

Guest Speaker: Jeremy Giles

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Preacher: Jeremy Giles

[0:00] Father God, we come to you this morning as we always should, in humility. Father, we come to your word as we should, in humility. Father, you have good things to tell us and good things to say, as you always do.

Father, would you speak to us this morning? Amen. So, take a look at this. There we go. This happened about a month ago. What we're seeing here is somewhere around 2,000 sheep. I think that's probably just a small number of them, but somewhere around 2,000 sheep walking through the streets of Madrid in Spain.

It's a crazy picture. We're not used to seeing sheep walking through the middle of a city, certainly not a modern city like Madrid. I don't think I can even imagine the sort of mess that 2,000 sheep would make in the middle of a city.

I don't know sheep that well, but I can't help but think that a nervous sheep, a sheep walking through a city, a nervous sheep is going to be a little bit more messy than a calm one. I mean, it's bad enough you go to a country fair and they have two horses to do hayrides or something, let alone 2,000 sheep.

[1:10] It must have been wild afterwards. But what you didn't see, at least I didn't see when trolling through the many pictures that come up when you search for this event on the internet, was chaos.

Weirdly enough, what you would expect if you saw 2,000 sheep coming through your city is chaos. You'd expect to see sheep everywhere. You'd expect to see them going down this side street or that.

You'd expect to see a few, at the end of the day, still walking around. You know, the shepherds leave the city with 1,500 sheep instead of 2,000. Everybody the next day has a sheep on their lawn cutting the grass.

You know, somebody would hit one and there'd be traffic through the city for the next few hours. Sometimes some hapless farmhand would be collecting sheep for weeks afterwards. But there are no reports of anything like that.

At least not that I could find. I tried to find some and couldn't. And I figured that if there was problems with this event, there would have been news of it. I mean, what's better than a news story about a bunch of sheep going through Madrid?

[2:14] A bunch of sheep making a mess in Madrid, making chaos erupt, right? That's a better news story. But I couldn't find any. Apparently, the sheep were paraded in and paraded out with a minimum of hassle, whatever minimum of hassle means for 2,000 sheep walking through a city.

But it wasn't like that. It wasn't an aimless flock of sheep. These sheep were guided by a shepherd. By shepherds.

And we're not surprised to hear that. Shepherds like these guys in the next picture. They guided the sheep into the proper areas of the city and into the holding areas where the sheep could rest.

And we're not surprised to hear that there were shepherds involved because leaders are needed in so many areas of our life, whether or not there are sheep involved. When sheep are in a tricky situation, like in Madrid here, great sheep leaders are needed to keep things going, to get everybody through.

Now, sheep are notoriously dull creatures, or so I've been told. I've never known any sheep personally, so you could probably have a debate with me on whether that's a myth or not. Perhaps they're quite smart. But regardless, when sheep are in a flock, the vast majority can't see beyond the sheep next to them.

[3 : 35] The ones who aren't stuck in the middle are just as likely to be grazing as they are to be looking out for the rest. They're going to be looking after their own needs, the grass under their feet, and not necessarily looking out for threats in the distance, or for the well-being of the sheep around them.

This is why when the Bible speaks about people being sheep, we shouldn't necessarily be insulted. It's actually quite an apt description of our society. The vast majority of people have their heads down, looking to feed themselves, to make their own ends meet.

The vast majority of people can't see beyond the person next to them, even if they do want to help. The very smart, the very brave, maybe the very foolish, might get away from the flock.

But really, they're just as likely to get lost and confused as they are to make some great discovery. It really isn't that surprising a comparison, even if it isn't the most flattering to our race.

Now, in Psalm 23, David wrote about being a sheep.

[4 : 47] He compares God himself to a shepherd. David is not just part of a flock, but a part of a flock of sheep with a shepherd. And that makes all the difference for him. He says in the Psalm that God leads him to times of plenty.

He leads him to times of peace, and he leads him through times of hardship. He says in the Psalm that God leads him all the way to plenty. He guides him through so many things.

That's the God that David followed. That's God is David's shepherd. I'm sure that for the sheep going through Madrid, it must have seemed like the valley of the shadow of death.

But their shepherds guided them through, presumably, the green pastures beyond. A shepherd mitigates a lot of the problems that sheep have in a flock. A shepherd is tall and watchful.

A shepherd doesn't have to have his head down all the time. A shepherd can see threats coming. If a lion is coming, a shepherd is able to see him in the distance, long before he's actually a threat.

[5 : 51] A flock of sheep with a shepherd is defended. Even when there's no immediate threat of danger, even if the pasture that the sheep are in right now is green, maybe the next pasture is greener and safer and better.

The sheep may not know how to get there, but the shepherd does. God led the Israelites out across the desert when they left Egypt, out to find green lands, promised lands.

Israel had a hard time throughout their entire journey through the desert, looking past the circumstances right ahead of them. They had a hard time seeing past their need for food, their need for water, and frequently were like that, too.

Yet like a good shepherd, he led them all the way across, by a cloud during the day, by a pillar of fire at night. God was a shepherd when they needed one. God was a shepherd, just like David describes much later.

Now David had a son, and his son had a son, and generations rolled until one day, without giving up any of his authority, God sent Jesus. God became flesh and dwelt among us.

[7 : 04] Jesus takes up this same image of shepherd. When we see a large crowd that Jesus is looking out on, he sees the need of them.

He sees the aimlessness of them. And he says these people are like sheep without a shepherd. In one of his parables, he tells people that he is the good shepherd.

A hired shepherd, he says, will run at the first sign of danger. When something threatens the people they're leading, they'll run. But not Jesus, not the good shepherd.

He cares for his people so much that he will die for them. When danger comes to them, when someone threatens them, he is willing to lay down his life to protect and save them.

It's an inspiring image of our Lord. We, like sheep, tend to have our heads down, not noticing threats to us, not bothering with people on the other side of the flock. The bravest of us walk away from the flock, thinking that maybe we know better.

[8 : 07] And we end up on various and dangerous paths, undoubtedly. Like Isaiah prophesies, we, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to our own way. Think of any good Canadian saying, well, if that path works for him, let him go.

Let him turn to his own way. Who are you to judge? You're just another sheep, wandering just as aimlessly. Jesus, however, in another of his parable, describes another shepherd, leaving the entire flock of sheep to follow just such a wandering sheep, turned to his own way.

If each of us has turned to our own way, then just as Isaiah continues, God has laid our iniquities, our wrongdoings, our wanderings, as an aimless sheep on him, on the good shepherd.

The good shepherd died so that his sheep could be saved from their fruitless wanderings. Now when Jesus had indeed laid down his life for us and had been raised again, he continued using this image of sheep and shepherd.

John records this conversation between Jesus and Peter, recorded in the Gospel of John. We'll go there quickly. I have it bookmarked, so you don't need to go there. John 21, 20, if you need to find this again sometime.

[9 : 29] I hope my bookmark's still there. Oh, there we go. So this is John 21, verse 16. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

He said to him, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. He said to him, Feed my lambs. He said to him a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love me?

He said, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. He said to him, Shepherd my sheep. He said to him a third time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? Peter was grieved because he had said to him a third time, Do you love me?

And he said to him, Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you. Jesus said to him, Feed my sheep. The good shepherd himself, without giving up any of his authority, has commissioned Peter to be a shepherd as well.

The chief shepherd, as Peter calls him, to the readers of 1 Peter, has called him to be a shepherd as well. Now, if you have a large flock of sheep, like the ones that march through Madrid, you need more than one shepherd.

[10 : 51] The chief shepherd might be the owner of the sheep. He might be a family member of the owner. He's the one who makes sure that the sheep are taken care of, that there's enough people to make sure that the sheep don't wander.

He is the one who's making sure there's enough people to make sure that the sheep don't wander down every side street. When he tells Peter to shepherd his sheep, the risen Jesus is about to leave. He's about to go to the right hand of the Father.

But first, he's making sure that his flock is taken care of. He's going to make sure that they are fed, and he's going to make sure that they are led. Jesus was about to send the Holy Spirit to the church, a momentous occasion.

But he's also going to make sure that there are human leaders who would lead by Jesus' example, just like Peter. And that leads us finally to the book of 1 Peter. Peter is an apostle, yes.

Peter is one of the original disciples, yes. On top of that, he has been called personally by Jesus to be a shepherd. Now, that's some serious prestige.

[11 : 53] That's some serious authority coming directly from the lips of Jesus. The authority of a shepherd given by the chief shepherd. But Peter isn't wielding his authority here in an overhanded sort of way.

It seems to have been common from the beginning of the church that wise men should guide the church. People who were older in the faith, people who were elders in the faith, you might say. Probably in many cases, they were older in years, but not necessarily. Peter doesn't come to them as an overhanded leader.

Peter addresses his readers as fellow elders, not as a master, as a fellow. In effect, Peter is saying, one elder to another, let me tell you what this should look like.

One leader of the church to another leader of the church, let me tell you. And then he pulls out this image, again, of shepherd and sheep. Without any fanfare at all, he tells the elders of this church that they are to be shepherds as well.

[13 : 03] Elders of the church, like George, are to be shepherds. And you can see why this might be a very serious thing. God, the shepherd of his people, sent his only son to be the shepherd of his people and to save not only his people, but the entire world.

The chief shepherd then commissions Peter to also be a shepherd, to do the same thing. And it turns out that all elders of the church across the world are to be the same, shepherds.

The job that Peter got from the very mouth of Jesus is the same one that elders like George have.

The job that Jesus took and came to earth with is the same that he gave to Peter.

It may sound like I'm trying to describe something like the divine right of kings for church leaders, but that's not really the entire story. It might sound like I'm trying to tell you that you need to listen to the elders of the church because they have the authority of Jesus, but that's not the entire story.

Think again of the image of shepherd. When the chief shepherd arrives, whose well-being is he there to check on? Is it the shepherd's well-being or the sheep's well-being?

[14:26] Well, it's the sheep, of course. It's not for the sake of the shepherds that they're hired. It's for the sake of the sheep that the shepherds are there at all. If the chief shepherd, Jesus, died to save his sheep, you and I, and then called elders to shepherd the sheep as well, what do you think he's expecting of his shepherds?

If the owner of the sheep is willing to die for them, you can be pretty certain he's looking for something similar from his shepherds. Again, you can see why who becomes an elder might be a very serious thing for both the person themselves and for the people that are being led.

An elder has, as an example, Jesus himself. It shouldn't be surprising, then, that both Peter and Paul spend a lot of time talking about what elders should look like in the church.

Peter here gives us three characteristics, then, that our elders should be striving for. I'm going to lose all my papers here, so excuse me. Let's try again.

So the first characteristic that he's looking for from his elders is that they should be an example. Our leaders should, as one of the translations puts it, not be lording over us.

[15:49] The essence here is power. Our elders' motivation for leading us can't be power. It can't be the want of power. It can't be the chasing of power.

If the leaders who are leading us are thirsty for power, we're in deep trouble. A power-hungry leader is perfectly happy to lead, but will be much less likely to take into account the well-being of the people he's leading than he will be satisfying his own needs.

One of their goals might be to lead effectively, but probably one of the other goals will be power in itself. Perhaps by intimidation, threats, many sorts of manipulation.

This kind of leader is a classic sort of hypocrite, a person who insists on their followers giving up power, but resists any attempt at oversight themselves. I've seen a boss or two like this in jobs that I've worked.

I'm pretty certain that most of you have too. It's very common. In a workplace, I'm sure you know that it's destructive to have a power-hungry leader. In the church, where we deliberately make ourselves vulnerable before God and frequently before other people, it can be absolutely devastating.

[17:07] And I hope you haven't come out of churches like that. I've seen some, and it is truly devastating. The second characteristic that elders should be displaying is an eagerness to serve as opposed to an eagerness for gain.

Now, this is far from a prohibition for paying our pastors, our leaders. It's a warning against leaders who are motivated by gaining money.

A leader who is out for money will be one who weighs their decisions not on their love for Jesus and his church. They're weighing their decisions on the return of investment.

These are the sorts of leaders who are counting their hours so that they're not underpaid versus counting their hours so that the parts of their life are well served.

The last characteristic that Peter brings up here is one that catches a lot of different motivations. A leader must serve willingly, not under compulsion. Not because life's circumstance pushed the leader into it.

[18:12] An elder shouldn't be leading because seminary was the only school that let him in and he didn't want to go to trade school. They should be leading because they genuinely want to. Peter seems to be making sure that the elders that he's talking to are motivated properly for the job that they've been given.

Just like the hireling shepherd that Jesus mentions in his parable, at first sign of DeJa, motivations like money and power fall away.

Peter's writing to a persecuted church. Leaders of a persecuted church are going to be targeted. Their motivations are going to be tested sooner or later.

Again, think to the occasion that Peter was called that we read in the Gospel of John to shepherd Jesus' flock. What was the question that Jesus asked? Peter, do you love me?

Yes? Okay then. Shepherd my flock. Jesus, what does he want to know? What does he want to know about Peter? He wants to know where his allegiance is, what his motivation is.

[19:23] Is Peter going to be shepherding because he likes power? Is he going to be shepherding because he loves money? Is he going to be shepherding because he has nothing else to do now

that Jesus has left?

Is he going to be shepherding because he has no other choice? What Jesus seems to want to hear is that Peter will be serving because he loves Jesus so much. In his letter, Peter ends his exhortation to elders with this encouragement.

This, again, is from 1 Peter 5, verse 4. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Once again, he's pointing out who truly cares for the sheep. Who is it that's rewarding good leaders? It's Jesus. It's Jesus who cares for the sheep. For you and I, enough to hold a leader to account for the good things that he does for his flock and not.

And on the other flip side, the person that the leader is trying to please is not you and I. It's not the flock. Now, before you ask after the service, talking about George and what an elder should look like in the church while he's gone was actually his idea.

[20 : 45] So, it's not talking behind his back if he knows you're doing it, right? Actually, if you take a look at the blog in your bulletin, George himself has written about his views of what an elder in the church looks like.

Now, I'll leave it to you to have a think about what kind of leader we have in this congregation, the Church of the Messiah. But first, I would suggest to you that what George needs a lot more than a proper critique, what George needs a lot more than our opinions or criticisms of him is our prayers. As our leader, George has taken a responsibility for our feeding and for our leading and that makes him eligible for a never-ending or an everlasting crown like Peter mentions, but it's also a very heavy burden.

What he needs more than our opinions is our prayers. what we really want is a leader who we don't really question very often as far as how he compares to what we see here in 1 Peter and in Paul's letters as well, whether or not he matches what we see here.

He needs our prayers that he would lead ever more like Jesus led and ever more like we are a church being led by Jesus. So, that said, let's pray for George and the leaders of the church.

[22 : 15] Father God, we thank you for people who are willing to lead, people who love you enough to lead. Father, we thank you that we have a pastor, a shepherd of this flock, an elder.

Father, we thank you that he is by many accounts a good leader. Father, we ask that you would in turn lead him well.

Father, would you lead him to be ever less motivated by money, ever less motivated by power. Would you lead him to be ever more motivated by love of you?

Father, we ask this for George, we ask this for David, we ask this for leaders, elders, in churches across the city and across the world. Father, we accept that you have given us leaders and Father, we ask that you would make them ever better leaders.

Father, we ask this in the name of Jesus. Father, you make this possible through Jesus. Father, we thank you and pray these things. Amen.