

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS**  
**Commentary by Michael Sigler**  
**May 13, 2012**

**The Good Shepherd**

Read John 10:7-18

**Key verse: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).**

This great “I am saying” of Jesus (v. 11) is, I believe, the key to the entire passage (vv. 7-18). The rest of the passage tells us what it means for Jesus to be “the good shepherd” and what it means for Jesus to lay down his life for the sheep.

Yet, verses 7 and 9 seem confusing at first read. Here Jesus says “I am the gate for the sheep.” So, I picture the sheepfold of Jesus’ time—often a circular fence of some kind, open to the sky. I can picture Jesus as the good shepherd, bringing the sheep in and out of the sheepfold. But why does Jesus say “I am the gate for the sheep.” How can Jesus be both the shepherd and the gate?

An interesting answer is given by Bible scholars who say that shepherds would often lie across the entrance of the sheepfold at night to protect the sheep from thieves, weather, and wild animals. So, the shepherd was also the gate!

As the gate for the sheep, Jesus indicates that the way in to God’s salvation must pass through Christ (v. 9) and that “all who came before me are thieves and bandits” (v. 8). Jesus as *the way* to salvation? Sounds a bit presumptuous, doesn’t it?

Author Max Lucado illustrated the problem with saying that all ways lead to God:

*We don’t tolerate such logic in other matters. We don’t pretend that all roads lead to London or all ships sail to Australia. All flights don’t lead to Rome. Imagine your response to a travel agent who proclaims they do. You tell him you need a flight to Rome, Italy. So he looks on his screen and he offers, “Well, there’s a flight to Sidney, Australia, at 6:00 a.m.”*

*“Does it go to Rome?” you ask.*

*“No, but it offers great food and movies.”*

*“But I need to go to Rome,” you say.*

*He says, “Well, let me suggest Southwest Airlines.”*

***“Southwest Airlines flies to Rome?”***

***“No, but they win awards for on-time arrivals.”***

***You’re getting frustrated, so you reiterate, “I need one airline to carry me to one place—Rome.”***

***The agent appears offended: “Sir, all flights go to Rome.”***

***Well, you know better. Different flights have different destinations. That’s not a thickheaded conclusion, but an honest one. Every flight does not go to Rome. And every path does not lead to God (from the video based on Lucado’s book, 3:16 Stories of Hope).***

**In verses 11-13, Jesus contrasts the “good” shepherd with the “hired hand,” the shepherd for whom tending sheep is only a means to a paycheck. “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (v. 11). By contrast, when danger threatens, “the hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep” (v. 13)**

**As the Good Shepherd, not only does Jesus lay down his life for the sheep but, as the Good Shepherd, Jesus knows his sheep and his sheep know him (vv.14-15) and they know his voice (v. 16). The late radio commentator Paul Harvey shared the following:**

***“Cattle rustling is a major problem in Uganda. The Ugandan army daily attempts to reunite cattle with their owners. The biggest difficulty lies in proving ownership. Here is how one elderly lady settled the issue: The BBC’s Nathan Etungu witnessed the process beginning in a village north of Mbale. He told the BBC’s Network Africa that when an elderly woman stood before the heard a remarkable thing happened. She called her cows by name and to the amusement of the soldiers, as each cow heard her voice, it lifted its head and then followed her. As far as the army was concerned, it was as strong a proof of ownership as one could find.”***

**In verse 16, Jesus says: “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice.” In this verse, we see a glimpse of Jesus’ worldwide mission—to die for the sins of the world. Jesus came to save not just the Jew, not just the Gentile, not just the American—but all who will receive Christ as Savior and follow Him as Lord. How would Christ accomplish this mission? He would do so through laying down His life on the Cross and then rising from the dead:**

***“For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No 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” (vv. 17-18).***

**The eighth-century Greek monk, Saint Theodore of Studios, contemplated Jesus laying down his life on the cross. And Saint Theodore was inspired to write these words:**

**(continued on next page)**

*How splendid the cross of Christ!  
It brings life, not death;  
Light, not darkness;  
Paradise, not its loss.  
It is the wood on which  
The Lord, like a great warrior,  
Was wounded in hands and feet and side,  
But healed thereby our wounds.  
A tree had destroyed us;  
A tree now brought us life.*

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