

# The Heart of Christ: The Good Shepherd

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 11 October 2020

Preacher: James Ross

[ 0 : 0 0 ] now we're going to read together from John chapter 10, so if you have a device or a Bible, it'll be helpful to find John 10 there, the words are also going to be up on our screen, and we'll read from verse 1 to verse 18 together, so let's hear the Word of God, very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber, the one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep, the gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice, he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out, when he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice, but they will never follow a stranger, in fact they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice,

Jesus used this figurative speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them, therefore Jesus said again, very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep, all who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them, I am the gate, whoever enters through me will be saved, they will come in and go out and find pasture, the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy, I have come that they may have life and have it to the full, I am the good shepherd, the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, the hired hand is not the shepherd who does and does not own the sheep, so when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away, then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it, the man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep, I am the good shepherd, I know my sheep and my sheep know me, just as the father knows me and I know the father and I lay down my life for the sheep, I have other sheep that are not of this sheepfold, I must bring them also, they too will listen to my voice and there shall be one flock and one shepherd, the reason my father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again, no one takes it from me but I lay it down of my own accord, I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again, this command I received from my father, amen. So we're going to continue thinking about the heart of Christ as we see it in his public ministry and here we're going to think about the loving call of

Jesus, the good shepherd but before we get to our text I just want to set the scene and I do that careful not to take anything for granted because I've learned from past experience. So a few years ago we went to the Philippines for a while and we were teaching a group of kids at a Sunday school and I prepared this brilliant lesson along with Vicky that had games and songs and crafts and it wasn't until a few minutes in when one little child put his hand up and asked what's a sheep? So we need to be clear on sheep and shepherds so we have a picture, oh we should have a picture up there hopefully to help us to think, yes. So in the Middle East in the times of Jesus, sheep would be kept in a pen, a walled pen, there'd be various families would keep their sheep in a shared pen and they'd hire a watchman to stand at the gate to both defend from wolves or other animals but also to let the shepherds come in and out and take their sheep to pasture. So that's one important background but also we need to go further and to think about the background of the Old Testament because the shepherd image is one that has been there for a long time. So we think perhaps about King David who wrote Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd and he was a shepherd who became the king and that idea of the king as shepherd over the people of God is one that we find in the Bible. So we read at the beginning from Ezekiel chapter 34 and what we have there is God announcing judgment on bad shepherds over the people.

They didn't care well, they didn't teach well, they took advantage of the people and God said I'm judging them and instead I the Lord will be their shepherd and then later on and we read it the Lord would send a shepherd, another David. And so when Jesus comes and he says I am, title of God, the good shepherd, that's a loaded term where Jesus is recognizing himself as the fulfillment of Old Testament promises. But we also have to think about the background in John's gospel because

what's been happening in the last few chapters has been conflict, conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees, the religious leaders. In chapter 9 we find the Pharisees kicking out of the temple a man who was blind who Jesus had healed. The reason for him being kicked out, he had faith in Jesus. Jesus shows his heart of kindness and love to the man both in healing him and revealing that Jesus is the promised son of man so that this formerly blind man actually worships Jesus. So all of that is the background that comes together for Jesus in John 10 saying I am the good shepherd. And we're going to think about the heart of Jesus, recognizing that in contrast to the other leaders of his day, other voices that people might listen to, Jesus is sounding a loving call to life with God. He's inviting people in to the flock of God and he will do that by laying down his own life for his sheep. So three things for us to notice. First of all, there's a lot of mention of the shepherd's voice, especially in the first five verses, but also in verse 16. So first five verses, the picture there is of that sheep pen, but there are thieves and robbers around it and they are looking to claim over to harm and to steal. But by contrast, there is a shepherd and he is recognized and he enters and he calls his sheep and he leads them out. Three things to notice about the voice of the shepherd. First of all, it's a voice that's known and trusted. Read with me if you will. Verse three again, where we read, the gatekeeper opens the gate for the shepherd and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. The shepherd calls, the sheep follow. The shepherd goes ahead and they follow his lead. They follow his voice. Jesus says they won't follow a stranger, but they will follow their shepherd. They have learned by experience. This is the man who I can trust. He cares for us. He is for us.

[ 7 : 21 ] He is a safe voice to follow. And do we hear what Jesus is saying? He's saying, that's what I would be to each one of us. That safe voice to follow, leading us to life, to give us everything that we need in relationship with him. That voice from the shepherd is also a personal call. Did you notice it there at the end of verse three? He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out? Not just thinking of the flock as a mass. Each sheep is known. Each is commanded, but that command is also an invitation.

Follow me and you will have protection. Follow me and I will make sure you find the feeding of pasture. Follow me and I will give guidance through some of the difficult terrain that you will face. We might look at sheep and think they're all the same, kind of fluffy with black legs, but not to a shepherd and not to Jesus, the good shepherd. And just as encouraging for us, so we gather a very small section of the church as it happens. We're part of a flock. But in Christ, we're loved and known and cared for individually. He knows our stories. He knows our struggles. He knows our hopes and fears.

And he is for us. And he is calling us to him as we are. One other thing about the voice of the shepherd, and this is over in verse 16. He says there in verse 16, I have other sheep that are not of this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. So here Jesus is talking about his mission to the non-Jewish nations. So he wants to call people from other nations to be part of the kingdom of God, part of the flock of God. And what's he saying? He's saying, when people hear my voice, they will hear and they will respond.

[ 9 : 43 ] It's a reminder of the effective call of God to save people from sin. We thought about it last week, God's irresistible grace in the life of those who he chooses. To use this image, the voice of Jesus is a guarantee that none of his sheep will be lost. None will be left to stray.

So there is confidence in the success of God's plan to build his church. And it rests on the voice of Jesus, the authority of Jesus, the call of Jesus. As part of my homework for this week, I watched a YouTube video from a Norwegian sheep farm. It's probably the only time I've ever done that. And this shepherd from Norway, he was inviting people into his farm and there was a group of maybe 20 sheep about 100 meters away. And he was inviting various guests to see if they could effectively call the sheep. So they were trying to copy the shepherd's call and the shepherd's voice. One after another was trying, failing miserably, as we would expect. But as soon as the shepherd came on camera, as soon as he started to speak, those sheep that were grazing, their heads were up and they were bleating and they were running because they knew the shepherd's voice. Let me ask each one of us very simply.

Ask yourself, am I following the voice and the call of Jesus, the good shepherd? It's a wonderful picture of discipleship. He is the master who goes before us and he calls us to follow.

Do we know him and trust him? Do we follow him in obedience? Are we willing to be led because we know that he is the one that we can trust? And maybe connected to that, where do you and I hear the voice of our good shepherd? We hear it in the Bible, don't we? We hear it in the word of God. We hear it in the good news of the gospel. That's why it's so important for us to be back together as the people of God Sunday by Sunday for Sunday worship. That's why it's so important that we find time in our busy schedules to be reading the Bible individually and as families. It's why we make time as a church for our community discipleship group because we never want to be far from the shepherd's voice. Because when we're listening and when we're obeying, that's where safety is.

[ 12 : 21 ] That's where life is to be found. So perhaps one application for today for each one of us is that we would either commit or recommit to following the call of Jesus and to hearing his voice in his word, whatever changes that might mean for us.

Following on from the shepherd's voice, I want us to think about the shepherd's love for a few moments, especially from verses 7 to 10. So remember that the conflict theme that's rumbling in the background. And then hear Jesus' words in verse 8, all who have come before me are thieves and robbers. And then in verse 10, the thief comes only to steal and to kill and to destroy. This is a word spoken against the false teachers of his day who are claiming, you need to listen to us and be like us because we will teach you and show you the way to God. And Jesus would say, no, you're wolves in sheep's clothing because you are rejecting me, the Son of God, the one who is the good shepherd. They were making much of themselves rather than giving glory to God. And their path was a path to death and not to life.

So not everybody who claims to represent God really does represent God and teach his word faithfully. We had two of our friends from India joining us on Wednesday for a Zoom call. And one of the prayer requests was that the people of God would be protected from false teaching that they might hear online.

Health, wealth, and prosperity teaching, which is a false gospel that would draw people away from trusting in the Lord Jesus and in the message of the word of God.

Jesus recognizes that in his day, and it's still a reality today. But by contrast to the thieves and robbers, Jesus says, verse 7, very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.

[ 14 : 30 ] What's he saying there? He's saying the only way to be part of the flock of God, to be in the kingdom of God is through Jesus. It's another way for him to say, as he said in John 14, 6, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. Jesus, in lots of different ways, claims he is the exclusive way of access to God, and not just to God, but to life with God.

In verse 9, he says, I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. There is safety and there is salvation in coming to God through Jesus. Verse 10, his sheep will come in and go out and find pasture. There is feeding. There is plenty. In verse 10, he talks about, I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. There is abundant life and there is salvation that comes only from Jesus.

And also further on in verses 14 and 15, there's this wonderful statement again, I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me. And then he gives a comparison, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. Do we see the loving heart of Jesus there? He's saying, just as I have this eternal loving fellowship with my Father in heaven, so I love my church, my sheep. This is the loving shepherd of Luke chapter 15. Jesus loved the shepherd image. You know, Luke chapter 15, there's the lost sheep and the shepherd who goes searching. And when he finds it, he puts it on his shoulder. He returns home with joy and has a great feast for the community because he'd found his lost sheep. Speaking of the joy Jesus has in welcoming sinners who turn to him and find salvation through him. Jesus is a loving shepherd. So let me encourage everybody today, don't miss the loving heart of Jesus, which is on display here. Hear what Jesus in his call is inviting you and I to. This is spiritual security and satisfaction and true and eternal life, enjoying knowing God. And when we think about who's calling us and what he's calling us to, why is it that so often we remain distant? Why is it that we become so cold to our Savior?

We become apathetic in our faith. Rather than doubting his love, let's every day seek to prove it to be true, to enjoy him daily, to recognize we need him. So if Jesus is the shepherd, he's saying that we are sheep. As sheep, we need guidance and protection. And Jesus is saying, I would give that to you because I love you. Jesus in the gospel, he is calling us in. He's calling us into the safety of

God's kingdom, God's flock. Why would we stay on the outside? What could be better than this life that we were made for? Life of knowing and enjoying the love of God. So again, maybe we need to consider the loving heart of Jesus and to think about our choices, that we would choose for true life and eternal life and not anything less. The last thing I want to draw attention to, and it sort of follows on from the shepherd's love, is to think about the shepherd's sacrifice, especially in verse 11, but verses 15 to 18 as well. So being a shepherd was a tough job, still is, a dirty and a demanding and at times a dangerous job. David, in the Old Testament, just before he goes out to face Goliath, he tells King

Saul, when I was a shepherd looking after my father's sheep, there were times when I had to rescue sheep from the jaws of a lion or I had to protect the flock from the attack of a bear.

Dangerous job. And that's the pattern. And here comes Jesus, the true shepherd king, and he's not just going to risk his life, he's actually going to, verse 11, be the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. What's the supreme demonstration of love?

[ 19 : 04 ] Jesus would say it's self-sacrifice. It's giving oneself for another. He'll say it in just a few chapters in John's gospel, the night before he goes to the cross, he will tell his friends, greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. And then Paul, reflecting on the cross in Romans 5 and verse 8, says, God demonstrates his love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. At the heart of the good news of Christianity is the self-sacrificial love of Jesus, the good shepherd. And here he is anticipating his work on the cross.

As he says, I, like a good shepherd, will lay down my life for my sheep. I won't turn and run from danger. Rather, I will face it down to protect those I love. This little section really brings us into the heart of Jesus. We can go deeper still. Verse 17, we learn something about the relation between the father and the son. The reason my father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down again and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my father. So Jesus is saying, God the father, he loves me because I am perfectly obedient to the eternal plan of salvation. Jesus is not going to deviate from that plan to save sinners by going to the cross to die for us. And Jesus says, I willingly lay down my life. Because he loves his father, yes, but also because he loves his people, he loves his sheep. In Hebrews, the book of Hebrews, for the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross and scorned its shame. Here is Jesus in complete authority. He's saying, I have authority to lay down my life and I have authority to take it up again. And he's using that authority for his sheep, not only in his dying, but also in his rising in glory and in victory, because where the shepherd goes, so the sheep will follow. So just as Jesus took his life up again, and then was ascended to the glory of heaven, there is that promise that that is the reality.

Eternal glory is the reality for all those who follow him. There is so much good news in here. We have here a shepherd who is for us and with us always. What's Jesus, our good shepherd, doing now?

He's praying for us. He's pleading our cause. He's saying to the Father, look, I have made that sacrifice to cover their sins. They are mine, and I will have them to be with me. We have this promise of Jesus, the good shepherd who has fought off all of our great enemies, Satan and sin and death, and he's won a decisive victory over them at the cross. And it's this Jesus who calls us to follow him, and to follow him to enjoy life to the full, to enjoy salvation from him. So it's true sometimes that people say to be a sheep is a negative thing. Someone says to a person, he's such a sheep. You know, he's led by someone else and someone else's ideas, just a follower, somebody who's perhaps weak.

[ 22 : 49 ] But you know, Jesus is our good shepherd. It's entirely different, isn't it? If he is the one we follow, then we know that in him we have protection. We recognize our own inability and our weakness, and we look to him for strength. He is the one who will protect us from Satan, that roaring lion that seeks to devour. He is the one that will protect us from those wolves in sheep's clothing that would lead us astray. He is the one who gives us everything that we need. He has promised, he has called, he has loved us, and he is the one who will keep us from here to eternity. So let's hear the call of Jesus, the good shepherd. Let's follow him today and always.