

# What is the Church? A Flock

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our scripture reading this morning is from the book of John, chapter 10. It says John, chapter 10. There's a number of verses in the bulletin.

We're going to read verses 1 to 18. Next week, we're starting a new series on the book of Colossians that will last us throughout the spring. And today, we're finishing a third part of a series that we started just before Christmas called What is the Church?

And what we're doing is every week, we're looking at a different image that the Bible gives us of what the church is. So, just before Advent season, we saw that the church was a body.

The church is also called a bride. And today, we're looking at how Jesus calls the church a flock. So, we're going to read verses 1 to 18. This is Jesus speaking.

This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

[ 1 : 52 ] So, Jesus again said to them, I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees.

And the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.

Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. 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. For this reason, the Father loves me. Because I lay down my life that I might take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.

[ 3 : 09 ] I have authority to lay it down. And I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father. Amen. And this is God's Word. There's nothing that will wake you up like the electricity going out in the middle of the service, right?

We're all present now. And it's good because when we talk about the flock of Christ, there's two ways you can think about it. One is, in all these images, Jesus is telling us what is already true of us.

So, if you are a Christian, you are already a part of the flock of Christ. But there's another way to think about it, which is, what is true of us is not always what we live out.

And so, we can look at this image and say, how can we embrace this reality in such a way that we begin to live into it and embrace what Jesus says is true of us? And it's fitting because this is New Year's, right?

We're thinking about who do we want to be in the coming year. And one of the images that Jesus gives us is a flock. And there's three things that you see in this passage about what it means to be the flock of Christ.

[ 4 : 24 ] And that's what we're going to look at for the next few moments. The first thing you see is to be a part of the flock. The flock. What is the flock? The flock is called by the shepherd. And you see that in verse 3.

Jesus says, the sheep hear his voice, the shepherd's voice, and he calls his own sheep by name. The sheep hear his voice, and they respond.

And I don't know a thing about shepherding other than what I learned from books. But when I read the books, what they tell me about the ancient world and the way shepherding was is that you would have to imagine different families would all keep their sheep in one pen.

So you might have 160 sheep in a pen, and 40 of them belong to one family. And the image here is Jesus looking at a whole number of sheep, and he calls out to those sheep, and the ones who know him come out from the flock.

So every sheep knows his shepherd's voice and comes out for it. That's the image. And so if you take that image, what is the definition of a flock?

[ 5 : 31 ] The definition of a flock of Christ are the people who hear Jesus' voice and who respond to it and come out from and listen to it. So here's the implication for the church.

What does that mean for us this morning? Christ's voice, our shepherd's voice, is the glue that holds our Christian community together.

Christ's voice is the glue that holds Christian community together, which is to say the same thing as this. What holds us together as a part of the flock of Christ is not our moral code.

It's not the worship style that we choose. It's not the socioeconomic background that we come from. What binds the flock together, what makes it the flock, is that all those sheep in that bunch respond to the voice of the shepherd.

And the reason Jesus tells this story is because of what happens just the chapter earlier in chapter 9. In chapter 9, there's a story that many of you are familiar with.

[ 6 : 37 ] There's a blind man, and Jesus goes to the blind man, and it's a memorable story because he heals him in a really strange way. He puts mud on the blind man's eyes, and then he tells the blind man to go wash in the pool of Siloam.

And so what happens is he puts the mud on the eyes, the man goes and washes, and suddenly he can see. But then that's just the beginning because then a problem arises because the blind man who now sees finds himself trapped between Jesus and the Pharisees because the Pharisees come to the blind man and they say, What happened here?

How did this happen? How do you see? And they don't believe the blind man when he says that Jesus healed him because they say there's no way Jesus could have healed you because Jesus, first of all, is a sinner.

And Jesus, he couldn't have healed you on the Sabbath because you're not allowed to heal on the Sabbath. He could have never done that. And then they look at the blind man and they say, What do you know? You're just a sinner.

Because at the beginning of the passage, this all started when the disciples passed by the blind man, and they said to Jesus, Who sinned that this man is blind?

[ 7 : 47 ] Was it him or was it his parents? And Jesus says, That's not it at all. But what is Jesus? So when Jesus uses this shepherd metaphor, he's explaining what has just happened because at the end of that story, the Pharisees, they kick the blind man out of the synagogue, and Jesus comes after the blind man.

And when the Pharisees come to Jesus, Jesus pushes away the Pharisees because they can't see who he is. The metaphor is a response to that scene, the shepherds.

The Pharisees are the people that you think should be in church. The Pharisees are people who know their Bible well. They went to church since they were young. They were people who did what everyone around them told them they should do.

They listened well. They had it all together except for one thing. And what was that one thing? When the shepherd called, when Jesus called, they did not follow him. They had everything put together in their lives except they didn't know the shepherd's voice.

And then you've got the blind man who had nothing together. He was a beggar. He had nothing going for him. The world around him thought that he was blind because he was a sinner or because his parents were sinners.

[ 9 : 03 ] And Jesus looks at that one person who has nothing going for him. He has no credibility in his own community. But what? But Jesus comes to him and Jesus calls him.

And when the blind man hears Jesus' voice, he comes after him. And everything that Jesus is talking about in this chapter is explaining why that's the case. A true sheep hears the shepherd's voice and that's what makes him a part of the flock.

Nothing else. Some of you know Alistair Begg. He had a really famous sermon that he preached a couple years ago that has almost a million views on YouTube. Because of this one scene where he talks about the man on the cross that was next to Jesus who Jesus said, today you'll be with me in paradise.

And Alistair Begg is talking about how remarkable that is. And he said, I can't wait to meet that man in heaven because here's a man who shows up in heaven who maybe has never been to church, has never been to a Bible study, has never been baptized.

And he imagines having this conversation with this guy and looking at his resume and saying, you haven't done any of these things. And then maybe an angel coming over and saying, well, what is your doctrine of justification?

[ 10 : 14 ] And the man saying, I've never even heard of that word before. And then everyone's standing around this man next to Jesus on the cross and saying, well then, why are you here? How did you get in?

And the man responds by saying, because the man on the cross told me I could come. And that's what Jesus is saying in this passage is what it means to be a Christian first and foremost is that Jesus Christ has called you.

Nothing else. There's nothing that we've done to earn his love. It's simply that he calls us by name and we come and follow after him. And Jesus, he pushes the envelope on this.

You know, sometimes, you know, there's some people who are comfortable making other people uncomfortable. And Jesus is like that sometimes. And he'll make a point and then he'll drive in the dagger to make it even more uncomfortable.

And he does that because you see there in verse 16, what does he say? He says, and I have other sheep that are not of this fold.

[ 11 : 20 ] I must bring them also and they will listen to my voice. And the jab there is that the Pharisees, people who were raised to be true Israelites, and Jesus here is saying these men actually, they don't belong in the kingdom of God because they don't listen to the shepherd.

And yet, there are people who are not from Israel. Gentiles, the despised people, if you were living in the perspective of Israel, there are Gentiles who I will call and because they respond to my voice, because I call them by name, they will be my children.

They will be a part of my flock. And I think this raises a question for each of us. It raises a lot of questions, but one of them to start with is, is there a person in your life or is there a type of person for you who if they showed up at this church, you will smile with all of your teeth, but you'll be saying in your heart, what is this person doing here?

Because if the gospel is the gospel, and if it really is what Jesus says that it is, we should always expect to be surprised by the people who respond to it because it's people that will be not like us, people who had no background, who you would have not looked at and said, of course they're in church.

They were born for this. It's the people who you would say, there's no explanation for this except Jesus Christ is doing something that no one else could do in that person's life. And we will be acting like the flock of Christ when we really believe and when we live out the reality that what binds us together is not the fact that we all have a similar background or anything else that connects us, shared hobbies or anything like that, except that we are here because we believe that Jesus Christ calls us his sheep and we have come after him.

[ 13 : 13 ] And one side effect of that when you really believe that is it doesn't just change the way that you see other people, it changes the way you see yourself because if you really believe that, then you have to believe that the only reason that you're in the flock is not because Jesus saw that you would be a worthy sheep.

It's because of his mercy and it's because of his grace and it's because he set his love on you. Nothing that you did during it. When that settles in your heart, it makes you humble. It makes you the kind of person that looks out and says, if God can do this to me, he must be able to do it to anybody.

He can do it to anybody. And that changes the way that we do evangelism, among other things, because suddenly you begin to say, your vision changes away from who would fit in really well at Columbia Presbyterian Church to we're going to cast this net as wide as we can because we believe that Jesus Christ can do things that we can't do and that he's going to call people that we would have never called ourselves.

Wouldn't it be great if this church, and we could say this is true of every church, wouldn't it be great if people look at this church and they would say, there's no explanation for all these different people coming together except the fact that they believe that Jesus Christ has set his love on them because they don't have enough in common to hang out for any other reason except for that.

So the first thing of what it means to be a flock is that they're called by the shepherd but here's the second thing. The flock, to be the flock, what does it mean to be the flock?

[ 14 : 48 ] It's to be led by the shepherd which is, that's really a part of being called but we're going to separate it out, to be led by the shepherd and you see that in verse 3 and 4. So Jesus says here, the sheep hear his voice and he calls his own sheep by name and then what does he do?

He leads them out. So they're in the pen, he calls them and then he leads them out and he calls them by their name. When he has brought out his own, he goes before them and the sheep follow him for they know his voice.

So he's leading them out of the pen to go find pasture. So to be a part of the flock, what does it mean? It's not just that you respond to Jesus' voice and you wave at him from within the pen and wish him a good day.

It's that when he calls you out you actually begin to follow him wherever he goes. And the image here is different from the way that shepherding works today, again, from what I read in the books.

But normally today when you see shepherds, the way that a shepherd will guide his flock is with dogs and they'll push from behind wherever he wants them to go.

[ 15 : 58 ] So the dogs will lead the flock from behind. But in the ancient times it was the opposite. The shepherd would lead the sheep from in front of them so that for them to know where to go they always just had to keep their eye on the shepherd wherever he was going.

So the shepherd in the ancient world was like a true north. As long as the sheep kept their eye on him, everything was going to be okay and they were going to stay safe. And why is that important?

What is the message there? That Jesus leads us? Yes, but to the nth degree because the truth about sheep is that sheep are no good on their own.

You know, my dog, especially when we got it at first, she knew how to get out of our house and she knew how to hit the road. And the one comfort that we had was knowing that as far as she could go from our house, she knew how to get home.

She had a keen sense of smell. She had good instincts. And part of you wonders, would she rather be out in the wild than not inside of our house? Would she rather be out there free and wild because she knew how to do it so well?

[ 17 : 07 ] Sheep aren't like that. Sheep are the opposite. They're no good out on their own. When was the last time you saw a wild sheep that was thriving? Right? It doesn't happen because sheep, they're defenseless against predators.

They can't tell food from poisonous plants. They're skittish. Even when you're trying to help them, that's why they have to, shepherds have to have a crook so they can grab them. And they have no sense of direction.

In 2005, there was a BBC article that was titled Turkish Sheep Die in Mass Jump. And the article, one part read like this.

Turkish shepherds watched in horror as hundreds of their sheep followed each other over a cliff, says Turkish newspaper reports. First, one sheep went over the edge only to be followed by the whole flock.

According to reports, more than 400 sheep died in the 15-meter fall. Their bodies cushioned the fall of the other 1,100 who followed. And the Bible says that's totally consistent with who sheep are.

[ 18 : 15 ] And the Bible says that's totally consistent with who we are. If we don't have a shepherd or if we have a shepherd who misleads us, we will go astray every single time.

And so for Jesus to say that he is the true shepherd, what he's saying to each of us is, without me, you are spiritually lost and you will not be able to find the way and you're going to hurt yourself.

It's not like there's a lot of different choices you could take and they'll all lead to different types of fun and freedom. It's that if Jesus isn't your shepherd, you're going to get lost and you're going to get hurt in ways that you could have never expected beforehand.

And growing in Christ, growing in Christ means learning to keep our eyes on the shepherd in every part of our lives. and sometimes we chafe under the idea that we need to follow someone or that we need to be guided, but we intuitively know that that's true, right?

You know, any professional athlete worth his salt, any good athlete, they know they need a coach. You know, when I was at Ole Miss, my freshman year, they placed me in the same dorm as all the freshman football players.

[ 19 : 27 ] And one of the things that I noticed and it was tragic was you would have some football players who would thrive in the system that they were placed in. And then you would have other football players who were just looking at them.

They looked like monsters. They were just incredibly gifted athletes who could have done anything. And yet they hated being coached and they hated the system. And because they hated it, they didn't even make it through the first semester.

And it was so hard watching these young men who had potential that they could not have dreamed of. But because they hated the idea of being led by someone else and being coached by someone else, they threw away the greatest opportunity of their lives.

And what Jesus is saying to each of us when he says he's the shepherd is, I am here for you. I am here to lead you so that you're going to have what you could have never had without me.

True peace, true satisfaction, true joy. There's a great scene in Lord of the Rings where Bilbo Baggins, this little hobbit, has been holding this ring and that ring is a metaphor for all the sin in this world.

[ 20 : 35 ] And the longer he holds on to it, the harder his heart becomes. And his good friend, the wizard, comes to him one day and says, Bilbo, you need to give me that ring.

It is not good for you. It is crushing your soul. And Bilbo, he can't bring himself to do it. And he looks at this thing and he can't give it up. And he turns around to the wizard, his best friend, and says, you're trying to take this from me.

You're trying to hurt me. And the wizard, you know how wizards are, a storm forms behind him and he scares Bilbo into giving up the ring.

But in scaring him, what he says is, Bilbo, I'm not trying to rob you. I'm trying to help you. You need to trust me.

And isn't it true that sometimes we look at the scriptures and we look at what Jesus tells us to do and tells us not to do and it feels like he is keeping us from fun. He's keeping us from what we want out of this life.

[ 21 : 37 ] But the more you follow him as your shepherd, what you realize is he's not trying to hurt us. And he says that in this passage. He says in verse 10, what? He says, I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Everything the shepherd does is for his sheep. And you know, one of the hardest things for each of us and all of us are different but the same in this way. All of us have parts of our lives that when we're called to look at Jesus, our shepherd, we look away.

We want Jesus to be the king of a certain part of our life but not another part. Whether it's our finances, our family, our jobs, the way that we handle our neighbors.

And it's worth each of us asking, what is the part of my life that when I think about Jesus as my shepherd, I'm tempted to look away because I'd really rather handle this on my own.

And I'd really rather not hear what he has to say to me about how I should deal with this part of my life. And what does Jesus say?

[ 22 : 46 ] I'm not trying to hurt you. I'm not trying to rob you. I'm here to give you life and give it to you abundantly. Okay? Just a final thought on that.

I'm not even going to talk about this but just worth thinking about. If it's true that for us to be a part of the flock that each of us individually needs to keep our eyes on Jesus and we're going to go astray, what does that mean for our church?

You know, you might look at our church and say, well, of course we're supposed to keep our eyes on Jesus. But it's one thing to say that that's true. It's another thing to live it out and to really, really commit to saying we want to do what Jesus wants for our church.

Not what we think would be nice. Not what we've always done or not what we think would be a good new thing to do. You know, traditions can be good. Traditions can be bad. New things can be good.

New things can be bad. But is our central concern that Jesus is our shepherd and that he's leading us where we need to go next? Okay? So you see in this picture, you've got the flock is called by Jesus, called by the shepherd.

[ 23 : 50 ] They're led by the shepherd. And then finally, briefly, the flock is kept by the shepherd. And you've got the image there in verse 12 of Jesus compares a shepherd to a hired hand.

He says, He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd who does not own the sheep, he sees the wolf coming and he leaves and scatters. He leaves the sheep and flees and the wolf snatches them.

He flees. Why? Because he's a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. And Jesus says this, I am the good shepherd. I know my father. I know my own and my own know me.

There's nothing wrong with being a hired hand except that you can't put all of your trust in the hired hand because what is a hired hand there for?

They're there to get paid. And as long as they're getting paid, they'll be there. But when something really bad happens, something really scary happens, the hired hand is going to leave because they're saying, I didn't sign up for this. I'm not getting paid to fight a lion when it comes to the sheep.

[ 24 : 52 ] But a shepherd, why is a shepherd different? Why would a shepherd stay in the midst of danger when the hired hand would leave? It's because for the shepherd, the sheep are his wealth.

When those 400 sheep went off that cliff in Turkey, the shepherd said, that's \$50,000 that we're never going to get back. They were devastated because a shepherd, all his wealth is in his sheep.

And the measure of a good shepherd is this. It's will he defend his flock. And you see this in the Old Testament. Remember King David? Do you remember King David when he wanted to go fight Goliath?

He went and told King Saul, he said, let me at him. And King Saul said, you can never do that. Do you remember what David told him? Here's what David said. He said, your servant, me, your servant used to keep sheep for his father.

And when there came a lion or a bear and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth.

[ 25 : 59 ] And if he arose against me, I caught him by the beard and struck him and killed him. David is saying, I know what it's like to fight because I am a shepherd and a true shepherd fights to defend his flock.

You know, when Jesus, when he talks about the kind of shepherd that he is, he uses this phrase. He says, I am the good shepherd. And I can guarantee you that if you were to Google Jesus as the good shepherd, you would find the most lovely picture.

It would be 65 degrees and sunny and you would have a picture of Jesus with a sheep flung over his shoulders, but it looks like it's not a burden to Jesus at all. But that's not what a good, that's not the measure of a good shepherd.

On the sunny days, the measure of a good shepherd, if you really wanted to paint it, it would be, what is the shepherd doing when it's wet and muddy and there are monsters in the fence?

There's wolves, there's thieves. That's the measure of a good shepherd is does he stand by the sheep when it gets bad? And Jesus says he's the good shepherd and he defends it by saying this.

[ 27 : 06 ] He says, in verse 11, I am the good shepherd. the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. That's simply how Jesus defends him being a good shepherd, that he is willing to lay down his life for his sheep if that's what's necessary.

And that word for, I'm willing to lay down my life for the sheep, what it really means is in the place of. I am willing to die so that they can go free.

And Jesus, because Jesus knows, he already knows at this point in his life that that is what it will take to be the shepherd of his flock. That he will have to lay down his life so that his sheep can find life and find life abundantly.

Okay? Last two questions to close with. Number one, do you know that you are your shepherd's treasure? You know, we talked to the kids just now about how sinful we are.

And if you, to understand this metaphor of the sheep, you have to believe that you're helpless. And in a lot of ways, you're dumb. And I'm dumb. It's not a compliment to say that we're sheep.

[ 28 : 21 ] But here's the compliment. The compliment is that Jesus looks at these sheep and he says, these sheep, they can't live without me. But, and, they are my treasure.

They are so worthy to me that I would lay down my life for them gladly so that they can be free and that they can know life. And that's what the gospel says to us over and over again. Do you realize how sinful you are?

And, do you realize that even in your sin, your Savior loves you more than you could ever possibly imagine? And that he's willing to back that up with his own life. Okay? Do you know that you are Christ's treasure?

Okay? And then here's the second question. And I think this is the more important question. Do you know that Christ is a good shepherd? You know, do you ever think about how many times have you heard an adult whose parent has passed away and it takes them until they're an adult and they put all the pieces together of their youth?

Hopefully, this is what happens. And they look back and they say, you know, for all my life I misunderstood my dad or I misunderstood my mom and I didn't realize that all the times that they were working or doing something that it was for me that they were doing it.

[ 29 : 38 ] And they say, I was so ungrateful to the love that they showed me and I was blind to it until it was too late. That's kind of what I'm getting at here with this question. Do you know Jesus is a good shepherd?

Because if you know that it changes you and it changes your relationship to Jesus where it's not about what does it take for me to satisfy Jesus? It's simply being satisfied in Jesus.

And the overflow of that transforms the way that we live every other part of our life so that in every part of our life we want to keep our eyes on our shepherd because we trust him and because we know that he is good, that he is the good shepherd.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, burrow this truth into our hearts today so that this day and every day we can keep our eyes on our good shepherd.

In your son's name we pray. Amen.