

## FOLLOW THE GOOD SHEPHERD

### JOHN 10:11-16 ✠ EASTER 3

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In recent years, it's become an insult to be called a "sheep". You may have heard it expressed as the term "sheeple". If you're unfamiliar, this term comes from conspiracy groups. They categorize those of the mainstream thought as "sheeple" because sheeple are too foolish to think for themselves. Their message is quite simple – "stop being sheep!"

Yet, in the Christian church, we wear the title "sheep" as a badge of honor! We sing children songs like, "I just want to be a sheep" or hymns like "I am Jesus little Lamb". Is it because Christians are foolish? Easily tricked and swayed? Is it because Christians can't think for themselves? Or because they're weak?

Here's the deal. We're all sheep. Because we all have a shepherd. We all listen to someone's voice. In most cases, the shepherds we listen to formulate our worldview. We follow where shepherds call, and we tend to formulate into groups of people who share similar opinions and ideas. The evidence is abundantly clear, especially recently. But the point is, wherever you are, you're being led by someone. Because you're a sheep! Everyone is.

In our text, Jesus even says that we're all sheep. And we're lead either by the hired hand, or the Good Shepherd. The question is: who are you led and guided by? Who shapes your character, your habits, your life? Is it the hired

hand, who actually cares very little about you? Or, is it the Good Shepherd, who has given His life for you?

Hired hands unfortunately tend to formulate worldviews against Jesus as the Good Shepherd. And let me be clear: there are numerous hired hands who slap a cross on a book cover or slap a generic phrase like “God given rights” in some speech without ever talking about God and where He leads His people.

For example, there are a series of books from the early 2000’s titled, *Conversations with God*, authored by Neale Walsch. Based on the title of the book, can’t sound all that bad, right? Well, currently I’m reading the edition meant for teens. But there are three things that are obviously missing from this book – Scripture, Jesus, and anything remotely close to Christian teaching. Don’t let “God” on the book cover fool you. That’s what hired hands do – they pose as shepherds, but leave you starving for the word of God. The author, posing as a shepherd, leads you to pastures of poison and dangerous waters. He writes heresy, saying that humans are divine, sharing essence with God. What that means is that you can start to making up your own commandments to live by, you know, since you’re divine and everything! What terrible heresy! This kind of shepherding leads sheep right to the den of wolves!

There are many other hired hands and shepherds who care little for the sheep – all because they lead the sheep away from the Good Shepherd. They imitate the Good Shepherd, preaching ideas such as love, grace, and forgiveness, yet they remove the cross and grave from their speech. They teach kindness and generosity without religion, which is just secularism. But the problem with these shepherds is that once the wolf, that is Satan, comes to snatch their sheep from

earthly life, these shepherds are useless. They let their sheep die. Because they have no power to defeat the wolf. They have no power to defeat sin, death, and the devil. So, be careful who you listen to – that’s Jesus’ warning from our text: **“He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, 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 cares nothing for the sheep.”**

Thanks be to God for the Good Shepherd who cares for the sheep. For other shepherds of the world will fail. So, we follow the Good Shepherd who is Jesus Christ, our Lord. We follow him alone – not any other hired hand on God’s green earth. We listen to HIS voice alone, and we know Him by it. We can trust in His goodness as a shepherd, because He isn’t apathetic towards the life of His sheep. He actually cares very much for the life of His sheep. Because our shepherd isn’t self-absorbed. He’s self-sacrificial. His love is best expressed in his own death to save you from the wolf, who is Satan Himself. He isn’t quick to abandon the sheep like the hired hands. And that’s precisely what makes Him the “good” shepherd. His goodness isn’t just that he’s an effective shepherd – warding off predators and leading the sheep to nourishing pastures and still waters. Certainly, He is exceptional at those things, but when Jesus refers to Himself as the Good Shepherd, He means that there is a gracious, kind, and loving quality about Him. All these characteristics determine how he cares for the sheep.

And as a shepherd, He takes care of the sheep He has, but realizes the danger of the sheep who are being led by hired hands. Because they’re being scouted out by the ravenous wolves. He says of these, **“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 sheep, one shepherd.”**

He said this of the Gentiles, who were sheep to whom the Lord called under His care. The Scribes and Pharisees didn't like that, because they thought the Messiah was to be for the Jews only. But Jesus not only shepherds the Jews, but also the Gentiles. He's come to be the Good Shepherd for all people – laying down His life to protect them from the wolves.

Jesus is not afraid of the wolves who come to prey on the sheep. The hired hands are. They either run from the wolves or unsuccessfully die trying to fight them. The wolves gobble up both shepherd and sheep.

Now, to spare you from talking in images for a bit. The wolves are Satan and his demons. The hired hands are the false shepherds which present a false Christianity, or a false system of belief or worldview. These false shepherds cannot save you from Satan and his demons, because they haven't defeated him. They haven't been sinless. They haven't defeated earthly death. Nor have they defeated eternal death. So they cannot offer any real protection, refuge, comfort, or safety. Any guise of that in this life is all a part of the predators' pursuit of the sheep. In the end, Satan consumes both false shepherds and their faithful sheep eternally in hell.

However, the Good Shepherd sacrificed His life to guard, protect, and guide His sheep against harm and danger. And He IS successful at guarding the sheep from sin and death! Because He has beaten Satan by rising from the grave to new life! He's paid the punishment for sin on the cross, yet rose to new life! He

sacrificed His life for the sake of the sheep, so that they may have life. Jesus demonstrated His goodness as a shepherd, his care as a shepherd, and His unfathomable love on the cross, where He **“laid down His life for the sheep.”**

The sheep of the Good Shepherd listen to His voice. He calls them by name and leads them to green pastures. He calls you by name, because He first has given you His name. He first made you His sheep at baptism. And every time one of his sheep goes astray in unrepentant sin, He goes out to find them, time and time again. He bears the burden of the sheep and scoops them up and returns them to the rest of the flock.

So, follow the Good Shepherd, because He can actually protect you from the old evil foe. Listen to His voice, because He will teach you everything you’ll need to know as one of His sheep. Go where he leads you, because He even though you may encounter trials and sufferings as a sheep, it’s always to lead you to green pastures and still waters. Trust your Good Shepherd, because He never fails you.

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