



JOHN 10:1-21 (PART 2)

***“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep ...***

***“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep ... 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. This command I received from my Father.”***

***(verses 11, 14-15, 17-18)***

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True confession time. This illustration of the shepherd and the sheep has always slightly troubled me because in real life a shepherd tends the sheep with the

intention of preparing them for slaughter. That detail somewhat undermines the comfort of this image. Having made my confession, I'll go on to say it's not actually troubled me too much, being simply an example of the fact that parables communicate a main point, and it's unhelpful to push beyond to the illustration's limits.

But Jesus' illustration of sheep and shepherd is obviously different already. When have we ever heard of a shepherd intentionally giving his life for his sheep? David fought the lion and the bear, but he did so with the clear intent of vanquishing the predator and rescuing the sheep alive. It was never his intention to lay down his life.

Jesus intends otherwise. This is a shepherd whose clear goal is to rescue sheep, keeping them alive not simply till market-day but for all eternity, not allowing anything or anyone to snatch them out of his hand (verse 28).

This extraordinary plan for a shepherd requires an extraordinary sacrifice on the shepherd's part. It requires the laying down of life. Which, as it turns out, is exactly what Jesus intends to do. It's not that he is willing to accidentally lose his life in the line of duty, if it actually comes to that. No. It's more intense. It's that in taking up the job in the first place he has made a choice to sacrifice his own life in order to accomplish for the sheep the very thing he has set out to do. Their rescue for all eternity is dependent on him giving his life. He accepts the cost. He freely makes that choice.

One wonders if this remarkable twist in the story is the reason that some of those listening gave this verdict: *"He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?"* (verse 20). They knew that a typical shepherd would never do this.

But it's instructive that Jesus has his sights clearly set on this goal and that he actually lays the groundwork in his teaching at this point. His disciples, let alone the crowds, wouldn't have understood the reality of his intent. But imagine their wonderment later, after the cross and the resurrection, when the full events had unfolded. They would have reflected on this story of the shepherd. They would realize Jesus had told them in advance of his necessary sacrifice for the sake of the sheep. They would have marvelled.

This is a Good Shepherd indeed.

*Lord Jesus – yes, you are the Good Shepherd. Beyond the calling of any shepherd, you stepped into history, choosing to lay down your life for needy, wandering sheep. Thank you this includes me. Praise you for your goodness. Thank you for your sacrifice.*

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Memorize:

Take the simplicity of verse 11 and memorize it. *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”* Recite it often during the day. Give thanks each time for the life you have received. Look to Jesus.