

“What Makes Your Shepherd ‘Good’”

(John 10:11-18)

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Text: *“I am the good shepherd, I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.”*

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. My dear friends in Christ Jesus, this day in the season of Easter is known as “Good Shepherd Sunday” from this Good-News-filled Gospel of John 10, the Good Shepherd chapter of the Holy Bible. But why and in what sense is your Savior and Lord, “Good”? What makes Him the “Good” Shepherd? What does “good” really mean?

The word of course is one of those sorely overly-used words, like the word “love”. We use the word “good” it seems *all* the time and as a result, probably lose something of its meaning, esp. in terms of how it’s used here in John 10. We see “good” movies, and eat “good” food, we have “good” days as opposed to “bad” days, we feel “good” and when we walk into stores we look for “good” deals, we constantly do things for our “good” and hope to live a “good” life. We tell our children to be “good”. But what is this word on the level of Jesus and His salvation for us really all about? How is He “good,” how is He our “Good” Shepherd?!

John 10, verses 14 and 15 really boils down to two basic qualities. Let’s read these verses again: ***“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.”*** In summary, there are two little words – two basic action verbs – which describe in what way Jesus is your “Good” Shepherd. They are the words, *ginosko*, which when translated means “to know,” and *tithemi*, which when translated means “to lay down.” Jesus is “good” in that He knows you and by His grace, you now know Him AND secondly, Jesus is “good” in that while knowing you so intimately and completely, He laid down His life for you.

These two words which define “good” are quite amazing to say the least. Once again, Jesus is your “Good” Shepherd because He knows you! But wait, you know if you think about it, knowing you, really knowing you and knowing me, *that* should be a reason perhaps that He *not* be good to you and *not* good to me!

It is not uncommon in our experience that we will speak of someone we are so impressed with as being “so good to us.” It is like hearing someone who is experiencing the early stages of romance! “Oh, and he is sooo *good* to me!” But of course he is! Think of where he or she is at, at the time of courtship, when one sees *the best* of another...their best behavior, their best qualities, their best appearance, their best energy, their best laughter and their best of everything...and to celebrate what they see in these best of circumstances, they are “good” to you. They treat you with respect and kindness, they honor you and praise you, compliment you, shower you with gifts, tell you how great you are. And some folks look back with longing

reminiscence, ***"Remember, the good 'ol days...remember how "good" things were, and how good you were to me?!"***

But later on, you really get to know people! And what happens as you get to know, really know someone else; when the honeymoon is over, when you get to know their idiosyncrasies, when you memorize their every fault and weakness, when you can anticipate their every bad habit, when you know just how they can be in those less than "good" moments in time. What then? In knowing someone more and more, are we still "good" to one another? Do we still heap praise for all of their good qualities? Do we still serve them with unconstrained generosity because they are after all still God's gift to us from heaven (I am thinking of how Luther viewed his dear wife Katie)? Do we still treat the other as one who is precious to us simply because they are precious to God? Are we still good towards one another in spite of the universal predicament of sin so easy to see?

And so often the answer is "no". "No, are you kidding...you still expect me to be good to that person?! Do you *really* know them like I know them?? If you really knew them like I know him or her, then you wouldn't be so good, so kind, or so patient. Just give it time and you'll see, just wait until you really know them and you might not feel the same way! You might not want to be so good to them!"

But here's the amazing part in regards to your Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. In His grace, He goes just the opposite direction; He draws near; He comes toward you. First off, this whole section in John's Gospel clearly portrays Jesus as the Good Shepherd and you, as one of His sheep. What about sheep? What is it like to be in the middle of a hot pasture and say for instance, pick up a lost and straying sheep? Picture the animal up to your chest and your nose right up to their wooly coat...can you smell the pleasant aroma?! No you can't, because what you're smelling isn't pleasant at all! It is a distinctive smell of a hot and wandering animal; the sheep is dirty. And to make matters more interesting, it is a *sheep* you've just picked up...a particular animal which isn't necessarily good for developing any amount of patience in you if you're a shepherd. Sheep are notorious for wandering, acting dumb, getting lost and straying off...they can be a lot of work, because they are *constantly* going astray; it is what they do all the time! So, just how fond are you now of this sheep? This dirty, smelly, wandering off, and dumb sheep? Just how good are you inspired to be towards this ridiculous animal? And it is in the midst of such imagery that Jesus comes to you and gladly describes Himself, ***"I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me (vs 14)."***

And now we can appreciate what good really means. He knows you...knows *everything* about you. Your every doubt, your every fear, your every sin, your every failure, your every bad habit, your every fault, your every bad experience, your every perpetual stinky behavior, your every tendency to wander off from God, your every expression of the sin that is in your heart (Matt. 15)...He knows it ***all!*** In fact, He knows it *better* than you do. And alas, this is what demonstrates the true goodness of Jesus Christ, because He is nevertheless good to you. He does not treat you as your sins deserve! He does not look at your downside and say, "I'm outta here!" "Adios, I no longer like what I see!" or claim that He ought no longer be good to you now that He's collected all the info on you. No, much, much to the contrary, He says, "I know you...I

know you completely, I know you up, down, forward, and back; I know your thoughts, your secrets, your heart, your mind...I know you absolutely...and I still love you, I am your **Good** Shepherd...I know you and remain close to you, to hold you, to forgive you, to love you, to protect you, not to abandon you, but to stay with you." That's good...this is what good really means.

Americans clearly state what they want out of life. They want good health and good things to live that American dream. But how many people list that their goal is to be good to undeserving people? That their idea of a good life is to love the unlovable, to serve the selfish, to hold close those who in fact resist and make life difficult? Not many folks would consider that a good life that is dedicated to saving sinners, instead we want to define "good" as only that which benefits what we want for ourselves. Well, now we consider the second part of the biblical definition, the part which most assuredly blows us away.

What does Christ do for these He knows? What did He do because He knew you and because He is truly good? The second action word is again *tithemi*. You might think as a result of really getting to know me – *knowing everything* – He might consider this the occasion to get out of town! But no, the second word is even more amazing. How does God define good? Jesus is your Good Shepherd because He laid down His life for you. Didn't just pat you on the back and say, "hang in there good buddy," "better luck next time," "you can do it," "we're all rootin' for ya," "have a good life," "I'll pray for you," "don't call me, I'll call you." No, He shows us good and takes the next step. Because He knows you, He did not turn the other way from what needed to be done for your own good. He knew what had to be done, because your life was insufficient for what had to be done...a sinner could not be left to die, because death would be all he or she would ever know. So instead, He laid down His life for you. So Christ says at verse 15 so simply and so beautifully, **"and I lay down my life for the sheep."**

"For those stinky, dumb, wandering, and sinful sheep, I will be good, so good that the world will never be able to comprehend my great love for my people. I lay down my life for them, every, single one of them. Because I love them, because I love you, I give my very life for you." As a result, the good life of the Good Shepherd now stands in your place; His life in place of yours...so that now the Heavenly Father looks upon you and says, there is another example of what is good: **you!** You are good now because of what Christ has done for you, put on you, made you to be...covered by His blood, saved by His grace, delivered from death and the grave, forgiven for your every sin...the Only Good One has shared His goodness with you making good, making you holy.

You now know Him intimately well. In fact, He compares your knowledge of Him and His knowledge of you with His relationship with the Heavenly Father. You now know Jesus Christ. Not as a terrible judge, not as someone who withholds goodness, but as your Good Shepherd. And in knowing what good really means, you rejoice in being His sheep. Let us by His good life for us, simply receive His good gifts over and over again through life and know with the greatest joy what the word "good" really means...it is what God in and through the Good Shepherd is towards you!