The Good Shepherd

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[0:00] Bibles open at John chapter 10. John chapter 10. Jesus teaching on the good shepherd. As we turn back there, let's seek the Lord's help.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, our Lord, our rock, and our Redeemer. Amen. I wonder if you sometimes ask yourself the question, where is my life going?
Where is my life going? Sure, things seem to be okay, but there seems to be a lack of direction, something missing that you can't quite put your finger on. So where do you go to find direction in life? Where do you go to find purpose? Somewhere that you can build your life upon that's a sure and certain foundation. If you put in a Google search about spiritual guidance, you get over 142 million results. That's a lot of results, a lot of information out there on spiritual guidance. Everything from spiritual gurus to books entitled 10 tips on spiritual growth, horoscopes, tarot cards, mediums, spirit guides, guardian angels, and the latest in celebrity comes up.
Where do you even start? That's a whole realm of confusion. And of course, all these things can have problems with them. Some of them very dangerous problems. And the problem with these things is that ultimately they're quite empty. Horoscopes are actually just made up by people looking at the planets and stars. You don't have to go too far into celebrity culture to see very poor examples to follow. And those perfect pictures and magazines that present perfect celebrities are airbrushed anyway. Going after these things never seems to deal with the emptiness and direction that we need in our lives. They're also very impersonal things.
You read a book, but the so-called guru who wrote the book is never there face to face. Does life really depend on general words in a horoscope, which could apply to many other people at the same time? Does it really depend on the random turning of some set of cards or from any other of these things? They are not sure and certain. People who have put their trust in these things have been let down always. But what if there was a sure and a certain way in life? What if there was a sure and a certain foundation? What if your life could have a real purpose and a real meaning? What if there was someone who was personal and not empty that you could go to 24-7? Who could be trusted with your life? Who loves you more than you could ever possibly know? Who promises to give you a hope and a future?
[3:08] Is there such a person? The Bible tells us emphatically, yes, there is such a person. His name is the Lord Jesus Christ. And in this passage in John 10, Jesus is speaking of himself and his relationship that he has with his followers. He uses pictured language to help us understand.

He likens himself to the shepherd. He likens himself to the shepherd. The good shepherd who leads and guides his followers. He is the good shepherd. The one who leads and guides his sheep. Who gives them life in its fullness. The one who loved them so much that he laid down his life for the sheep. He is the person that can be trusted. He is the person who will never let us down. He is the person who loves us so much that he will not even leave us in the sin that we are in. But has done something about it.
Done something about it. And in this passage in John 10, Jesus goes on to teach us what that means, that he is the good shepherd. And he answers two questions in this passage. The first, what do his sheep look like? What do his sheep look like? And the second, why can they never be lost? Why can they never be lost? So first of all, we'll look at Jesus' answer to the question, what do his sheep look like? Now, Jesus is asking this question, of course, because Jesus wasn't speaking about his sheep as an actual flock of sheep who are white, fluffy, four-legged creatures in some field somewhere. He was speaking of Christians. He was speaking of his followers, human beings. His sheep are his followers, his disciples. They are Christians. So how do you recognize a Christian? How do you recognize one of them? Well, Jesus gives at least four signs in this passage.

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[5:07] The first is that Jesus' followers have saving faith. Jesus here was dealing with Jews who had come up against him earlier on in John's gospel. They've always been lurking there in the background, trying to trip Jesus up. They were calling into question everything that Jesus was teaching.

And he tells them their problem in verse 25, you do not believe. That's your problem. You do not believe. And then he says in verse 26, you do not believe because you are not my sheep. Now, if you were one of those Jews, this is like a sledgehammer hitting you. These were people who were God's people. They knew the Old Testament. They knew, they had known the promises about Messiah. And here is Jesus, who's apparently Messiah, telling them that you are not my sheep. You do not believe in me. You do not trust in me.

And what Jesus is saying is, you have faith. These Jews had faith. Of course, they had faith. They believed in all the Old Testament promises. And you know, many people say to me as a minister, I've got faith. My question is, well, who is that faith in? Or what's it in? That's the important thing. Sure, we all have faith. You've all got faith here today. I know that because you come into these pews and you had faith that when you sat down, the pew would take your weight. And well, there's no pews broken and you're all sitting in a pew. So the pew has taken your weight. That's faith.

But what's our faith in? What's it in? You see, there is a clear link with believing in Jesus and being a follower of Jesus. If you do not believe and trust in Jesus, you're not a sheep.

You're not a follower in him. You need to trust him. But when he says he died for your sins, you take him at his word. When he says that he was raised to life so that you could be made right with God, you take him at his word. When he says he was going back to his father to rule over all, you take him at his word. This is the first mark of a true Christian, that they lean on Jesus alone to be saved. They're not relying on themselves or anything in themselves to deal with their own sin, but they run to Jesus because they know that only Jesus can save them. And they cling to him with everything that they have. The issue is not about having faith. It's about having the right kind of faith. The right kind of faith. Who's your faith in this morning? Are you trusting in some of those things I said at the beginning? Are you trusting in other things? Trusting in yourself? Like Zacchaeus, are you trusting in your money to save you? Or are you trusting in Jesus? Are you trusting in him?

[7:59] The second mark of being a follower is that his sheep listen to his voice. In verse 27, Jesus said, my sheep listen to my voice. That is a true Christian not only hears the voice of Jesus, but listens to it. Now, in a modern culture, we do distinguish between hearing and listening.

When I was a primary teacher teaching the class, I would say to the boys and girls, you're hearing me, but you're not listening to me. The words are going in, but you're not processing them. You're not obeying what I'm saying. You're not listening to me. So Jesus' sheep don't only hear his words, but they put them into practice. They obey. They obey. In fact, that's actually a sign that you are a follower. You listen to his voice and you obey. Now, a Christian is by no means perfect.

It's not that we obey Jesus perfectly. We can't. But a Christian mourns over their own weakness and feeble efforts to put God's word into practice in our lives. Day by day, more and more, we seek to put that word into practice, to do everything as we serve the good shepherd. They listen to his voice.

I was once on the Isle of Lewis preaching at one of the congregations there, and one of the elders was a shepherd. And he said, I want you to stand at the top of the field, and I want you to call out to those sheep at the bottom. So I did. Nothing happened. Nothing happened. So he stood at the top of the field, used the same words, the same tone of voice, the same volume of voice, and the sheep came running. Because he was their shepherd. They knew him. They loved him. I wasn't their shepherd. I was a stranger. They were content to stay as far away from me as they possibly could. But they ran to him.

They listened to his voice, and they did what he said. And it's the same with the Christian and Jesus. We don't want to listen to any of the voices of the world or anything like that, but we listen to his voice because we know we can trust him with our very lives. The third mark is that Jesus' followers have a unique relationship with him. He says in verse 27 of his sheep, I know them. I know them.

[10:16] It's already said back in verses 14 and 15, I know my sheep, and they know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. A Christian is not someone who knows only about Jesus. You can know about Jesus. There are many people who know about Jesus that are not his followers. There's many a university professor who teaches in a theological faculty, who knows all

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about the Bible, but who doesn't believe it. He's not a Christian. Jesus knows his sheep, and they know him. It's not merely something that we know in our heads, but it deeply impacts our life. It changes us. Like Zacchaeus, whose heart was changed, he gives away his own God of his money because Jesus had changed him. Zacchaeus listened to the shepherd's voice. He came down from the tree, and he was a sheep of Jesus Christ. You know, is that not a comfort? Jesus knows you. You can't go to anyone else who knows you as well as Jesus does. Not even your parents, not even your grandparents, not even your brothers and sisters or your friends.

Jesus knows you in a way that no one else does. He knows what makes you tick. He knows you inside out. He knows you backwards. He knows you upside down because he created you, and he knows you.
He knows your weaknesses. He's even able to use your weaknesses so that he gets the glory from it. He's an amazing saviour, a wonderful saviour. No one else will know you like him.
The thing is, he knew you from before the foundation of the world. Before you were even born, he knew you. He knows you. He knows you. The fourth mark is that Jesus' followers follow him. Now, that might sound quite a useless thing to say, but Jesus himself says it. He says, my sheep listen to me, and they follow me. I don't know if as children, you played the game, follow my leader, where the leader is at the front. The children line up behind.
Some camps I was in used to play this game as well, maybe the junior camps, maybe not the senior camps, but the idea behind it was that the people behind the leader would copy their actions. When he turned to the left, they would turn to the left, to the right, to the right, put their hands in the air. [12:34] They did their hands in the air. They followed him. That's what the Christian seeks to do, to follow Jesus, to do what he would have us do, to obey him, to follow him. And the tense of the verb there is a continuous one. You're not just a Christian when you first believe, but if you are truly saved, you're a Christian all your life. It's a habitual thing. It's a habit. Martin Luther said famously, the sheep, though the simplest of all creatures, is superior to all animals in this, that as soon as he hears his master's voice, he will follow no other. That's the mark of a Christian too. The four marks of a Christian. You know, we all have shepherds in life. These are things or people that we go to for help and guidance. So how do we know if Jesus is truly our shepherd?

How can we know that? Well, here's a question for us. Where do you go first when something goes wrong? When the phone call comes in, the letter of bad news comes in, someone's struggling, where do you go to first? Because that thing or person is your real shepherd.
That's how you can know. And even as Christians, it's so easy. We can run to so many other places before we run to the Lord. Sometimes prayer is the last thing that we do. But Jesus is the good shepherd who has proven himself, who has been tested in every way. He really did stand his ground and fight the wolves of sin and hell and death. He stood his ground just as David had done as a shepherd boy against the wolf and against the bear. And Jesus gave his life for his sheep. We can trust him with our lives. We have his word on it. These are the signs that Jesus gives of the marks of his sheep.
Well, secondly, Jesus deals with in the second half of this chapter, why they can never be lost. He answers that question. In other words, the salvation that Jesus purchases for his followers is something that cannot be taken away from them. It cannot be taken away. It's sure in this life, and it's eternal into the next. We can put our trust in people and things in life, and we often get let down. But here is someone who will never cast you away. Once heard a person say to me, Alan, I can hear a bit of Jesus. He sounds amazing. But will he have me? Will he have me and all my sin and all my failures?
I've done some terrible things in my life. Will this Jesus have me? Yes. If you go to him in saving faith, he will never turn you away. He will never cast you away. He will have you forever and ever. [15:27] And Jesus, Jesus says in John 10, 14 to 30, words that have been treasured by Christians ever since. Verse 28, his sheep will never perish. Then he expands this as if he needed to by saying, no one can snatch them out of my hand. I once remember a child who had stolen something, and the parent goes up to the child and says, give it to me. The parent says, the child says, no.

And they've got it in their hand, and their hand is clasped over it like that, and they're not going to let it go. But the parent's a lot stronger, and the hand gets prized open, and whatever's been stolen comes out, and gets returned to who it got taken from. No one can prize open Jesus' hand.

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He has you in it if you're his, and no one can prize open his hand. No one can snatch you out of his hand. Then Jesus strengthens that statement again in verse 29. My father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my father's hand. Jesus didn't need to strengthen those statements, but he does. He says it at least three times. They will never perish. They will never be taken from my hand. When you are saved by Jesus, you're in his hand, you're in his father's hand, and the Holy Spirit lives within your heart, and no one can overcome them. And again, there seems to be four reasons, more briefly, why they can never be lost. The very proclamation of Jesus' death, he says in verse 15, I lay down my life for the sheep. Did you notice that we miss out the little words in the Bible that are so important? I lay down my life for the sheep. That little word for, we could also translate it in place of. Jesus substitutes himself in the place of his sheep.
He actually takes their punishment and sin upon himself by dying on the cross of Calvary. And when Jesus was dying there, he knew who he was dying for. He was dying for his sheep, his own chosen ones. His death did not make their salvation possible, and made their salvation certain and sure. He paid the cost of salvation himself. You see, each one of us is spiritually bankrupt before God. We're not even at zero. We're in the red, and we're unable ourselves to increase that balance. We cannot earn merit with God. But God sent Jesus who willingly came, and his bank balance is way in the black, infinitely in the black. And on the cross, he took our bankruptcy. And his perfect standing before God was credited to our accounts. And if Jesus did this, and the punishment is paid,
God cannot and will not demand a second punishment from us. Because Jesus paid it all. All to him we owe. The second thing is that Jesus promises eternal life. He says in verse 28, I give them eternal life.
[18:33] Now if something is eternal, it's forever, and ever, and ever, and ever, and keep on adding the evers. It never comes to an end. And if life is eternal, it cannot be taken away. The very mark of it is that it goes on forever, and ever. It's not a reward anyway. It's a gift of eternal life that Jesus gives graciously.

And God accepts us in Jesus because of what he has done, not because what we have done. Third, the promise of eternal security. They shall never perish. Jesus actually says it. They shall never perish. Now that doesn't mean as Christians that we're promised an easy life. By no means. Life is not only, it's not going to be all bright and rosy when you come to Jesus. It can be very hard. In fact, as a Christian, sometimes things can get a lot harder because we believe in Jesus and have to stand up for the truth. But it does mean that you have a shepherd to lead and guide you in the difficulty.
He'll be with you. And even when you can't go alone yourself, he puts you on his back and carries you. And at times, we can be stubborn sheep. Very stubborn sheep. Can't speak for you, but I can speak for myself. I'm a very stubborn sheep. A very resistant sheep. Sometimes I don't want to go where Jesus leads. And that's when he graciously brings us back on the path with his rod and his staff.
They shall never perish or be removed from the care of the shepherd. Jesus says in verse 28, no one can snatch them out of my hand. He has purchased them and he will never surrender them.
[20:17] Jesus will never return you to the shelf. He'll never take you back to the shop and say, I've had enough. I've had enough. I'm going, I want a refund. No. Once his, his forever bound by eternal lasting bands, as our hymn reminded us. He has won them and he will see them through to heaven. And the promise, this promise would be enough, but he strengthens it by saying his father has done the same.

His father has done the same. The saying goes that in this life, only two things are certain, death and taxes. That's not true. It's not true for the Christian. It is certain that if you believe in Jesus dying in your place to take the consequences of your sin, then you definitely, you absolutely, you utterly, you completely will be saved, shall be saved and have the guarantee of eternal life. Maybe death and taxes are certain, but so is eternal life. If you believe in Jesus Christ, Jesus can be trusted fully. Take him at his word. Take him at his word. What are you waiting for?
What are you waiting for? The story is told of Queen Victoria, who was a Christian. She asked her court chaplain one day, can I be assured that I'm going to heaven? He said, know your majesty. There is no sure way of knowing that you're going to heaven. Now in those days, everything the queen said was written down and published in the court newspaper. And a young evangelist by the

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name of John Townsend read that and he was shocked, absolutely appalled that a minister had given this very poor advice to Queen Victoria. So he prayerfully considered and he wrote a letter. And this was his letter to Queen Victoria.
To her gracious majesty, our beloved Queen Victoria, from one of her most humble subjects, with trembling hands, but with heartfelt love. And because I know that we can be absolutely sure now of eternal life and the home that Jesus went to prepare. May I ask your gracious majesty to read the following passages of scripture. John 3, 16 and Romans 9, 9 to 10. Of course, we know them quite well. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whosoever believes in him shall be saved, not might be. And if you confess with your mouth and believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord, you shall be saved. These passages prove that there is full assurance of salvation by faith in Jesus. For those who believe and accept his finished work, I sign myself your servant for Jesus' sake, John Townsend. He was praying for the Queen and two weeks later he received a letter and this is what it said. To John Townsend, your letter of recent date I received and in reply I would state that I have carefully read the portions of scripture referred to. I believe in the finished work of Christ for me and trust by God's grace to meet you in that home of which he said, I go to prepare a place for you. Signed, Victoria. Years later, she was visiting her estates. An elderly lady came up to Victoria and said, your majesty will I see you in heaven? The Queen said, by the all availing blood of Jesus, you most certainly shall, my dear, I have his word on it. I have his word on it. You can be sure of salvation in Christ. It's the one thing that keeps you going as a Christian. Yes, it can waver at times because of sin, because of personal circumstances, but through the Holy Spirit it can be restored. You can know that you're going to heaven. You can be sure about that. Jesus is what life is all about. A relationship with him doesn't mean that everything will go smoothly, but there is no better master to serve. There is no greater friend to love. Trust in him today. Believe in him. Accept his sacrifice on your behalf and accept the eternal life that he offers. He is the bread of life who has spiritual food for your hungry soul. He is the light of the world who shines in the world's darkness on our storm-tossed lives and following his light prevents us from shipwrecking our soul. He is the gate for the sheep. Entering through him alone is what saves us. All you need to do is go through that gate through faith. He is the good shepherd who stood his ground against the wolves and the bears and everything else of sin and hell and death and he overcame. He won the victory. You can trust that.
He is the resurrection and the life. He died and rose again conquering death and if you trust in him you too shall conquer death. He is the way, the truth and the life. Trusting in him as the only way to God and he can be trusted. He has the words of eternal life. To who else will we go? He is the true vine and our sickly lives can be grafted into him. That we may have life as well. The life of Christ flowing through us.
[25:40] Will you come to Jesus today? Will you accept him? Because your very life depends on it. Amen. Let's pray.

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