

Jesus, The Good Shepherd

by Bubba Garner

The gospel of John was written to produce faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:30-31). It is constructed around seven miracles, or signs as John calls them, that could only have been performed by a divine being. Who else but Jesus, God in the flesh, could turn water into wine, walk on water, restore sight to a blind man, or raise Lazarus from the dead?

The fourth gospel is also framed around several "I AM" statements that, once again, only Jesus could have made. Who else could live up to His claims to be the bread of life, the light of the world, and the resurrection and the life?

"I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11), He also said. He is the One who came to seek and save the sheep who had gone astray. He is the one who felt compassion for the crowd, for they were like sheep without a shepherd. And He didn't respond by claiming to be "like" a shepherd or that He was "a" shepherd. He boldly professed to be "the good shepherd."

What is it about Jesus that makes Him the good shepherd?

Jesus knows His sheep. In Biblical times, the sheep were not just some business expense or tax write off for the shepherd. He was intimately connected with them; he was personally involved. And the sheep had such a love for their tender shepherd that they would only follow his voice. In fact, when they heard the voice of a stranger, they didn't run away and hide, they found him who knew them by name.

Jesus calls His people by name. "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona" (Matt. 16:17). "Zaccheus, hurry and come down" (Luke 19:5). "Lazarus, come forth" (John 11:43). And Jesus knows you by name. He knows what you're thinking, how you're feeling, when you're afraid, and when you fell lost. "I know My own and my own know Me" (John 10:14). You are not just another number to Him. You are His sheep, and the good shepherd know His sheep.

Jesus watches over His sheep. When the sun went down at the end of a long day, the shepherd didn't get to clock out. As they came in for the night, he inspected them, one by one, while they passed under his rod. As he carefully looked over them, he counted. If one came up missing, he didn't do a cost-benefit analysis and say, "well, at least I still have 99 left." He went out and searched for the one who had strayed and brought him back to the safety of the fold. He did this because he knew them sheep and he watched over them with his own life.

When Jesus made the claim to be the "good" shepherd, He did so to distinguish Himself

from all other religious shepherds. The Pharisees would not accept the man Jesus healed, figuring a man born blind must be a man born a sinner. “So they put him out” (John 9:34). But Jesus goes after that sheep. He doesn’t abandon him to danger. He accepts Him into a better fold, one where his needs are cared for, where he can find pasture.

Jesus wants to lead you to safety, to find green pastures and still waters. But He can’t lead someone who wants to be the leader. Hear His voice. Follow Him. He is the “Shepherd and Guardian” of your soul (1 Pet. 2:25).

Jesus lays down His life for His sheep. There was an easy way to tell the difference between a shepherd and a hired hand—how they responded to danger. When the wolves or thieves came to threaten the flock, the hireling fled for his own life, But the shepherd fought for the lives of his sheep. Before David became the “shepherd- king” of Israel, he tended his father’s sheep. He told King Saul how he rescued a lamb out of the mouth of a lion, grabbing the lion by the beard and killing him (1 Sam. 17:34). The shepherds did this not to impress anyone or for fear of losing their job. They were motivated for no other reason than their love for their sheep.

Jesus laid down His life, not for sheep who were loyal to Him and following Him. He laid down His life for Judas, who betrayed Him. He laid down His life for Peter, who denied Him. He laid down His life for the false shepherds, who crucified Him. He laid down His life for sinners, who rejected Him. The good shepherd became the lamb of God. He laid down His life to give the lost sheep safety and salvation.

Jesus, the good shepherd, is calling. Come to Him, where there is rest and room, while there is time and opportunity.