

I am the Good Shepherd
John 10:11

Of all the 'I am' sayings of Jesus, 'I Am the Good Shepherd' is perhaps the most loved of all. More often than not we use the word good in an offhand manner – 'he is a good person', 'we had good time'. I'm reminded of the film 'As Good As It Gets' when a far from good cranky script writer played by Jack Nicholson pays a long suffering waitress the ultimate compliment, "You make me want to be a better man".

Unlike English, Greek has two words for good. The first speaks of moral goodness. But as someone has observed, it is possible to be 'morally repulsive'. Some people are so upright and uptight that others are repelled rather than attracted by their 'goodness'. The second refers to authenticity – beautiful, winsome, lovely, attractive. Jesus is the Good Shepherd in both senses of the word, not simply a good shepherd, one of many in a similar class, but *the* good shepherd unique, one and only. Compared to Jesus we who are shepherds in a lesser sense, under shepherds if you will, scarcely seem to be that at all. Who of us could call ourselves a good shepherd, let alone *the* good shepherd? Yet intuitively we know Jesus to be both and we love him for it.

Jesus is rightly the Good Shepherd for two reasons:

- i. Because he lays down his life for the sheep (v11)

He did so willingly out of love. He was not the victim of Roman tyranny and Jewish intrigue. He laid down his life out of love for us, his sheep. "It was not the nails but the strength of his love which held him to the cross." Such love is beyond comprehension. We cannot understand it. Planned before the foundation of the world, it was the turning point of history. "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8)

Karl Barth the famous Swiss theologian was once asked 'What is the most important word in the Bible?' He replied, "The Greek word 'huper'", translated in English as 'for', 'on behalf of', 'in the place of'. "We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isa 53:6)

William Barclay tells of a French soldier who lost an arm in the First World War. The surgeon reluctantly informed him of the sad news, to which the young soldiers replied. 'No sir, I did not lose my arm. I gave it for France.' Jesus did not simply lose his life on the cross. He willingly gave it out of love for us.

- ii. Because he knows his sheep and they know him (v14)

This affords us great comfort. We long to be known for who we really are. C.S Lewis reminds us that we all have a 'God made hole' in our lives which he alone can fill, reminiscent of Augustine's Confession 'O Lord Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee'.

Moreover, we are utterly and absolutely secure in the knowledge that nothing takes God by surprise. He knows the best and the worst about us and he loves us and no one can snatch us from his hand.

We take comfort that we like each sheep, are different. We don't have to compare ourselves with others. God loves us as we are. Like sheep we are spiritually helpless and lost. But we have a Good Shepherd who has come to seek and save. Like sheep we are inclined to be wayward as the hymn writer put it, 'Prone to wander Lord I feel it, Prone to leave the Lord I love'. But the Good Shepherd remains faithful even when we are faithless. Such love defies human comprehension. We simply echo the words of Isaac Watts.

"Love so amazing, so divine
Shall have my life, my soul, my all."

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