

**John 10:11-18**

**Easter 4; April 21, 2024**

*"Sheep are dumb."* How many of you have heard that? I know that I have said that before. But after doing some reading about sheep this week, I'm not sure that is an accurate statement. When we make that statement and compare it to the people of the church being sheep, think what it is saying. It really is saying that we are all just a bunch of dumb sheep. When we make that comparison, it really belittles the people of God's church. It really disrespects people who were made in the image of God and redeemed by God's Son, Jesus. God's church is not full of *dumb people*. Sinful, yes. Dumb, no! Perhaps, we need to think of sheep in a different light. We can still use the "d" word. Instead, of thinking of sheep as being *dumb*, we need to think of sheep as being *dependent*. Isn't that how David, a shepherd himself, portrays himself in Psalm 23? He's completely *dependent* on the LORD, his shepherd, to lead him to green pastures and quiet waters, to guide him with his rod and staff, to feed and bless him.

The reality is that there are some very good qualities that sheep have. In fact, God talks about those qualities in His Word. Let's just take a brief look at some of them:

- *Sheep Are Innocent.* Sheep, by nature, aren't harmful creatures; they are harmless and peaceful. Believers in Jesus are peaceful and peacemakers. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes his followers as: **"Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God."** (Matthew 5:8) The Apostle Paul talks about how the believers of Jesus are to live: believers as: **"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."** (Romans 12:18)
- *Sheep Are Meek.* Sheep are meek creatures who know their place and willingly submit. The prophet Isaiah compares Jesus as the servant who will go to his death, because that was what he came to do. **"He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."** (Isaiah 53:7) Sheep are not going to snarl or fly into your face.
- *Sheep are Useful.* Every part of a sheep is useful. Its meat, its wool, and its skin are offered up for the good of others. In a similar way, the whole life of a believer is useful to the Lord. God places us where and when it is according to his plan. As David encourages his Son in the building of God's Temple, he says: **"Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the Lord is finished."** (1 Chron 28:20)
- *Sheep are content.* Sheep will be content to be in the pasture that their shepherd leads them to. The Apostle Paul describes the contentment that believers in Jesus have. **"I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances."** (Phil 4:11) He can say that because he knows that He we have a God who gives us what we need in Jesus.
- *Sheep know when danger is near.* The sheep recognize the dangers around them and trust in the shepherd to protect them, to guard and guide them. The writer to the Hebrews describes the trust that believers have in Christ. **"Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it."** (Heb 4:1)
- *Sheep know the value in the herd.* They know that there is safety in numbers. They instinctively gather in flocks because there's safety in numbers. Being part of a herd provides protection against predators. Believers find support and encouragement from the sheep in Jesus' church. Sheep are social animals. God's people are social people. We value friendships, family bonds and belonging to a larger group.

Yet, even though sheep do have some good qualities, they still need a Good Shepherd. Jesus declares: **"I am the Good Shepherd."** In the Old Testament, the word that was used for the **"LORD"** in Hebrew came from the word translated: **"I am."** So, when Jesus says in our text, **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The**

**hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own 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. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep,**" they knew what he was saying. Just like a shepherd was committed to his flock, Jesus was committed to his mission of rescuing people from their sin. He was not going to run off at the first sign of any danger.

Jesus is not just a Shepherd when the grass is green and the sun is out and everything looks cheery and optimistic. Jesus perhaps shows His utmost power and salvation when the valley is dark, the hope appears gone and the struggles are the greatest. Jesus promises: **"I am with you always, even to the end of the age"** (Matthew 28:20). Our crucified and resurrected Shepherd is always with His flock. We are always protected from our enemies. Jesus does not run away when the enemy approaches. He's not intimidated by ravenous wolves. He's not frightened by roaring lions. Jesus says that the difference between him, the Good Shepherd, and the hired hand has to do with commitment. The hired hand is committed to the herd only so far. They care more about their safety than the safety of the herd. He's not going anywhere.

Not only is Jesus committed to his sheep, he is capable of protecting his sheep. He came to this world to destroy this world's greatest enemy – Satan himself. Jesus continues to gather other sheep in, and He does it through the selfless serving and the gracious speaking of His people – us. That's the kind of Shepherd Jesus is.

The story is told of a college faculty that had gathered together for their weekly meeting. A professor of archeology brought with him a lamp recently unearthed in the Middle East. It was reported to contain a genie, who, when the lamp was rubbed would appear and grant one wish. Immediately, a professor of philosophy was particularly intrigued. He grabbed the lamp and rubbed it vigorously. Suddenly a genie appeared and made him an offer. He could choose one of three rewards: *wealth, wisdom, or beauty*. Without hesitating, the philosophy professor selected *wisdom*. *"Done!"* said the genie and disappeared in a cloud of smoke. All the other faculty members turned toward the professor, who sat surrounded by a halo of light. At length, one of his colleagues whispered, *"Say something. What wise insight do you now have?"* The professor, much wiser now, sighs and says, *"I should have taken the money."*

May God help us to hold on to the truth that Jesus is our Good Shepherd. He is worth more than any wealth in this world! He brings us wisdom that this world cannot give us. Someday, we will stand at beautiful sheep before our God when our Shepherd leads us home to heaven. May God grant it. Amen.