



Mary Craig Ministries, Inc.

The Good Shepherd - March 2013

The church I grew up in had beautiful stained glass windows in the front of the sanctuary. I would stare at them; I loved them. The one in the middle was of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. It comforted me, though it would be years before I even began to grasp the full import of its meaning.

Peter, in 1 Peter chapter two, talks about Christ suffering for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow His steps. Jesus had no sin and no guile was found in His mouth. When reviled, He did not revile and when suffering, He did not threaten; rather He entrusted Himself to the One that judges righteously. Jesus bore our sins in His own body on the tree, Peter tells us; that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness. It is by the stripes of Jesus that we were healed; for we were as sheep going astray. Now we are returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. (1Peter 2:21-25)

During the time of the Patriarchs, shepherding was a noble occupation, and the number of sheep owned contributed to a man's wealth. Farmers, however, vied with shepherds and, in fact, the first murder was by a farmer resenting a shepherd's offering. (Genesis 4:1-8) By the time of David, shepherds were losing status. David as a choice startled folks because of the lowliness of the status of shepherding. God choosing David to be king elevated that status somewhat. God exalts the humble and lowly, as we know.

Today we love the 23rd Psalm, and I'm sure even then people were drawn to it. By the time of Christ, shepherds were not heroes by any stretch. It was a long way from the 23rd Psalm speaking, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want." Shepherds were on the bottom rung of the social ladder, down there with tax collectors and dung sweepers. They were "sinners," despised people, considered untrustworthy, thieves, and despicable.

It is striking, then, in John 10:11-18, that Jesus starts answering some Pharisees hostile after the cure of the man born blind. Their opposition led Him to contrast teachers called and commissioned from above with hired shepherds and to contrast hired shepherds with Himself.

There was a door, an entrance, into the protected area of the sheepfold. Shepherds with small numbers of sheep owned their sheep and knew them; they were counted and cared for. When the number of sheep grew to over 100, a shepherd might hire someone to help with that task of protecting and caring for the sheep.



Jesus says, "I am the door of the sheep." He is the Good Shepherd and not a hireling. The sheep hear the voice of the good Shepherd, and the voice of a stranger they will not follow. Jesus knows His sheep, and His sheep hear His voice and follow Him. (John 10:3.-5, 27)

Those who have not entered by the door, and Jesus is the Door, so those who have not entered by faith in Jesus and a commission from Him, are not true. Jesus is the ideal of all that the office implies and the long expected Shepherd of the prophecies, namely Zechariah 13:7; Ezekiel 34:23; Psalm 23.

By Jesus' own words, His death was considered by Himself as giving Him the right to be the actual and legitimate Shepherd of the sheep. By voluntary sacrifice, He gives His life for the sheep. One party is rescued by another's death. Jesus did not stop short at confronting danger and exposing Himself to death; but of His own free choice, subjected Himself to death, because there was no other way to rescue the sheep.

*The hireling flees, because he is a hireling, and cares not for the sheep.
I am the good shepherd and know My sheep, and am known of Mine.
John 10:13, 14*

The Shepherd found the sheep in peril, and died to rescue them from it, which was done by a vicarious death (John 10:12). A hireling would avoid death and run from danger. The Good Shepherd spontaneously laid down His life for the sheep.

*I am the good shepherd;
The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.*

*As the Father knows Me, even so know I the Father:
And I lay down My life for the sheep.
John 10:11, 15*

The good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep. (John 10:11, 15, 17, 18) Jesus knows His sheep. He cares for them. He watches for wolves and predators, for danger. He owns His sheep; He has a vested interest in them. He feels when one is missing or something's wrong. His sheep know Him as their Shepherd.

Jesus' death, though a violent one, and one inflicted by others, happens in accord with His will and He dies in a voluntary and sacrificial death. He could have warded off His death if He had pleased, but in giving His life for His sheep, He secures His right to them.

Jesus, in His capacity as a substitute and as the High Priest, called of God, laid down His life for His people by a voluntary act.

*Therefore does My Father love Me, because I lay down My life;
That I might take it again.
No man takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself.
I have power [exousia] to lay it down, and I have
Power to take it again.
This commandment have I received of My Father.
John 10:17, 18*

What Jesus did, He did by design. Even taking His life up again (v. 17, 18) is by design. Jesus' death brought rescue and deliverance to those for whom He died, namely, His sheep.



Jesus died for His sheep. He died for their benefit and for their good. He died in their place. He secured the safety of His sheep. He knew the dangers and watched and took necessary and sufficient steps to safeguard the lives of His sheep from danger and destruction. He died in order to separate His sheep from those that were exposed to the destroyer. In purchasing them by His substitution, He puts them under His protection and care; He makes them His own. His sheep are rescued to be His. (Acts 20:28, Romans 14:9)

Jesus received a commandment from His Father to lay down His life. He also possessed intrinsic power to dispose of His life as He pleased. Jesus is at once Lord and Servant, one with the Father. Jesus makes this plain in John 10:30, *"I and my Father are one."* The Father and Jesus are in full accord. Jesus both fulfilled the commandment in His obedience and exercised His own inherent authority.

Christ had an inherent divine right to dispose of His humanity at His discretion. In accord with that, He received the commission or command of the Father to lay down His life in the execution of a covenant, which takes for granted all that inherent right, and proceeds upon it.

The word "commandment" (John 10:18) implies that God appointed the arrangement of salvation and is pleased to allow the substitution of Christ's atoning work to be credited to the account of others. Jesus came into this world charged with a commission from the Father, a commandment. Jesus obeyed that commandment. Jesus acted at every step only in obedience to the commandment of the Father, who required atonement in the place of the elect by Jesus.

All of this is out of love. The Father loved and sent Jesus. In Christ and redeeming grace, the Father manifests His love to those He gave to Christ, out of love. The Father gave commandment to Jesus and loves Jesus, not only on His own account, but also on account that Jesus accomplished the work given to Him. (John 10:17)

Jesus was exempt from the malice and power of men. No power from any source could constrain Him. No power could kill Him. Jesus came in the power of an endless life. He was immortal, first of all, in virtue of a sinless and perfect humanity; and He was immortal in virtue of the fact that His humanity was the flesh of the Son of God. Jesus had power in His own right to lay down His life and to take it up again. Jesus had full power to withhold the sacrifice or to offer it. He voluntarily offered His life for His own.

A martyr, in giving up his life in attesting to the truth, is only discharging a duty owed to God; he has no discretion to retain his life. As to Jesus, it was in His power, as a divine person, to lay down His life within the resources of His omnipotence and to resume it at His will.

Therefore, the Father loves Jesus because He lays down his life, that He might take it again. (John 10:17) Jesus wanted His audience to know absolutely and plainly that His death was not the end. They wanted to kill Him, but they were not to conclude that when He died that they had gained their desired end. Jesus was no involuntary sufferer. His public execution was not fatal to His Messianic claims. He was not to be abandoned by God as though cut off forever. Rather, the Father loved Him, and as He gave His own life, that act would procure great reward. Jesus was to receive this love, and all the reward which this love could confer, including the glory and office of being the Chief Shepherd.



Jesus had resurrection in view. Jesus could exhaust the curse and the wrath of God and not be destroyed. He alone could give His life because He alone could take it again. A mere creature could do neither. Jesus had to die so as to take up His life again.

As to the reward, we might wonder how Jesus talks about Himself as the object of divine love for the reason of laying down His life. He was the Son of the Father's love from all eternity. But this reward is based on the work of atonement, the humiliation to which He stooped. The love of God here displayed advances Jesus to the office and dignity of receiving a multitude of redeemed sinners and being the Chief Shepherd of the sheep.

*And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself,
And became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.
Wherefore, God also has highly exalted Him, and
Given Him a name which is above every name:
Philippians 2:8, 9*

So there is more than just the Father's love to people. The Father loved the Son with the love of recognition and reward for His atoning work, His voluntary sacrifice of Himself.

Jesus has universal dominion over all flesh. He has supreme authority over the Church, i.e., over the flock for whose welfare He laid down His life. He is Lord of His people, head of His Church, Chief Shepherd of the sheep. His dominion is based upon His sacrifice.

The sheep are known by Christ and know Him (John 10:14, 15). Mutual knowledge between the Father and Son spills over into the relationship between Christ and His. This is that "knowing." Our relationship with Christ is to be like the relationship between the Father and Christ. The sheep were given to Christ from the Father and Jesus laid down His life for them. Jesus goes on to tell us that His sheep include Jews and Gentiles (John 10:16, Ephesians 2:16).

A hireling flees and leaves the sheep to their fate. Jesus didn't run from what was necessary to rescue His sheep. He set His face like flint. He is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4), and that Great Shepherd of the sheep (Hebrews 13: 20).

Who is laying down his life for you? Be sure that what stands between you and God is worth it.

Living in the Glory of the Atonement,

Mary Craig, D.P.M.

Mary Craig

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*Now the God of the peace, that brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus,
That great shepherd of the sheep,
Through the blood of the everlasting covenant,
Make you perfect in every good work to do His will,
Working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight,
Through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.
Hebrews 13:20, 21*

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