

I Am the Good Shepherd

Series: Divine Declarations

Brad Bailey – March 24, 2024

Intro

Here we are on final Sunday before Easter Sunday... a week in which we reflect on the week of Christ's suffering. And as we prepare to engage his death... I can't think of anything more valuable than realizing who he was... that suffered for us.

Today we are continuing in our series entitled: Divine Declarations
We are allowing God to speak to us through the declarations that Jesus makes about who he was.

No statements are more profound than what have become known as the great **"I am" statements**.

With these words... Jesus was declaring his divine nature...for they make use of the very name which God had told Moses he could tell the people who it is that sent him... He said tell them "I am that I am". (Ex 3:14-15)
(This name...transliterated in four letters as YHWH or JHVH and articulated as Yahweh or Jehovah. Jesus takes the tetragrammaton YHWH, the verb "to be" in Hebrew, the name of God who is the I AM that I AM, and applies it to Himself.)

Each of these statements is also a divine revelation... of what Jesus is providing. He adds a metaphor to explain who he is to us. "I am the **Bread of life**. I am the **True Vine**. I am the **Light of the world**.

Each of these speaks to our souls... in different ways... about who Jesus is in relationship to us. Each is **an invitation to know him...** and more importantly...**to receive him as such**. Today...Jesus declares...
I am the Good Shepherd.

When we think of Jesus as the **Good Shepherd**, we're **reminded of how much we need** help and guidance in our lives.

But being cast as a sheep may not seem like the "nicest" thing anyone has said about you.

- When there is one of those questions placed to **people: If you could be any animal, what would you be and why?**
Why is it that no one ever says they want to be a sheep?
- It is **never a mascot** of a sports team.
- We have a basic sense that they **aren't particularly bright**...and they may be stubborn. Have you **ever seen a trained sheep?** At the circus, come see the **tigers... elephants...** but there don't seem to be many sheep acts.

> But we do well to realize that this may be just what the human soul needs.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus looked upon the crowds with compassion... because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

The truth is that our minds may appear to navigate earthly life reasonably well... but spiritually we are like sheep... wandering with little understanding...and vulnerable.

> We are vulnerable... but also valuable.

In Middle Eastern life...sheep are held in great value...

And God sees the care that shepherds provide sheep as a quality needed for our spiritual lives. [1]

- Over **200 times** the Scriptures refer to shepherds or shepherding
- There is **something about this role** that so **parallels** that which can serve and lead the human soul well....that **we see God draw out spiritual leadership** from the life which had spent years shepherding sheep.
- **Abraham**...was a shepherd.
- **Jacob** was a shepherd.
- **Moses** was raised as a son in the home of Pharaoh...to rule a Kingdom... nice start...but then spent 40 years in the desert among nomadic people learning to be a shepherd before God called him to come back and lead his people out of Egypt.
- ... and of course **David**.

What does this tell us?

The leaders were to serve as shepherds. God speaks of the priests as shepherds.

> And something arises in God...when those entrusted with such...fail to do so.

[2]

[NOTE: When this message was actually shared, due to length, I only summarize the texts from Ezekiel below.]

Ezekiel 34:2-6, 11-12, 15-16

"Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? ³ You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. ⁴ You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured.

> *If they had been good shepherds...they would have done what was needed ... with sacrifice....but instead they acted selfishly*

Ezekiel 34:2-6, 11-12, 15-16

You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. ⁵ So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. ⁶ My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.

... they hadn't gone to find the lost sheep... now wandering... scattered.

Ezekiel 34:2-6, 11-12, 15-16

¹¹ "For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹² As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. ...¹⁵ I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. ¹⁶ I will search for the lost and bring back the strays.

God Himself will take up the shepherd's role.

And then through the prophet Micah...God spoke of the one who would come...which was quoted and declared over the birth of Jesus

Matthew 2:6

**But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
Are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
For out of you will come a ruler
Who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.**

The text being quoted from Micah...also states:

Micah 5:2 (NKJV)

Whose goings forth *are* from of old, From everlasting."

So now in the midst of his life and ministry, Jesus describes how he has now come as **The Good Shepherd...**

And we hear the heart the heart of God being fulfilled...

John 10:2-4, 9-12

The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. ³ The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ...⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. 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.

John 10:14-18

...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. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They

too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. 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.

Jesus is making a **grand declaration to every living soul.**

Jesus declares that he is **THE** Good Shepherd of our lives.
I am the good shepherd. – John 10:11

The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. ³ The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. – John 10:2-3

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. – John 10:12

He is distinguishing himself from those who have failed to shepherd his Father's sheep.
God has come to fulfill what no mediator could.
No prophet or priest entrusted... can compare.

But in a way he is distinguishing himself from all who may serve as shepherds of our souls. He is the owner. We belong to him.

He would later call his new leaders to feed and care for his sheep.... so human leaders would still serve... but he is THE shepherd.
We are **all to serve as shepherds** of other lives... to embody the love of Christ... **but we have one ultimate shepherd.** (Heb. 1:3 - "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being..")
> **Some of us need to take that in.**
Perhaps we have been let down... looking to others... feel nobody cares.

We may find someone who cares about us...and think: "Finally, this is the person who will take care of me. This is the person who will meet all my needs. This is the person. At last, I can relax. This is the person who will **give himself or herself completely to me**, take care of everything."
> **And then we face that they have needs...**and desires...and limits to their grace... and their love.

Some of us have **looked to parent...** or **friends...** or you had jobs working for people, you have **voted in leaders thinking**, "This is the one who is going to take care of everything. This is the one. This is the one who's finally going to take care of me."

But the fact of the matter is everybody here, until we recognize we need a shepherd, and no human being besides this One can be the Shepherd, until then, you are **always going to be disappointed or detached.**

You have been searching for the Shepherd. And Jesus says...“It’s me. I am the Shepherd you’ve been looking for. I am the One you seek.

> We should value the care of others...but we are HIS SHEEP.

And he goes beyond what anyone would have fathomed. He is the shepherd of all.

I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. – John 10:16

He speaks of there being those that are not of this sheep pen...who will also know his voice...and who will be united in him. He is speaking here of what Israel had lost sight of...which is the fact that God was going to bless the whole world.

The Good Shepherd has come, and to those who respond to his voice...

1. He finds us...and knows the way home for the soul which is lost.

Jesus said his very purpose was **to seek and save** that which **was lost**. He described his purpose to be like a shepherd who goes out to find the lost sheep.

For the shepherd the thought of one sheep... astray and alone, would consume his heart and mind.

In another time....

Luke 15:1-4

Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." ³ Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴ "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?"

Do you know that **there is a shepherd who searches for you...who is able to find you?**

We have all wandered ... from the source of our existence.

As God declared through the prophet Isaiah...

We have all strayed like sheep. Each one of us has turned to go his own way. - Isaiah 53:6 (GW)

Some may think... “I don’t sense that I am lost.”

That is the **very nature of sheep**...they **wander and don't even realize** that they are lost.

In many respects we **have become familiar** with the things around us... don't have any sense of being lost in the space we have become familiar with.

But this can be like a child going on a trip to Target or Toy' R Us with a parent. The child decides to wander over to the toy section they had seen. **A separation has occurred... but they don't realize it.**

Until that moment comes when reality emerges. Three things becomes real...

- **I don't know how to navigate the bigger reality.**
- **I need one greater than myself.**
- **I have no way to get home on my own.**

Only a moment before, the **child thought they were in heaven**...the great toy aisle...but now the toys don't seem to offer much.

> **We too can feel fine with our toys**... familiar and fun... and therefore have no sense that we are lost.

And we as modern "west coast" types have been **especially inclined** towards **independence**. We left somewhere to find ourselves...to follow our dreams. We don't want other people telling us who we are... something has felt **controlling and confining**.... So we come to the place where we think we can be free.

At some point... we face the reality that the new us...is defined by others... or is as nothing more than rooting our existence in something as fleeting as our feelings or desires...which will soon begin to fade...

Like a kid playing with a comic book character... and then facing reality...a reality that he is lost in.

Beneath us all... we wonder if we can be found.... Or are ultimately alone.

> **There is a Shepherd who is able to find us.**

When I am lost... from myself... he is able to find me because he is greater... truer....

Looking back on my life...I could refer to some point in which I found God...but I realize it is actually that God found me.

Amazing Grace... "I once was lost, but now am found" That is the song God longs for every soul to be able to sing.

And when we are found... we realize he knows us... we have always been his...and he knows us.

The Bible says that is the condition of every human being. Every human being knows that though you are trying to be your own god, live for your own glory, call your own shots, make your own decisions (that's our natural condition), you know underneath you are desperately flawed and feeble.

We desperately want to be known...but we don't want anyone to see us completely.

And that is why we may fear being found... because we will be seen.

But the Good Shepherd offers themselves.

The Good Shepherd has come, and to those who respond to his voice...

2. He will lay down his life... because he values us.

John 10:2-4, 9-12, 14-18

"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. ...¹⁷I lay down my life-- only to take it up again. 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.

What makes all false shepherds similar is that **none of them willingly** lay down their life for us, **yet we often lay down our lives for them.** We so easily invest in them, even though they do not invest in us.

The uniqueness of Jesus Christ as a Shepherd is he **lays down his life** for his sheep.

And he lays it down **voluntarily**. He says, "No **one takes my life** from me. I give it of my own accord.

He sees the destiny of the sheep.

The danger... the destiny...is death itself. Separation from God.

As the Scriptures make clear: we are separated from God...and destined to die in that separation...that is what it means to be "in sin"...in a state of defiant independence.

The Bible says that the **essence of our problem... our sin...** is that we **declare that we will rule our own lives** ... our own kingdoms.

The Bible says that's what a sinner is, somebody, in a sense, who has **run off with something that his not his or her own property**. You didn't create yourself. You don't own yourself. And if we run off... we are separated from the very source of life.

The One who knew no such separation... the Son of God... came into our world... and he lays down his life as a substitute for our separation.

Hebrews 2 tells us Jesus Christ frees those who all of their lives long have been in bondage through the fear of death.

How? Because **he not only frees us from separation....but he defeats that separation.**

Did you notice what he said about laying down his life?

Notice... I lay down my life--only to take it up again.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.

It cannot be taken on behalf of another... it must be offered.
He offers himself...but then defeats death as he is raised to up.

What does this mean?

It means that **as we prepare to remember** his death and resurrection this coming weekend.... We realize **he didn't just suffer.... He gave his life.**

He wanted us to hear that.

And when he rose... he rose for us.

And there lies the profound love of the Good Shepherd... the profound love of God.

As our Good Shepherd, Jesus loved us so much that He gave up His own life to save us from our sins. Despite our mistakes, He offers us peace and total acceptance. When we realize and accept this amazing love from God, it can bring about a powerful change in our lives.

The Good Shepherd has come, and to those who respond to his voice...

3. He leads us into true life.

When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ...⁹I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. - John 10:4, 9-10

Jesus refers to **a transition... of going in and out.**
And this **leads to being saved... and leads to finding pastures.**

He declares that he is the "gate"... or many translations may say "door"...which may seem a little confusing since he also states he is the shepherd. But they are both elements in the role that surrounds sheep/....and could be served by the same person. Jesus brings the pictures of all lives as being like sheep who have those who claim authority over them...but there was **only one gate to the pen... the gate or door...** was simply an opening in which **one laid in that space.** They were the gate and the gatekeeper... and anyone else who did not enter through that gate....was a thief climbing fences to what was not theirs.

He says the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy... another has come into the realm of human lives to destroy us. I believe he is speaking of the **spiritual thief...** the **spiritual enemy** which has sought God's glory... and seeks **to direct us away from God.**

We may not like the idea...but there are powers that seek us to bow and worship anything but God... and it is simply that which seeks to kill and destroy.
Jesus says... **"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."**

He guides us... to pastures that provide life, both now and forever.

The pastures were life giving... that is what Jesus is able to lead us to.

As David described so beautifully in Psalm 23...

Psalm 23:1-4

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures,

He leads me beside quiet waters,

He restores my soul.

He guides me in paths of righteousness

For his name's sake.

Even though I walk

Through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil,

For you are with me;

Your rod and your staff,

The comfort me.

Closing

God has come... in Christ....to be the shepherd of our lives.

Even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death... we can have life in him.

And it begins by realizing that we need a shepherd.

Potential Story:

The shepherd listens for the cry of the sheep...and the good shepherd listen for us to call out.

There was a story that ran in the news back in 2005 from Istanbul, Turkey. And I conformed it to be true.

A group of shepherds had brought a huge flock of sheep...that represented the sheep of all the families in their village...to a hillside to graze. Once all the sheep seemed to be settled in, the shepherds went off a little ways and took a seat to have breakfast as they watched the sheep from a distance.

One sheep walked up to the edge of the cliff on the other side of the hill and walked right off the cliff.

And then sheep did what sheep do. They followed that sheep ... until 1,500 sheep walked off the cliff. [3]

It's a striking story... but one that may reflect what God sees all around us.
There is a shepherd calling out to listen to his voice.

PRAYER

Resources: Michael Erickson, John Hamby; Tim Keller (The Good Shepherd, 1991)

Notes:

1. Mary Beth Gladwell notes: " The idea of shepherding, and in specific the idea of God acting as the Shepherd of His people, is a motif found throughout the Bible, from beginning to end. In Genesis 48:15, as Jacob, on his deathbed summarized his life, he declared that God had been his "*shepherd all of his life to this day.*" In Revelation 7:17, when the saints who come out of the tribulation are brought before God, John brings together two of the most striking images of the scripture by stating, "*for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eye.*" – More on The Shepherd Motif in the Old and New Testament - [here](#)

2. Note: This judgement of the shepherd leaders of the day is a major theme, found most in Jeremiah and Ezekiel . See [Lessons in Shepherding 2: Jeremiah and Ezekiel By Paul Alexander](#) in his work on developing the role of elders.

3. Sources: "[450 Sheep Jump to Their Deaths in Turkey](#)" — [Yahoo! News](#), July 8, 2005
And Reuters. "[Hundreds of Turkish sheep follow leader off cliff](#)" — [Yahoo! News](#), July 8, 2005

The story notes that 450 sheep died that day. Only 450 because as the pile of animals grew taller on the ground it cushioned the fall for the rest of the sheep that went off the edge.)

"There's nothing we can do. They're all wasted," Nevzat Bayhan, a member of one of 26 families whose sheep were grazing together in the herd, was quoted as saying by Aksam.