

What is Jesus Like? 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: 03 August 2025

Preacher: Douglas Cranston

[0 : 00] Well, friends, there was an old theological book that was written by a man called Griffith Thomas, who was the principal of Wycliffe College in Oxford.

! Paul's on the truth regarding the work and the message of the Lord Jesus Christ, principally who He was and what He came to do.

And to understand these two things is to understand, he said, in essence, the reality and the confidence that we should have in the gospel.

This is, of course, one of the great truths that sets Christianity apart from every other philosophy or ideology or religion.

There are many of those. And many of them would claim to point to the truth or to instruct us about how we might search for the truth or for enlightenment.

[1 : 30] Some would call us to engage in certain commands and rules. And if we follow those, then we might find a way to happiness or contentment.

And standing against that comes the claims of the gospel writers as they record the Lord Jesus Christ and what He said about Himself.

Because He did not come to point away to truth, but said, I am the truth.

He didn't come to lay down a set of rules and regulations that would lead to contentment or peace or give us satisfaction of life.

He said, I am the life. And so, He reminded us that salvation and glory and what is achieved through the cross is not about reaching a destination, but it's about finding an identity such that we find ourselves in Christ.

[2 : 59] And along with that, then, comes the question that I have for us tonight. What is Jesus like?

Now, many of you will have gone to home Bible studies where that question could entertain you all evening with all kinds of varieties of answers. And I'm sure one of those answers would be somebody standing up and saying, this is what I think Jesus is like to me.

And I've often been tempted when that is said at Bible study meetings, although I haven't, to say, well, that's entirely irrelevant.

Because we don't need to conclude what Jesus is like to me. We just need to observe what He is like and what He claimed to be in the Gospels.

And John's Gospel in particular is a Gospel which helps us to see what Jesus is like. Because throughout that Gospel, He is placing before us a number of unique claims concerning His own identity.

[4 : 32] We've just sung a song which tells us and reminds us of many of the names attributed to Jesus.

You'll have to excuse me, I'm in medication, which makes my mouth very dry. John Newton's great hymn talks about Jesus as the rock, a shield, a hiding place, a husband, a friend, a prophet, a priest, a king.

And along with that, he speaks about a name for Jesus that perhaps strikes the deepest chord with so many people in their Christian faith.

And that is Jesus as shepherd. shepherd. All that that image of the shepherd implies seems to church so many places in the life of the believer.

The attributes of the shepherd that they so easily identify in their living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. and I think particularly in Scotland with the love of that 23rd Psalm where as believers sing, the Lord is my shepherd.

[6 : 07] I shall lack nothing. And so there is a sense in that Psalm that an understanding of the Lord as my shepherd is surely one of the crucial understandings for the believer in which we take confidence, in which we find comfort, and in which we have a lasting surety.

So what I want to do very simply and straightforwardly and I hope it's helpful is to try and break down this passage chapter 10 and if you have your Bibles open that would be great.

Looking at first of all the setting and then the substance and then the sequel. I promised myself when I began ministry that I wouldn't have three alliterative points as I went through but it just seems that the Bible just falls naturally into that.

First of all the setting. Well it's very obvious in John's Gospel that the setting is the previous chapter where Jesus has given sight to a blind man drawing the wrath of the Pharisees for healing on the Sabbath.

And in chapter 9 verse 34 Jesus hears that the man has been effectively excommunicated and Jesus reveals himself to the man who is wondering about why this has happened.

[7 : 46] And as Jesus talks to this man he affirms his identity as God and draws this wandering sheep into the fold of his grace becoming his healer shepherd but more importantly his saviour and his shepherd.

And as we move to chapter 10 then it's very obviously the case that Jesus sees the Pharisees as the hirelings the thieves and the robbers of whom he speaks in verse 8 and 12.

He describes these people as those who could not care less for the sheep. They are nothing more than they are for the pay and when trouble comes verse 13 they are off with no thought or concern for the danger of the sheep that they were paid to protect.

While this is the immediate setting there is also a sense that Jesus is reflecting back to the Old Testament and there to the book of Ezekiel where there he follows this common theme.

Chapter 34 of Ezekiel the word of the Lord came to me son of man prophesy against the shepherds of Israel prophesy and say to them even to the shepherds thus says the Lord God ah shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves should not shepherds feed the sheep.

[9 : 47] You eat the fat you clothe yourself with the wool you slaughter the fat ones but you do not feed the sheep. And then later on in the same chapter for thus says the Lord God behold I I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out as a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among them his sheep that have been scattered so will I seek out my sheep and I will rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered on the day of clouds and thick darkness.

us and so Jesus undoubtedly would have that at the back of his mind as he does as we are told adopts this figure of speech that picks up on these themes of the Old Testament Psalm 23 Psalm 80 and not surprisingly from the prophet Isaiah he tends his flock like a shepherd he gathers lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart and of course a lot of the purposes of the Old Testament is to create an expectation of one who would come who would be the ultimate prophet who would be the lamb that would take away the sins of the world who would be the king of kings who would be the great high priest and here is the creation of a longing for the shepherd who would come who would complete his task who would give himself completely and fully for his people and effectively what Jesus is doing here by identifying now as the good shepherd is saying this is about me

Jesus says this fulfills that promise of me here is what I am going to do trust me the setting secondly then the substance of the passage begins with a need to properly understand the picture that Jesus is using as this illustration I remember when I was taking a group to the Holy Land and we were going round in the bus and when we were doing that I saw this guy at the back of a flock of sheep with a big stick beating them and driving them and I said to the guide oh my I said for years I have been telling people about the eastern shepherd who led his flock and here now I see that that has been wrong oh he said that is not the shepherd that is the butcher so we need to understand the eastern shepherd and we need to understand the picture here the eastern shepherd is not some gentleman farmer but one who is portrayed as being strong and sure and brave who will stand in the face of wolves who come to harm his sheep he's presented in the old testament as one who lords over his sheep and the figure of the shepherd was so precious to the people of God that they actually called their kings as shepherds his words as in verse 27 he's not the gentle voice but the kingly command and the picture of course of the sheep pen is not a sheep pen that we would know if we were farmers and we knew that our sheep would be in our pen it would be a large pen where all the sheep that had been brought into the village or brought down out of the hills

would go into and each shepherd would know his sheep and would call them out the picture there is of a great shepherd and the second aspect of the picture that we are told about the shepherd is that he is the owner he owns the sheep by contrast to those who are hirelings who are just being given the job of looking after the sheep he calls his own sheep by name and also in verse four when he has brought out his own and he's not just the owner you will notice he knows his sheep by contrast all others are strangers who have no concern for the sheep and notice verse five they will never follow but will flee when they hear the voice of the stranger but in contrast the

[16 : 14] Lord so beautifully presents himself I know my own and my own know me he's the owner he knows his sheep and he cares for the sheep that reminds me of one of the cruelest questions I think that the disciple asked Jesus do you remember the boat trip across Galilee in the storm and Jesus is asleep and the frightened sailors turn to the sleeping Jesus wake up how he come up and cry do you not care but Jesus as he presents himself as the good shepherd presents himself as the one who cares for his sheep and

I suppose ultimately in verse 17 he is the one who lays down his life for the sheep and here Jesus very clearly is indicating that not only is he the shepherd but he is the savior savior and that's no picture here that we need to interpret this is the reality of the lord's fundamental identity that when we call him savior we call him by his name this is the one who will give himself on the cross of calvary to redeem a people for himself given to him by the father and john follows this up in chapter 19 and verse 30 when dying on that cross he said it is finished and bowing his head he gave up his spirit and john references that here when he has Jesus telling us that no one takes my life from me no one has the power to take the life from me you see even in the lord's life and death he is sovereign lord and the lord chooses when he will die no one takes it from him but he gives his life in that saving death and he's laying himself down as that atoning sacrifice for his sheep the setting the substance and the sequel in the sequel Jesus draws some important implications from what he's been teaching and I think surely one of the most significant implications is in verse 28 where Jesus says I give them eternal life and then these amazing words they will never perish!

and then you will notice he elaborates on that no one will snatch them from my hand and he repeats that in verse 29 he reinforces this truth no one is able to snatch them from my hand so John beautifully and subtly moves from Jesus declaring himself as the shepherd of the sheep to the promise of security for the sheep and it is beyond question that when we read this today God is communicating to his saved people that we need to rest in the surety that we have in that finished work of Christ to lie down in peace to live in glorious worship of the God who gives us that peace as an eternal promise from the almighty if you've ever worked with sheep

I had a friend who was a sheep farmer in my congregation in Kilmer Combe and I used to go up occasionally and help him with the sheep and one of the things you quickly learn is that they're very agitated and there are so many things work against them ever lying down God doesn't want us to be an agitated people who are so agitated that we can never lie down and rest and be at peace and here is the ultimate assurance here for I want you to notice that this is a security not by means of our confession or by means of how well we are doing or by means how much we manage to pray in a day or read scripture in a day we are held by the sovereign grace of

God you see how can we know we are Christ's sheep well verse 26 tells us that they believe and we need to notice that you're not my sheep because you didn't believe we are the sheep of God before they believe and because we are the sheep of God we believe that security chosen in Christ before the beginning of the world that sovereign election that nothing of ourselves but all of God as Eric used to say all of God all of grace and all in Christ Spurgeon called it the livery of the

[24 : 27] Lord's people they believe and they also listen to my voice John Hyde was known as praying Hyde was a great influence in the mission in India and his mantra was I know but one word in my Christian life and that is an obedience they believe they listen and they obey congregation this size there will be people here this night who are perhaps unsure in their faith they're perhaps struggling in their faith they're perhaps worrying about sins they just wonder if they are truly saved and converted and what this passage as

Jesus presents himself to us is saying is I've got this all that I am about is doing the work of salvation that you could never do trust me in your moments of doubt trust his finished work in your moments of despair trust his finished work peace and in moments of poor understanding of thinking that you're not doing as well as you should be doing or you're not doing as well as you used to do trust his finished work because the security and the peace that is promised to enable us to lie down

at peace and in the surety of the gospel being ours is based on the work of Christ and the shed blood of the Lamb I heard an illustration recently that I think displays this perfectly it's the story of two brothers on the night before the first Passover in Egypt let's call them Frank and Bert good Jewish names Frank says to Bert are you not just a little bit concerned about what's going to happen tonight there are a lot of things that have been going on lately frogs and flies and locusts and rivers turning to blood and now God's angel of wrath is going to pass through the land and take every firstborn I'm afraid I'm really not sure and Bert says oh I have no doubts I'm really confident God has promised blood in the front door we are safe I can't wait have you sprinkled blood on the front door of your house and Frank says well I sure have I've done it but it's all right for you you have many children I only have one and I'm afraid full of uncertainty I obeyed God I'm just not sure about this nothing like as sure as you are I'm really nervous I put the blood there as God told me to but I don't know that I've got enough faith to believe that it will work and Bert says not me bring it on I trust the promises of God and that night the angel of death sweeps through

Egypt which one of the two brothers lost their son neither death doesn't pass over them on the ground of the intensity or clarity or surety of their confession of faith the angel of God's wrath passed over on the grounds of the blood of the lamb on the lintel of the door friends the servant who shed his blood on Calvary's cross who bore the judgment and rejection of the father bearing shame and scoffing root in my place condemned he stood sealed my pardon sealed with his blood the shepherd who is the savior leader leader!

[30 : 30] leader! leader leader