

The Beautiful Shepherd

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[0 : 00] If we can turn again to John's Gospel, chapter 10, and we're going to be exploring those verses 11 to 18.

But the main text really is, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

These words of Jesus, this claim of Jesus, I am the good shepherd. I'm sure all of us would agree that sheep need a shepherd.

Without a shepherd, are they not vulnerable, in danger, and prone to go astray? That's what we were sharing with the children earlier on.

But do we humans need a shepherd? Not everyone agrees with that proposition, do they? The Bible, however, states that every human being needs not just any shepherd, but needs the Messiah shepherd called Jesus Christ.

[1 : 21] As I was saying to the children, the great prophet Isaiah, living over 700 years before Jesus, made this analysis of the human predicament or the human problem.

All we, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us have turned to his own way. We're in flight from God, imagining we can do without him.

I've got a lot of history books on war, and one of them is called The Pity of War. And in that book, that author says that human beings are the biggest predators on the planet.

Not that we kill each other for food, but for power, for greed, for exploitation. As our own bad rabbi Burns once said, man's inhumanity to man.

Can I ask you, are you without a shepherd? Are you without Jesus Christ today? Do you know the good shepherd?

[2 : 44] The reason I ask that, even at the very beginning of the service, is that this is what this sermon is about. Today's sermon is the fourth I am claim of Jesus.

There are seven of them found in John's gospel. I've been going through these as a series, as you know. We looked at I am the bread of life.

We looked at I am the light of the world. We looked at I am the door of the sheep. All of these are, I'm sure you would agree, astonishing claims for any human being to make.

Can you imagine what we would think of anybody that you met out in the streets of Partick there, and they come up to you and said, I am the light of the world. We perhaps don't grasp all those millenniums on about how charged these statements are of Jesus.

And so is this one. Because God is seen as the shepherd in the Bible. He calls himself the shepherd. And here is Jesus saying, I am the good shepherd.

[4 : 10] In this passage, Jesus tells us a number of things about himself as the good shepherd. One, he tells us the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Two, that he has an intimate and affectionate knowledge of his sheep. Three, that he has other sheep. And four, of the father's involvement or pact in the son's sacrifice for the sheep.

What we're going to do then is go through those four features or aspects of Jesus as the good shepherd that he mentions himself.

Firstly then, the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. This is the central message of this passage.

It is mentioned by Jesus five times. He mentions it obviously there in the verse we've read in verse 11.

[5 : 21] But look also at 14. I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me just as, rather 15, just as the father knows me and I know the father.

And I lay down my life for the sheep. He mentions it in verse 17. The reason the father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it again.

He mentions it in verse 18 twice. 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.

So this is something that Jesus wants to stress. And let's remember that he's still talking to the Pharisees. Chapter 10 verse 1.

Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a robber.

[6 : 29] Jesus knows what he's doing, and he knows what he's saying, and he knows why he's saying it to the Pharisees at this time.

They consider themselves to be the shepherd of the sheep. Essentially, in this first reference to laying down his life, it is stated without a comment.

It simply is a fact. But I'm going to say more about his willingness to lay down his life for us as we go through the rest of the sermon.

So, my second point is that the shepherd has an intimate and loving knowledge of his sheep. And that comes out in verse 14 and 15.

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.

[7 : 39] Now, what kind of knowledge does Christ have of his sheep when he says, I am the good shepherd, I know my sheep?

It's not simply as names on something like an electoral register. It's not simply that he's in some possession of facts about the sheep.

It's not about their gender. It's not about, you know, if we're thinking of ourselves, because the sheep is a metaphor for people.

It's not whether we're married or whether we're single. Of course, he'll know that as well. But what kind of knowledge is this? It's a knowledge that is experiential.

We must remember that in the Hebrew understanding of knowledge and the way that it uses the concept, it's something that is relational and experiential.

[8 : 51] It's something that is intimate. And what Jesus is saying here is, look, you know how sometimes all of us may feel that nobody really knows me.

We say that, don't we? You don't really know me. You don't understand me. And let's be honest, there is a region of each one of us that nobody knows but God.

And this is what Jesus is saying, I believe, when he says, I know my sheep. I know them lovingly.

I know them because they belong to me. And that, of course, is related to, I lay down my life for the sheep. I know them because I live in them.

And they live in me. But notice also, he says that, not only does he know his sheep, but his sheep know him.

[10 : 05] Can I just ask, do you know Jesus Christ? I don't mean, do you know facts about Jesus Christ? And that you could pass some exam in giving a certain amount of facts of where he was born, the circumstances in which he was born, when he started his public ministry, what actually happened at the conclusion of his public ministry.

I don't mean that. It's wonderful that we're in church today. But here is the \$64,000 question.

Do you know Jesus Christ in the sense that you know in the words of a hymn, now I belong to Jesus, and Jesus belongs to me?

Furthermore, notice something else in this verse 14. Jesus doesn't only say in this wonderful, loving, and experiential, and intimate way, I know my sheep, and my sheep know me, something that is reciprocal and mutual.

But he goes on to add, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. Just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father.

[11 : 35] And how does the Father know Jesus, the Son? And how does the Son know the Father? in an exquisite, ineffable bond and relationship of eternal love.

And he's saying, this knowing of you is issuing from my very relationship with the Father from all eternity.

So this knowledge is a deep bond and love. It is relational, it's experiential, it's based on issues from the relational and experiential and loving knowledge of Father and Son.

Now, if Christ this morning is your shepherd, his knowledge of you is based on his love for you and his intimate relation to you, he will never let you go.

His commitment, Christian friend, is absolute. The question that Jesus once asked Peter is an all-important question for every single one of us.

[13:10] Remember when he said to Peter after he had risen and he met him, Peter, do you love me? And he asked him three times.

And this is the only kind of relationship that God wants to have with every single one of us.

A relationship that is based on the love of God which will never end. Oh love, said the hymn writer, that will not let me go.

Now, is that not something that stirs you this morning? Thirdly, Jesus has said the good shepherd lays down his life.

Jesus has said the good shepherd knows his sheep and his sheep know him just as the father and the son know one another. But then he's got something else to say about the good shepherd.

[14:18] I don't want to say a lot on this point. not because it isn't important but because of the constraints of time. Jesus says in verse 16, I have other sheep that are not of this sheep fold.

I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. You know, Jesus knows who his sheep are before the sheep know that they belong to Jesus.

The roots of our salvation in Jesus Christ run very, very deep. they run deep into the oneness and the unity of the purpose of God.

Of the purpose of the Father and Son, which I will say more of as we come to the near the end of the sermon. But notice a couple of things from this feature of the good shepherd that he has other sheep.

Notice how he puts it, I must bring them. The greatest missionary that the world has ever seen and will ever see is Jesus Christ.

[16:14] The greatest lover of people is Jesus Christ. Notice also he says, they too will listen to my voice.

You might ask the question, how do I know that I'm one of his sheep, that I belong to him? That he knows me? I ask you a very simple question.

Do you listen to his voice? If you haven't already come to him and embraced him as your personal saviour and Lord, when he says to you, come to me, all you that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

I think that's something that is greatly needed in today's world, in today's society. We hear, do we not, so much depressing news.

things, the people that are meant to be at the wheel seem absent, the wheel of government.

[17:48] Are you listening to the voice of the beautiful shepherd? I deliberately choose that word because the word good is the word kalos.

That's a very easy word, isn't it? It's a Greek word, kalos. It means beautiful. And I hope, as even up till now, and by the remainder of this sermon, I hope that you see something beautiful in this good shepherd.

word. As we come to the close of the sermon, I probably won't work this, but I had the singularity in my head.

You know how the universe is expanding and based on that and based on a number of other pieces of datum, let's just put it like that, I don't want to get involved in that, the idea is that it must have then been back in some sort of single point or singularity of colossal denseness.

Our salvation goes right back to something that is so dense and it goes back to this pact of the Father and the Son in eternity.

[19:42] People can feel justifiable pride in some sacrificial act, or conversely they can feel great gratitude and love for someone who has saved their life.

The actor Mark Harmon, who was in the TV series NCIS, once in real world, saved the lives of two teenage boys, boys, who were trapped inside a burning car.

You can imagine how grateful these boys, they used a sledgehammer to break the glass and get into the car. God. But, as we conclude this sermon, I want you to notice some things from verses 17 and 18.

Verse 17, a remarkable statement. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life.

only to take it again. I mean, apart from saying anything about that verse, I don't know about you, I think it's beautiful.

[21 : 10] I just imagine God the Father, if you'll excuse the human language, of having immense pride in the willingness of his Son to go through incarnation, to come to what Professor Donald McLeod once described, and I'll never forget it, as the rubbish heap of human sin, and mingle with it, and take the spitting, and take the mockery, and take everything, and the shame, and the ignominy, ignominy, of the cross.

Can you see something beautiful here? Can you see something beautiful here? The reason my Father loves me is that I, the eternal son of God, lay down my life for human beings who don't want me.

But notice, only to take it up again. Now, I'll speak about that as I come to the second point in verse 18, which is the final point.

The Father's admiration and affection and, dare I say, rapture at the breathtaking willingness of His Son to come to do the Father's will, which entailed, as I say, enfleshment, living in the rubbish heap of sin and uncleanness, submitting to jeering, spitting, mockery, as well as the darkness of the cross.

Can you wonder that the Father, looking at Him, loved Him? Firstly, in verse 18, what we see is the unity of cross and resurrection.

[23 : 36] I lay it down, said Jesus, and take it up again.

No one takes it from me. And in verse 17, as I mentioned already, the Father loves me and that I lay down my life only to take it again.

That little word, only, is for the explicit objective and purpose and aim to take it again. The Apostle Paul makes this statement, which I'm just going to read to you, in chapter 4 and the verse 25. Listen to this. Speaking of Jesus, he says, He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Wait a minute, did we hear that right? Let's say it again. And was raised to life for our justification.

[24 : 53] A dead Christ, not risen, would leave us all either condemned in him or awaiting confirmation and acceptance of our justification through the resurrection.

The resurrection and the cross stand or fall together. It is quite correct for Paul to make the kind of statement in Romans 4.25 regarding justification and resurrection.

For John, as I mentioned in a previous sermon, life is the key term for our salvation. In other words, as it were, John's looking beyond the cross to the victory and declaration of our acceptance in Christ through the resurrection.

Are you alive in Christ? Remember, Paul could say, if Christ is not risen, our faith is utterly vain and empty and we are still, said Paul, listen to this, Corinthians 15, Paul says, if Christ is not risen, we are still in our sins.

the cross and the resurrection are a unity that you do not separate in terms of the saving work of Jesus Christ.

[26 : 52] I am the beautiful shepherd, said Jesus. Why?

Because I lay down my life for the sheep. Because I know my sheep intimately and love every one of them and I'm absolutely committed to them forever.

Why? Because I will bring my other sheep. And why? Because, you know, going back to the singularity and the denseness, this is not something that just happened to come to my mind. But God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him may not perish but have everlasting life.

May the Lord then bless these thoughts to us about this fourth I am statement and I hope still to be able to complete the series when I get another opportunity to share with you the final three of these great I am statements.

[28 : 22] Let's have a word of prayer. Oh Lord, how we thank you as we were saying to the children so simply, the Lord is my shepherd.

What a privilege that is. what a wonderful miracle that is. Giving us hope for all eternity.

Bless your word to each of us Lord. We ask in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen.