

**Sermon Text: John 10:11-18**

**Sermon Theme: The Sheep Need the Shepherd**

- 1. To Defend Them**
- 2. To Lead Them**
- 3. To Save Them**

<sup>11</sup> “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

<sup>14</sup> “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. <sup>18</sup> 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.”

Jesus used a lot of picture language in his preaching and teaching so that people could easily understand who he was and what he was here to do. These pictures have become some of the most beloved and comforting pictures to Christians of all time.

One of the great pictures that Jesus used is that of the shepherd and the sheep. There have been many paintings and drawings of this image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Maybe you have seen the image of Jesus surrounded by his sheep, standing with a shepherd crook, or with a sheep around his shoulders or in his arms. In many of those pictures, Jesus is looking lovingly at his sheep and the sheep is content and safe.

Jesus picture this picture because it was one that the Jews would easily understand. They knew how much the shepherd needed the sheep and the sheep needed the shepherd. Proper care of the sheep was crucial for a family because the shepherd needed the sheep. Sheep provided many things the family needed for their life. They provided milk, meat, and wool for clothes. They were used as a source of barter and trade with others. They were also a source of companionship. They were more than just herd animals to the family and the shepherd, many of the sheep were named and were taken care closely. Instead of a dog, the family may have had a special lamb as a pet.

The shepherd needed the sheep, but the sheep also needed the shepherd. Sheep are a herd animal. They want a good strong leader and they will follow whichever leader gave them the strongest leadership. With a good shepherd as their leader, the sheep did not need to be afraid because they knew that the shepherd was always there. Without a good shepherd, the sheep would never rest or be at peace. The sheep needed the shepherd to defend them, lead them and save them.

As you listened to Jesus’ words as we read our sermon text, did you think they were words of division that would cause anger and frustration or words of comfort that were filled with love and caring. Jesus spoke these words about 6 months before his suffering and death. He had just healed a man who had been born blind. You would think that people would have gotten the idea by now that he was the Messiah sent from God. However, the opposite was occurring. As Jesus spoke more and more about being a Savior from sin, less and less people followed him. The more he spoke about his work as the Savior, the more religious leaders plotted against him.

Even when he did something amazing and loving and heals this man born blind, the religious leaders are right there to question his miraculous act of love and mercy. They bring the man in who has been healed and put him on trial as a liar in an attempt to uncover the lies and deception of Jesus.

The religious leaders ask the questions that they think are important, “Why did he do this?” “How did he do this?” “Why did he choose you?” They do not receive the answers they are looking for.

Jesus goes and finds the man and as he talks to him and the crowd. He provides the answers for why he does these loving things. He is the Good Shepherd. There is no other shepherd like him. He has done this

because he loves his sheep. He has done this because his sheep need him to defend them, lead them and save them.

Jesus said, **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”**

When the wolves were circling the flock, when the horrible thunderstorm was mounting on the horizon, when the thieves came around the corner, this was the time that the sheep needed to be defended. It was also the time that the shepherd had to decide what kind of shepherd he was. If there are too many wolves, the storm was too big, or the thieves well-armed, the one who is not a good shepherd will seek safety. He will run away and hide and allow the sheep to fend for themselves. When the danger is gone he will return and collect whatever sheep are left and think nothing of the ones that are lost. He didn't care about the sheep.

When there is danger the sheep need a good shepherd that will defend them and keep them safe. The good shepherd will keep the fire going, will keep moving about the sheep, will raise the alarm for the other shepherds, or would even fight off the wolves or the thieves by himself even if it means injury or death. The good shepherd would not run to a safe place when the storm comes, he will gather the sheep and stay with them during the storm to make sure that nothing happens to them. To the good shepherd, every sheep is important.

Jesus picked a very good picture to use. We are the sheep, he is the shepherd. The devil is always circling us like a pack of wolves trying to tear us apart with temptation. There is always some storm of sin in our life where we are tempted to run away from our Savior, some thief of trouble or trial that wants to steal our peace and comfort.

If we try to fight these battles on our own, we will be overmatched. The wolves will be too strong, the storm will last too long, the thief is just too well-armed. We will soon tire in our fight and be consumed.

For the Jews, the wolves were already there, they were already circling those who believed in Jesus. The Pharisees, the chief priests and the teachers of the Law had already led many people into unbelief and by their threats and hatred they would lead many more away from the saving message of Jesus. These sheep needed Jesus to be a Good Shepherd and defend them.

But our Good Shepherd promises to defend us. He is always with us to battle the devil, the world and our sinful flesh keeping us from the sharp teeth of temptation and the devastation of sin and hell.

The sheep need the Good Shepherd to defend them when danger comes, but they also need the shepherd to lead them away from danger and keep them from danger. The shepherd's job of leading and guiding was almost as important as their job of defending. In the 23rd Psalm, we hear King David, a shepherd himself, talk about this. **He leads me beside quiet waters. He guides me in the paths of righteousness, 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 they comfort me.**

There were many paths that led from one pasture to another, but there were only a few of those paths that were safe paths for animals. Sheep are animals of least resistance. They will always try to follow the path that seems the easiest. However, the path that starts out easy, may not lead to safety.

There were as many dangers along those paths as there were in the pasture where the sheep came to stay. It was the shepherd who knew which path led past a lion's den, which path led along a narrow ridge, which path had poisonous plants along them, or which path was a dead end. The shepherd had the job of leading his flock along the safe path so that they would make it to their destination safely.

Leading the sheep was all about knowing each sheep individually. It was about knowing which sheep would run and which sheep would stay. It was about which sheep was scared by loud sounds and which sheep would stay near the fire. The sheep needed the shepherd to know them well so that he could lead them well. Jesus said, **“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.”**

Jesus leads us through this life on the only path that leads to heaven. Even though we know this, we want to take a different path. Many times it is an easier path than Jesus' path. We make decisions that will lead to a lot of comfort, money or fun and the least amount of hardship, conflict or problem.

The same problem that the sheep have because they follow the easy path is the same problem we have when we want to follow the easy path. But those are not always the best paths for a believer in Jesus to be on. When we make the “easy” choices we may be led into the temptation of trusting in that money more than God,

we may be led into the sin of despair when our life is no longer comfortable, or we may be led into sinful fun rather than what is God-pleasing. We don't want conflict and problems so we never speak about our faith to anyone. Even as we are walking these easy paths, we might understand that they are the wrong ones for us to be on, but they are so easy.

Jesus, our Good Shepherd, promises that although his path may not always be the easiest in this life, it is the one that is the most blessed and will lead to the place where we actually want to be. All those other "easier" paths lead to sin and unbelief, but in his Word, our Good Shepherd leads us on the path of faith which leads to heaven.

Our shepherd is good because he defends us and leads us where we need to go, but we have a greater need, the sheep need to be saved. Jesus uses this picture of the Good Shepherd to show how he would save us from our sins. **I lay down my life for the sheep. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again.** <sup>18</sup> **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."**

Our Good Shepherd does more than just defend us from danger or lead us on a safe earthly path, he is our Savior from our sins that lead to death. Jesus was willing to fight and even die for us, so that the devil could not carry us away to hell. He was willing to lay down his life so that his sheep would be with him forever.

Jesus is our Good Shepherd because the sheep need saving and that is what he has done. He has saved us from the dangers of sin, death and the devil and given us peace here on earth through him and forever in heaven.

Sheep need a good shepherd to defend them, lead them and save them. People need a Savior who will do the same thing. We have that in Jesus. May we continue to hear, listen and follow the voice of our Good Shepherd who leads us, defends us and finally will bring us to our heavenly home and may we never be tempted to follow the voice of another. Amen.