

The Good Shepherd

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[0 : 0 0] When I was in college, some friends drove down to Florida. One of our friends lived down there, a guy named Scott. And we went on this kind of surfing trip for a few days to go down there and stay with him.

And it required driving many hours into the night. And we didn't really arrive at Scott's house until the early morning hours. It was like two or three o'clock in the morning. And everybody in the family had gone to bed.

We had never been to Scott's house before. They left the key under the mat for us and some blankets and things. So we just basically came in at like three in the morning and just crashed on the floor and figured we'd meet and say hello to everybody the following day.

That was the plan. About five o'clock in the morning, I'm awakened to the sound of Scott's mom. Scott?

Scott? Scott? Scott? And I kind of open my eyes and I think, okay, well, it's, you know, Saturday morning. They must be early risers.

[1 : 0 8] So I go back to sleep. And then coming in a little later, I hear, Scott? Scott? And I kind of open my eyes again. I'm thinking, all right, Scott, you know?

I know it's early, but, you know, your mom needs you. Can I close my eyes? Scott? Scott? So I put my, I put, I'm like, I don't know the dynamics in this family, you know?

But I'm like, we need to have a conversation about, you know, or maybe figure out a more, you know, kind of efficient way to get Scott's, maybe you could go to Scott, you know?

Maybe Scott's dead asleep, like we should be, you know? Or maybe Scott's kind of weirdly, maybe their dynamic's off. Like maybe Scott's ignoring his mom.

I don't know. But this stuff starts to go through my mind and I've got the pillow buried over my head. And for the next like 30, 45 minutes, Scott? Scott?

[2 : 0 6] Scott? And I'm just building rage. I'm just like, this is not okay. I'm like, either she is in severe trouble. Has she fallen in the bathroom? She can't get up. Is she, is she in trouble?

Why is Scott ignoring his mom? What's going on here? And I'm just getting more and more and more angry. And so finally, after about 45 minutes, I'm like, I'm not going back to sleep now because I've been 45 minutes listening to this poor woman call for her son who's clearly ignoring her.

And so I stand up and I'm like, we're going to have a family intervention. I'm like, I've never met these people, but this is not okay. And so I start going through the house all bleary out and I'm going from one room to the next.

And I'm trying to follow the sound of this poor one's voice. And I walk into the living room and across the room, I see a birdcage. It was a, it was a parakeet.

And apparently its favorite word to say was, Scott? Scott? I realized my blunder. And then I was wide awake, ready to start the day.

[3 : 0 9] The point is this. There are a lot of voices out there. The question that we're going to ask this morning is, what are the voices that we are listening to?

Right. And are they worth listening to? Are they credible? Are they trustworthy? Are they the voices we think they are?

Are they coming from reliable sources or not? Who should we be listening to in our lives? And in John chapter 10, Jesus says that there's only one voice that we need to listen to.

There's only one voice that we need to hear. And if you hear that voice, that becomes the most important voice. And all other voices rank down from that. And he says the voice that we need to hear is the voice of the good shepherd.

The voice of our true shepherd. And Jesus deliberately uses this metaphor of a shepherd to describe the kind of relationship that we're meant to have with him. He's saying that we are like sheep and he's like a shepherd.

[4 : 12] And we're meant to have that kind of relationship. And there are a few things in this passage that show us why Jesus is the good shepherd. Why his voice is the most important voice.

And the things that we see in this passage are this. The reason that we should listen to his voice of all other voices is because he's the good shepherd. And so he knows his sheep, number one. He loves his sheep, number two. And then three, he unites his sheep. He loves, he knows, and he unites his sheep. Let's pray. And then we'll get started.

Lord, we thank you for your word this morning. We thank you that you are our good shepherd. And it's actually your voice we're here to listen to. So I pray that you would help us to tune out, to quiet the other voices.

Not only the external, but the internal voices. Quiet us. Give us a peaceful, open spirit that we might receive and hear from you this morning, Lord.

[5 : 11] And it's in the name of Jesus that we pray. Amen. So first of all, Jesus is the good shepherd because, as he says, he knows his sheep. He says in verse 14, I am the good shepherd.

I know my own, and my own know me. Now, if you know anything about shepherds, they might have hundreds of sheep in their flock. In some cases, thousands.

But a good shepherd actually is able to know and recognize each individual sheep. And often, especially in Palestine, shepherds would give each sheep a name.

They would have a specific name for each of their sheep. I actually watched a clip of an experiment conducted by the BBC. This was back, I think, in the 70s, where they took a shepherd who had several hundred sheep, this massive flock.

And they moved the shepherd away. They got him off site. And then they brought in a few sheep that were not part of his flock. But they were the exact same breed. And from an onlooker's perspective, like if you were to watch this video, there's absolutely no way to tell these sheep apart.

[6 : 24] They all look identical. They mix these plant sheep in. Then they bring the shepherd back. And they just want to know, can he recognize sheep that aren't a part of his flock?

And how long will it take him to do it? And what's amazing is he's able to do it within minutes. I mean, from me looking, I'm like, there's no way. I immediately lost sight of, but he just walks around. And within minutes, he's like, that one, that one, that one. And they come, and the reporter's amazed. And the reporter says, well, how's that possible? What's your trick? And he says, there's no trick.

There's no, he says, I just know my sheep. I know my sheep. And so he has this kind of blink instinct where he immediately recognizes when sheep come in from the outside.

And so this kind of intimate knowledge is what Jesus wants to convey. And shepherds not only recognize their sheep, but they know their individual quirks. They know their individual tendencies.

[7 : 25] More to the point, they know their weaknesses. Right? They examine them every day. They understand. They know immediately when they're sick or ill. They know their weaknesses.

And that's a good thing because sheep have a lot of weaknesses. I mean, sheep are weak animals. Among all the animals in the animal kingdom, sheep are probably some of the most helpless.

You know, when sheep got lost, they don't last long in the wild. They don't survive very long. That's partly because they're, frankly, not very intelligent. But it's also because they are herd animals.

They are hardwired to be followers. You know, when a sheep's trotting along, that sheep is not thinking about where it wants to go or where it should go.

It's not plotting a plan. Its executive function is kind of low. It's not setting goals, right? It's not being strategic. The sheep is literally just looking at the animals around it and trying to do exactly what they do as closely as possible.

[8 : 29] Its only goal is to stay with the herd. I read this one story from a farmer who raises sheep who said that one morning, as his sheep were kind of walking around feeding, one of his sheep tripped over its own feet.

And then for the rest of the day, all the other sheep in the herd leapt over that spot where there was no obstacle, but all the sheep saw that one trip. And so they all just wanted to make sure they didn't trip.

And so they're leaping over this invisible obstacle for hours, right? And, you know, so it can be funny. It can also be disastrous. I read a news story.

This is from years ago, maybe 2005. There were some shepherds in Turkey, and they had a combined flock, and they neglected their sheep one morning because they all wanted to eat breakfast.

And so they took their eyes off the flock, and they're on a cliffside. And one poor, unfortunate sheep gets too close to the cliff edge and slips and falls.

[9 : 35] So you can guess what happens, right? Hundreds of sheep just start plunging off the cliff because the first one did, right? And 1,500 sheep plunge off this cliff.

You know, it was a massive economic impact to the community. I think roughly 400 didn't survive. The rest did because they landed on the fluffy mountain that had been formed by the first 400. Right? So when the Bible says that we are all like sheep, that's not a compliment. It means that we're spiritually helpless, number one.

It means that we're not meant to survive on our own apart from God. It means that we're not meant to be autonomous beings in the world.

Right? We're not designed to survive that way. We need a shepherd. And it also means, to say that we're like sheep, that we are hardwired to be followers. That we are hardwired to be social, cultural, spiritual herd animals.

[10 : 44] Right? And everyone, every human being follows someone or something. We have a kind of herd instinct wired into us. We want to conform. You know, this was famously demonstrated in 1951 when Solomon Asch conducted an experiment in which he asked participants to look at a line on the left.

It was one line. And then he would show them three lines on the right. And he would ask the participants to pick out which of the three lines on the right. And they're all of varying lengths. And he said, pick out which line on the right is the same length as the one on the left.

And so they would go down the line, each participant giving an answer. And under normal circumstances, when asked to pick out which of these lines is the same length as this line, 99% of participants got it right.

So it was a fairly easy, fairly straightforward task. Then they made one change. They had, they set it up, but everybody in the line was a confederate.

They were working with the researchers except for the last person. And they had all of the people go down the line and all of these confederates gave the wrong answer. And then they got to the test subject and they wanted to see what the test subject would do.

[12 : 01] Well, what do you think happened? 75% of the time, the test subject knowingly gave the wrong answer. They knowing, because they would listen to this person and this person and this person and they're all giving and they're looking at it and they're looking and it would get to them and 75% of the time they would give the wrong answer.

And the reason, Ash concludes, is because even though they suspect that all of their peers are wrong, they would rather fit in and say the wrong thing than say what they really believe and risk rejection.

And there's an incredible study for showing us how we actually operate. And I would suggest that this is how many of the conversations in the public square happen today.

People sheepishly agree with things that we know deep down are wrong, but we would rather fit in than face rejection. You know, when it comes to all of the major issues, most people don't take time to really thoughtfully discern what is true or right.

It's much easier to adopt the opinions of the people around us, especially the people whose admiration or respect we crave, and to just assume that if we do that, it will put us on the right side of all of the issues.

[13 : 25] Right? When in fact, it actually might be leading us right over the edge of a cliff. Right? So what this is telling us is that we need a shepherd who knows this about us.

We need a shepherd who understands that we are spiritually helpless, who understands that we are not meant to survive apart from him, who understands that we can tend to be herd animals and that our ability to discern and figure out truth, it can be very, very impaired.

So we need a shepherd, first of all, who knows us. And Jesus says that he knows each one of us as intimately as the Father knows him and as he knows the Father.

He's saying this eternal relationship within the Trinity that has existed always and the intimacy that you find there, Jesus says the same intimacy exists here.

I know you just as well. He's the good shepherd. But then he goes one step further. Jesus not only knows us and our weakness, but he loves us and has compassion for us.

[14:34] And this is really, I would say, the main emphasis of this passage. There were many self-appointed leaders, religious leaders, in Jesus' day. And in the previous chapter, we see Jesus confronting them and exposing the truth about their ministry.

He heals a blind man, and then that becomes a foil against which he condemns the religious leaders for their spiritual blindness, because they don't recognize or affirm Jesus as the Christ. And he says, therefore, you are false shepherds. You're blind to what is right in front of your eyes. And so he compares them to thieves and robbers.

They're hired hands who care nothing for the sheep. They're here to benefit from the religious institution. But they're not interested in the truth when confronted with Jesus.

And the thing that sets Jesus apart from these religious leaders who really only care about their own clout, what sets Jesus apart is his love for his sheep.

[15:43] And this isn't just a sentimental feeling of love. It is that. But it's a willingness, he says, to lay his life down for his sheep. And as I read this, I thought, and I encourage you to take a moment and think.

Think about your own life. Think about the voices that you tend to listen to. And they could be voices from good sources. But think about the voices that you tend to listen to, the voices that are most influential in your life, voices from the past.

Maybe it's coaches or teachers or parents. Voices from the present. Could be external or internal.

Think about those voices. How many of those people love you?

How many of those voices truly have your best interest at heart? How many of those voices would suffer for you? How many of those voices would lay down their life for you?

Lee Stein wrote an op-ed in the New York Times back in a couple of years, 2021, I think. It was coming, right coming out of the pandemic. And the title of the op-ed was The Empty Religions of Instagram.

[16:50] And she talks about younger generations who have turned their backs on religious tradition. She says, you know, we've, a lot of us, meaning her and other people, her, in her age and demographic, a lot of us have found alternative scripture online.

Our new belief system is a blend of left-wing political orthodoxy, intersectional feminism, self-optimization, therapy, wellness, astrology, and Dolly Parton. She calls, she refers to all of these social media influencers, these kind of gurus, as the neo-religious leaders of our era.

And she actually compares them to the prosperity gospel televangelists of the previous generation. These are the new prosperity gospel televangelists.

And then she talks about the comment sections of a lot of the feeds of these influencers. And she says sometimes their followers will post these incredibly vulnerable, incredibly sort of self-effacing disclosures in the comment section, sharing about the pain that they're going through, the suffering that they've endured.

And she notes how many times their comments go unanswered. And she calls it a confession without a confessor. These people longing to be known and loved.

[18:14] So I would suggest that these are among the hired hands of our day. Most of them care very little for their followers. They're interested in building their brand.

Some of them are just in it for the money. And then Stein goes on to say this. She says, I've hardly prayed to God since I was a teenager. But the pandemic has cracked open inside me a profound yearning for reverence, humility, and awe.

I want moral authority from someone who isn't shilling a memoir or calling out her enemies on social media for clout. This woman's not a Christian.

Can you imagine somebody saying that? I'm longing for moral authority from someone who isn't shilling a memoir. And then she comes on. She concludes this way. She says, we are looking for guidance in the wrong places.

Maybe we actually need to go to something like a church. And I would say that whether she knows it or not, I don't know this woman personally. I don't know where she is spiritually.

[19 : 22] But I would say whether she knows it or not, this is a woman who is longing for a true shepherd. This is someone who is longing for a good shepherd because she's seen the hired hands and the thieves and the robbers.

And she's disillusioned with that world. And she wants something real. Someone who knows her and loves her and will respond in the comments section. You know, this reminds me of a book by Philip Keller.

No relation to Tim Keller. Philip Keller about his time spent as a shepherd. And he was a good shepherd. He loved and cared for his sheep. He took care of them. The grass was green and they were clean and safe.

But then there was a fence. And on the other side of the fence, his neighbor also raised sheep. And he really neglected his sheep. Those sparse grass, they were all underfed. They were all covered with parasites.

But here's the thing that broke my heart. He said that every morning, all of the sheep in the neighboring pasture would line up along the fence. And they would just sit there staring into his yard and staring at his sheep.

[20 : 29] And he says it's almost as though they were longing to come in and join the flock. And I think the world is full of people like this. I think the world is full of people who are disillusioned with the voices that they have been following.

And they're longing for a shepherd who not only knows them fully, but loves them completely and without reservation. And of course, this is exactly what we see Jesus fulfill on the cross.

When Jesus lays his life down for the world, he is saying, I'm the good shepherd who not only knows you and knows your weakness and knows that you're helpless, but I'm willing to give my life to do what you could never do, to attain salvation for you, to make it possible to open the gate and welcome you in.

And this raises the third and final question for us. When Jesus talks about sheep, and when we talk about us, who is the us that we're referring to?

Who are Jesus' sheep? And this brings us to the third thing about Jesus that we see. He not only knows his sheep and loves his sheep, but he unites his sheep. Earlier in chapter 10, Jesus uses the image of a sheepfold.

[21 : 44] All sheep who belong to God are in the fold, Jesus says. And up to this point, you have to understand, he's talking to the religious leaders, the Jews, and up to this point, they all assume he's talking about Israel.

When he talks about the sheepfold, clearly he's talking about Israel, because that's sometimes, you know, what we see in the Old Testament. But then Jesus says in verse 16 something that they're not expecting.

And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also. And they will listen to my voice, so there will be one flock, one shepherd.

And he is very clearly talking about non-Jewish people. He's talking about Gentiles. He's talking about people who would have been considered unclean. The unclean outsider.

This would have shocked many of Jesus' hearers. And if you look down in verse 19, we see that at this statement, the crowd is divided. And there are some people who react with violent anger at the idea that outsiders would even be mentioned by somebody like Jesus.

[22 : 52] Right? And some of them accuse him of being insane or demon-possessed. Because who would talk like this? No faithful Jewish rabbi would speak this way. It's close to blasphemy.

And so they're horrified and offended. Many of the Jews in Jesus' day had forgotten that God's promises were never meant for Israel alone. All through the Old Testament, God reminds people of his ultimate plan.

And in fact, in the passage that we read earlier from Ezekiel chapter 34, God is saying that the day will come when he will judge the false shepherds of Israel.

And that he will come himself as the true shepherd. And he says this, I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. I myself will search for my sheep and look after them.

As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries.

[23 : 56] And I will bring them into their own land. And Jesus is deliberately invoking this Old Testament imagery. And he's saying the time has come and this promise is being fulfilled.

Jesus is God who has come to be the true shepherd of his people. And now is the time to gather God's people from all of the nations of the earth.

And so the invitation has gone out all around the world. The gospel is the good news of Jesus' victory over sin and death. And that message is circling the globe.

And it's the invitation that has gone out to everyone. That the door, the gate has been flung open wide. And anybody who thought of themselves at best as having to stand along that fence line.

Either because they felt like they were too immoral. They weren't religiously inclined. They messed up too bad. That they've been too hurt or disillusioned. Right? All of those people who feel like this is not for them.

[25 : 00] Jesus is saying you're exactly who it's for. You're always the one that God had in mind. Because the people who belong to Jesus are not necessarily the good people.

They're not necessarily the moral people. They're not necessarily the religiously inclined people. The church is pretty ragtag.

The people who belong to Jesus are the people who hear and respond to his voice. See, in Jesus' day, the shepherds of various flocks would sometimes at night, they would mix all the flocks together.

They would all go to bed. And then they would wake up in the morning. And you're like, well, how do we separate out and know who's in whose flock and all of that? Well, easy. They would just call their sheep by name.

And the sheep would only recognize and respond to the voice of their shepherd. So they would just stand back and call their sheep. Come here. Come here. And their sheep would separate out.

[26 : 02] Sheep know the voice of their shepherd. And when sheep come to know and trust the voice of their shepherd, that's the only voice they'll respond to. So this brings us back to the question that we asked at the beginning.

What are the voices that we are listening to? What are the voices that we're responding to? For those of us who are Christians, are we listening to the voice of our shepherd?

Is that the voice that we hear most clearly and most consistently in our lives? Because our lives are full of voices. If your life is anything like my life, our lives are so busy and so noisy and so chaotic.

So the question is, are we creating any time, any space in our lives to hear the voice of our shepherd? Because we can't follow his voice if we're not listening to it.

And, you know, this morning in our adult Sunday school class, we started a new class and we're talking about habits, habits of the household. And so we talked about how we start our day. You know, when we wake up.

[27 : 05] What is our wake up routine like? And I have to say, most of the time, the first thing I do when I open my eyes is look at my phone.

And so the voice that I'm hearing is coming from the news or it's coming from my inbox or it's looking at my calendar. Not the voice of my shepherd.

The times when I'm intentional about making sure that the first voice that I'm tuning into in the morning is the voice of Jesus, the voice of my shepherd. It sets me on a completely different course for the day.

It actually, over time, if I do it consistently, it meaningfully shifts and impacts my days and weeks. Right? The rest of the day kind of flows out of that. So the question that we need to ask if we are Christians is, are we allowing the voice of our shepherd to be crowded out?

Or are we intentionally seeking to hear and respond to the one who truly knows us, truly loves us, the one who calls us by name? For those of us who are not Christians, I ask the same question.

[28 : 12] What voices are you listening to? What are the voices that you have fallen in love with, the voices that you most trust? And where are they leading you?

You could be hearing this and you're totally content in your life. You feel like things are going well. You don't really feel any, you know, kind of stirring.

You're just kind of like, okay, well, this is interesting, but it's not really for me. That's totally fine. You know, if you're not in a place where you're ready to hear this, then no one here, including me, can convince you otherwise.

That's between you and the Lord. But I would suggest that perhaps there are some people hearing this where you're just beginning to get to a place where you're beginning to question where you're being led.

And you're beginning to question the influences in your life and whether or not they actually have your best interest at heart. Like that author of the op-ed talking about the empty religions of our world.

[29 : 15] And maybe you are feeling a kind of stirring as you're hearing some of this. Maybe it feels sometimes like when I came to faith when I was 22, I remember feeling like something was waking up inside me.

I had heard this a thousand times. It never penetrated. And then all of a sudden it just felt like I was, something in me was responding when I was hearing it. If that's the case for you, then I would humbly suggest that you are beginning to hear the voice of your shepherd.

And it may be that your shepherd is now calling you by name. And if that's the case and you would like to talk to somebody about what to do with that or how to make sense of it, I would love to do that.

And you can find me after the service. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you and recognize that we're talking in metaphors that you've given us to try to understand something that is actually very profound.

That the eternal God of the universe who made all of this would know each one of us by name. As intimately as the members of the Trinity are known amongst themselves.

[30 : 29] That the God of the universe would love us so deeply and dearly that you would be willing to lay your life down for us. And that even now you are calling, you are calling out across the world, calling us to come home to you.

And I pray, Lord, for our hearts to leap at that invitation. That we would join together, join one another on our journey home.

Back into your fold. We pray this for your glory. Amen.