

I Am the Good Shepherd

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Preacher: Rev. Clive Jennings

[0 : 00] Probably for us who live in a town we're not aware of what a shepherd actually does. It's estimated that 3,000 to 4,000 sheep each year are killed because of attacks by predators or are stolen and that roughly equates to about 11 animals that are killed or injured per attack.

Being a good shepherd isn't just about sort of floating around on a quad bike with a whole load of hay bales strapped precariously to the back. It's about caring and protecting for your sheep.

Shepherds are passionate about what they do. They are out there in all winds and weathers. The people who were hearing this morning's reading knew about shepherds.

They lived with them. They knew them. They had already heard Jesus talking about, I am the gate. And here in the presence and heart of the religious leaders, Jesus is saying, I am the good shepherd.

By saying the good shepherd, I guess probably he's ruffling a few feathers because he's sort of saying actually, if there are good shepherds, there's probably not good shepherds as well, which clearly isn't what the Pharisees really wanted to hear at that time.

[1 : 16] So Jesus uses this analogy from everyday life that people would understand. You see, the hired hand is not the shepherd and he doesn't 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 he cares nothing for the sheep.

You and I know whether people are going to stand with us. You know, whether they're going to stand with us in tough times, the good friends that are there with us, the good shepherds that will be there.

They won't hang us out to dry. They won't leave us when trouble comes. Jesus says, I am the good shepherd. I am not going to abandon my flock. The good shepherd owns the flock.

He has a strong investment in them. You see, if it's yours, you stand and protect. If necessary, with your life.

[2 : 20] The hired hand hasn't got that level of commitment or trust. And sadly, we know from our own experience in life, don't we, for many of us that are watching this today, that people will step aside and sometimes abandon us when the going gets tough.

People who we thought cared for us, maybe an employer, our carer, our relative. Maybe it's to do with our finance, our pension scheme, our wealth.

Only to realise that when the going gets tough, people just disappear and go. You realise very quickly that they weren't the shepherd you thought they were.

And when the going gets tough, they're just up and left. Not Jesus. You see, Jesus says, I am the good shepherd. He promises that he will never leave us or forsake us.

Take David, for example, in the Bible. David, the shepherd boy. There he is looking after the flock. No wonder God chose David. You know, David has got that commitment.

[3 : 27] He has got that commitment to his sheep. He's the youngest son. He learnt to tend for them from a young age. And he's fighting off wolves. He's fighting off wild animals.

No wonder he wasn't fazed and intimidated by Goliath. I mean, Goliath was just another predator to be dealt with because Goliath was going to come and decimate the flock.

Oh, that's not going to happen. God is with me, said David, and dealt with it. A good shepherd stands their ground. 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. It's relational. Jesus loves me.

This I know for the Bible tells me so. It's a great hymn. It's a great song. It's a great biblical and life-giving truth. It's no surprise that it appears in the soundtrack of one of my favourite films, which is *The Bodyguard for Obvious Reasons*.

[4 : 31] And in the middle of the film where Kevin Costner is doing all that he can to protect Whitney Houston as her protection officer, fighting against all the odds to keep her and her family alive, she sings this hymn with her sister, Jesus loves me.

This I know. It's a truth. You see, the shepherd never kicks the sheep. I can't emphasise that enough. He is there to care and to fight for us.

I think we forget that sometimes, the fight that is going on with the evil one. The fact that, you know, Jesus, the good shepherd, that he engaged with that. He knows that.

He knows what the fight is. You know, if you're the son of God, why don't you come down from the cross? It's not what's in our hands. It's what's in our hearts.

That's why Jesus took on death and won, because he is the good shepherd. He didn't give up on us. He fought for us and continues to stand for us and fight for us.

[5 : 33] He is never going to desert us. He told us that. I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me. You know, this relational, deep relational part of scripture is something for me that's at the heart of my relationship.

And I have your relationship with Jesus. You know, I know my sheep. He knows us. He knows our finances, our issues, our vices, our joys, our fears, our flaws.

He knows about our honesty. And when we say that we are for him, he knows if we really are. And the cost that it takes. And that it has taken to live that with him.

You know, it's the discipleship principle that Jesus surrounded himself with, that he didn't surround himself with the 18. You know, he chose people who were the least likely people to shape the early church.

He uses you and I. That's why they stuck with him. That's why he stuck with them. In the storm, on the cross, he never gives up.

[6 : 41] I've read that Sunday school story time and time again about the 99 sheep and Jesus goes off and looks for the one.

That to me is so powerful, a message of the good shepherd. You know, sitting on any alpha course and hear some gut-wrenching stories from people how they had experienced addiction and they had lost everything.

They'd lost their home, their house, their family, their dignity, their self-esteem. And then you hear the story of how Jesus came and met with them.

And perhaps through a person, through a situation, through you or I, they found fresh hope. They found dignity. They found restoration. They found new life. And they found the good shepherd who came and brought them home.

No wonder Jesus tells us and models to us that we should go after the one time and time again. The 99 is secure.

[7 : 46] We need to go after the one. I pray that to know Jesus is your rescuer and protector, rubs off on you and is your passion to go and reach people.

Going to the one, I believe, is at the heart of what we're called to do at Christ Church at the moment. The young person who receives TLG coaching. The family that is receiving help and make lunch.

The person who hopefully you phoned today. The one that you've had that conversation with. You know, it's about the one that others gave up on.

That Jesus says, go out and find them. Be with them. Bring them in. Love them against the odds. Show them what it means to reach out and bring them home into a lifelong, life-giving relationship with the one who never gives up and keeps seeking the lost.

Nicky Gumbel tells a story on an alpha course where many people come to know Jesus as the good shepherd. And Nicky Gumbel tells the story of the Welsh revivals. I've got a real passion for the Welsh revivals.

[8 : 51] High on the moors in the Welsh mountains, there was two vicars that used to go for a walk, two ministers. And they met a shepherd, a young lad who was looking after his sheep. And as they met with him, again and again as they walked, they introduced him to Jesus.

He couldn't read or write. So they taught him the 23rd Psalm in the beginning by using his fingers. The Lord is my shepherd. Is my shepherd.

It was about a relational, a relational thing with Jesus. Jesus. And he got it. This young lad got it. And he came to faith through talking with these two people who he met day by day, week by week, while he was out tending his sheep.

There was a long, hard winter and the ministers went out for a walk upon the hills. And they looked for this shepherd. They couldn't find him, understandably.

So they went to the nearest village and they were shown to his mum's cottage. And she explained during the harsh winter that he had died. That he had died on the hills.

[10:00] And she said to them, can you explain something to me? Because they found my son in a snow drift but laid over his sheep, protecting them, as he always did.

But one thing I don't understand is when they found his body, they found his finger grasped around the fourth finger. The ministers explained to him of what they had taught him, that the Lord is my shepherd.

Jesus was prepared and laid down his life for the sheep, for you and me. That's the good shepherd. When he went to the cross, it wasn't a disaster. It was a design.

It wasn't a tragedy. It was a strategy. He came for those who were lost from the fold. And in the time that Jesus was telling this story, it was you and me, the Gentiles.

We were the lost sheep. We weren't expected or even allowed into the fold. He is the one who came for us and rescued us and brought us back.

[11:09] These sheep I must gather. It's a gospel imperative. That's why he's a good shepherd. He isn't worried about the sheep, what we look like.

He's not worried about where their sheep are or what stock they're from, whether they are black, white, grey, green, pink, blue, rainbow-coloured, smelly, dirty, beautifully coiffured.

He came for all the sheep, especially for those who have a propensity to get lost, to wander off, to sin, to rebel, because that's what some sheep do.

The good shepherd never kicks his sheep. He carries them home to safety, often weighed down with sin, but brings them safely home.

Jesus said, I am the good shepherd. He knows his sheep. He loves you, whether you have been with him for years or whether you have wandered off.

[12:12] And whether you have wandered off now and watching this, he is waiting to come and meet with you and find you. He knows his sheep. He's committed.

You see, his love for us is sacrificial and successful. He doesn't walk away. He's compassionate. He knows you and will guide you through life's joys and struggles and fight for you when you need it.

He rescues. He comes and snatches you back from safety when we wander into harm's way and when we cry out for help. And he protects.

And when the predators come and they will come, and many of us know that, the wolves that come to scatter the flock, the wolf in sheep's clothing that comes to scatter the church, he is ready, fearless and doesn't abandon us.

And he cares. The love of God never ceases. He knows his sheep. He knows you and me. And most of all, for the one, for the one that comes back every time, he rejoices.

[13:26] And we should be rejoicing too because there is nothing more exciting than seeing somebody brought back into the fold to know Jesus, to know him, to know the good shepherd.

The Lord is my shepherd and he is good. Do you relate to the good shepherd? Do you love his qualities? Do you love his values? Do you love his grit and his determination?

You see, Jesus talks about the good shepherd that goes after the one. And if ever there was a day, I believe, for the church in this season is to get our eyes off the 99 and go after the one.

because there's a lot of ones out there that we, as a church, need to reach. Perhaps now the Spirit of God is prompting you.

Perhaps he's saying something to you about reaching the lost and the least. Ask him to equip you now. Ask him to come and give you that boldness and courageousness of the good shepherd as we go out and do as he has asked us to do, as we see him do time and time and time again.

[14:38] And let's do as he's commanded, like he shows us. Would you pray with me now? And maybe if the Lord, the Holy Spirit is prompting you now, maybe you feel that burning up inside you

of, yeah, this is my calling.

This is, it's for me to go to make that phone call to go and get alongside that person. I pray that the Holy Spirit would come and encourage us, empower us, enthuse us and excite us this morning.

Lord Jesus, reach out, Lord. Lord, thank you for the times that you have carried us home, the times that we needed carrying.

Encourage us to be more adventurous in our quest and our mission, knowing that you are always there with us. And help us to be more like you in all that we do and say.

And thank you, Jesus, that you are always there. And for all of us, Lord, thank you for carrying me home on the time that I needed it.

[15 : 49] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.