

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns 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. ¹³The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

¹⁴“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to 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 authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.” (NIV 84)

Theme: The Good Shepherd Cares for his Sheep.

1. He willingly gave up his life for us.
2. He knows us personally.

Bears have huge claws. Tigers are fast and powerful. Lions hunt in packs and rip open with their powerful jaws. Wolves are ferocious pack hunters; while coyotes typically hunt alone. And then there's sheep. In 2009 it was estimated that in America alone almost 250,000 sheep and goats were killed by predators in that year alone, cause 20.5 million dollars in damage. In the U.S. coyotes kill more sheep than all other predators combined, followed by dogs. Against such predators sheep stand no chance; they aren't fast, strong, or powerful. They are docile instead of ferocious. They don't have huge fangs or claws to defend themselves. They are predator to no animal and prey to almost everything else. In fact birds like eagles, hawks, and even ravens have been known to kill sheep. And on top of it all—sheep aren't very smart; when predators attack, sheep have been known to trample each other to death. They are slow, weak, and stupid.

There is a reason why the Lord refers to us as sheep. When compared to our predators we are weak, defenseless, and stupid. We stand no chance of survival; without someone on our side—like a shepherd.

Sometimes, however, a shepherd isn't able to watch over his sheep. He needs some sleep, maybe he has something else to tend to—some business out of town, or maybe he needs to take care of a sick family member. Whatever it is, the shepherd hires someone to watch over his sheep.

But that hired man doesn't really care about the sheep. He watches over them simply because he is getting paid to do so—it's a way to earn a living, to provide for himself and a family if he has one. But he's not emotionally invested in the sheep, they are not his sheep; he didn't buy them. They are just some stupid defenseless animals. If a predator comes around the hired man flees to save his own life. And when the sheep scatter because of an attack, he's not going to go after those lost sheep.

That of course, is a problem. Sheep can't defend themselves; and neither can we. When the devil attacks us we are hopeless to stop him on our own. Peter describes Satan this way, **your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.**

As a sheep is helpless against a lion, so we too are helpless against the devil. And to make matters worse, Jesus calls the devil, **a wolf in sheep's clothing.** It's bad enough when a predator attacks you in the open; but a surprise attack is much more effective. Satan rarely attacks us in the open. He disguises himself to look like one of us—a sheep, only to attack and devour us. Satan doesn't attack us using those we can clearly see are wicked; no instead, he uses those who seem innocent, or nice, or Christian; so we put our guard down and are easily overtaken.

We need a shepherd, a good shepherd who knows our enemies and loves us enough to guard and protect us against them. We have that in Christ Jesus. As he says in verse 11, **I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.** A good shepherd risks his life for his sheep, fighting off bears and lions, coyotes, wolves, and so on. That is what Jesus does for us. He fights off every attack from all our enemies—not just from the devil, but also from the world and our sinful nature.

But our enemies just keep on coming. And there is that took drastic measures to defeat—death. Four times in our text for today, which Jesus' spoke about six months before his death, he mentions giving up his life for his sheep—three times in verses seventeen and eighteen

alone, **The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.** Jesus saved us by giving up his life; he died in our place. And he did so willingly. He willingly came down to this earth and he willingly went to the cross. No one forced him to do it; he didn't have to die if he didn't want to. But he willingly gave up his life to save his sheep. He did this by becoming a lamb—by being our substitute. He took our place on the cross, suffering the eternal punishment that we deserved. The shepherd became **the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world** as John the Baptist said, or as Isaiah prophesies in chapter 53, **He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.**

Why would Jesus be willing to die for us? Because he loves and cares for us; but also because he knew what he had the power to do. Did you catch it in verse 18? Not only did Jesus willingly let himself be crucified, but he also had the power to take up his life again. In other words Jesus knew he had the power to raise himself from the dead. He did just that three days after his death. Although he died, he took up his life again; although he died, our Shepherd lives! His power over death means that even when we sheep die, we will live. And we **will dwell in the house of the Lord forever**—free from sin, Satan, and any other predator.

The Lord, the Good Shepherd watches over us. And so we know that we are safe; and we'll always be safe. Satan and all our enemies will never get to us to harm us. It reminds of the old looney tunes cartoons. Noah and Micah are really in to looney tunes right now, so we watch them all the time. There is a series with Sam the Sheepdog and Ralph wolf (who looks exactly like Wile E. Coyote but with a red nose). After the two clock in, Sam the Sheepdog takes his spot on top of a hill or cliff watching over the sheep in the valley below. Ralph Wolf tries everything in his arsenal just to get a sheep—at times he even disguises himself like another sheep. Sometimes it seems as if he is actually going to get a sheep—but he never does. Sam the Sheepdog always catches him in time and saves his sheep. And you know that no matter how grave the situation may seem, there really is no chance that Ralph the Wolf is ever going to get a sheep when he's up against

Sam the Sheepdog. We can say the same about the Lord, our Shepherd, watching over us. Try as he might, the devil can't get to us. Even when things seem bleak, he will never harm us. As Jesus says after our text in verse 28, **I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.**

That is because we are his sheep. We were chosen by him from the beginning of the world. We belong to him—we are his sheep and we are his shepherd. And he knows us. He knows who we are. He knows each and every one of us by name; he even knows the very number of hairs in our heads.

And this isn't just some sort of head knowledge. This isn't just some sort of knowledge he gained by reading a report on us from the angels or watching us from afar. He knows each and every one of us personally. He knows all our deepest thoughts, feelings, and emotions. He is deeply connected to us and invested in us.

He knows us and we know him. **I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.** We are the Lord's sheep through faith in him which comes only through the gospel. So us knowing the Lord goes hand-in-hand with him knowing us—it comes by the word. As the gospel is shared and we are brought to faith we are welcomed into the Lord's flock and he knows us and the more we are in the Word the more we know him!

Through the Word we know who Christ is and what he has done for us. He gave up his life only to take it up again. He suffered and died in our place willingly to take away our sins; and then he rose from the dead to save us from death. And in doing so he saved us from our most dangerous predator—the devil. Through the Word we know the Lord as our Good Shepherd. And again, this is not just some sort of head knowledge. We know the Lord by experience. We all have seen in our own lives and in the lives of loved ones the many times the Lord has taken care of us, how he has always been beside us—we can all give first-hand accounts of his goodness and mercy.

And because we know him, we follow him. Jesus says a few verses before our text, **his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.** We know the Lord. We know what he has done for us. And so we listen to him and not to others. There are many who claim to show us the

way. There are many who claim to have the answers to life's questions. They may seem to be legit shepherds; but they are wolves in sheep's clothing. Their pastures look enticing—lush and green; but they are full of danger and poison.

But we know the Lord through his Holy Word. We have read that Word and study his gospel so we recognize the words of our Shepherd and we follow him and cling to his every word. When we are attacked, and even when we aren't, we gravitate to our Good Shepherd. No one else leads us green pastures and quiet waters as the Lord; so we follow him. No one else has watched over us and taken care of us like our Good Shepherd has. For his love stands firm and his protection secures forever.

Sheep have many predators and they are helpless against all of them; hundreds of thousands die each year at the hands of their enemies.

The predators we face are far more numerous and powerful—and we are much more powerless against them. And yet not one of us is lost. That is because we have a shepherd watching over us—and not just any shepherd, The Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ who gave up his life only to take it up. He knows us and we know him. And so we follow him to his heavenly home where we will dwell forever. Amen.