesh, His death on the cross has an infinite value.

Through His sacrifice He is able to cover the staggering debt of all His sheep.

That leads us to our second question, "Why is He calling Himself the *Good Shepherd*?"

We will now sing together the words of Psalter 135, all verses.

*"I am the **Good** Shepherd."*

We have already considered how Jesus contrasted Himself as the Good Shepherd with the bad shepherds, who were leading people astray and who were more concerned about themselves than the sheep.

It is therefore especially in contrast to them and their failures that our Lord stands out above all.

The religious leaders felt challenged by Jesus' ministry.

Not challenged to become like Him but challenged because they were afraid of losing their grip of control and power over the people.

The admiring talk among the people about Jesus greatly disturbed them.

All the attention He was given by them only meant that they were given less and less respect and clearly were losing control.

Therefore, as John recorded in verse 39, they sought again to take Him, but Jesus escaped out of their hand.

As Jesus went away, notice how He drew along many to follow Him.

John wrote, *"And many resorted unto Him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true. And many believed on Him there (verses 41-42).*

They followed Him as sheep follow their shepherd.

What made them leave their homes to be close to Jesus in the wilderness?

What made them risk the wrath of their leaders like the man healed of his blindness in chapter 9?

It was what they learned to see in this Shepherd.

It was His *goodness* that spoke to their heart.

So let us together ponder the *good* of this Shepherd.

Pray that God would open your eyes for the beauty of this Saviour.

How is Jesus the Good Shepherd? What makes Him the Good Shepherd?

Children, congregation, everything about Him is good.

First, His character is good.

He said, *"I am meek and lowly of heart."*

He is fairer than the children of men, mightier than all the children of men together!

He only had to say a word, and the man born blind was healed.

He could multiply a few loaves into baskets of food.

Later, He commanded the dead to arise easier than we can breathe.

And yet, though so exalted, so mighty, so capable, He is meek and lowly of heart.

God Himself calls attention to His Servant-Son in Isaiah 42:1-3:

"Behold My servant, Whom I uphold; Mine elect, in Whom My soul delighteth;

I have put My Spirit upon Him:

He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.

A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench:

He shall bring forth judgment unto truth."

God has His Spirit upon Him.

He is filled with the spirit of wisdom and understanding.

The spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord is in Him.

This makes Him of quick understanding.

He shall not judge like we do, after the sight of our eyes or reprove after the hearing of His ears.

Do you see the glory of this Good Shepherd?

He is altogether lovely in His meekness and lowliness of heart.

He is not afraid to become dirty in the pursuit of His sheep.

How willingly He humbles Himself to receive rebels and wasters of His gifts.

With great joy He embraces the shamed and desolate hearts who sense their worthlessness.

He is not ashamed to humble Himself, even to the lowliest.

As the Good Shepherd, He reaches out to the despised, the rejected, the shamed, the failed, the oppressed!

He received the publicans and harlots as warmly as Nicodemus and the young rich ruler.

He was kind, warm, gentle, loving to friend and foe.

He did not weigh people on their merits, or race, or creed, or life.

He saw each person as special, though lost, either like a lost sheep or a lost coin, or lost as a rebellious lawbreaker or lost as a tidy law-keeper.

Therefore, do not look upon yourself other than to be and remain humble.

But look unto this Good Shepherd Who reassures us in His own Words in Ezekiel 34:16,

*“I will seek that which was lost,
and bring again that which was driven away,
and will bind up that which was broken,
and will strengthen that which was sick.”*

Fear not to draw near to Him, even though others will disapprove of you.

Fear not to bow before this Good Shepherd, even though you have wandered off into the world's pastures.

He is kind, merciful, gracious, full of kindness, slow to anger, plenteous in mercy, compassionate and ready to pardon.

The second aspect of how the Good Shepherd is good is that He will not flee and leave His sheep alone facing the wolves.

He is not like the 'hirelings,' which today we would call herd-managers.

Jesus meant with them the religious leaders among the Jews.

They not only neglected to care for the real needs of the sheep, but they also fled away if their own lives were in danger.

But the Good Shepherd is not like that.

Jesus never abandons His sheep that get themselves again into painful troubles through their sins.

Upon rising from the dead, Jesus lovingly and instantly sought the disciples in their desolate condition.

And particularly He sought out Peter, the wicked denier!

But see Him also at work in John 9:35,

“Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?”

Picture the Lord walking through the streets of Jerusalem seeking the outcast!

He knows this sheep was bewildered.

In one day, so incredibly much changed for this man, and yet something of his joy is dampened as now he is a 'cast-off' in a different way.

First, he was an outcast because of his blindness for the people believed that either his parents or he himself had sinned.

But now he becomes an outcast because of his bold confession of his unknown healer.

So, the Good Shepherd went out to seek this sheep that had been pushed out of the fold, abandoned by the religious leaders who rejected Jesus.

He was intent on finishing the good work He had begun in this man.

Now that He had healed his blind eyes, He would also open this man's still blind mind for Jesus' glory.

For though his confession of Jesus, Whom he defended against the vile accusations of the Jewish leaders, was brilliant, yet he did not know the full glory of Jesus.

In John 9:30-33 he said,

"Why herein is a marvelous thing, that ye know not from whence He is, and yet He hath opened mine eyes.

Now we know that God heareth not sinners:

but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth His will, him He heareth.

Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind.

If this man were not of God, he could do nothing!"

Note that though he confessed his faith that Jesus was of God, he still needed to learn that Jesus was far more.

Besides, he needed to unlearn that salvation was not based on us being or doing good.

For that is what he still thought as is clear from verse 31, *"Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but **if** any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth His will, **him** He heareth"* (John 9:31).

Therefore, the Good Shepherd sought him out to bring him to greater faith.

What a glory there is in the faithfulness of the Good Shepherd!

How that is to encourage us!

What He has begun, He will finish perfectly. He will never forsake the works of His own hands.

If He has made our hearts thirsty, He will lead our hearts to drink of the fountain of life. When He has made you hunger for righteousness you cannot find in yourself or in anything you do, then He will fill this hunger with Himself.

The third aspect of the goodness of this Good Shepherd is what He reveals in the question to the healed man.

After Jesus found him in the streets of Jerusalem, He asked,

*“Dost thou believe on the **Son of God?**”*

Did you hear that also?

Jesus identifies Himself as the **Son of God!**

My friends, the *good* of the Good Shepherd is that He is God Himself, Jehovah, the Perfect and all Sufficient One!

That truth is the cornerstone of all hope for us poor and needy sheep.

None of us can be good. None of us are sufficient.

None of us can be a worshipper that does God's will perfectly.

Therefore, none of can be acceptable to our holy and just God.

We come short of His glory and even in the most humble and upright approach to God, we meet a consuming fire.

There is none good, no not one.

We are altogether unprofitable.

If our acceptance with God is to be based on our goodness, then there is no hope for any of us.

This the healed man needed to learn, as well as all of us.

But what **we** are not, is what the Good Shepherd **is**.

He **is** Good! He **is** Perfect! He **is** Sinless.

And therefore, He can save sinners by being their Substitute.

He did not need a ransom for Himself, but He could be, and He became the ransom for many.

Are you in distress of heart because you see how God's law prevents your reconciliation with Him?

Is the truth that there is no good in us or no good can be done by us dousing all hope to make it well again?

Hear then the hopeful tidings: *Jesus is God Himself and therefore He is able to save to the uttermost all that come through Him to God.* (Heb. 7:25)

Relying upon Him brings the rest He promised.

Believing in Him is like entrusting ourselves to Him as our shield and great reward.

What a precious gem is that revelation of the Good Shepherd to Abram in Genesis 15:1!

This Good Shepherd can shield us from the wrath of God against our sins.

None else could have carried the weight of this divine wrath but Jesus, the Son of God.

Friends, are you shielding yourself by faith behind Him and His righteousness?

In Him also was Abram's exceeding great reward.

A reward is something you earn after having worked.

But none of us can then ever be rewarded other than with death for even our best is unclean.

How then could God promise to Abram and all his spiritual seed, the believers, an exceeding great reward?

That has everything to do with the fourth aspect of the 'good' of the Good Shepherd.

"I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep."

For a shepherd to sacrifice his own comfort and even his entire life for the survival of his sheep, is truly grand.

We all admire such dedication and love though we may question whether a shepherd sacrificing himself unto death to save a sheep, is not going too far.

After all, a sheep is still a sheep.

Yet Jesus uses this example of devotion to call attention to Himself and His own sacrifice.

He did not just do this for foolish sheep.

He did this for inveterate enemies of Him and His Father.

He did not do this for sheep who thoughtlessly wandered out of the right path.

He did this for men and women who consciously chose death over life, sin over obedience.

Is there anyone greater than this Good Shepherd?

He was not forced by anyone. He laid down His life willingly, as He reminded His hearers in verses 15-18:

“I lay down My life for the sheep.

Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life.

No man taketh it from Me but I lay it down of Myself.”

Behold Him, behold Him!

He not only willingly gave up His glory in heaven to become a shepherd on earth!

He not only exchanged the delights of His Father’s company with the mockery, opposition, hardship, slander and dishonour of Satan and sinners.

But He willingly became the *sheep* to be led to the slaughter.

He was obedient unto the death of the cross, obeying His Father’s commandment, as He said in verse 18,

“No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. This commandment I have received of My Father.”

His death was not defeat but the deliberate deed of perfect love to His Father on behalf His people.

Lastly, the ‘good’ of the Good Shepherd is that He knows His sheep.

There is great comfort in that truth.

He will never forget that His sheep will always remain sheep.

Those who own sheep know that a sheep will never become smarter, abler, or nobler.

The shepherd knows he never can take his eyes off them and let them fend for themselves.

But no shepherd knows his sheep better than Jesus Christ.

And in that knowledge, He always remembers that His sheep remain dust,
that their heart is fickle,
that their enemies are stronger,

that His sheep remain poor and needy in themselves.

He measures their shoulders and knows their weaknesses.

He knows how to lead them to higher pastures through valleys of various afflictions.

Never erring, He knows how to time the gathering around the water troughs, and He knows how to drive them.

What a glorious shepherd is this Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, the Son of God!

Time and words fail to exalt Him as He ought to be exalted.

Therefore, *Come and see!*

Seek Him now and seek Him only as the Good Shepherd.

Humble yourself before Him and implore Him to shepherd your soul.

Confess to Him that you have many other shepherds offering their help and goods.

Do not hide it from Him that your heart is rather inclined to follow them instead of Him.

Never doubt that He is willing and able to shepherd your heart and life.

Lastly, there is one more Biblical truth we need to remind us of.

For most of you, since you were born, He has been your shepherd already.

Psalm 95:7-8 reminds us of our covenantal privileges: we are placed in His pastures under His care.

“For He is our God; and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand.

Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart.”

In Psalm 100:3, this truth is repeated, *“Know ye that the LORD, He is God;*

it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves;

we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.”

You know that many of the Jews of old disdained the LORD God as their Shepherd.

Though He set them aside from all people, they set Him aside as they chose other gods before Him.

Is that your picture also?

Will you continue to disbelieve His message?

Do you know what your future will be if you do so?

It is the exact opposite of those who follow Him.

Jesus says in verse 28, *“And I give them (that follow Me) eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.”*

Earlier He stated in verse 9 that those who enter through Him as the door, that they *“shall go in and out and find pasture.”*

And in verse 10, He added, *“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”*

So, in sum, they that follow Him, will have eternal life.

They will dwell with God, ever grazing in the pasture of communion with Him.

They will have life more abundantly than what we can ever have in this life.

A life that is even more abundant than Adam and Eve experienced in Paradise.

For in eternal life, we will see the Shepherd in the beauty of what we read in Revelation 7:17,

“For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

Therefore, my friend, all I like to repeat once more, with plea and prayer,
Come and see.

Amen.