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Series: *A Chrismon Christmas!*

Title: *Jesus: The Good Shepherd*

Text: John 10:11-15, 18

Preacher: Mark Adams

As I have mentioned in the past, one of my favorite WWII BOOKS is *The Good Shepherd*, by one of my favorite authors, C. S. Forester. You may remember that Tom Hanks starred in a movie based on this book a few years back. The movie is called *Greyhound*, but I think the book title is much better---a more accurate way of looking at the story.

It's about a U.S. naval officer, Captain Krause. His destroyer is the U.S.S. Keeling, and he commands not only the Keeling but a small fleet of destroyers whose job it is to protect 37 cargo ships---ships that are filled with soldiers and weapons, ammunition, tanks, trucks---all bound for England to help defeat Hitler.

This is Captain Krause's first command---and it's a huge responsibility because he and the ships he protects are crossing the Atlantic in 1942---at the height of what was called the "*Battle of the Atlantic*."

The story focuses on the three terrifying days that those convoys were in what they call, the "*Mid-Atlantic Gap*," where they did not enjoy the benefits of air-cover.

Forester's title is accurate because in those 72 hours the convoy would be subjected to relentless attack by a U-boat "wolf pack." That's why I like the original title because it is Captain Krause's job to "shepherd" these 37 ships through the dangerous "wolf pack filled" waters. Plus, the book makes it clear that Captain Krause is a devout Christian who constantly asks God for help. Krause does a great job because the U-boats sink only seven ships from the convoy and one of the other destroyers.

The intensity of the combat is unrelenting, and the film version does a great job of showing this. I mean, Captain Krause is on the bridge of his ship nonstop for those 72 hours. He's constantly having to make decisions to protect his flock. A running motif of the film version is that he never gets to eat. His stewards keep preparing him food, and bringing it to him, but when it arrives there is yet another attack and the food almost invariably crashes to the deck. In a poignant scene towards the end, Krause changes his shoes for bedroom slippers because his feet are bloodied by standing for such a long period. I mean, he lives up to the title of the book. He is a GOOD shepherd and because of that, during those three nonstop days he faithfully protects and guides his "flock" to safety.

I think one reason this book---and the movie itself---was so popular is because inside all people can relate to those cargo ships. We all know we need guidance---SHEPHERDING---to make our way safely down the often-dangerous waters of life. I mean, think about it: How many times in the past week have you asked someone for their opinion on a decision that you faced? I'm talking about everything from what to wear or how to handle a homework problem---to picking the best treatment option on a medical diagnosis or how to resolve some child-rearing or marital crisis.

The fact is all people need guidance almost constantly---and they seek it everywhere---from horoscopes to psychics---from parents to pastors. In fact, a study done in the UK revealed that the average person will make 773,618 decisions over a lifetime. It showed that a typical adult makes 27 judgments each and every day --- usually starting with whether to turn off the alarm or hit the snooze button. Some decisions can take as much as nine minutes, which can add up to a mind-numbing four hours lost in thought every day.

One reason we take so long deciding, is the fear of getting a decision WRONG. In fact, this makes many people unable to MAKE decisions. They have what you might call "*decideophobia*."

So, guidance is important for us. As HUMAN BEINGS we need all the help we can get.

To give you a word picture to help you understand why this is true, let me pose a question: *“Which animal or mammal or insect are you and I most like?”* There are several different opinions these days.

- Charles Darwin of course claimed that the ape was the nearest animal to man and his assertion that we are descendants of apes caused quite a stir.

It still does to this day. And like all controversies it has been the source of several JOKES. Have you ever heard the one about the ape that was seen ambling out of the public library with a Bible under one arm and a copy of Darwin’s book, *The Origin of the Species*, under the other? A passerby asked the ape what kind of research he was planning to do with those two books and the simian replied, *“I’m trying to find out whether I’m my brother’s keeper or my keeper’s brother.”*

- Other scientists—mainly biologists—tend to act like man is most like a MOUSE or a RAT.

I say this because they base their testing of drugs for potential human use on these rodents—saying that their bodily functions are very similar to our own. I don’t know about you but it’s a little UNSETTLING to me to know that pretty much whatever makes a rat sick will affect a human in a similar fashion. I mean, what does THAT say about our inner nature?

- Some scientists say that we are a lot like ANTS or BEES because like humans they are social creatures that live in highly structured societies.
- Others have recently compared people to DOLPHINS because of the similar ratio of brain mass to body size.

Well, in the Bible we are MOST often compared to a SHEEP. David, the psalmist, a shepherd himself, employed this analogy repeatedly. In Psalm 100:3 he said, ***“We are [God’s] people and the SHEEP of His pasture.”*** In Psalm 77:2 he wrote, ***“God, You lead Your people like a FLOCK.”***

Psalm 79:13 says, ***“We, Your people and SHEEP of Your pasture will give You thanks forever.”*** And—in Psalm 23, his most popular use of this comparison, David said, ***“The Lord is my SHEPHERD.”***

And not just in Psalms—throughout the Bible we see this parallel drawn between man and sheep. One of my favorites is in Isaiah 40:11 where it says that God, ***“...tends His flock like a Shepherd: He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart. He gently leads those that are with young.”***

Now—we could go on and on citing Scriptures that infer that we are similar to sheep. In fact, I’ve lost count of how many times we humans are compared to sheep in the Bible—and I think the reason God inspired this comparison in His Word so often because—of all the animals God created—the species that most NEEDS guidance is SHEEP. I mean, with all the problems we have making decisions the SHEEP comparison just fits. Here’s why.

- First of all, no insult intended—I mean you and I are in the same boat here—but sheep on the whole are pretty STUPID and STUBBORN animals.

Ask yourself, have you ever been to the circus and seen a group of TRAINED sheep? Of course not. You’ve seen trained apes and even trained mice or rats or dolphins but not sheep. And you probably never will because sheep are just too simple-minded.

This week I came across the story of a modern-day shepherd who says he spends many days in the spring looking for sheep—more specifically PREGNANT sheep. He says that whenever a pregnant ewe goes into

labor, she immediately sits down no matter where she is---and she stays there even while the rest of the flock heads home. The problem is if she is facing downhill when she sits, she will stay in that direction, fighting against gravity to push the lamb out of the womb. If no one helps her, she will die in that position rather than simply turn around. So---when even one ewe is missing this shepherd and his family go out looking for her. When she is found, they either bring her home or turn her so her head is uphill and stay with her until her labor is over. If the weather is harsh, they have to build a shelter around her, while using their bodies to keep her warm.

See what I mean? Stubborn---simple-minded!

- Second, sheep are dirty and wayward.

Real sheep aren't like those clean, fluffy balls of cotton depicted on greeting cards. If you've ever seen the southern end of a northbound herd, you'll know why. I mean they don't even have enough common sense to keep themselves clean so they smell atrocious. Plus, they tend to wander off easily, perhaps because they can't see very far—less than 15 yards. And—no matter how many times you bring wayward sheep back, they are prone to wander off again because they can't learn from their mistakes.

- Third, sheep are defenseless and dependent. They don't have much of a bite--no natural defense—no claws, no horns, no fangs—not even a stink bag like a skunk.

They can't even defend themselves from infection and are susceptible to all kinds of diseases.

This is why British shepherds take sheep and rams, one by one, and throw them into a dipping trough, a huge vat filled with an antiseptic liquid. The shepherd must completely submerge each animal, holding its ears, eyes, and nose under the surface. It is of course horribly frightening for the sheep. And if any of the sheep try to climb out of the trough too soon, the sheepdogs bark and snap and force them back in.

- When you think of it, sheep aren't very INSPIRING animals.

This is why we see Lions and Bears and Tigers—oh my---as mascots for sports teams. But we never see a school claiming a SHEEP as its mascot because let's face it the "*San Diego Sheep*" just doesn't inspire anybody. Rams yes---sheep no. I mean, can you see yourself in the stands cheering, "*Go Sheep go!*" I can't.

This is because sheep aren't threatening in any way. They are top-heavy and their legs are spindly. This makes them slow. Plus, they have no camouflage, so when they are being chased by a wolf they are out of luck. Sheep are so dumb, they will eat too much if you let them—so much that they make themselves sick. They are definitely not your king-of-the-forest types.

- And finally, sheep are easily frightened and confused. It doesn't take much to scramble the "mental yolk" of a nervous sheep.

They've even been known to plunge straight over the edge of a high precipice, one following right after another. This week I read about shepherds eating breakfast outside the town of Gevas, Turkey, who were surprised to see a lone sheep walk off of a nearby cliff and fall to its death. But what really stunned them was when each of the rest of the nearly 1,500 sheep in the herd followed his example, every single sheep walking off of the same cliff. When it was all over, the local newspaper reported that "*450 of the sheep perished in a billowy, white pile.*"

It was only 450 because the 451<sup>st</sup> and 452<sup>nd</sup> sheep and so on were saved because by then the pile had become higher and the fall more cushioned. The estimated loss to the families of Gevas was \$100,000—an extremely significant amount of money in a country where the average person earns about \$2,700 annually.

Now—God doesn't compare us to sheep so often in His Word to put us down. No—He makes this comparison in His book so often because He wants to communicate one very important truth to us. He wants us to know that we are DESIGNED to need a Guide—capital "G"—in life.

As David wrote in the 23rd Psalm, we need Someone to *"...lead us on paths that are right."* We need a Shepherd with a *"...rod and a staff to protect us."*

So when we read Scriptures like Isaiah 53:6 where it says, *"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way."* Or Mark 9:36 where it says, *"When Jesus saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd."*

Texts like these should remind us that we DO have an inborn NEED for a Shepherd---THE Good Shepherd.

With this in mind take your Bibles and let us read together John 10:11-15 and 18. If able I ask you to stand in respect for God's Word. Jesus is speaking and He says:

John 10:11-15 and 18

**11 – I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.**

**12 – The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So, when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it.**

**13 – The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.**

**14 – I am the Good Shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know Me—**

**15 – just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father—and I lay down My life for the sheep.**

**18 – No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from My Father."**

Okay, at this point I'm going to ask the SWAIN family (8:30) MARGARET PETERS (11AM) to come forward and hang this week's CHRISMON ornament---as you can see it's a SHEEP---a reminder that Jesus is indeed our GOOD SHEPHERD. Thank you Swains/Margaret!

Now, what is it about Jesus—that makes Him QUALIFIED to be our Shepherd through life? I mean, what are the items on Jesus' resume' that show Him to be capable not only to be A Shepherd for us—but THE GOOD Shepherd? I can think of at least three things.

**(1) He KNOWS us and LOVES us.**

As our Lord said He is not some hired hand---some substitute teacher---paid to do the job but who doesn't really care about those he is paid to protect and guide. No---for Jesus, shepherding you and me is a personal thing. I need to remind you that the relationship between sheep and shepherds was different in Palestine than in other parts of the world. For example—in Britain most sheep are kept for killing and eating. We ate a lot of them in Ireland a few years back and I have to say—I "wolfed" them down because they were quite good!

But in Palestine MOST sheep were not EATEN. No---most were KEPT for their wool or milk. So, in the land of the Bible, the sheep were often with a shepherd for years—many times from birth throughout their entire lives. The result of all this time together is those shepherds KNEW their sheep and gave them names!

And we could certainly say the same thing about Jesus. From the beginning of time, He has watched each man and woman be conceived then be born and grow up. As God in the flesh Jesus knows everything about us

from the molecular level on out! I mean to the US government you may be just a number—but the God of the universe knows you by name. He knows your fears, your trials and temptations. He knows your strengths and weaknesses. There is not a sorrow you have that He is not aware of. He knows even your darkest thoughts—and as I said, He loves you anyway. Our Lord is THE GOOD Shepherd because He knows us. We can all say with David:

***“O Lord, You have searched me and You know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; You are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, You know it completely O Lord—for You created my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother’s womb. Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be.”*** (Psalm 139)

Listen fellow “sheep!” Jesus knows everything there is to know about you and your life situation. And this is not just an INTELLECTUAL awareness. This is an INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE between God in the flesh and you—His child. There isn’t a single motivation, thought, act, or word that has slipped out of your being and escaped our Lord’s undivided attention. As Hebrews 4:13 puts it, ***“All things are naked and open to the eyes of God.”***

And not only does He know us. He WANTS to guide us through life. Psalm 25:12 says, ***“Who is the man that fears the Lord? God will teach him the way that is best.”*** In Psalm 32:8 God says to us, ***“I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.”*** In Isaiah 65:24 God says, ***“Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.”***

Here’s another thing that makes Jesus qualified to be our shepherd. You see, not only does HE know US...

## **(2) WE know HIM.**

When—in our decision to follow Jesus—we acknowledge Him as our Shepherd—we learn to recognize Him when He speaks. This is the way it is with sheep. They may not be too bright—but they have enough gray matter up here to recognize their true shepherd. So, when he calls they will follow. In fact, this is how shepherds proved OWNERSHIP in Jesus’ day. They didn’t have brands or marks. Each shepherd had his own distinctive CALL and sheep would only respond to that call.

Even today, in Israel, it is still possible to witness a scene that Jesus almost certainly saw two thousand years ago—that of Bedouin shepherds bringing their flocks home from the various pastures they have grazed during the day. Often those flocks will end up at the same watering hole around dusk, so that they get all mixed up together—eight or nine small flocks turning into a convention of thirsty sheep. Their shepherds do not worry about the mix-up, because when it is time to go home, each one issues his or her own distinctive call—a special trill or whistle---or a particular tune on a particular reed pipe, and that shepherd’s sheep withdraw from the crowd to follow their shepherd home. They know whom they belong to; they know their shepherd's voice, and it is the only one they will follow. As Christians we are like sheep in that we know Jesus’ voice. We can recognize the call of our Creator and Redeemer. When ask Jesus to forgive us and lead us through life as LORD God gives us a sort of “caller ID” that enables us to distinguish His voice from that of our adversary. And—the more time we spend with Him in prayer and Bible study, the better this “caller ID” functions.

The wonderful thing about this is when we heed the instructions of our Shepherd we not only make wise decisions that benefit us—we actually join God in His work and benefit others! Jesus is qualified to be our Shepherd because we know His voice and when we listen and do what He says, we join Him in seeking and saving the other lost sheep of this world. There is one other quality that makes Jesus more than capable of being our GOOD SHEPHERD.

### **(3) He LAID DOWN HIS LIFE for us.**

There are many stories of shepherds in Jesus' day dying in the process of attempting to protect their flocks from wolves or lions or thieves. And, as Jesus said in our text, a hired hand would not do this—for he was only interested in his pay—but a true shepherd would, for he loved his sheep. After all they belonged to Him. A TRUE shepherd knew his sheep from birth. And that is a great picture of our relationship with Jesus. Our Creator and Redeemer laid His life down to protect us from sin and death.

It's like that Captain Krause who didn't care about his own health. He didn't eat or sleep or even sit down those three days because the thing that was first in his mind was the safety and health of the ships he protected. Jesus is like this captain but to a much greater degree. Think of it this way. Jesus---the GOOD SHEPHERD---became a Lamb, that One sacrificial lamb Who died for the sins of all mankind.

Understand—up until the time Jesus was born, sheep were sacrificed in the temple for the sins of people PEOPLE—including the shepherd. But in Jesus the roles were reversed. The Shepherd sacrificed Himself for His SHEEP.

I remember reading that when cowboys in Argentina or Brazil would come to a piranha infested river, through which they had to drive their cows---they would protect the herd by taking one cow upstream a few hundred yards where they would kill it and throw it in the river. The piranha would attack the dead cow and while they were thus distracted the cowboys would lead the rest of the herd across safely.

Well, this is an example of what Jesus has done for you and me—except for one thing. As He says here in John, no one TOOK His life from Him. He says, ***"I laid it down of My own accord."***

Jesus willingly died for you and me. This was His purpose in coming to earth in the first place.

Warren Wiersbe writes, *"Jesus did not die as a martyr, killed by men. He died as a substitute, willingly laying down His life for us."*

Shepherds do this for sheep because of the danger they face from PREDATORS like wolves. Jesus did this for us because of the danger we face due to SIN. Do you remember what John the Baptist said when He saw Jesus coming to be baptized in the Jordan? ***"Behold, the Lamb of God, Who comes to take away the SIN of the world."*** (John 1:29)

In the same text where the prophet Isaiah compared us to sheep who had gone astray, he spoke of Jesus and said, ***"Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows. He was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities...by His wounds we are healed."***

***For He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so He did not open up His mouth."*** (Isaiah 53)

I remember years ago taking our kids to the Agricultural Museum in Dover, Delaware. That day they had sheep being sheared---but the shearer didn't use electric shears. No---they did it the old-fashioned way. This "shepherd" used simple scissors like these. The sheep was cut several times in the process---but he or she was silent before the shearer. They opened not their mouths.

You know, one of the things many people do is over-sentimentalize Christmas such that they just make it about the baby in the manger---and in so doing they forget that this Child is the Messiah Who grew up to die

on the cross for our sins, Who rose from the grave---Who ascended to the Father, Who gave us the Holy Spirit—Who lives in us now.

I challenge you—fellow sheep—This Christmas don't make that mistake. Don't embrace this *“seasonal amnesia.”* Don't leave the baby in that manger. I'm sure you've heard the phrase, *“Keep Christ in Christmas!”* Well as Christians we should say more than that. We should say, *“Don't leave the baby in the manger.”* Because we know it wasn't just about a wooden manger. Jesus grew up—to die on a wooden CROSS. Jesus is the GOOD SHEPHERD—Who laid down His life for us—His sheep.

I remember Dale Smith telling me that you can't escape the Gospel. It is everywhere---even in the plots of movies.

And Dr. Smith is correct. One of the recurring themes in movies is SACRIFICE—heroic sacrifice where one person dies to save others. For example, in the movie ARMAGEDDON the character played by Bruce Willis stays behind on the meteor hurtling toward earth---so as to push the button detonating the bomb that will save humanity. In the next to the last MATRIX film, Neo gives his life for all the people living underground. In Saving Private Ryan—the captain dies so that the last Ryan son can live. In the Wrath of Kahn Spock dies to save the crew of the Enterprise. In the remake Kirk does it.

Well—why this recurring them? Where did this idea of self-sacrifice for the good of others come from? I can assure you it didn't come from the heads of sinful, selfish people like you and me. No—they are part of the ripple effect of what Jesus did on the Cross. I mean whether or not these writers know it, their story lines are inspired by the Good Shepherd laying His life down for you and me. And—in the same way that a “ripple” is not the same as the thing that caused it—all these movie plots aren't the same as what Jesus did. You see—in all these stories the good guys died for their loved ones—or for other good guys. For example, Spok died to save his crew. But Jesus—THE Good Shepherd—He died for ALL people—for SINNERS like you and me. As Paul says in Romans 5:8—say it with me: ***“God demonstrates His love for us in this while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”***

One more thought. Do you remember those first five words of the Shepherd Psalm—Psalm 23? Let's say them together: ***“THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD.”*** Now listen as I say these words,

“THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD.”

“THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD.”

Do you get my subtle emphasis there? God WON'T BE your SHEPHERD until you make Him your LORD. Shepherd's lead. Sheep follow. God won't lead you—until you commit your life to follow Him. If you are here today and you don't know the GOOD Shepherd, He is here right now and as I said a moment ago He wants to guide your life! Even now He is calling you by name! So it is up to you. Will you answer His call? Will you confess your sin---repent of it---and follow Jesus as Savior and Lord? There may be other Sheep here this morning who know the Good Shepherd but don't have a fold! You are looking for a flock to join! I know I am biased but I think the best one on the planet meets right here! We would love to have you become a part of this church family. However it is that God is leading you—we invite you to follow. Won't you come as we sing?