

The Seven I AM Statements of Christ

I AM the Good Shepherd (John 10:11-21)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on November 3, 2024

Introduction

- ❖ Lately, we've been in a series going through the seven I AM statements of Christ found in the Gospel of John. We've been noting how all seven statements are intended to disclose Jesus's true identity. He appears to everyone he encounters as a mere mortal. And he is mortal. He is truly human. But he's so much more.
 - **He is Yahweh incarnate. The God of the Old Testament in human flesh.** Each time he says, "I AM," he uses two Greek words that both mean, "I am." Jesus could've used either word individually, and the sentence would've made perfect sense in Greek. **But it's argued that he intentionally used both words so that his listeners would hear him say, "I AM I AM the Good Shepherd."** Which harkens back to the LORD God's self-disclosure at the burning bush, when he revealed his name as, "I AM Who I AM." The Great I AM.
 - That's who Jesus is claiming to be. He is God with us. Emmanuel. Which means if you want to know God, you need to know Jesus. If you want a relationship with God, you need a relationship with Jesus. He is the revelation of the Great I AM to humankind.

- ❖ Now in each of these seven statements, Jesus highlights an aspect of God. And he does so by way of metaphor. I AM the bread of life. I AM the light of the world. I AM the door of the sheep. Those are the ones we've seen so far. **And through these metaphors, Jesus is trying to say something about himself and something about us.** That's what we want to explore.
 - Now this morning, we're still in John 10. Starting in v11. But we're going to return to a metaphor that Jesus already alluded to earlier in vv1-5. He is the Good Shepherd. **Now by identifying himself as a Shepherd, it follows that he views his followers as his sheep.** We are the sheep of Jesus's sheepfold.

- ❖ **Now it's understandable that that kind of imagery evokes, within Christians, a sense of comfort and peace.** We can picture a caring shepherd holding a little lamb in his strong arms or carrying it over his broad shoulders. Gently tending to his sheep, as they graze in a grassy meadow, near a bubbling brook. Call us God's sheep, and we take that as a compliment.
 - But I'm not sure it would've been received that way by Jesus's hearers in John's Gospel. **Because for those who actually live in an agrarian society – who have exposure to actual sheep and their behavior – they probably wouldn't take to kindly to being described as sheep.**
 - They wouldn't associate the word *sheep* with "cute and cuddly". It would be more like "weak and helpless". **Talk to any farmer or shepherd, and they'll tell you that sheep are the most vulnerable, most defenseless creatures among all their livestock.** They're incapable of taking care of themselves. That's why you'll never see wild sheep freely roaming the countryside. That doesn't happen. Once a sheep gets separated from the flock, it doesn't run free. It struggles and dies.

- ❖ **So when Jesus describes *himself* as a shepherd and *you* as one of his sheep – don't take that as a compliment – take that as a reality check.** That you and I are weak and helpless. That we are vulnerable and defenseless. That we are incapable of taking care of ourselves. That we need – not just a shepherd – but a *Good* Shepherd to lead us and protect us. To take care of us because we simply can't do it.
 - Friends, being described as sheep may not be all that flattering. But it can still be encouraging. So long as it means we have a Good Shepherd like Jesus. If I have to be a sheep, then I want to be his. This morning I want to show you three reasons, from our text, for why you'd also want Jesus to be your Good Shepherd. (1) The Good Shepherd nobly sacrifices for his sheep. (2) The Good Shepherd intimately knows his sheep. (3) The Good Shepherd tirelessly searches for his lost sheep.

Nobly Sacrifices For His Sheep

- ❖ Let's consider the first reason that makes Jesus so good: The Good Shepherd nobly sacrifices for his sheep. This is emphasized in v11. Let's read it again, "*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*" Again, we need a more accurate picture of a shepherd. When you think of a shepherd, don't picture a young boy with his arms full of cute, cuddly lambs. If you ever met a real shepherd, you'd be staring at rugged individual who has a rather dangerous job.
 - **So according to v11, what makes him good at his job – a good shepherd – is his willingness to lay down his life for his sheep.** That's in stark contrast to hired hands who wouldn't dare. Who wouldn't dare put their lives on the line. Listen to vv12-13, "*¹²He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.*"
- ❖ In context, the hired hands that Jesus has in mind are the religious leaders of his day. **The Pharisees demonstrate, by their behavior, that being a religious leader is merely a job.** It's how they make a living. They'll perform their duty just fine when things are going fine.
 - But when the going gets tough – when shepherding God's people involves hardship or persecution – then they throw in the towel. **Because they don't have any emotional investment – no real love for the sheep – they're not willing to risk their own well-being for the sheep's well-being.** Why would they endure trials and tribulations for the good of the flock when their good was never the primary concern?
- ❖ That's why Jesus stood out. They why the masses flocked to him. Because they could tell he was a good shepherd. That he actually cared. That he was invested. That he loved them enough to lay down his own life for them.
 - That's what made Jesus a *good* shepherd. The Greek word here doesn't mean *good* in the sense of being morally good versus evil. **It means good in the sense of being noble or worthy of respect.** And we know there's a difference. You can be a morally upright person – good in that sense – but nobody respects you. Nobody is drawn to you in admiration. Because you might be smug or obnoxious about your goodness.

- ❖ When we say Jesus is good, we mean *good* in both senses. He's morally upright *and* he's worthy of respect. He's admirable. And it's because, as v11 says, "*The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*" Let's meditate on that more. Let me ask you: **What's so good about Jesus's death? What's so noble about it?** I mean we commemorate the day he was crucified by calling it Good Friday. We'd say it was a good death – a noble death. But what made it so? I'd suggest there are four ways to answer that, based on our text.

- ❖ **Jesus's death was noble because (1) it was sacrificial.** In other words, he didn't just die well. He didn't just set a good example by facing his own death with courage and a stiff upper lip. We know there are some people who don't handle it very well. The face death kicking and screaming. Jesus didn't do that. He died well.
 - **Now some would reduce the meaning of his death to just that – that he set a good example for how to face death with similar grace and courage.** Imagine a flock of sheep, safe and secure in their sheepfold, peering into their shepherd's house through the bedroom window, seeing him on his deathbed. Dying well with grace and courage. What a great example. I'm sure that will do something for them.
 - **But whatever that is will pale in comparison to the love and admiration the sheep will have for their shepherd if his death was sacrificial.** If he died from his wounds after successfully rescuing them from the hungry jaws of a wolf or lion. **A peaceful death is good and desirable but a sacrificial death is even more noble.** But we need to say more.

- ❖ **Not only was Jesus's death sacrificial, (2) it was personal.** It was "*for the sheep.*" We all admire those willing to sacrificially lay down their lives for a cause or for a principle. History records the stories of these heroic figures. Think of **Socrates**, the famous Greek philosopher, who was unfairly sentenced to death because of his teachings. He was given opportunities to receive a lesser punishment if he would plead guilty. But, for the sake of his principles, he courageously accepted his fate. And he's admired for it.
 - Or what about **Nathan Hale**, the famous American martyr in Revolutionary War. When General Washington was desperate to learn the location of the imminent British invasion of Manhattan, Hale was the only volunteer willing to go behind enemy lines to gather intelligence. He was caught and sentenced to death for spying. His sacrifice is memorialized in his famous last words, "I only regret that I have but one life to give for my country." Hale died for a great cause, and we admire him for it.

- ❖ But don't you see? Christians look to the cross and memorialize a shepherd who died for something greater, far more personal, than a principle or a cause. **He died for you. He died for me.** That's what makes him so good!
 - Friends, according to Scripture, the bad news is that each of us are sinners who deserve nothing good from God. Only his judgment. Only his wrath. **But the good news of the gospel is that Jesus died a sacrificial death for sinners.** Meaning he died in our place. Taking upon himself the judgment and wrath that we deserve. That's why he's our Good Shepherd!

- ❖ **But not only was Jesus’s death sacrificial and personal, (3) it was voluntary.** Look at vv17-18, *“I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”* The cross of Christ was no accident. It wasn’t an unforeseen tragedy. No, it was planned. It was the Father’s charge.
 - And the Son willingly received it. **No one took Jesus’s life. He voluntarily laid it down.** The story goes, that in WWI, a young French soldier was badly wounded in the arm, and it had to be amputated. After he finally came to, the surgeon had to inform him of the bad news. “I’m sorry to tell you that you have lost your arm,” he told the soldier. But the young man replied, “Sir, I did not lose it; I gave it – for France.” **Well, in same way, Jesus didn’t lose his life on the cross. He gave it – for the sheep.** He laid it down by his own authority. On his own terms.

- ❖ And we admire him for that. **His death was entirely voluntary, and (4) it was also temporary.** Jesus says he not only has the authority to lay down his life, he also has authority to take it up again. Jesus didn’t embrace death for the sake of death. There’s nothing redeeming in death itself. Death is an intrusion into God’s good created order. He promises to one day eliminate death altogether in the new creation that’s coming.
 - **But Jesus could voluntary embrace death because he knew that his death was not a final destination – but a door.** A door leading to resurrection life; resurrection power; resurrection glory. Which is a new reality that he offers to all his followers, all his sheep. As we walk in the steps of our Shepherd, we follow him through death into the newness of resurrection life.

Intimately Knows His Sheep

- ❖ This is what makes Jesus’s death so good. He nobly sacrificed himself for the good of his sheep. But there’s a second reason why he’s so good – **because the Good Shepherd intimately knows his sheep.** I see this in vv14-15. Let’s read that again, *“¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.”*
 - The emphasis is on the intimate knowledge shared between sheep and their shepherd. Back in v3, it says the Good Shepherd, *“calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”* **He gives names to every sheep, and he addresses each one by that unique name.** To a non-shepherd, looking out at a large flock, all you can see is an indistinguishable mound of white, fluffy wool. But when their shepherd looks out, he can see them individually. He can tell them apart. He knows each sheep by name.
 - It’s easy, as Christians, to feel lost in the crowd. God’s flock is so large. It’s incalculable. **If you can feel anonymous in this crowd, in this congregation, then how much more unknown do we feel when considering the universal, global church?** But that’s what makes your Shepherd so good. No matter how large his flock, he personally knows each sheep. He knows your name.

- ❖ And he calls you by it. Back in v4, it says Jesus's sheep gladly follow him, "*for they know his voice.*" They can recognize their shepherd's voice whenever he calls. **The fact is – if you're a follower of Jesus – whether you were conscious of it or not, you began your spiritual walk in response to a call.** You didn't make the first move. He did. Jesus called. You answered. You started following him after he personally called you by name.
- ❖ That's how intimately he knows you. **The mind-blowing truth is that Jesus knows you just as intimately as he knows the Father.** Look back at v14, "*I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.*" **The intimacy between the sheep and their Shepherd is analogous to the intimacy shared between God the Father and God the Son.** Don't overlook the staggering nature of that claim.
 - Christian, whenever you find yourself doubting Jesus's love – whenever he feels far and distant from you – just remember these words and meditate on the very triune nature of our God. **Meditate on all that is shared between the Father and the Son.**
- ❖ In what's known as his **High Priestly Prayer** in John 17, Jesus explains, in v8, that the **words** he shares with the Father are shared with his sheep. John 17:11 says the **oneness** Jesus shares with the Father is shared with the sheep (v21). In v22, the **glory** he shares with the Father is shared with the sheep. In v26, the **love** he shares with the Father is shared with his sheep. Their words, their oneness, their glory, their love – **all that is shared between the Father and the Son is shared between the Good Shepherd and his sheep.**
- ❖ **As intimately as he knows the Father, Jesus knows you.** Do you know him that way? If it's true that your Shepherd knows you *this* intimately, then make every effort to know him back in the same way. Seek to know him as intimately as he knows you.
 - Perhaps, for you, that means redoubling your efforts to spend more time in Scripture. Patiently reading it. Not just zipping through. Slowly and intentionally reading because you want to know his words; to see his glory; to rest in his love; to enjoy the oneness you share with him.
- ❖ And please don't feel guilty if you haven't been in his Word lately. I have no desire to guilt trip you into reading your Bible. Because it doesn't work. **Guilt might get you reading the Bible more. But it can't help you enjoy it.** It can't motivate you to pursue an intimate relationship with your Good Shepherd. But love can.
 - So don't miss what Jesus says at the end of v15. He basically says, "I know my own just as I know my Father," and then he goes on to reiterate, "*and I lay down my life for the sheep.*" **In other words, when Jesus laid down his life, he knew exactly who he was dying for.** He didn't just die for a hypothetical flock of nameless sheep.
- ❖ **No, my fellow sheep, as our Shepherd was dying on the cross, he thought of you.** He had *your* name on his heart. That's how much he loves *you*. That's how intimately he knows *you*. Let *that* be what motivates you to spend more time with him.

Tirelessly Searches For His Lost Sheep

- ❖ There's a third reason why Jesus is such a Good Shepherd – **because he tirelessly searches for his lost sheep.** Here's another way of saying it – he's good because he's a missional shepherd. I see this in v16. It's a bit cryptic at first, but when you realize who he's referring to, it's so encouraging. Look at v16, *“And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”*
- ❖ The obvious question is – who are these other sheep that Jesus is referencing? These other sheep that are not of this fold. Well, *“this fold”* is obviously referring to the Jews. He began his earthy ministry first to the Jews. He called his sheep, his disciples, from that fold. **So these “other sheep” not of the fold of Israel would be the Gentiles.** The nations. Every one of us who is a follower of Jesus but *not* of Jewish heritage.
 - Think about that. **Here in v16 Jesus is specifically referring to you.** He knows he has other sheep among the Gentiles. Lost sheep among all the nations of the earth. Among all the people groups of the world. And notice he says, *“I must bring them also.”* **Meaning Jesus is actively on the frontlines leading the effort to bring in his lost sheep – who are scattered among the nations – to bring them into the new flock he formed called the Church.**
- ❖ And notice how confident Jesus is that his mission to the nations will be successful. That it won't fail. Look back at v16, *“and they will listen to my voice.”* Because, as he's already stressed multiple times – the sheep know their Shepherd's voice. They *will* listen.
 - Friends, think about the implications. What this means for global missions. **If only we could get the Shepherd's voice to the nations.** If only we could preach his Word to the unreached peoples of the world. **If only they could hear his voice in the gospel, they will listen.** His lost sheep will come. We can be sure of that.
- ❖ **This speaks to the urgency and the certainty of global missions.** Some of us need to go. Go to the nations. Go to the hard places. Go to the dark places. Go to the ends of the earth. With one job. Not to save the lost. **But to unleash the voice of Jesus.** To declare his gospel. You just be faithful to do that. And Jesus will do the harder job – the humanly-impossible job – of bringing the sheep into the fold.
 - I know some of you are feeling a burden. **A particular burden to take the voice of Jesus to lost sheep among the nations.** No matter where you go – no matter what people group you work with – you can be sure there are lost sheep there. And if you could get the gospel to them, they will listen to his voice. **Friends, if it's that certain, then it's that urgent that some of us go.** And the rest of us should be generous and sacrificial in sending. So what is God calling you to do?
- ❖ **What's your part to play in his global mission to bring all of his sheep together as one flock under one Shepherd?** Look how v16 ends, *“So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”* That's what God wants. For there to be one Body unified under one Head. He wants to establish one Flock unified in Christ. And that should be what all of us want.

- ❖ **Because in today’s diverse and deeply divided society, there’s only one hope of establishing a robust, lasting unity – and that’s in Christ.** Our unity in Christ is what makes us *good* sheep. It’s what makes the church noble and worthy of admiration in the eyes of the world. Because we’re different from the world.
 - **The world is separated and divided by culture or class, by race or ethnicity, by left or right, by blue or red.** There’s so much tribalism and so little consensus. But let it not be so in God’s flock. This is where the church can stand out. We can differ in our cultural backgrounds and preferences. We can speak different languages and have different upbringings. We can differ in our political persuasions and how we feel about the outcome of this week’s election.

- ❖ **But through it all, the church can stay united as one flock because we share one Shepherd.** I care far more about who you’re following than who you’re voting for. If the biblical Jesus – if the Christ of the gospel – if he’s your Shepherd, then we are sheep of the same flock. We share far more in common. **There is far more binding us together than any difference that might threaten to drive us apart.**
 - If the flock of God can respond to this divisive political moment with deep unity and genuine humility, we have a unique opportunity to adorn the gospel. Making it all the more compelling to those who are fed up with all the division and all the fighting.

- ❖ But having said that, it’s necessary to say that we can’t avoid division altogether. The church is one and unified in Christ. **But there will always be a fundamental divide in the world between two groups.** Two groups divided by their vastly different responses to Jesus.
 - That’s reinforced by what we read in vv19-21, “¹⁹*There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. ²⁰Many of them said, “He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?” ²¹Others said, “These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”*”

- ❖ Notice these two groups. One group hears the message about a Good Shepherd laying down his life for his sheep and it sounds like sheer madness. It sounds insane! But the other group hears the same message and is drawn to Jesus. To follow him as sheep follow their shepherd.
 - **Same gospel. Same Shepherd. Two vastly different responses.** It’s like what we read in 2 Corinthians 2:16. That the gospel and gospel people are, “*to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.*” Or as the Puritans used to put it – the same sun that hardens clay is the same sun that melts wax. Same Good Shepherd. Two different responses.
 - **And the big question is – what’s yours going to be?** How are you responding to the Good Shepherd? Is your heart hardening? Or is it melting in faith and love for the Lord?