

“I am the Good Shepherd”

Text: John 10:11-18
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The word good is subjective. Go to a movie with your spouse or friends and after the movie the question will undoubtedly be asked, “What did you think of the movie?” Then you might respond, “It was good.” Well, that can mean a variety of things. What was good about it? Was it good because of the sound effects and visuals? Was it good because of one certain actor or actress’s performance? Was it good because of the plot line? Was it good because of the general flow of the movie? What was it about the movie that made it good?

Let’s say we go to a restaurant for dinner and the next day we are talking about it with some friends at work. They had never been to this particular seafood restaurant, so they ask the question, “Was it good?” “Yes, it was very good.” Well, what made it good? Was it the appetizer? The service? The fried shrimp? The salad? What made that particular meal good? Maybe it wasn’t the meal at all. Maybe the food was average but the atmosphere was above average. The person you sat across from at the table made the meal and the evening good.

We evaluate a lot of different things in life and there are rating systems in place to determine if something is good or acceptable. From car safety statistics to a box score of a basketball game, there are measurable ways to determine if some things are good or not. We can look at the standings of a sports league and know right away which teams are good and which ones are not so good based on the number of wins and losses. But what about the other areas of life that are not so easily measured? How do we determine what is good? And then beyond that, how do we distinguish between good and really, really good?

I recommended a restaurant to some friends of mine a few weeks ago. The name of the place is Kuby’s, Kuby’s is a German restaurant and meat market in Highland Park near the campus of SMU. It’s really easy to find, just follow all the Mercedes and Jaguars and you will eventually get there! Kuby’s has long been one of my favorite places to eat. They have some of the best German potato salad you will ever eat. I was telling Reese and Susan about Kuby’s and how good the food was, and they finally consented to give it a try. I told them that it was not just good, but really good. Needless to say, after I hyped it up so much they were a bit skeptical as to the validity of my claims. Ailer all, I’m the furthest thing from a food critic. However, they decided to give it a try despite my recommendation. Much to their surprise, they were absolutely blown away by how good the food was at Kuby’s. When they came back to Mexia they called me and said, “We were really surprised. We were amazed that you recommended something so good.”

You know when you are in the presence of something good –something really, really good, you don’t need numbers to back it up and you don’t need to be told it is good. The goodness just shines through.

A few years ago Alisha and I went to see *Phantom of the Opera* at Dallas Music Hall. I am not the kind of guy you are going to see at many musicals. If given the choice of going to a musical or rearranging my sock drawer, I think I would take the socks nine times out often. Actually, I would probably take the socks ten times out often. Nonetheless, I somehow wound up at the *Phantom of the Opera*. I know nothing about musicals and technically could not make an educated comparison between musicals. A musical is a musical in my book, But somewhere along the way, right in the middle of the *Phantom of the Opera*, I realized that a musical is not just a musical. There is a difference in a good musical and a really, really good musical. I don’t

know what happened and I don't even remember the song, but when they had finished it you could just feel something moving through the audience. At that point of the musical I didn't even know what was going on as far as the storyline was concerned, but I knew that something special had just happened. I had experienced something really, really good.

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd." In the Greek language there are two understandings of good. There is *agathos* – which simply describes the moral quality of something. Then there is *kalos* which means in the goodness there is a quality of winsomeness which makes it lovely. When Jesus is described as the good shepherd, the word is *kalos*. Sometimes in a town people speak of the "good doctor". When they say the "good doctor" they are not just referring to the doctor's skill and efficiency as a physician. What they mean is the doctor is good because he or she has sympathy and kindness and graciousness. The doctor is good because he or she cares.

Jesus is the good shepherd because he cares for his flock. It is his flock, not someone else's and that makes all the difference, and the difference between a good shepherd and a bad shepherd is how the shepherd views his flock. Jesus said, "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The 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. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep."

When we take ownership in something our outlook changes. It can be anything – from a car to a job to a relationship even to our faith. When it is ours we handle it differently. We have really stepped up the pace in our packing preparing for our move to Mexia. It is a chaotic time in which everything is thrown into disarray. We had an impromptu garage sale the other day. We put a sign up on the highway and then hauled everything out that we would not be bringing with us to Mexia. I was looking for the big stuff. It didn't matter if we needed it or not, if it looked heavy and bulky I wanted to sell it so I wouldn't have to move it. I even talked Alisha into putting our entertainment center in the driveway. It was a successful garage sale. We sold all of our bedroom furniture, Benjamin's dresser, a television, and a refrigerator. The entertainment center is still in the garage. If you want it talk to me after the service and I'm sure we could work a deal!

There were, however, two items that I really wanted to sell and didn't. Our two recliners. They were passed on to us ten years ago when we married and have seen better days. I thought for sure they would go quickly. I even told one guy that I would pay him to take it! When the sale was over those two recliners were staring me in the face and I had to drag them back into the garage. I was tired and not in the best of moods, so I grabbed one of the chairs and dragged it carelessly into the garage. It was as if I was mad at the chair for not leaving. In my mind it wasn't my chair anymore so it didn't matter to me what happened to it. It was a worthless piece of furniture that was in the way.

Now let's think about this for a minute. What if I had worked for several months to save up money to buy a new chair? And not just any chair but an expensive leather chair. I pick up an unsuspecting friend and drive him to the furniture store to help me load the chair in the truck. We take the chair back to my house and unload it in the driveway. Now do you think I am going to drag that chair into the garage and stuff in the corner? Of course not. It's my new chair that I paid for and I am going to be careful about bringing it into the house.

Jesus is our good shepherd and he has taken ownership of us. We are his disciples and since we belong to him he takes special care of us. He is not a hired hand who has nothing at stake with us. He is the good shepherd who lived and died so that we might have life. Jesus has

a lot invested in us and don't think for a second that he does not care for you. He cares deeply for you and would and did give his life for you. No matter what your situation in life today, you and everyone else needs to hear that message today –God really does care about you. Think about that for a second. The Creator of the universe who created the heavens and earth and billions upon billions of people, cares specifically for you.

The early American Indians had a unique practice of training young braves. On the night of a boy's thirteenth birthday, after learning hunting, scouting, and fishing skills, he was put to one final test. He was placed in a dense forest to spend the entire night alone. Until then, he had never been away from the security of the family and the tribe, But on this night, he was blindfolded and taken several miles away. When he took off the blindfold, he was in the middle of a thick woods and he was terrified! Every time a twig snapped, he visualized a wild animal ready to pounce. After what seemed like an eternity, dawn broke and the first rays of sunlight entered the interior of the forest. Looking around, the boy saw flowers, trees, and the outline of the path. Then, to his utter astonishment, he beheld the figure of a man standing just a few feet away, armed with a bow and arrow, It was his father. He had been there all night long.

Very often, just like that young brave, we cannot see our Good Shepherd during the trying times, but sure enough, he is right there –beside us, behind us, in front of us –and always, always with us. It's quite a feeling to know that we are loved and supported and that we do not walk through this life alone.

Fred Craddock told a story about a time when he was invited to the University of Winnipeg in Canada to give two lectures, one on a Friday evening and one on a Saturday morning. I gave the lecture on Friday evening. As we left the lecture hall, it was beginning to spit a little snow. I was surprised, and my host was surprised because he had written, "It's too early for cold weather, but you might bring a little windbreaker." The next morning when I got up two or three feet of snow had fallen. The phone rang and my host said, "We are all surprised by this. In fact, I can't come to get you to go to breakfast, the lecture has been canceled, and the airport is closed. If you can make your way around the corner there is a cafe." I said, "I'll get around." I put on that little jacket and made my way to the cafe. I went inside and finally found a place to sit, and after a lengthy time a man in a greasy apron came over and said, "What'll you have?" I said, "May I see a menu?" He said, "What do you want a menu for? We have soup." I said, "What kinds of soup do you have?" And he said, "Soup. You want some soup?" "Yes, I'll have some soup."

He brought the soup, and it was terrible! I couldn't eat it. The door opened to the cafe and in came this woman clutching her little coat. She found a place, not far from me. The greasy apron came, "What do you want?" And she said, "Glass of water." He brought a glass of water, took out his tablet and said, "Now what will you have?" She said, "Just the water." He said, "You have to order lady." "Well, I just want a glass of water." "Look, I have customers that pay –what do you think this is, a church or something?" She said, "Al! I want is a glass of water and some time to get warm." "Look, there are people that are paying here. If you're not going to order, you've got to leave!" And he got real loud about it. So she got up to leave and, almost as if rehearsed, everybody in that little cafe stood up and started toward the door. I got up and said, "I'm voting for something here; I don't know what it is." And the man in the greasy apron said, "All right, all right, all right, she can stay." Everybody sat down, and he brought her a bowl of soup.

I said to the person sifting beside me, "Who is she?" He said, "I never saw her before." The place grew quite, but I heard the sipping of that awful soup. I said, "I'm going to try that again." I put my spoon to the soup -you know, it was not bad soup. Everybody was eating this soup. I started eating the soup, and it was pretty good soup. I don't know what was in it, but I do recall when I was eating it, it tasted a little bit like bread and wine. Just a little like bread and wine.