

Bible Study Guide: Week of 4-19-2021

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

John 10:11-18

[Jesus said:] ¹¹“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own 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 do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

[Jesus said:] ¹¹“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

This passage is an extension of 10:1-10 in which Jesus referred to himself as the gate for the sheep. The crowds did not understand this figure of speech, so Jesus tries a new metaphor here. By some accounts, ancient shepherds would build an enclosure for their flock out of wood or stone, leaving a gap of 5-6 feet in the wall for the sheep to use as a door. The shepherd would then lay himself or himself across the gap, thus becoming the “gate” for the sheep. In this way, Jesus is both gate and shepherd. Here, Jesus’ self-reference as the “good” shepherd is contrasted in later verses with those who are apparently “bad” or “poor” shepherds—here called “hired hands.” What is it that makes him good? That he willingly lays down his life for the sake of the sheep.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus repeatedly uses the so-called “I am” statements to speak about his identity and mission. Often, these are connected with what John calls Jesus’ “signs.” For example, when Jesus says “I am the bread of life,” he follows that statement with the sign of the feeding of the 5,000. When he says, “I am the resurrection and the life,” he follows that with the sign of raising Lazarus from the dead. When he says, “I am the light of the world,” he follows that with the sign of giving sight to a man born blind. Here, his statement “I am the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep” is connected with the sign of his passion, death, and resurrection. For instance, John uses the same verbs “to lay down” and “to take up” we see in this passage to describe Jesus’ actions when he washes the disciples’ feet—he “lays down” his robe and, when he finishes washing their feet, he “takes it up” again. Likewise, Jesus’ death is the ultimate sign of “laying down his life for the sheep.” His resurrection is the ultimate sign of “taking it up” again.

¹²The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep.

The “hired hand” here may refer to the religious leaders of Jesus’ day who were ostensibly the caretakers of the people of God, but who fell short of this task. The wolf, meanwhile, could refer to any sort of harm or danger that threatens God’s people. It could also be a reference to Satan generally or to persecution more specifically.

¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

Jesus reiterates his identity as the “good” shepherd, in contrast to the “hired hands.” He then speaks words that are reminiscent of his words in the farewell discourse a few chapters later about the intimacy and knowledge between the Father, the Son, and those who believe in him. The unity and fellowship that the Father and Son have enjoyed since the beginning is now made available to those who trust in Jesus.

¹⁶I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

The “other sheep” which Jesus mentions here may refer to Gentiles who would be included in the church. It could also refer to the “lost sheep of Israel” who had not yet come to trust in Jesus. Or it could even refer to believers such as you and me who would come to trust in Jesus generations later. In any case, Jesus is emphasizing that his flock will be far more expansive and inclusive than we might imagine at first. Even more, he emphasizes the “oneness”—the unity—of this flock. This unity comes about because Jesus is the one shepherd of the whole group. As he says elsewhere, “they may be one because the Father and I are one.”

¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

Once again, note the language of laying down and taking up his life. More than this, notice that his doing so is, in fact, an act of power. We often think of power as control or domination, but Jesus insists that his power is enacted by laying down his life and taking it up again. Throughout John’s passion narrative, Jesus is “large and in charge.” When the crowds approach to arrest him, they fall backwards when Jesus claims “I AM he.” When he appears before Pilate, he tells him “you would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.” Everything Jesus does, he does willingly. Nobody takes his life from him; he gives it up freely and powerfully. Jesus claims that he is obedient to the will of God the Father—a claim which will be proved correct when he lays down his life.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. Why do you think our forebears in the faith named this congregation Good Shepherd? What does this name mean to you?**
- 2. What “wolves” do you think we in the church face in our current day and age? How does our Good Shepherd respond?**
- 3. The letter of 1 John, referencing this passage, says that just as Jesus laid down his life for us, so we ought to lay down our lives for one another. What might this look like for us to lay down our lives for each other in this congregation?**