**THE GOOD SHEPHERD**

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Scripture - John 10:11-18

The expression of Jesus being 'the Good Shepherd' is a familiar one for us. We have known it from our childhood. For many of us Psalm 23, the shepherd psalm, was the first Scripture we memorized. We love the words because they give us a feeling of peace, protection and eternal hope.

When we think of a shepherd we think of green pastures and peaceful babbling brooks. But being a shepherd in Jesus' day, or even in today's time, is not a glamorous job.

During Jesus' day there were two kinds of shepherds. First there were nomad shepherds. They led their flocks to other pastures when the pastures they were in were exhausted. And then there were those shepherds who lived in the villages like Bethlehem. They stayed there and pastured their sheep in fields they either owned or paid to use.

But the life of a shepherd was hard. The land many times was dry, as was the air. It was always hot. There were many dangers including wolves, lions and robbers and the shepherd was responsible for the sheep. You had to watch the sheep continually as sheep are not very intelligent animals. They wander off and have no sense of direction. Instead of coming back the way they came they would stop, lie down, and literally die there. Because of this, a shepherd would have to pick them up and carry them back on their shoulders because the sheep would not walk themselves. Since they were not very intelligent, the shepherd would have to carry a staff to beat off predators and use the crook in his staff to nudge the sheep when they didn't want to move.

The shepherd was clothed in a tanned whole skin with wool left on it, an under tunic to keep the sweat against his body for cooling, and a girdle with pockets for pebbles. He would toss the pebbles in the direction of the sheep to try and get their attention.

He wore a beard and long hair for convenience in the pastures. He was, as a general rule, an untidy individual that smelled of the outdoors and of sheep and was not welcome in the city.

Not all shepherds were good shepherds. Not all shepherds cared for their sheep as they should. The false shepherds were not born to their task. They came into their job, not from the calling, but for the money. When wolves threatened the flock, the false shepherd would flee, thinking only of saving his own life. The true shepherd was called to care for the sheep and naturally would defend the lives of his sheep at all costs, even their own.

A good shepherd had numerous qualities that were very desirable and today I want to talk about some of those desirable qualities.

1. **Good shepherds had faithfulness.** The sheep were the most valuable thing in their life. They would willingly lay down their life for their sheep. According to William Barclay, the famous commentator, if anything happened to the sheep, the shepherd had to prove that it was not his fault. The Law says in Exodus 22:13 regarding a man responsible for taking care of asses, oxen, or sheep: “If it is torn by beasts, let him bring evidence; he shall not make restitution for what has been torn.” The shepherd then must bring proof that the sheep didn’t die from natural causes and that he could not have prevented their death. Therefore, it was natural for the shepherd to risk his life for his sheep. Barclay relates a story from W.M. Thomson’s book titled “The Land and the Book” where he writes: “I have listened with intense interest to their graphic descriptions of downright and desperate fights with these savage beasts. And when the thief and the robber come (and come they do), the faithful shepherd has often to put his life in his hand to defend his flock. I have known more than one case where he had literally to lay it down in the contest. A poor fellow last spring, between Tiberias and Tabor, instead of fleeing, actually fought three Bedouin robbers until he was hacked to pieces with their khanjars, and died among the sheep he was defending.” Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, was willingly to lay down His life for His sheep, that is, for you and for me. As we read in the Scripture earlier, Jesus said He had the power to lay down His life and He did it willingly.
2. **Good shepherds were obedient.** They had a task to do and they were faithful to fulfill it at all costs. Jesus was obedient as the Good Shepherd, even to death on the cross. Even though He was the Promised One of God and had power to destroy all those who opposed Him, He did not do what may have pleased Him. Instead, He obediently gave up all that went with His calling and went to the cross willingly to die for our sins.
3. **Good shepherds had tenderness.** I mentioned earlier that a shepherd would carry the lambs back to the flock when they got lost. They would tenderly carry them on their shoulders. Jesus does the same for you and for me. When we go astray, He tenderly carries us on his shoulders and brings us back. When we sin, He tenderly listens to us and cares for us. There was a story, a number of years ago, titled Footprints in the Sand. In it a dead man is before Jesus, complaining that when he was suffering, he only saw one set of footprints in the sand and none of Jesus who promised to always be with him. Jesus lovingly turned to the man and explained the one set of footprints in the sand was his for he was carrying the man during his troubles.
4. **Good shepherds bind up the hurt and the sick.**  They bind up the hurt and sick sheep and care for them until they are well. Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, does the same for you and for me. For He is also the great physician, healing all our wounds whether they be physical, mental or spiritual.
5. **Good shepherds are diligent in finding good places to pasture**. A good shepherd was diligent in insuring that his sheep had the best place to feed and be nurtured. Jesus does the same for you and for me. He ensures that we are fed and led to places of worship and places where people can minister to us. And if we are reluctant to be led to those places, He prods us with His staff, that is, with situations or people, to move us in the direction we need to go for our good.
6. **Good Shepherds have wisdom.** Good shepherds have all the desirable qualities I have mentioned. And when those qualities are present, people go to them for wisdom. Jesus is the wisest shepherd who ever lived. He truly has the words of life and all who come to Him will be filled and find the true meaning of their life.

Yes, Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He is faithful, tender, binds up our wounds, feeds us on eternal food, and is wise with the answers that give us meaning in our lives. Remember Him not only as our suffering servant and Savior, but also as our Good Shepherd who cares for His sheep. He cares for you and for me and laid His life down for us, His sheep.

In Jesus Holy Name. Amen.