

THE 'I AM'S' OF JESUS

Part 10

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

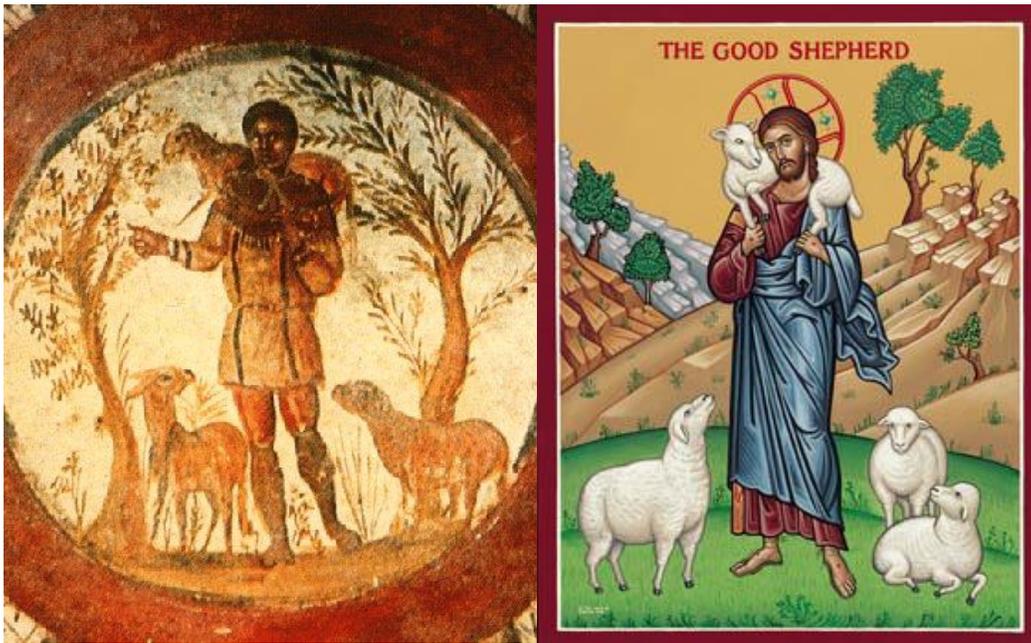
Based on the book: "The Great I Am's of Jesus."

By Anthony Coniaris, Light and Life Publications

One of the most tender descriptions of God in the Bible was given by Jesus Christ when he said, "I am the good shepherd - Εγώ ειμί ο ποιμήν ο καλός" (John 10:14). In both the Old and New Testaments, the concept appears about eighty times. The shepherd's life was difficult... but peaceful and simple. To be a shepherd in those days you needed to show tender loving care for your flock. You needed to feed them, water them, lead them out to graze, protect them against wild animals, protect them against harm, help them give birth, alleviate them of their wool in the warmer months. The relationship between shepherd and flock was mutually beneficial. Sheep are so placid, that they would have slim chance of survival in the wild.



In Eastern cultures, sheep were kept more for their wool and milk, rather than their meat. The shepherd's family would only eat meat once a month or so. This meant that the shepherd got to know each sheep individually, over the ten or twelve year life-span. The shepherd knew which one was the child of which, he knew each one by name. Such was the appeal of the idea that the ancient Christians would draw and paint images of the shepherd in the underground catacombs of the first and second centuries as a way of depicting Christ without getting caught by the Roman authorities.



The prophet Isaiah describes God as a shepherd carrying his sheep in his arms:

*“He shall feed his flock like a shepherd,
He shall gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his embrace,
and shall gently lead those that are with young.”*

(Isaiah 40:11)

David says in Psalm 95:7,

*“For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.”*

In the book of Ezekiel we have another picture of the shepherd. The Lord lashes out at the false shepherds, who had been feeding **themselves**, and not the flock.

*“The weak you have not strengthened,
the sick you have not healed,
the crippled you have not bound up,
the strayed you have not brought back
the lost you have not sought,
and with force and harshness you have ruled them.”*

(Ezekiel 34:1-10)

Then God utters a prophecy, *“I **myself** will be the shepherd of my sheep.”*

(Ezekiel 34:11-16)

As the good shepherd, Jesus was moved with compassion for people, and the Gospel describes the scene with the shepherd and sheep analogy. “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (Matthew 9:36)

As the good shepherd, Jesus said to his disciples, “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32)

Brothers and sisters, we Christians became members of the *flock of Christ - η ποιμνη του Χριστου* when we were baptized. But we grow up sometimes not knowing where we are going, not knowing what the point is, not knowing right from wrong.

Jesus spoke of people losing their way in life as sheep getting lost. There is a story of a city man speaking with a farmer. “How do they, the sheep, get lost?” asked the city dweller. The farmer responded, “They just nibble themselves lost. They keep their heads down, wander from one green tuft to another, come to a hole in the fence and never can find the hole by which to get back again.” This demonstrates that to the farmer, the reality is very matter-of-fact.



It is us modern people who get offended too easily when we hear that we may be compared to sheep. That is because all we know about sheep is that they follow each other. We have no clue about all the other aspects of the mutuality of shepherd and sheep. And even though we resist the Christian use of a simple analogy, we nevertheless carry on our lives as sheep anyway... following all the '-isms' of this world, materialism, capitalism, socialism, feminism, rationalism... thus ironically proving the 'lost sheep' analogy as true. Then there is the ultimate '-ism'... the Greek word *ploutismos* (ploutos = wealth) means that everything in our life is geared towards the pursuit of wealth... to the detriment and at the expense of everything else... family, relationships, friendships, even our humanity. Thus it is, that the dominance of the wealthy over governments and their fellow human beings is called 'plutocracy'.

It was no accident that when speaking about the dominance of money in our life, Jesus gave a polarised statement.

*“You cannot serve two masters.
Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you
will be devoted to the one and despise the other.
You cannot serve both God and Mammon”
[the pagan god of money]” (Matthew 6:24).*

We Orthodox Christians, use a paradoxical term to describe the marriage between our personal freedom and our choice to follow and live the life in Christ. We say *“λογικά πρόβατα - rational sheep”*, which connotes that as rational human beings, we **choose** this way of life and we can leave whenever we want to. The *rational* refers to our freedom to choose this way of life and the *sheep* refers to how we understand our relationship with the Spirit of Life, Light and Love, otherwise known as God. For us, our way of life is not about the sheep... its about the shepherd. What a shepherd does for the sheep, Christ does for us - only infinitely better. He defends us. He feeds us, He guides us. He knows his sheep one by one... by name.

Jesus Christ said,

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

“There is no greater love than for someone to lay down their life for their friends.” (John 15:13)

Jesus Christ - our Good Shepherd - did just that for us.

Amen.



*Next week, we shall continue with part 11 of our series on the “I AMs of Jesus”.
We shall be talking about “I am a King - βασιλεύς”.*

You can catch up with the series on Twitter. Follow us @stgeorgerosebay.

*Sermon given by Fr Gerasimos Koutsouras
St George Church, Rose Bay, Australia
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