

His Goodness Faileth Never

John 10:22-30

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,

What makes Jesus the Good Shepherd? And there are many in our world who are good, who do good out of their protecting and providing: parents and grandparents, teachers, friends, neighbors, policemen, and the like. And many do so out of true Christian love, yea, even being willing to give their lives for those they've been called to serve.

But what sets Jesus apart as *the* Good Shepherd? Is it because He does these things better than all the rest? Or for more people than all the rest? Is it because He provides all these people for us, and works through them for us? All of that's true, but not the bottom-line answer.

The answer, of what sets Jesus apart in His goodness, is simply this: Jesus is the One, the only One, who declares us good, and gives to us His goodness, and with it the peaceful life of a conscience at rest in Him. He is the Good Shepherd because He is the shepherd who takes no accounting of Himself, but acts purely and always for the sake of His sheep.

This word good is not merely the opposite of bad. And Christ's version of good is not merely whatever is good in anybody's eye. Good, rather, is what the world was before sin, when God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. Good is a world created in perfect unity, with no sin affecting and no chaos abounding. Good is right knowledge of God. Good is life unaffected by disease, uninterrupted by death, untouched by tragedy, and unstained by selfishness. Good is God's plan. The way it should be in our world, but no longer is, and the way it will be, in time and in eternity. He works together all things, both the good and the bad, toward a final and complete *good*, for those who love Him.

And so to bring about this goodness in us is what Jesus has come to do, both in the past, in the present, and in the future. All the other people in our lives who are mini-good shepherds – those who care for us, love us, protect us, provide for us – they can sustain the lives we have. They can help improve our lives, and they may even be able to help lengthen our lives according to God’s plan. But everyone has limits.

But not Jesus. He has come to not merely mend, but recreate this broken and fallen world. He doesn’t seek to simply give us more health and wealth. No, He has come to give us the goods of body *and* soul, to give us all that is needed in this world, and to give us the abundance of paradise in the next. To give us the goods of the forgiveness of sins in this life while we await the verdant pastures of the perfect and complete life in the world to come.

But of all of the protecting and providing that our Good Shepherd does for us in this life, we must hone in on the most important and best good that the Good Shepherd gives: His voice. His Word. And for us this includes words of warning; namely, from the wolves. As we heard from Acts: fierce wolves would come in and speak twisted things, twisting His words to deceive us and mislead us. Pulling us away His Word and putting in its place false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.

And there are two particular ways that the devil and his wolves seek to twist this image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd: that of license on the one hand, and legalism on the other. When we hear about Jesus as the great provider, it’s easy to think only of pleasure and ease, of getting everything I could ever want. That is, in the language of Psalm 23, when we say the Lord is my shepherd. I shall not *want*. That means that I shall have all my needs met and truly be content. But it doesn’t mean having everything that would allow me to be entirely amused, or that we’re freed from responsibility, or that we would have all of the riches of this world that we can desire

and so do anything we could ever *want* to do. No, the desires of the sinful flesh and the Holy Spirit are opposed to each other on purpose, that the Holy Spirit keep us from doing what our sinful flesh *wants* to do. When we indulge and eat the forbidden fruits of this life – we are not living the good life, but the dying life. Families, relationships, cultures, everything affected when we let unrestrained indulgence reign supreme.

And on the other hand, there are those who hear that Christ has come to bring the good life, and hear it as a marching order. Being a Christian means I *have* to live a good life in order to earn and keep the favor of the Good Shepherd. But this too is not truly hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd, but is a twisting of God's Word that the wolves are delighted to do. We cannot attain to the good that we wish to see in the world, and the Good Shepherd is not a means to a personal perfection. The Good Shepherd is the perfection to whom we run and cling.

It is He, our truly Good Shepherd, our Savior Jesus. He has come to work a different work, to give us not the fullness of this dying life, but to give us the fullness of Himself and His life. The *real* good life of *His* perfection. To forgive our sins. He doesn't want us to have forgiveness without new life, which leads to license. He doesn't want us to have a new life without forgiveness, which leads to legalism. No, your Shepherd has for you both forgiveness *and* new life. And both by His gracious hand.

And this is a hand that has you always in His grip, even to the end of the age. You can't be snatched away. Nothing can separate you. The wolves may try and entice you away, but don't be fooled. Hear the voice, and you know that voice, and you follow that voice. Keep following that voice, by remaining in the Word – the Scripture – that speak that same united voice across all 66 books. Don't let the devil scratch your itching ears with messages that sound enticing, but only lead to license or legalism. Instead, remain with Christ, who works His good works in You,

whose dying and rising is your forgiveness, your life, and your salvation. Who through His Holy Baptism of you joins you to Him and to His cross, your old man being slain, so that your new man would rise to life. That in Holy Communion this new man in you is fed with the very body and blood of this your Good Shepherd, He who gave His life for you and now puts His life in you. And all this that His death and atonement for your sins, His resurrection and life, be a present reality for you.

*This* is the good news Gospel of the Good Shepherd. Good works for the Good Shepherd are never to make yourself worthy of Him. He makes you worthy by *His* laying down of His life, and calls you to a new obedience that isn't a new way to keep your salvation *after* you're converted. No, instead this is the sheep who is so overjoyed at the goodness of the Shepherd that he can't help to follow in His steps as close as spiritually possible. This is the true goodness of Easter, the good of new life. The good of Resurrection. The good of new creation. In the beginning God saw all that He had made, and it was very good. Now also in Christ, everything is again very good. Perfect and complete. He gives you eternal life. In Him, you will never perish. For no one is able to snatch you out of His hand. Amen.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.