



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 10: 11-15

Fall 2022

"The Good Shepherd"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Seth. That's a good text for our text this morning, which is John chapter 10, verses 11 through 15, where the Lord says,

<sup>11</sup> "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters *them*. <sup>13</sup> *He flees* because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. <sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, <sup>15</sup> even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.

John 10: 11-15

A great text of Scripture. May the LORD bless the reading of it and now bless us as we consider it. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

LORD, it's a great thing to be with Your people on a Sunday morning and we thank You for this morning. We thank You for the rain You've given us and pray that You would bless us with safety as we travel the roads today. LORD, it is a blessing and we thank You for it. And thank You for this time together that we can read the Scripture, as we've

done, and consider the meaning of this great text and this great statement by Your Son that, 'He is the good shepherd; and that He lays down His life for the sheep.' And what a blessing it is to be one of the sheep. It's all of grace and we thank You for that.

But we need to be fed and just as the good shepherd leads us out into the pasture, we are in the pasture now and we seek Your blessing. May He feed us and may we be built up in the faith. And may we be men and women who are equipped for the exigencies of life, the difficulties of life, the challenges that we will face of all different kinds; for we are living in difficult days, LORD, days that challenge our faith, challenge the very notion of absolutes and truth; and we're called to be lights in the midst of this darkness. And we can only do that, and be that, as we nourish ourselves on the Word and as You nourish us through the Spirit on Your Word. And so we pray that You would feed us this morning and build us up in the faith, equip us for whatever may come this afternoon; whatever may come throughout the week, that You would equip us to be lights and bring glory to You.

Bless us now, LORD, as we sing our next hymn; prepare our hearts for a time of study, which should not only be a time of study but of worship. And I pray that You would make it both and build us up in the faith.

Thank You again for this time together and thank You for Your Son, who made it possible. It's in His name we pray. Amen

*(Message)* Have you ever spent time studying the names of Christ? It's very instructive. You could develop a complete Christology, or theology of Christ from them. He has many names and titles, some we're familiar with: 'the Son of Man', 'the Son of God', and written on His thigh, is "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS". Paul called Jesus 'Our great God and Savior'. He has glorious names that reflect His majesty: 'The Rock', 'The Sunrise', 'The Morning Star'.

There are many other names we could add to the list which conjure thoughts of His power and glory, along with names that instill within us confidence in Him. He's all powerful and absolutely reliable. In fact, one of His names is "the Almighty."

But the most personal, and maybe the best loved of the names, or titles, the Lord has is this one, that of "Shepherd". We find it throughout the Old Testament; Isaiah 40 prophesies that He "will come with might." Then, "Like a shepherd, He will tend His flock. In His arm He will gather the lambs and carry *them* in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes." (vs11&12).

Three times in the New Testament Jesus is called a "shepherd". In Hebrews 13, verse 20, He's called "the great Shepherd of the sheep." Peter called Him "the Chief Shepherd." (1Pe 5:4). And here in John 10, verse 11, the LORD describes Himself as "the good shepherd." He's everything that David wrote about in Psalm 23. "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want." "Shall not want."; what a great promise that is. It calls to mind thoughts of His care for us, His flock. And what is clear is that His care for His sheep knows no limits.

The false shepherds exploit the sheep for their own gratification—they are thieves. But Christ desires our wellbeing. He leads the sheep out to good pasture. He feeds them, protects them, cares for the, so that they will have good health. He is "the good shepherd", which is a description full of meaning. The adjective *good* in Greek is *kalos*. It also means *beautiful*. We're familiar with that from words like *calligraphy*, which means 'beautiful writing.'

And the LORD is truly the beautiful shepherd, (though His beauty in His incarnation was not in His physical appearance). Isaiah described that appearance. Really it's the only description we have in the Bible of His physical appearance and that was: He is "like a root out of dry ground." (Is 53:2). There's not much beauty in that.

No, His beauty was inside. It was His character; and it was a compelling character. Tax collectors and sinners were drawn to Him by His kindness, as were lepers whom He touched with compassion. He spent time with them, dining with them, and people loved Him for it.

But the beauty here, the *goodness* of the shepherd in John 10, is really explained in the next statement that the Lord makes, where He says, "The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." (vs10).

Shepherds in Palestine were known to put their lives at risk for the sheep, to lay them on the line for the welfare of the flock. David, as a shepherd boy in Bethlehem did that. He told of how when a lion and then a bear attacked the flock, 'He went after them and rescued a lamb out of the mouth of the beast. And when it rose up against him, he said he seized it by the beard and struck it and killed it.' (1Sam 17:34). A good shepherd puts the welfare of the sheep ahead of his own.

That tells us something important about shepherds: They weren't the sentimental figures we might imagine them to be, sitting around idly with lambs gathered in their arms. They were strong and brave. It was a manly job; a dirty, exhausting, and dangerous job being a shepherd. David was certainly that kind of person—and he is a picture of our Lord.

But a picture that stops short of our Lord because the Lord not only laid His life on the line for His sheep, He laid it down for them—and gave it up for them. And that must have been a very rare occurrence among Palestinian shepherds; and when it happened it was accidental. But with our Lord, it was deliberate, it was planned.

He is different from all other shepherds—and His death was different from that of all other shepherds. When a shepherd died in defense of his sheep, it was a futile defense of the flock. It left the sheep defenseless and completely exposed to the predators and danger—and helpless. But the Lord's death was successful. It was the defense and the very means of deliverance: His death meant life for the sheep. His work as a shepherd was to die.

And His death is the theme of this passage. Four times He speaks of it: In verses 11 and 15, and then in verses 17 and 18. But in verse 11 we learn the nature of His death—three things in particular. First of all, it was voluntary. That's made obvious in

verse 17 and verse 18 where He states, 'I laid down My life. No one has taken it from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative.'

In fact, we'll see this later on in the garden when they come to arrest Him and they want His identification. They're looking for Jesus, and He says, "I am *He*," and they fall down at the very power of the words, (Jn 18:6). Which is to signify what He says right here, 'No one takes His life from Him'; it's voluntary. He gives it up. "I lay it down on my initiative." (Jn 10:18b).

So the death of Christ was not an accident. He didn't die before His time. He died right on time. In chapter 12 He speaks of His "hour", meaning the time of His death. He was troubled. He knew it was coming, but He asks, "...shall I say, Father, save Me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour." (vs27). His whole life was planned for that hour, for that moment, for that event. It was the plan from all eternity—ordained.

Peter said that. In the first sermon of the church, on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, verse 23, He was "delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God." Who slew Christ? Well, ultimately, it was the Father. Jesus' death was no mistake. It was the plan of the Triune God from all eternity—and it was voluntary.

It was also vicarious. That's the second thing we learn. It was a substitutionary death. It was "for the sheep", Jesus said. (vs11b). It was in their place. Now the preposition *for*, has different meanings in different places, such as 'for the benefit of'. But it also means, 'in the place of.' And that's this meaning here.

We have an ironic example of that in chapter 11, when Caiaphas, the high priest, speaking of his plot to kill Christ said, "...it is expedient for you...", (the others, you men who are the leaders of this nation), "...it is expedient for you", (of the Sanhedrin) "that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish." (vs50). "...die for the people", means that, 'He die instead of the people dying.' What Caiaphas was saying is, 'We need to get rid of this man; he is a problem for us. If we don't, the Romans will

come and take our place away. And so he has to die so that we live.' (In other words, he's saying, 'Die in their place').

He spoke, (Caiaphas did), spoke better than he knew. John said Caiaphas 'prophesied unwittingly': "...he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation and not for the nation only, but in order that He might gather also together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad." (Jn 11:51-52). It's a death for the Jews and the Gentiles alike. In other words, He would die in their place as their substitute.

And that's the meaning here in our text, 'in the place of the sheep". (Jn 10:11b). Because only in that way could the sheep be saved from danger and judgment.

In Romans chapter 6, verse 23, Paul wrote that "the wages of sin is death". Sin is a hard master. Men pay their workers in dollars, shekels, Euros, whatever. Sin pays its servants in death. It's a hard wage, but it's fair, it's just. It's what sin earns—which is really a debt. The sins we commit build up great debt with God. So we're all obligated to receive our wage, which means to suffer death's penalty because sin against God is infinite in its guilt.

But Paul also wrote, "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." (Rom 5:20). And in His grace, God provided a substitute to receive the wage in our place, to pay off our debt for us. That's what Christ did on the cross: He died our death. The penalty has been paid. The sheep will never pay it for themselves—it's been paid. Actually, it has been paid, and paid fully by our substitute. And that's the meaning here.

[However, there is no suggestion that His death was merely an example—that it was for the purpose of illustrating God's love in order that we would be moved by it to love others. That's one of the old, (but very common today), interpretations of the atonement; but it empties the atonement of all of its value, as 'it's just an example'. And it's very common today to hear that kind of explanation: the 'Moral Influence Theory' is what it's called in various forms. Now there is some truth to it because, as we understand what Christ suffered for us on the cross, it should move us to love as He loved. And so it does have that effect.]

But that was not the essence of the crucifixion. The assumption our Lord makes is that the sheep are in mortal danger: They need to be rescued. And they are in mortal danger from something far worse than a lion or a bear that is about to pounce upon them—they are under the very wrath of God. That's John chapter 3, verse 36: 'The wrath of God abides on the man or woman who doesn't obey the Lord'. That's how that great chapter, from which we get John 3:16, that's how it ends, with the threat, the real danger, that we face of the wrath of God.

Well, it's in their defense, it's for our rescue that He laid down His life by putting Himself between us and divine judgment. So when the judgment we deserved fell on Him, He saved us by His death. So it was a *voluntary* sacrifice; it was a *vicarious*, (or *substitutionary*), sacrifice—and third, it was a *specific* sacrifice. He died for a specific group of people, a specific number. He died for the sheep. He did not lay down His life for everyone in general; He died for His people in particular.

As we saw, it was for "the children of God" according to John chapter 11, verse 52, which we just read. It's for the elect. —Those whom God chose to save... He saved. The atonement of Christ, the death of Christ, is not feckless but *effective*. It actually achieves its purpose—which is to pay for sin, remove guilt, and purchase the sinner; save the sheep.

Now, that tells us a great deal about the love of God. It tells us, first of all, it's *effective*. He not only desires the best for us, He actually does it. His love is not sentimental—it acts; it accomplishes. And it cannot be frustrated. The Lord is an absolutely reliable Savior. Nobody loves like the Son loves; like the Father loves; like the Triune God loves. Nobody helps like the Triune God helps. And this second Person of the Trinity calls Himself, "The Good Shepherd", who helps like a shepherd.

And to reinforce that, the Lord makes another contrast in verse 12 and verse 13, "He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of 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 is not concerned about the sheep."

The hired hand was a servant and not an owner. He had no real interest in the sheep. His commitment was to himself and his own wellbeing. He is a person who is in it for the money—and that's all. So when caring for the flock became dangerous, he abandoned it. He has no personal investment in the flock—so took no personal risk for it.

Now Jesus didn't identify the hireling. He was a common figure around the flock—and someone that everyone to whom He's speaking would have been aware of and known exactly what He was referring to. And so He may not have been identifying the hireling and it was just the idea to use him as something of a foil to illustrate His great love for the sheep.

But the religious leaders fit the description: Remember the events of chapter 9 and their treatment of the blind man had just occurred. The Lord's teaching in chapter 10 is connected with that. When this man was challenged about who healed him, he did not back away from what he affirmed. And he affirmed that the Lord healed him, (since He, in fact, did). And when he said that, that conflicted with the men of the synagogue, the leaders of the synagogue with their personal and religious interest. And so what did they do? They 'put him out of the synagogue.' They 'didn't protect the sheep.'

And there are men like that in the ministry today: hirelings, mercenaries, people in it for pay, (or in it for whatever they can get out of it), but who risk nothing for the truth. In fact, they oppose the truth. So they don't teach the whole counsel of God; don't proclaim the Gospel of grace; don't warn of sin and call people to repentance and faith. They don't because they don't believe it.

In 1923, while still a professor at Princeton, J Gresham Machen wrote the book, *Christianity and Liberalism*, to explain why liberal Christianity isn't Christian. It is as relevant today as it was 100 years ago. He wrote how liberal preachers will use the

language of the Bible and the language of orthodoxy in sermons, but use it in a way very different from its real meaning. They oppose, they hate the doctrine of the cross.

He wrote, "They speak with disgust of those who believe...", and then he has this quote about them, "...that the blood of our Lord, shed in a substitutionary death, *placates* an alienated deity and makes possible welcome for the returning sinner." Now that quote was taken from Harry Emerson Fosdick, the leading liberal of the day.

Some years later, Dietrich Bonhoeffer heard Fosdick preach at the Riverside Church that John D. Rockefeller Jr. built for Fosdick. Bonhoeffer went back to his room that morning and wrote in his diary of the sermon, "Quite unbearable." He called it "idolatrous religion." Then he wrote, "Perhaps the Anglo-Saxons are really more religious than we are, but they are certainly not more Christian—at least if they still have sermons like that." Fosdick and those like him, are 'hirelings'. They don't seek the good of the sheep. They use them and destroy them.

There's only one message for a believer in such a place as that: 'Get out of Sodom! Go where Christ is! He is the 'good shepherd' ', (And He says it again in verse 14). He cares for the sheep completely and sacrificially.

And Jacob gives a good illustration of that. You'll remember, after he flees from Laban, (and Laban catches up with him and his wives and all of his herds just before he's about to make it across the river), he explains to Laban all that he went through as his faithful shepherd for so many years. He said, "By day the heat consumed me and the frost by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes." (Gen 31:4). Now that's a good shepherd. It's a sacrificial life that he led in service of his patron, Laban.

Well Christ cares for us in that way. He is the One of Psalm 121, "He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep." (vs4). He is our protector; He is our provider. He supplies all our needs: physical needs and spiritual needs. That's what the good shepherd does. He feeds His sheep—even in dry seasons when the land is barren, He leads his sheep to pasture.

I used to see that in Israel years ago. There were shepherds and their flocks of sheep, or herds of goats, on the Judean hills just east of Jerusalem, down toward the

desert. It amazed me because during the winter there would appear to be nothing out there to graze on—just rocks and dirt. And yet, the sheep and goats would be out there grazing on something. The shepherd knows where to take them. All they had to do was go where the shepherd would lead them—and they were fed.

And so it is for us. When it's spiritually dry, or a spiritual winter, (and nations go through that, churches go through that, and we go through that personally, there are times of dryness in our life), but in those times, Christ cares for us and feeds us. For time and eternity, for body and soul, the Lord feeds us as we follow Him. He knows how to do it. He's the shepherd; and as the Psalm promises, we "shall not want." (Ps 23:1).

And so, we are to follow Him. We are to rely upon Him. We're to trust Him in those dry seasons, through those valleys, "the valley of the shadow of death." (Ps 23:4). That's the nature of our relationship with Christ. We follow, and He provides. It's a close relationship, one of mutual knowledge between us.

And that is what the Lord goes on to state. He knows His sheep, and He says they know Him. Because He knows us He cares about us, He leads us, shepherds us wherever we are. And because we know Him we trust Him and we follow Him. "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know me." (vs14).

He knows our number just as He knows the number of every hair that's on our head. He knows the number of everyone who is His sheep. He knows who are His own. He knew who we were when He bought each of us with His own blood. When He paid the ransom price for us, He knew who we were at that moment on the cross. And He has not lost one of us—and will not lose one of us.

But He not only knows who we are, He knows what we are. He knows our names; He knows our nature; He knows our person and character; our age and maturity. He knows us completely, and it is impossible that He could overlook or forget one of us.

He's intimately and infinitely involved with each of His sheep. He knows where we are at all times. He knows our trials. He knows our needs. He knows our weaknesses and fears. He knows when we are sick, when we're worried, and when we're

discouraged. He knows our situation better than we do. And that should be a great comfort to us because as sheep we wander: We get into trouble; sheep get lost; they get snatched up in the jaws of wolves. As the hymn writer put it, we are “prone to wander.” But the Lord is a pursuing shepherd, a pursuing Savior. He seeks and finds—and never fails.

He knows us well. He knows us thoroughly. Nothing about us surprises Him. He knows our needs and the secrets of our hearts. And He's known us from the beginning; He's known us from all eternity. Mr. Spurgeon said, "He did not buy His sheep in the dark." He knew all about us from the beginning. He's known all about us—always. There's never been a moment in His existence He didn't know us.

Well, this is one of the great imponderables of the Godhead: That He could see us from all eternity, “Wrecked and ruined by the fall, yet love us notwithstanding all”, as another hymn put it. But He does; He loves us “notwithstanding all.” That's a great and glorious truth because it means if He loved us when we were ruined and rebellious, completely unlovely with fists clenched against Him in rebellion, then He will not stop loving us now that we are His redeemed and reconciled: His children, His sons and daughters.

It's a reminder that we're absolutely secure in His care and in His love. ‘It's a great and glorious truth’, as I say. I call it an ‘imponderable’, ‘past finding out’, ‘beyond understanding fully’—but that's what Jesus said in verse 14, that, ‘He knows us and He loves us, in spite of who we were.’ And because of that He's made us what He is.

But, having called that an imponderable, what Jesus said in verse 15 is just as imponderable: He knows us; He's all-knowing; but **we also know Him**. In fact He said, ‘We know Him like the Father knows Him, and like He knows the Father.’ Now think about that. How can that possibly be true? How can we know the Son of God the way the Father knows Him? Well not, of course, to the degree that the Father knows Him, which is infinitely, and completely, and perfectly—not in that sense, but we know Him,

really, personally. We know Him truly and we have real affection for Him. We love Him; we love to hear Him; and love to hear about Him. And hear Him; for His sheep know His voice. They are drawn to that voice. They are drawn to Him.

We hear His voice when the Scriptures are read or when they're preached. It's the Word of God. It's divine revelation. It, and only it, is that. That's what our ears respond to. That's spiritually what we're drawn to. It's not oratory style, or eloquence. There's nothing wrong with that; that can be very helpful and beneficial but it alone doesn't feed the soul. It's the Bible and biblical teaching that feeds the soul: because Christ's sheep want to hear His voice and that's where we hear the voice of Christ. It's in the Word of God. And as we hear it we learn of Him.

It is as we see Him in Scripture, and we learn of Him, that we are encouraged and strengthened in the faith. We are given wisdom in that way; and courage, and life, and more. We're actually transformed as we study the Word of God, as we read it and ponder it—and as we hear it taught. It's by learning of Him that we become like Him in our character and our practice. It's what the regenerate, the born again, naturally need and what they want.

And we can recognize it when we hear it. We have new ears to hear and new eyes to see. And we naturally respond to the Word of God and the Word of Christ that comes through to us.

Bonhoeffer went to Riverside Church, which is a great, Gothic cathedral in New York City—a very impressive building; no expense was spared. It looks like a church. What does a church building look like?...Well go look at that one and you'll know. That is what a church looks like, (we would think). But he went there and he didn't hear the voice of Christ. Not there.

That evening he went down the street to a Presbyterian church, Broadway Presbyterian Church, where the minister was reviled by Fosdick as “a fundamentalist”. But that's where Bonhoeffer heard Christ. He went home that evening, back to his room,

and in his diary he wrote, "The sermon was astonishing. A completely biblical sermon." And that's because it was about Christ.

Now I can't vouch for all of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology; but from his words and his actions, he took Christ and the Christian faith seriously and was a man that reflected much of Christ. Very soon after his experience in America he decided to leave. He'd come over because friends and people that knew him, or appreciated him, wanted to remove him from the danger that was building in Germany in the '30s. But he decided, very soon after coming, to go back to Germany to serve the church in that dark and godless day of the Third Reich.

The born again know Christ. They know Him in varying degrees, but they know Him and they follow Him. And they become increasingly like Him as they follow Him and sacrifice. That's what's emphasized in this passage, Christ's self-sacrifice. —And we become like that. In verse 11 He said of the good shepherd that he "lays down his life for the sheep." He ends in verse 15, "I lay down My life for the sheep." And so if we love Christ, then we will love the sheep, and we will serve the sheep sacrificially. And doing that is really serving the Savior.

Do we do that? That's a question that we should ask ourselves. This is how we apply the Scriptures. As we read it and we understand what He's saying about who He is and what He's done, we must ask ourself, am I following that? So do we do that? Do we humble ourselves, as Paul in Philippians chapter 2 said Jesus did, and put the interest of others ahead of His own? The Lord did that "to the point of death,...", Paul said. "...even death on a cross", (Phl 2:8). Meaning, 'Even on such a cruel, painful, and shameful instrument of execution as a cross, He did it because He loved us and because that was the only way that we could be saved from sin and guilt and the terrible consequences of that death and eternal punishment.' So He took the punishment in our place. He became the sin bearer and suffered divine judgment so that we would escape it. It is a unique sacrifice. Only He, the God-man could do that.

But we can imitate Him by sacrificing our time and our energy, our possessions if need be, for the wellbeing of others—and especially for the spiritual wellbeing of others. We're to call the lost of the world to faith and help our brothers and sisters in Christ to grow in grace and knowledge of the Triune God. That's the mission of the church—and it calls for sacrifice. That's what the sheep do when they follow the good shepherd.

How can we know that we're one of Christ's sheep? How can we know that we're one for whom He died? He died for the elect. He died for His people. We see this written in Scripture. He died for the sheep. How can we know that we are one of them?

Well, the answer's very simple: By hearing His voice and believing in Him; trusting in Christ as God's Son and our Savior.

We can trouble ourselves over the doctrine of election, (it's a great blessing to me; I revel in it). But if it troubles someone with the thought, 'If He died for the elect, maybe I'm not one of the elect, maybe it's not for me', well you can settle that issue, because we know who the elect are: They're the ones that repent and believe; they're the ones that trust in Christ. —So trust in Him, and settle the issue.

'They hear His voice', by the way; that's what the Lord said. How do you know you're one of the sheep? You hear His voice. So if you know you're a sinner and guilty, and you want to be rescued, then you are hearing something. Don't ignore it. Respond to it. Trust in Christ. Only He can make you clean and save your soul. So may God help you to do that.

And help the rest of us, all of us who have put our faith in Him, to live faithfully for Him, to serve Him, and serve one another. Well, we can do that by God's grace and God's grace alone. Let's pray.

LORD, we can all say amen to that, "Only through Christ in me." The race will end; will end for all of us—and sooner for some rather than later. We don't know when the race will end for us. But through the faith that we have by Your grace, that has laid hold

of the Savior, because You've enlightened the eyes of our heart to see and understand these things, and enabled us to lay hold of Him, we are secure in Him and we will finish the race—and we will be able to confess that it was all through Him—and through Him alone. And so we give You the praise, Father, and thank You; and thank You that You're shepherding us, Your people, even now at this moment, and You will continue to do that.

The LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In Christ's name. Amen.

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