

THE INDESTRUCTIBLE SHEPHERD

JOHN 10:14-18

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INTRODUCTION¹

Working up a topical message on the resurrection can be difficult. There are simply so many different passages to choose from and so many implications to emphasize. This morning I have decided to focus specifically on John 10:14-18. I will not be attempting an exposition of the passage. Rather, we will be considering what Jesus says specifically about His death and resurrection as the indestructible Shepherd. I will not be dealing with every detail in this passage. Rather, I have broken the passage up into three sections. First, we will consider Jesus as the self-sacrificial shepherd (10:14-15), we will then consider Jesus as the sovereign sufferer (10:17-18), and finally we will consider Jesus as the risen Savior (10:17-18).

JESUS: THE SELF-SACRIFICIAL SHEPHERD (10:14-15)

In John 10:14-15 Jesus identifies Himself as a self-sacrificial shepherd.

¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know My own sheep, and they know Me, ¹⁵ as the Father knows Me, and I know the Father. I lay down My life for the sheep.

Jesus identifies Himself as the good shepherd. What a perfect metaphor to use. Not only does it say something about Himself—He is protector, provider, and Savior—it says something about us as well. It is telling that God does not reveal Himself first as a lion tamer or as the dog whisperer or as the rancher or even as a crocodile hunter. These titles certainly would accurately convey something of the power and sovereignty of God. But what these metaphors fail to convey is the unique relationship between a helpless and dependent people and their paradoxically omnipotent and tender God.² Sheep, after all, are not the most amazingly gifted animals in God's box of creatures. They are not nimble or agile like rabbits, deer, or feline. They are not smart like chimps or pigs, nor do they have the strength of lions or bears. Sheep are basically dumb, defenseless, and helpless animals. They need protection from predators and help in finding both nutritious food and necessary drink. Sheep are in every way dependent upon the meticulous and tender care of a brave and fearless shepherd.

Shepherds would oftentimes put themselves in harm's way for the sake of protecting their sheep. A good shepherd will put his life on the line to protect his sheep from the predators of the wild. As you may know, David was a shepherd before he became a king. Turn with me to 1 Samuel 17:34-35 and notice how he speaks of the danger that he experienced in protecting his sheep.

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²² Gary Burge has an excellent discussion on the use of shepherding imagery in the Bible in his book, *The Bible and the Land* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 49-58.

³⁴ David answered Saul: ‘Your servant has been tending his father’s sheep. Whenever a lion or a bear came and carried off a lamb from the flock, ³⁵ I went after it, struck it down, and rescued the lamb from its mouth. If it reared up against me, I would grab it by its fur, strike it down, and kill it.

It is obvious from David’s words here that he put his neck on the line on a regular basis to protect his sheep (which is made clear from the word “whenever”). David never actually laid down his life for his sheep, but he certainly was not hesitant to put himself in life-threatening situations for the well-being of his sheep. The shepherding business was not for limp-wristed men. It was a job for warriors and hunters. When you think of Jesus’ words in John 10—where he says, “I lay down My life for the sheep”—is this encouraging or discouraging to you? Suppose David, in an attempt to rescue one of his sheep from the mouth of a lion, found himself being overpowered by the lion. After successfully retrieving his sheep, the lion deals David a death blow to the head. David has successfully staved off an attack. He has saved the lamb from the mouth of the predator. But the battle has left David in a pool of cold blood. Certainly, the sheep are safe and sound and yet the shepherd who has given his life protecting them and providing for them lays lifeless on the ground. Is this encouraging or discouraging to the sheep? David was successful in warding off an attack today, but what about tomorrow? Who will the sheep look to when a new band of predators circle the camp tomorrow? To put it bluntly, a dead shepherd, regardless of his heroic legacy, is useless. A dead shepherd cannot protect. A dead shepherd cannot lead and guide and direct. A dead shepherd cannot wield a staff. A dead shepherd cannot even so much as remove a sticky pricker from wool. A dead shepherd is useless.

So let me ask you again; do you find it encouraging or discouraging when you hear Jesus say, “I lay down My life for the sheep”? Doesn’t this demonstrate how key the resurrection is for the Christian faith! We assume the resurrection so much that we do not even begin to flinch at the news of His death. The point is that it would not be encouraging to hear of the death of Jesus if there were no resurrection. What good is a dead savior? This is the very point that author of Hebrews makes in Hebrews 7:23-25.

²³ Now many have become Levitical priests, since they are prevented by death from remaining in office. ²⁴ But because He remains forever, He holds His priesthood permanently. ²⁵ Therefore, He is always able to save those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to intercede for them.

The author is here seeking to demonstrate why the priesthood of Jesus Christ is in every way superior to the priesthood of the Old Covenant. In vs. 23 we see what exactly made the priesthood of the Old Covenant inferior to the priesthood of Jesus Christ Himself. And what was it about the Old Covenant priesthood that made it so inferior to the priesthood of Jesus Christ? All the old covenant priests were mortal men. And we know that dead men cannot intercede before God on behalf of men. Dead men are dead. Jesus, on the other hand, can intercede on our behalf forever, because he lives forever. He has defeated the grave. This why the author of Hebrews says in 7:16 that Jesus’ priesthood is not based on genealogical descent (He was not a Levite), but is based, rather, on the ‘power of an indestructible life.’ He can plead the blood that

He shed on our behalf forever. Jesus' eternal priesthood means that we surely do "have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the Righteous one", who "is the propitiation for our sins." He lives forever as our advocate. If Jesus' death was the final word, His death would have been pointless. The point of the author of Hebrews is that a dead priest is a worthless priest, regardless of his legacy. A dead savior is a worthless savior, regardless of his legacy. Jesus can offer an eternal hope, because He lives forever to assure it. Jesus' death would mean very little if he did not rise again. He could offer nothing but a short, temporal salvation. But since He lives forever, he offers an eternal hope. This is why Paul could say, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17).

JESUS: THE SOVEREIGN SUFFERER (10:17-18)

You will see in vs. 17-18a that Jesus identifies Himself as a sovereign sufferer.

¹⁷ This is why the Father loves Me, because I am laying down My life so I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down on My own. I have the right to lay it down and I have the right to take it up again.

You must remember that Jesus is saying this to a crowd of Jews. His words were ever so authoritative. He knew that they had been plotting His death. He refers to Himself as the good shepherd and then tells them authoritatively that no one takes His life from Him. Instead, He wants them to know that when He dies, He dies on His own accord.

So often Jesus is communicated as a passive sufferer at the hands of violent men. He is often viewed as a weak, helpless, impotent sufferer. But we know better. Jesus was not a helpless or impotent sufferer. He wasn't wrestled on the cross. The Romans did not cajole Him up there by identifying and preying on an obvious chink in His divine armor. It is not as if soldiers jumped Jesus while He was taking a quick cat nap. No! Jesus was no helpless sufferer. He was a sovereign sufferer, an omnipotent sufferer, an Almighty sufferer. Let me put it to you this way, Jesus was more intent on dying than the soldiers were on crucifying Him. Jesus was more intent on giving up His life than the Jews were on convincing the Romans to crucify Him. Jesus was sent with a mission. He was consumed with completing the mission that God had given Him. His mission had everything to do with shedding His blood—dying—for the redemption of sinners (Mark 10:45). At the end of the day, we must understand that Jesus knew exactly what He was doing while those who crucified Him hadn't but the slightest clue. Certainly, they knew that they were putting a man who claimed to be the King of the Jews to death, but they hadn't understood the significance of who this King was (1 Corinthians 2:8). Jesus, on the other hand, had the cross on his mind, practically speaking, from the moment he came out of Mary's womb.

The question which we all must ask is; Who put Jesus on the cross? Certainly, violent Romans and angry Jews played a large part in the unfolding drama. But we must come to understand and embrace Jesus' own determination in going to the cross. So often when we think about the death of Christ we focus solely on the events as they appear on the surface. There is, of course, nothing wrong with approaching the Gospel narratives as such, but we must always remember that behind all of the human actions and decisions is the sovereign hand of God, working all things according to the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11). I want to take you

to a few passages which prove that Jesus knew full well what was coming His way. And He knew what was coming His way not just because He knows the future, but precisely because He, as the sovereign God, has ordained all things which come to pass. In other words, all of the events surrounding the cross were ordained and planned by God. Turn with me first to Matthew 16:21.

²¹ From then on Jesus began to point out to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised on the third day.

Notice the phrase “From then on.” In other words, Jesus frequently discussed His impending death and consequent resurrection with His disciples. It was a part of their everyday conversation. Jesus was speaking of the cross long before it was ever a working plan in the minds of the Jews. If you turn with me to John 13:17-19 you will notice that Jesus was fully aware even of Judas’ betrayal.

¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. ¹⁸ I’m not speaking about all of you; I know those I have chosen. But the Scripture must be fulfilled: **The one who eats My bread** has raised his heel against Me. ¹⁹ I am telling you now before it happens so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He.

Jesus is here foretelling the betrayal of Judas. He actually says that Judas’s actions had to come about so that the Scripture might be fulfilled (see vs. 18). He told His disciples about Judas’ betrayal so that they would not be thrown for a loop when it took place, but so that they might instead see that Jesus was in fact in control of all of the events surrounding His death. It was not that Judas was forced by God to betray Jesus, but Judas certainly was fulfilling God’s preordained plan (see also Luke 22:22).³ Jesus knew what He was walking into. This may be most clearly seen by the constant reference that Jesus makes to “the hour” in the Gospels. You will remember that the Jews were unable to seize and arrest Him because “His hour had not come” (John 8:20). What was this hour? It was the hour of His death. When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane praying with His disciples, knowing that Judas, leading a band of soldiers, was on his way to betray Him, Jesus said to His disciples (in Mark 14:41-42):

⁴¹ Enough! The time has come. Look, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Get up; let’s go! See—My betrayer is near.

Jesus knew that the hour of His death had come (see John 18:4). The Roman soldiers did not wrestle Jesus to the ground. Jesus did try to run away from the band of soldiers. No. In fact, Jesus rebuked Peter when he tried to resist Jesus’ arrest by cutting off the ear of Malchus, the high priest’s servant (John 18:10). Pay close attention to Jesus’ words.

³ As D.A. Carson explains, “In the case of both Caiaphas and Judas, therefore, divine ultimacy even behind evil actions is presupposed. But divine ultimacy operates in some mysterious way so that human responsibility is in no way mitigated, while the divine being is in no way tarnished. In particular, Judas is responsible even when Satan is using him; but over both stands the sovereignty of God.” D.A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1994), 132.

“Sheath your sword! Am I not to drink the cup the Father has given Me?” (John 18:11).

Jesus’ life was not taken from Him. He came to die. He did not resist arrest. No. In fact, Jesus rebuked Peter, saying “Am I not to drink the cup the Father has given Me?” Jesus knew that His death was His Father’s will. When the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, Jesus submitted to His arrest. But don’t get confused. Jesus was not submitting to the Roman guards *per se*. He was submitting to His Father’s will. Paul says in Philippians 2:8 that Jesus became “obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.” But to whom did He become obedient to? To the overpowering will of the soldiers? No! He became obedient to the Father. This is why He responded to Peter as He did. And this is why He tied His authority to lay down His own life to His obedience to the Father in John 10:18. Jesus did not seek to be set free. He freely gave His life, a ransom for many. No one takes His life. He gives it freely. This is most clearly seen in Acts 2:23 and 4:27-28. Look at these two passages with them.

Acts 2:23 He was delivered up according to God’s determined plan and foreknowledge, you used lawless people to nail Him to a cross and kill Him.

Acts 4:27-28 For, in fact, in this city both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, assembled together against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, to do whatever Your hand and Your plan had predestined to take place.

What we see from these two texts in Acts is that God did not just ‘roll with the punches’ as the events of the death of Jesus began to unfold. It is not just that God allowed certain things to happen and then waved His divine baton and caused it all to work for the good as it came His way. No, He directed and orchestrated every bit of it. You will notice that God’s foreknowledge is based upon His predetermined plan. That is to say that God did not merely look down through the corridors of time and see that Jesus was going to be crucified. No. He predetermined that Christ was going to die at the hands of lawless men. His foreknowledge of the future is based upon His predestining all things that are to come to pass. That is to say that there would be no foreknowledge apart from predestination. Let me put it this way; the cross was not a monkey wrench thrown into the plan and purpose of God. In fact, the cross was the very center of God’s plan and purpose from the beginning. Consider for a moment Revelation 13:8.

All those who live on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name was not written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slaughtered.

Here we have a book called “the book of life of the Lamb who was slaughtered.” And before the foundations of the world were put in place there were names put in that book. And before the foundations of the world were put in place “God had already planned that his Son would be slain like a lamb to save all those who are written in the book.”⁴ When Jesus refused

⁴ John Piper, *Spectacular Sins: And Their Global Purpose to the Glory of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 58.

to fight for His freedom in the garden He was submitting Himself to the “determined plan” of God. Judas, Herod, Pilate, the guards, the angry Jews: they were all fulfilling God’s “determined plan.” Jesus’ life and death were mapped out by God. This does not mean that the soldiers or the Jews are somehow unaccountable or absolved because God used them to fulfill His plan of redemption. No, they are morally culpable for crucifying Jesus. And yet, just as God used the wicked nation of Assyria as a tool in His hand to bring judgment to Northern Israel (Isaiah 10:12-19) God used the violent Romans and the hate-filled Jews as a tool in His hands to accomplish redemption through the death of Jesus Christ.

So you must understand that although the Romans and the Jews certainly had a large part to play in the death of Christ, Jesus’ life was not taken from Him. He died as a sovereign sufferer. Even His death was the fulfillment of His sovereign purposes and plan. That is to say, and I ask you to think hard about this, He died in complete control. Jesus was supplying His executioners every ounce of strength that was needed to take His life. Even as He was dying He was “sustaining all things by His powerful word” (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus died as a sovereign sufferer. There was not one stray bullet that threw Him for a loop. Everything went according to His uncontestable and sovereign plan.⁵

⁵ A. W. Pink’s comments on the ultimate sovereignty of God will be helpful here. “Two alternatives confront us, and between them we are obliged to choose: either God governs, or He is governed; either God rules, or He is ruled; either God has His way, or men have theirs.

And is our choice between these alternatives hard to make? Shall we say that in man we behold a creature so unruly that he is *beyond* God’s control? Shall we say that sin has *alienated* the sinner so far from the thrice Holy One that he is *outside* the pale of His jurisdiction? Or, shall we say that man has been endowed with moral responsibility, and therefore God must leave him entirely free, at least during the period of his probation? Does it necessarily follow because the natural man is an outlaw against Heaven, a rebel against the Divine government, that God is unable to fulfill His purpose through him? We mean, not merely that He may *overrule* the effects of the actions of evil-doers, nor that He will yet bring the wicked to stand before His judgment-bar so that sentence of punishment may be passed upon them—multitudes of non-Christians believe these things—but, we mean, that every action of the most lawless of His subjects is entirely beneath His control, yea that the actor is, though unknown to himself, carrying out the secret decrees of the Most High. Was it not thus with Judas? and is it possible to select a more extreme case? If then the arch-rebel was performing the counsel of God is it any greater tax upon our faith to believe the same of all rebels?” A. W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 38-39.

Piper’s comments about the sovereignty of God specifically in the death of Christ are worthy of consideration as well. “Even though Luke 22:3 says that Satan entered into Judas and brought about the final betrayal of Jesus to the Jews, nevertheless Peter asserts that behind Satan, God was guiding all things: ‘This Jesus [was] delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God’ (Acts 2:23); indeed, ‘Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, [did] whatever [God’s] hand and plan had predestined to take place’ (Acts 4:27-28). But all these satanically influenced and divinely guided leaders failed in their opposition to God. For ‘the Lord brings the counsel of the nations to naught; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations’ (Psalm 33:10-11; Isaiah 43:13). Of every attack on God’s people in the world it can be said, ‘Who has commanded and it came to pass, unless the Lord has ordained it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and calamity come?’ (Lamentations 3:37-38). ‘Does evil befall a city, unless the Lord has done it?’ (Amos 3:6). Yet we must always be aware that in his mysterious dealings with the world and with his own people the principle stands sure: ‘As for you, you meant evil against me; but God mean it for good’ (Genesis 50:20).

Behind Satan’s limited freedom to act is the hand of a sovereign God guiding all things for the good of his people (Romans 8:28).” John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God’s Delight in Being God* (Multnomah Books, 2000), 69.

JESUS: THE RISEN SAVIOR (10:17-18)

Lastly, we see that Jesus is the Risen Savior.

¹⁷ This is why the Father loves Me, because I am laying down My life so I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down on My own. I have the right to lay it down and I have the right to take it up again.

You see in vs. 17 the purpose for the death of Christ. Jesus' death was no end in itself. He died "so" (or better, "so that")⁶ He might take it up again. The purpose of His death was to defeat the grave, to reverse the effects of the fall by doing away with sin. This is what drove Him to the cross in the first place. What Jesus was looking forward to was the victory and reward that could come only on the other side of the grave. Don't get me wrong, Jesus' death was essential. Jesus purchased our redemption with His blood (Hebrews 9:12 and 1 Peter 1:18-19), that is, through His death. For "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22). Jesus ultimately died, not because He loves death. No! Jesus died because He hates death. He died to do away with death. He died to "destroy the one holding the power of death—that is, the Devil" (Hebrews 2:14). When Jesus gets final victory at the end of the age, the last enemy to be defeated will be death (1 Corinthians 15:26). He will throw it into the lake of fire (Revelation 21:13-15). Ultimately, Jesus died to purchase life. Jesus went through the passage of death because it was the only route to removing the curse of sin—it was the only way of winning eternal life for those who would trust in Him. Turn with me to Hebrews 12:2.

² Keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that lay before Him endured a cross and despised the shame and has sat down at the right hand of God's throne.

Jesus approached the cross with joy precisely because He anticipated what was to follow on the other side. Jesus didn't relish the cross as an end in itself. The word translated as "despised" in the HCSB, καταφρονήσας (*kataphroneo*), literally means "to consider something not important enough to be an object of concern when evaluated against someth[ing] else, *care nothing for, disregard, be unafraid of.*"⁷ In other words He considered the shame of the cross to be "small beans" compared to the glory that was to follow. It is sort of like childbirth. The pain of delivery is only bearable because you know what is awaiting you at the moment of delivery. No one would ever go through the pain of child birth 'just cuz.' Only an idiot would get pregnant for the purpose of experiencing labor. Women look beyond the pain of labor to the new life that is to come on the other side of pushing. The hope of new life does not take away the pain of delivery, but it certainly puts the pain of labor in perspective. Jesus uses this very illustration in John 16:20-23. Jesus approached His death with joy, because He was focused on the resurrection and exaltation that were to follow. Jesus went with joy because He knew that

⁶ The word is ἴνα (*hina*).

⁷ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. ed. by Frederick William Denker, 3^d Ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 529.

His Father was not going to “abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay” (Acts 2:27, NIV). He knew that His Father was going to raise Him up, and highly exalt Him and give “Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:9-11).

CONCLUSION

We have taken a look at the good shepherd, Jesus, this morning. We have seen that He is a self-sacrificial shepherd, a sovereign sufferer, and a risen savior. Jesus has defeated the grave. He gave His life freely for those whom He came to save. And the best news of all is that He will raise each of us up with Him, when He comes back in all of His glory. Our great Shepherd lives forever to bring about full and final salvation, an eternal salvation. He laid down His life to purchase for us life eternal. What a hope that we have in Jesus. Behold, embrace, and celebrate your indestructible Shepherd.