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Series: The Gospel of John
Message: The Good Shepherd

Transcribed Message
February 22, 2026
John 10:10-21

I need to begin this morning with both a confession and a story. First is the confession. I may have underestimated my flock last Sunday. I may not know my flock the way I should know my flock because it was pointed out to me when I suggested that maybe ten or so of you have been shepherds, that I may have overlooked a significant number of you who were perhaps 4-H'ers, and you had a sheep as a 4-H'er, and that might have raised the number considerably. So I don't know if you want to take me up on this offer, but if you fall into the category of a shepherd, which means, remember, a shepherd is somebody who's not just gone to the petting zoo and petted a sheep, but a shepherd is somebody who had significant time with a sheep. Just put your hand up. I would want to know, if you were in 4-H and you've had sheep. I don't think I was that far off. I think I'm not that, you know, it might be 15, right? Maybe 15.

Well, that is in relation to this story, because somebody did come up to me last Sunday, and they said this was a true story about a 4-H person who had a sheep. Now, I don't know if I've got the story exactly right, but I'm going to give you the high points. A young guy had a sheep, and as they do in 4-H, which I know nothing about, the sheep was judged, right? He did not qualify to go to the next level. I think that's the way it worked. And so, what do you do with the sheep that doesn't go to the next level? You send them to the OKC sale barn. Don't cover your children's ears. But that's what happens, I guess, at least in this case.

So, he sends his sheep out to the OKC sale barn because it didn't qualify for the next level, whatever that was. Then he found out, after he had sent his sheep out there, that in fact something had changed, and his sheep was now going to qualify to go to the next level. But his sheep was already at the sale barn with hundreds, and I don't know, maybe thousands of other sheep. But he said to his parents, he will know my voice. I'm going to go out there. Take me out there. I want to call out to my sheep. So, he goes out

to the OKC sale barn, climbs up on the rail fence, and begins with all of these sheep in this pen to call out to his sheep. And his sheep heard his voice. His sheep heard him. And this is what his sheep did. He looked at him and said, here I am. Come and get me. I know where this is going. Please, please come and get me. Well, that's a true story on some level. I may have changed a little bit of it. I don't remember exactly.

But we're in John 10. Open your Bibles to John 10, this amazing chapter. And our big idea this morning, again, Jesus' death on our behalf changed everything. So straightforward, so simple a truth. Jesus' death on our behalf changed everything. Let's look at what we saw last week as we introduced this 10th chapter. And remember, chapter 10 just continues chapter 9. Now, that's obvious to us, but the storyline continues. Because you remember in the storyline of chapter 9 is the man born blind from birth. Jesus miraculously heals him. And the religious leaders, the spiritual leaders of Israel at the time do not celebrate in any way this incredible and amazing miracle. They don't rejoice with him. They don't praise God for what has happened. They're not even curious as to the possibility that the one who healed him might, in fact, be the Messiah as the Old Testament had spoken of. But instead, they began to criticize and they began to find fault, and they began to just really show the nature of their heart, which is as the shepherds of Israel, they really don't care much for the sheep. They're in it for themselves. And so that's the storyline that as you go into chapter 10 and this amazing chapter on Jesus as the Good Shepherd, that's the backdrop to it. And so, in effect, it's Jesus saying, here are your current shepherds, and they're not very good. In fact, they're bad. But here is a look at me. And so that's the contrast.

Then secondly, isn't it, the characteristics of a good shepherd. And what are the characteristics of a good shepherd? Well, we looked at four of them, and we'll just touch on them briefly. A good shepherd knows the sheep intimately. The good shepherd knows the sheep intimately. Jesus is our shepherd. He comes to us in every life circumstance. You know, maybe you're here this morning and you're feeling incredibly lonely, even though you're sitting in a room with hundreds of people. Maybe you feel like nobody cares, and maybe it just is a tough spot that you're in right now, and Jesus is the good shepherd. He's the one who says I noticed you. I know you. I know you intimately.

And secondly, the shepherd calls the sheep by name. He calls the sheep by name. That's how well we are known. In fact, a reoccurring statement in this 10th chapter is that very thought of being and belonging to Jesus, that we're His own, and He knows our name. And you know that old TV show, *Cheers*, you want to go where everybody knows your name. There's just something affirming about that, isn't there?

Thirdly, He leads and He nurtures the sheep. In verse 3, He leads them out. In verse 4, He goes before them. And He can do that precisely because the sheep hear Him. They're listening to His voice. They follow Him because they're listening. And He's calling to them, and they're paying attention to their shepherd.

Just this last week, Lifeway Research comes out with this survey of church-going Christians, right? People like us. And you know what it showed? 31% of people who say they go to church regularly, 31% read their Bible daily. That means two-thirds, if statistically this were true of us, two-thirds of us don't even open our Bible once a day. And then it went on to give, maybe a little bit of encouragement, 14% read it a couple of times a week. So less than half of regular church-going people are in this sense listening to the voice of their shepherd. They have no idea what their shepherd is saying to them on any given day because they never open their Bible. They don't read their Bible. That's not to put guilt on you. That's not condemnation. That's simply to say if you want to know the voice of your shepherd, you've got to go to the book in which he has spoken to you and open it and read it. And why not do it every day? Because every day this is what we need, isn't it? We need that guidance. We need to know that we're following. We need to have his wisdom. We need to walk in this light.

Fourth, he provides, provides all the sheep needs. That is verses 9 and 10, right? I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. Now, I want to just say two things about those two verses. The first one in verse 9, this life that is described for us, I'm the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved. Obviously, salvation is in view in verse 9, isn't it? Salvation is in view. It is a picture of our spiritual life. It's a picture of the quantity of that life, that it is a forever life. We'll see this even more, Lord willing, next Sunday. But he says he will be saved, so that is what is in view.

Then you look at verse 10, and verse 10 is another kind of life, isn't it? The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. Now we're looking at something that is daily. Now we're looking at something that is temporal. Now we're looking at the quality of that life. So let me ask you a question. By understanding verse 10, do you have abundant life? When you think of your walk with God and your spiritual life, that's what he's talking about. He's talking about our walk with God. He's talking about our daily walk with God. Would the word abundantly be a good description of your daily walk with God? And I guess the follow-up question to that is, what does that mean, and how is it that we experience that? And I think it is to be understood and to be realized with one simple word, and that word is obedience.

How is it that we have this life that Jesus describes? I have come that they may have life and that they may have it abundantly. It's available to everybody that is in this category of verse 9, that has received salvation, right? But it is not, I think, enjoyed by all. And I don't think it's enjoyed by all, because sometimes as sheep we're not listening to the voice of our shepherd, and we're not walking in obedience to the things that he's called us to do and to be. This abundant life is not related primarily to the physical world. This is not a promise of health, wealth, and prosperity. This is not Jesus saying to you, if you come to me and you're one of my sheep, boy, you're going to just live happily ever after, and every day is going to be sunshine and roses, and it's all going to be great. That's not what he's saying. He's speaking about that which is spiritual. He's speaking about that which is related to a sheep who's listening to and following in obedience the voice of his shepherd. We listen and we obey because we are his own.

Now, let's look at the shepherd who loves his sheep. The rest of this amazing passage this morning, I want to start off by just putting before you a contrast between a shepherd of the first century and the good shepherd of chapter 10 because there's some interesting corollaries. There are three things I want you to see by way of contrast between these two.

The first one is a shepherd in first century Israel that would have heard Jesus say, I am the good shepherd. As we talked about last week, everybody in that audience who heard him talk about what it meant to be a shepherd knew about what it meant to

be a shepherd. They were aware of that, weren't they? But a shepherd in the first century could die, could die in taking care of the sheep, but it wasn't planned. He didn't go out that morning and say, I want to find some wolves, and I want to encounter a lion, and I want to take on a bear like David described as being a shepherd. No, I mean, it could happen in the protection of the sheep. He could die, but it wasn't planned. What Jesus is going to say to us in this passage is, he will die, and it was planned. In fact, we know it was planned in eternity past, before the worlds were even created, before you and I were even thought of.

Secondly, if the shepherd dies, it's absolute disaster for the sheep. It's sheep without a shepherd. They're helpless, they're hopeless, they're in danger, they're going to wander. Everything goes bad if the shepherd accidentally dies, right? But look at the other side of that. The death of our shepherd brings life. Jesus says it is putting before us this avenue of eternal life and abundant life because of what God has provided for us in his Son.

And thirdly, the shepherd is willing to live for the sheep. Obviously, any shepherd worth anything was willing to live for the sheep. Our shepherd is literally willing to and going to die for the sheep.

With that little contrast, with that background, let's look at the perfections of the shepherd. In verses 11 through 18, there are three things that Jesus brings before us. The first one is the sacrifice he willingly makes. The sacrifice he willingly makes, and verse 11 shows us this first characteristic, he is good. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

There's more than one word in the Greek language for the word good. This is the word *kalos*. We get the word calligraphy from it, right? The idea of this word is good in the sense that it is beautiful. Good in the sense that it is winsome. Good in the sense that it is lovely. Good in the sense that it is excellent. It's the opposite of everything that is false. It's the opposite of everything that is hypocritical. It's the opposite of everything that's phony. That's what Jesus is saying. Remember, the contrast is chapter nine, the bad shepherds. Chapter ten, the good shepherd. The shepherds of chapter nine that are leading Israel care nothing for the sheep. They're all in it for themselves, and so he's contrasting himself in that way.

Again, he says, here is this fourth of the I am's, right? I am the good shepherd. And it's the definite article in front of it again, isn't it? We saw it with I am the bread of life. I'm the sufficient one. I am the light of the world. I will show you the way that you should go. I am the door. I am the point of entry. I am the good shepherd. We'll see the other three as we go on in the gospel of John.

There are three adjectives in the New Testament that describe our Lord as being our shepherd. We'll probably look at this next week again but just let me put them before you. There is this truth of he's the good shepherd, right? He's good. That is within this setting of being our shepherd. He is the good shepherd, John 10. And we're going to see why he's the good shepherd. He is the great shepherd. In Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 20, he's the great shepherd. And then when you get to 1 Peter, he is the chief shepherd. Jesus is described in the New Testament as being the good shepherd, the great shepherd, and the chief shepherd. We'll touch on the significance of each of those. But here's what Spurgeon said about this. "There is more in Jesus, the good shepherd, than you can pack away in a shepherd. He is the good, the great, the chief, multiplied shepherd. Let me say that again. The chief shepherd, but he is much more. Emblems to set him forth may be multiplied as the drops of the morning, but the whole multitude will fail to reflect all his brightness. He is inconceivably above our conceptions, unutterably above our utterances." That's our good shepherd. That's our great shepherd. That's our chief shepherd.

So, we ask the question, why? When Jesus says, I am the good shepherd, we say, why? Why are you the good shepherd? Look at what he says. Because he lays down his life for the sheep. He lays down his life for the sheep. In this 11th verse, in that one statement, I am the good shepherd. Jesus, why are you the good shepherd? Because the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I would suggest we could take the rest of the morning and probably a Sunday or two after, just to develop the truth of what is in that statement. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. There is a staggering amount of truth with regard to who Jesus is and what he does, just in those words on our behalf. As you're reading this, it's almost as if he says this in a sense in passing. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. It's not to minimize it in any way. He's going to say it in this

11th verse. He's going to say it in the 15th verse. He's going to say it in the 17th verse. He's going to say it in the 18th verse. He wants us to understand and get the truth that one of the primary things that exemplifies and characterizes the good shepherd is he lays down his life for the sheep.

Let's look at this. It's in contrast, first of all, to verses 12 and 13. Let's read verses 12 and 13. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees. And the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. That's chapter 9. That's those guys. Here's chapter 10, and the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

What we have in verses 11 and 15 specifically is we have, as some have said, the most important word in the Bible. How about that? The most important word in the Bible. You look at verse 11. What's the most important word in the Bible? I am the good shepherd. One word. It's just one word. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. You know what it is? It's the little preposition "for". It's the little word *hupere*. We have the most important word, perhaps, in all the Bible in that one preposition. It points to the kind of death that Jesus is going to die. That's what that little word does. This most important word in all the Bible is pointing us directly to the kind of death that Jesus is going to die. And what kind of death is he going to die? He's the good shepherd.

How would you describe the nature of his death on our behalf? Well, the Scriptures are filled with the truth behind this little preposition for. We can begin to explain it in this way. It is vicarious. The Latin word *vicar*, representative of, is this word vicarious. He took our place. It is substitutionary. Those two words are kind of like synonyms – vicarious, substitutionary. Literally, he took my place on the cross. I should have died for my sin. My sin is what separates me from God, and that sin has to be accounted for. It has to be paid for. What Jesus says he has done as the good shepherd is he has taken my place. Instead of me, the enemy of God, deserving of death, his own Son, Jesus, the perfect one, without sin, takes my place and your place. That is vicarious. That is substitutionary.

It is also penal in the sense that a penalty has to be paid. Now, that's a very unpopular thing today. Even numbers of conservative so-called theologians are pushing back increasingly on this idea that there is a penalty that is involved in the death of Christ. But my friends, the Scriptures are clear that the wrath of God was poured out on his son. And Jesus took all of that on himself. So, in that sense, it is vicarious, it is substitutionary, and it is penal. A penalty needed to be paid.

Jesus paid that in his atonement. So, if you just look at the word atonement, just break it into two words, at moment. At that moment, in the covering of my sin, in that atoning death, Jesus covered over my sin in the shedding of his blood, and the giving of his life, and his death on the cross. So, my friends, when Jesus says, I am the good shepherd, and he tells us why, it is because I am willing to lay down my life on behalf of the sheep. It is an amazing thing.

Now, here's the key to all of it, isn't it? It's voluntary. It's voluntary. He did it not under compulsion. He did it not because he was forced to. He did it because he voluntarily lays down. The verb lays down is present tense, active voice, which means the subject of that verb, which is Jesus, is the one who's giving himself for us. He lays down his life for us, in that sense of offering himself for us. And he did it because a characteristic of the good shepherd is that he lays down his life for the sheep.

Now, the second thing that we see is the knowledge of the shepherd. The knowledge of the shepherd, verses 14 through 16. We start in verse 14, I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me. He's the only one who knows. He's the only one who knows, right? We don't know. I mean, we think we know, and we know as best we can, but he's the only one who knows.

If you had looked at the life and the man Lot in the Old Testament, and the story of Sodom, you would have looked at that man, and you would have said, no way. This guy is not a follower of Jehovah God. This guy has got some issues ...until you get to the New Testament. Peter says in 2 Peter that this righteous man Lot, his soul was vexed with all the sin that he saw around him. We would have written him off, I'm pretty sure, because there wasn't a lot there to look at and say, this guy is a good, righteous man. But God saw between all of that, and He saw the heart.

We would have looked at Judas, a disciple, an apostle of Jesus, and we'd have said, yeah, he's one of them. He's in the group. He's part of it ... until we realize he wasn't. And so, here it is. The only one who knows the sheep, He is the one who knows. I think there should be comfort in that. That should encourage us. He knows us, right? Again, that point that we made earlier, He knows everything about you, and He loves you, and He loves me. Packer put it this way: "What matters supremely is not, in the last analysis, the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlines it, the fact that He knows me. I am graven on the palm of His hands. I am never out of His mind. All my knowledge of Him depends on His sustained initiative in knowing me." That's amazing that that's the way He loves us. That's the way He moves towards us. That's the way He pursues us, shows us His kindness. On a lighter side, there was a t-shirt that said, Jesus loves you. And then right below that line, it said, then again, He loves everybody.

Look at the second thing, a relationship like no other. Verse 15, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep. If you've been with us way back in the opening of John's Gospel, remember he was bringing in this Trinitarian truth. He was talking about the Father and the Son and the Spirit, and we were grappling with the mystery and the wonder of the Trinity. Well, he does it again here, doesn't he? John slips in the doctrine of the Trinity, and he speaks of the love of the Father and the love of the Son, and the love of the Son towards the Father, and he speaks of the knowledge that they have of one another. This immense, vast, beyond our capacity to ever understand and grasp, this relationship between the Father, the Son, and of course, also the Holy Spirit, but just the two are mentioned here.

But notice what he says about that. Just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father (Jesus is speaking), and I lay down my life for the sheep. He's speaking of this relationship as if we are also in this, and we are. This is not to say that we know the Father or we know the Son at the depth that they know each other. It's not to say that, yeah, we love God and we love Jesus at the same level that they love each other. No, of course, we could never say that. But I think what he is saying is it's a reciprocal relationship. We reciprocate. We love our Father. We love our Savior. We love the Holy Spirit. And in turn, we experience that love. We want to know more of the Father. We want to know more of the Son. We want to know more of the Spirit. There is, I think, in

that sense when he starts off that verse and says, just as, and he brings us into this picture, I think that's the emphasis that he's pointing to and speaking of. So, it's a wonderful truth.

But notice now in verse 16, the others that are brought in. This is an amazing verse as well. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice, so there will be one flock and one shepherd. This verse, again, is worthy of one Sunday all by itself. But I'm kind of sensitive to that stuff anymore. And so, we're just putting it in with all these other verses. But this verse has really got a whole lot in it. It's prophetic. It's looking at really the program of God for the ages. And what he says here is simply to look forward to the church and the beginning of the church. It's totally unexpected. There isn't anybody in this group listening to Jesus talking about being the good shepherd that could have ever anticipated him saying verse 16. That's how significant verse 16 is. This was not on anybody's radar. This wasn't on anybody's bingo card. Jesus is going to introduce the church in verse 16. Not a chance.

But again, look at that. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. Now, he's already told us about a previous fold, hasn't he? And that fold was Israel. That fold was the nation of Israel, Judaism, the Jewish people. But now he's speaking of another fold, a different fold. And this one he says, I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So, there will be one flock and one shepherd. He must bring them. Who's in view here? Us. Most of us are Gentiles. We're in view here. He's talking about us. The other fold are Gentiles.

Believe me, this is not what the Jewish people were ready to hear in that day for centuries after that either, right? The Gentiles are being brought into this fold. This is the missionary mandate. This is the Great Commission that's being brought before us. Jesus says that this is in fact what is going to unfold. In Ephesians chapter 2, you can just jot down verses 11 through 18. That's the fulfillment. It's a great statement on the part of the Apostle Paul talking about how God has brought together Gentiles and Jews and brought them into one company called the church. There is in that sense in the church to be diversity as well as unity. The glory of the church is how God brings together people who are from all these different backgrounds, all these different

situations, all these different upbringings, all these differences, and yet he brings them together and they are one. One flock, one shepherd. Jesus as the source of that unity.

And then look lastly, verses 17 and 18, the sovereignty of the shepherd. The sovereignty of the shepherd. For this reason, the Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father. Listen, this is so important. What Jesus is saying here is he is not a victim. Jesus is never a victim. Jesus is never to be seen as a martyr. The stress of Scripture in talking about the life and death of our Lord is that it was fulfilling prophetic Scripture. It was the realized plan of God. How many times in the Gospel of John have we already seen John say in relating the plans and the plots of the Jewish leaders saying his time had not yet come? They wanted to do him in. They wanted to kill him. They wanted to take his life and then John says, but his time had not yet come. That's all Jesus is saying here. He is waiting on the Father. He's waiting on the Father for the fulfillment of Scripture. Jesus is the one who is in control. He is the one who is sovereign.

When we look ahead to John 19, when Jesus is standing before Pilate, and I'll just paraphrase, and Pilate is questioning him, and Jesus isn't saying anything, and Pilate says, hey, don't you know that I hold your life in my hands? Do you know who is talking to you? Do you know I'm the most powerful man in the room? And what does Jesus say? Well, Jesus doesn't answer him, but in effect he says, no, you're not. Not actually. There's one far more powerful than you. That's the sovereignty of our Lord.

And then look, death was the means of resurrection. Verse 18 again, no one takes it from me, but I lay it down to my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father. Death was the means of resurrection. That's the point that he's making. His authority is such that he can lay it down, and that he can take it up again. That's the point of verse 17.

Look at verse 17. You have that purpose clause. For this reason, the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. And then in that 18th verse, you have the conjunction and, so he has authority over everything, over his life, over his death, over his resurrection. He was raised because death could not hold him.

We're going to pick up here next Sunday but look at verses 19 through 21. There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. Many of them said, he has a demon, and he is insane. Why listen to him? Others said, these are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind? It's the same truth we've seen so many times. The gospel never does nothing, does it? The gospel never does nothing. The truth often divides. You see a picture here of unbelief, the blindness of unbelief. It's not a lack of information. It's not a lack of clarity. Jesus was absolutely clear. Jesus was open and transparent about who he was and the declarations that he made, but it shows us the power of unbelief.

What do we take away? Jesus died on the cross so that we might have a relationship with God and enjoy and delight in him forever. I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Let me ask you, who wouldn't want a shepherd like that? Who wouldn't want a shepherd like that? Who wouldn't want a shepherd who would lay down his life? Who wouldn't want a shepherd who knows you perfectly and loves you as you are? Who wouldn't want a shepherd who is sovereign over all the details of life? That's the Savior. That's the Lord Jesus. That's who the gospel speaks of.

When the gospel says to us that we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. It's the offer of a Good Shepherd in your life, and I trust that if you have never put your faith in Jesus alone, that this might be the morning that you say yes to the Good Shepherd, that you agree with him about what he has said about you. You agree with him about what he has said about Jesus, and you will agree that all you have to do is to believe and you'll receive the forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life.

Let's pray. Father God, we thank you again for our great, our good, our Chief Shepherd Jesus. Thank you for his sinless life. Thank you for the beauty of his life. Thank you for the excellence of his life. Thank you for the love that he has shown to us in the giving of his life on our behalf. Father, may we live in such a way that we bring glory to your name. May we live in such a way that we honor the name of our Shepherd. We pray again, if there is anyone here this morning who has never trusted Jesus as

their Savior, that your Spirit would open their eyes and their heart to believe this morning, to receive this wonderful and amazing gift. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.