

# John 10:14-19

by St. John Chrysostom

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*Jesus is the Good Shepherd who knows and is known by His sheep, demonstrating His love and care for them through His willingness to die for them.*

**Scripture:** Ezekiel 34:2, Luke 10:22, John 10:11, John 10:16-17, Romans 5:10, Romans 8:32, Ephesians 2:15, Philippians 2:21, Titus 3:3

**Topics:** "Christ's Sacrifice", "Shepherd Leadership"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of being a good shepherd, drawing parallels between the shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep and Christ who sacrificed Himself for humanity. He emphasizes the need for shepherds to care for and protect their flock, contrasting the selfless dedication of a shepherd with the selfishness of hirelings. Chrysostom highlights Christ's unwavering commitment to His sheep, even in the face of opposition and danger, showcasing His ultimate act of love by laying down His life for all. He delves into the significance of Christ's resurrection, proving His divine power and authority over life and death.

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## Transcript

I am the Good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine. As the Father knows Me, even so know I the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.

1. A great matter, beloved, a great matter it is to preside over a Church: a matter needing wisdom and courage as great as that of which Christ speaks, that a man should lay down his life for the sheep, and never leave them deserted or naked; that he should stand against the wolf nobly. For in this the shepherd differs from the hireling; the one always looks to his own safety, caring not for the sheep; the other always seeks that of the sheep, neglecting his own. Having therefore mentioned the marks of a shepherd, Christ has put two kinds of spoilers; one, the thief who kills and steals; the other, one who does not these things, but who when they are done does not give heed nor hinder them. By the first, pointing to Theudas and those like him; by the second, exposing the teachers of the Jews, who neither cared for nor thought about the sheep entrusted to them. On which account Ezekiel of old rebuked them, and said, Woe, ye shepherds of Israel! Do the shepherds feed themselves? Do not the shepherds feed the sheep? Ezekiel 34:2, Septuagint But they did the contrary, which is the worst kind of wickedness, and the cause of all the rest. Wherefore It says, They have not turned back the strayed, nor sought the lost, nor bound up the broken, nor healed the sick, because they fed themselves and not the sheep. Ezekiel 34:4 As Paul also has

declared in another passage, saying, For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's Philippians 2:21; and again, Let no man seek his own, but every man his neighbor's. 1 Corinthians 10:24 From both Christ distinguishes Himself; from those who came to spoil, by saying, I have come that they might have life, and that they might have more abundantly John 10:10; and from those who cared not for the sheep being carried away by wolves, by never deserting them, but even laying down His life for them, that the sheep might not perish. For when they desired to kill Him, He neither altered His teaching, nor betrayed those who believed on Him, but stood firm, and chose to die. Wherefore He continually said, I am the good Shepherd. Then because His words appeared to be unsupported by testimony, (for though the, I lay down My life, was not long after proved, yet the, that they might have life, and that they might have more abundantly, was to come to pass after their departure hence in the life to come,) what does He? He proves one from the other; by giving His mortal life (He proves) that He gives life immortal. As Paul also says, If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved. Romans 5:10 And again in another place, He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Romans 8:32

But wherefore do they not now bring against Him the charge which they did before, when they said, You bear witness of yourself, your witness is not true? John 8:13 Because He had often stopped their mouths, and because His boldness towards them had been increased by His miracles. Then because He said above And the sheep hear his voice, and follow him, lest any should say, What then is this to those who believe not? hear what He adds, And I know My sheep, and am known of Mine. As Paul declared when he said, God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew Romans 11:2; and Moses, The Lord knew those that were His 2 Timothy 2:19; comp. Numbers 16:5; those, He says, I mean, whom He foreknew. Then that you may not deem the measure of knowledge to be equal, hear how He sets the matter right by adding, I know My sheep, and am known of Mine. But the knowledge is not equal. Where is it equal? In the case of the Father and Me, for there, As the Father knows Me, even so know I the Father. Had He not wished to prove this, why should He have added that expression? Because He often ranked Himself among the many, therefore, lest any one should deem that He knew as a man knows, He added, As the Father knows Me, even so know I the Father. I know Him as exactly as He knows Me. Wherefore He said, No man knows the Son save the Father, nor the Father save the Son Luke 10:22, speaking of a distinct kind of knowledge, and such as no other can possess.

2. I lay down My life. This He says continually, to show that He is no deceiver. So also the Apostle, when he desired to show that he was a genuine teacher, and was arguing against the false apostles, established his authority by his dangers and deaths, saying, In stripes above measure, in deaths oft. 2 Corinthians 11:23 For to say, I am light, and I am life, seemed to the foolish to be a matter of pride; but to say, I am willing to die, admitted not any malice or envy. Wherefore they do not say to Him, You bear witness of yourself, your witness is not true, for the speech manifested very tender care for them, if indeed He was willing to give Himself for those who would have stoned Him. On this account also He seasonably introduces mention of the Gentiles;

John 10:16

For other sheep also I have, which are not of this fold, them also must I bring.

Observe again, the word must, here used, does not express necessity, but is declaratory of something which will certainly come to pass. As though He had said, Why marvel ye if these shall follow Me, and if My sheep shall hear My voice? When you shall see others also following Me and hearing My voice, then

shall you be astonished more. And be not confounded when you hear Him say, which are not of this fold , for the difference relates to the Law only, as also Paul says, Neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision.

Them also must I bring. He shows that both these and those were scattered and mixed, and without shepherds, because the good Shepherd had not yet come. Then He proclaims beforehand their future union, that,

They shall be one fold.

Which same thing also Paul declared, saying, For to make in Himself of two one new man. Ephesians 2:15

John 10:17

Therefore does My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again.

What could be more full of humanity than this saying, if so be that on our account our Lord shall be beloved, because He dies for us? What then? Tell me, was He not beloved during the time before this; did the Father now begin to love Him, and were we the causes of His love? Do you see how He used condescension? But what does He here desire to prove? Because they said that He was alien from the Father, and a deceiver, and had come to ruin and destroy He tells them, This if nothing else would persuade Me to love you, namely, your being so beloved by the Father, that I also am beloved by Him, because I die for you. Besides this He desires also to prove that other point, that He came not to the action unwillingly, (for it unwillingly, how could what was done cause love?) and that this was especially known to the Father. And if He speaks as a man, marvel not, for we have often mentioned the cause of this, and to say again the same things is superfluous and unpleasant.

I lay down My life, that I might take it again.

John 10:18

No man takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.

Because they often took counsel to kill Him, He tells them, Except I will, your labor is unavailing. And by the first He proves the second, by the Death, the Resurrection. For this is the strange and wonderful thing. Since both took place in a new way, and beyond ordinary custom. But let us give heed exactly to what He says, I have power to lay down My life. And who has not power to lay down his life? Since it is in the power of any that will, to kill himself. But He says it not so, but how? I have in such a way the power to lay it down, that no one can effect this against My will. And this is a power not belonging to men; for we have no power to lay it down in any other way than by killing ourselves. And if we fall into the hands of men who plot against us, and have the power to kill us, we no longer are free to lay it down or not, but even against our will they take it from us. Now this was not the case with Christ, but even when others plotted against Him, He had power not to lay it down. Having therefore said that, No man takes it from Me, He adds, I have power to lay down My life, that is, I alone can decide as to laying it down, a thing which does not rest with us, for many others also are able to take it from us. Now this He said not at first, (since the assertion would not have seemed credible,) but when He had received the testimony of facts, and when, having often plotted against Him, they had been unable to lay hold on Him, (for He escaped from their hands ten

thousand times,) He then says, No man takes it from me. But if this be true, that other point follows, that He came to death voluntarily. And if this be true, the next point is also certain, that He can take it again when He will. For if the dying was a greater thing than man could do, doubt no more about the other. Since the fact that He alone was able to let go His life, shows that He was able by the same power to take it again. Do you see how from the first He proved the second, and from His death showed that His Resurrection was indisputable?

This commandment have I received of My Father.

What commandment was this? To die for the world. Did He then wait first to hear, and then choose, and had He need of learning it? Who that had sense would assert this? But before when He said, Therefore does My Father love Me, He showed that the first motion was voluntary, and removed all suspicion of opposition to the Father; so here when He says that He received a commandment from the Father, He declared nothing save that, this which I do seems good to Him, in order that when they should slay Him, they might not think that they had slain Him as one deserted and given up by the Father, nor reproach Him with such reproaches as they did, He saved others, himself he cannot save; and, If you be the Son of God, come down from the cross Matthew 27:42; yet the very reason of His not coming down was, that He was the Son of God.

3. Then lest on hearing that, I have received a command from the Father, you should deem that the achievement does not belong to Him, He has said preventing the, The good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep; showing by this that the sheep were His, and that all which took place was His achievement, and that He needed no command. For had He needed a commandment, how could He have said, I lay it down of Myself? For He that lays it down of Himself needs no commandment. He also assigns the cause for which He does this. And what is that? That He is the Shepherd, and the good Shepherd. Now the good Shepherd needs no one to arouse him to his duty; and if this be the case with man, much more is it so with God. Wherefore Paul said, that He emptied Himself. Philippians 2:7 So the commandment put here means nothing else, but to show His unanimity with the Father; and if He speaks in so humble and human a way, the cause is the infirmity of His hearers.

John 10:19

There was a division therefore among the Jews. And some said, He has a devil (and is mad ). Others said, These are not the words of him that has a devil: can a devil open the eyes of the blind?

For because His words were greater than belonged to man, and not of common use, they said that He had a devil, calling Him so now for the fourth time. For they before had said, You have a devil, who seeks to kill you? John 7:20; and again, Said we not well that you are a Samaritan, and hast a devil? John 8:48; and here, He has a devil and is mad, why hear ye him? Or rather we should say, that He heard this not for the fourth time, but frequently. For to ask, Said we not well that you have a devil? is a sign that they had said so not twice or thrice, but many times. Others said, These are not the words of him that has a devil: can a devil open the eyes of the blind? For since they could not silence their opponents by words, they now brought proof from His works. Certainly neither are the words those of one that has a devil, yet if you are not persuaded by the words, be ye shamed by the works. For if they are not the acts of one that has a devil, and are greater than belong to man, it is quite clear that they proceed from some divine power. Do you see the argument? That they were greater than belonged to man is plain, from the Jews saying, He has a devil; that He had not a devil, He showed by what He did.

What then did Christ? He answered nothing to these things. Before this He had replied, I have not a devil; but not so now; for since He had afforded proof by His actions, He afterwards held His peace. For neither were they worthy of an answer, who said that He was possessed of a devil, on account of those actions for which they ought to have admired and deemed Him to be God. And how were any farther refutations from Him needed, when they opposed and refuted each other? Wherefore He was silent, and bore all mildly. And not for this reason alone, but also to teach us all meekness and long-suffering.

4. Let us now imitate Him. For not only did He now hold His peace, but even came among them again, and being questioned answered and showed the things relating to His foreknowledge; and though called demoniac and madman, by men who had received from Him ten thousand benefits, and that not once or twice but many times, not only did He refrain from avenging Himself, but even ceased not to benefit them. To benefit, do I say? He laid down His life for them, and while being crucified spoke in their behalf to His Father.

This then let us also imitate, for to be a disciple of Christ, is the being gentle and kind. But whence can this gentleness come to us? If we continually reckon up our sins, if we mourn, if we weep; for neither does a soul that dwells in the company of so much grief endure to be provoked or angered. Since wherever there is mourning, it is impossible that there should be anger; where grief is, all anger is out of the way; where there is brokenness of spirit, there is no provocation.

For the mind, when scourged by sorrow, has not leisure to be roused, but will groan bitterly, and weep yet more bitterly. I know that many laugh on hearing these things, but I will not cease to lament for the laughers. For the present is a time for mourning, and wailings, and lamentations, since we do many sins both in word and deed, and hell awaits those who commit such transgressions, and the river boiling with a roaring stream of fire, and banishment from the Kingdom, which is the most grievous thing of all.

When these things then are threatened, tell me, do you laugh and bear you proudly? And when your Lord is angered and threatening, do you stand careless, and do you not fear lest by this thou light for yourself the furnace to a blaze? Do you not hear what He cries out every day? You saw Me an hungered, and gave Me no meat; thirsty, and you gave Me no drink; depart ye into the fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Matthew 25 And these things He threatened every day. But, says some one, I did give Him meat.

When, and for how many days? Ten or twenty? But He wills it not merely for so much time as this, but as much as you spend upon earth. For the virgins also had oil, yet not sufficient for their salvation; they too lighted their lamps, yet they were shut out from the bridechamber. And with reason, since the lamps had gone out before the coming of the Bridegroom. On this account we need much oil, and abundant lovingkindness. Hear at least what the Prophet says, Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your great mercy.

Psalms 51:1 We therefore must so take pity upon our neighbor, according to His great mercy towards us. For such as we are towards our fellow-servants, such shall we find our Lord towards ourselves. And what kind of mercy is great? When we give not of our abundance, but of our deficiency. But if we give not even of our abundance, what hope shall there be for us? Whence shall we have deliverance from those woes? Where shall we be enabled to flee and to find salvation? For if the virgins after so many and so great toils found no comfort anywhere, who shall stand forth for us when we hear those fearful words of the Judge Himself, addressing and reproaching us, because I was an hungered, and you gave Me no meat; for inasmuch, It says, as you did it not unto one of the least of these, you did it not unto Me; saying this not

merely of His disciples, nor of those who have taken upon themselves the ascetic life, but of every faithful man.

For such an one though he be a slave, or one of those that beg in the market-place, yet if he believes in God, ought by right to enjoy all our good will. And if we neglect such an one when naked or hungry, we shall hear those words. With reason. For what difficult or grievous thing has He demanded of us? What that is not of the very lightest and easiest? He says not, I was sick, and you restored Me not, but, and you visited Me not. He says not, I was in prison, and you delivered Me not, but, and you came not unto Me.

In proportion therefore as the commands are easy, so is the punishment greater to them that disobey. For what is easier, tell me, than to walk forth and enter into a prison? And what more pleasant? For when you see some bound, others covered with filth, others with uncut hair and clothed in rags, others perishing with hunger, and running like dogs to your feet, others with deep ploughed sides, others now returning in chains from the market-place, who beg all day and do not collect even necessary sustenance, and yet at evening are required by those set over them to furnish that wicked and savage service; though thou be like any stone, you will certainly be rendered kinder; though you live a soft and dissipated life, you will certainly become wiser, when you observe the nature of human affairs in other men's misfortunes; for you will surely gain an idea of that fearful day, and of its varied punishments.

Revolving and considering these things, you will certainly cast out both wrath and pleasure, and the love of worldly things, and will make your soul more calm than the calmest harbor; and you will reason concerning that Judgment seat, reflecting that if among men there is so much forethought, and order, and terror, and threatenings, much more will there be with God. For there is no power but from God. Romans 13:1 He therefore who permits rulers to order these things thus, will much more do the same Himself.

5. And certainly were there not this fear, all would be lost, when though such punishments hang over them, there are many who go over to the side of wickedness. These things if you wisely observe, you will be more ready-minded towards alms-doing, and will reap much pleasure, far greater than those who come down from the theater. For they when they remove from thence are inflamed and burn with desire. Having seen those women hovering on the stage, and received from them ten thousand wounds, they will be in no better condition than a tossing sea, when the image of the faces, the gestures, the speeches, the walk, and all the rest, stand before their eyes and besiege their soul.

But they who come forth from a prison will suffer nothing of this kind, but will enjoy great calm and tranquillity. For the compunction arising from the sight of the prisoners, quenches all that fire. And if a woman that is an harlot and a wanton meet a man coming forth from among the prisoners, she will work him no mischief. For becoming for the time to come, as it were, incapable of molding, he will thus not be taken by the nets of her countenance, because instead of that wanton countenance there will then be placed before his eyes the fear of the Judgment.

On this account, he who had gone over every kind of luxury said, It is better to go into the house of mourning than into the house of mirth. Ecclesiastes 7:2 And so here you will show forth great wisdom, and there will hear those words which are worth ten thousand blessings. Let us then not neglect such a practice and occupation. For although we be not able to bring them food, nor to help them by giving money, yet shall we be able to comfort them by our words, and to raise up the drooping spirit, and to help them in many other ways by conversing with those who cast them into prison, and by making their keepers kinder, and we certainly shall effect either small or great good.

But if you say that the men there are neither men of condition, nor good, nor gentle, but man-slayers, tomb-breakers, cut-purses, adulterers, intemperate, and full of many wickednesses, by this again you show to me a pressing reason for spending time there. For we are not commanded to take pity on the good and to punish the evil, but to manifest this lovingkindness to all men. Be, It says, like to My Father which is in heaven, for He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Matthew 5:45 Do not then accuse other men's faults bitterly, nor be a severe judge, but mild and merciful. For we also, if we have not been adulterers, or tomb-breakers, or cut-purses, yet have we other transgressions which deserve infinite punishment. Perchance we have called our brother fool, which prepares for us the pit; we have looked on women with unchastened eyes, which constitutes absolute adultery; and what is more grievous than all, we partake not worthily of the Mysteries, which makes us guilty of the Body and Blood of Christ.

Let us then not be bitter enquirers into the conduct of others, but consider our own state, so shall we desist from this inhumanity and cruelty. Besides this, it may be said that we shall there find many good men, and often men worth as much as all the city. Since even that prison-house in which Joseph was had in it many evil men, yet that just man had the care of them all, and was, with the rest, concealed as to his real character; for he was worth as much as all the land of Egypt, yet still he dwelt in the prison-house, and no one knew him of those that were within it.

Thus also even now it is likely that there are many good and virtuous men, though they be not visible to all men, and the care you take of such as these gives you a return for your exertions in favor of the whole. Or if there be none such, still even in this case great is your recompense; for your Lord conversed not with the just only, while He avoided the unclean, but received with kindness both the Canaanitish woman, and her of Samaria, the abominable and impure; another also who was a harlot, on whose account the Jews reproached Him, He both received and healed, and allowed His feet to be washed by the tears of the polluted one, teaching us to condescend to those that are in sin, for this most of all is kindness.

What do you say? Do robbers and tomb-breakers dwell in the prison? And, tell me, are all they just men that dwell in the city? Nay, are there not many worse even than these, robbing with greater shamelessness? For the one sort, if there be no other excuse for them, at least put before themselves the veil of solitude and darkness, and the doing these things clandestinely; but the others throw away the mask and go after their wickedness with uncovered head, being violent, grasping, and covetous. Hard it is to find a man pure from injustice.

6. If we do not take by violence gold, or such and such a number of acres of land, yet we bring about the same end by deceit and robbery in lesser matters, and where we are able to do so. For when in making contracts, or when we must buy or sell anything, we dispute and strive to pay less than the value, and use our utmost endeavors to have it so, is not the action robbery? Is it not theft and covetousness? Tell not me that you have not wrested away houses or slaves, for injustice is judged not by the measure of the things taken, but by the intention of those who commit the robbery. Since just and unjust have the same force in great and in little things; and I call cut-purses alike the man who cuts through a purse and takes the gold, and him who buying from any of the market people deducts something from the proper price; nor is he the only house-breaker who breaks through a wall and steals anything within, but that man also who corrupts justice, and takes anything from his neighbor.

Let us not then pass by our own faults, and become judges of other men's; nor let us, when it is time for lovingkindness, be searching out their wickedness; but considering what our own state was once, let us now be gentle and kind. What then was our state? Hear Paul say; For we ourselves also were sometime foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, hateful, and hating one another Titus 3:3; and again, We were by nature children of wrath. Ephesians 2:3 But God seeing us as it were confined in a prison-house, and bound with grievous chains, far more grievous than those of iron, was not ashamed of us, but came and entered the prison, and, though we deserved ten thousand punishments, both brought us out from hence, and brought us to a kingdom, and made us more glorious than the heaven, that we also might do the same according to our power.

For when He says to His disciples, If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet; for I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you John 13:14, He writes this law not merely for the washing the feet, but also in all the other acts which He manifested towards us. Is it a manslayer who inhabits the prison? Yet let not us be weary in doing Him good. Is it a tomb-breaker, or an adulterer? Let us pity not his wickedness, but his calamity.

But often, as I before said, one will be found there worth ten thousand; and if you go continually to the prisoners, you shall not miss so great a prize. For as Abraham, by entertaining even common guests, once met with Angels, so shall we meet with great men too, if we make the action a business. And if I may make a strange assertion, he who entertains a great man is not so worthy of praise as he who receives the wretched and miserable. For the former has, in his own life, no slight occasion of being well treated, but the other, rejected and given up by all, has one only harbor, the pity of his benefactor; so that this most of all is pure kindness.

He, moreover, who shows attention to an admired and illustrious man, does it often for ostentation among men, but he who tends the abject and despairing, does it only because of the command of God. Wherefore, if we make a feast, we are bidden to entertain the lame and halt, and if we do works of mercy, we are bidden to do them to the least and meanest. For, It says, inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these, you have done it unto Me. Matthew 25:45 Knowing, therefore, the treasure which is laid up in that place, let us enter continually, and make it our business, and turn there our eager feelings about theaters.

If you have nothing to contribute, contribute the comfort of your words. For God recompenses not only him that feeds, but him also who goes in. When you enter and arouses the trembling and fearful soul, exhorting, succoring, promising assistance, teaching it true wisdom, you shall thence reap no small reward. For if you should speak in such manner outside the prison, many will even laugh, being dissipated by their excessive luxury: but those who are in adversity, having their minds humbled, shall meekly attend to your words, and praise them, and become better men.

Since even when Paul preached, the Jews often derided him, but the prisoners listened with much stillness. For nothing renders the soul so fit for heavenly wisdom as calamity and temptation, and the pressure of affliction. Considering all these things, and how much good we shall work both to those within the prison, and to ourselves, by being continually mixed up with them, let us there spend the time we used to spend in the market-place, and in unseasonable occupations, that we may both win them and gladden ourselves, and by causing God to be glorified, may obtain the everlasting blessings, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom and with whom, to the Father and the Holy Ghost, be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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