

John 10:10

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Date: 01 January 2019

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[0 : 00] But John chapter 10, and in particular, right at the heart of this passage, we'll be looking at chapter 10, verse 10, where Jesus says, The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. That's what we're actually going to open up. And I think you can see almost straight away, this kind of sums up the passage in a sense.

It gives us two poles, that there are many bad shepherds and that there is one good shepherd.

That's the point that Jesus is wanting to make in this passage. There are many bad shepherds, but there is only one good shepherd.

And the many bad shepherds, well, they promise the good life. They kind of masquerade as shepherds in that they promise the good life. Their ideas sound appealing. They may have a plan, even a ticket, to help you get rich quick.

They may have a means of establishing a border, perhaps in the shape of a wall, to keep the wrong kind of people out of your life. A diet, no, a pill to remove unwanted pounds.

[1 : 04] A shampoo that restores volume to your hair. Joe's dad sent home some shampoo from England last year, one of my favorite shampoos over there. But he chose the extra volume shampoo.

What am I supposed to take from that, Joe? I have no idea. All these ideas sound so appealing. In fact, in the City Morning Herald on the 10th of January, that's Friday, isn't it? Friday?

Maybe Thursday? It only popped up in my news feed on Friday. So I had to read it. It was like clickbait to me. Basically, it was entitled, Money Can't Buy You Happiness?

Here's nine things that prove otherwise. That prove that theory wrong. There you go. And what happens in this article is Gregory Karp, the author of the article, he actually picks up on a couple of things.

He picks up on a couple of things that someone called Gretchen Rubin, who is kind of a bit of a self-help guru, a happiness guru in America, what she thinks about in terms of happiness for living.

[2 : 04] Now, she's written books like The Happiness Project, and Outer Order, Inner Calm, and a number of other best-selling books. And when asked, can money buy you happiness?

Her answer is this. Money can't buy you happiness. But you can spend it in a way that brings you more happiness. Oh, isn't that enticing?

You can buy better relationships, she says. And by that she means spend money in a way that actually brings about relational activities. You can buy experiences, not things.

You can buy solutions. For example, get a cleaner instead of doing all that cleaning work yourself. Free up your time to do something you enjoy. By discipline, can't change your fitness or your diet habits?

Hire a personal trainer, she says. Now, in some ways, these things, they're not bad advice. But really, how much of a difference is this going to actually make to my life?

[3 : 07] Will it really push my life into the bearable? Will it fix my brokenness? Will it mask my pain?

Because that's what we're hoping for. To mask it. We know it's not going to go away. We even have that phrase for it. There are shepherds who appear to be good.

They promise the good life. They promise it. But they can't deliver. They really only steal, kill and destroy, Jesus says.

Harsh words, aren't they? You think Jesus is a good teacher and a nice bloke? Listen to those words. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. Why would he say that?

What would Jesus mean? Well, Jesus means that these shepherds are bad shepherds because basically they're in it for themselves. We've all met people like that, haven't we?

[4 : 09] The people that kind of use and abuse us. These people are in it for themselves. They can't deliver. We buy the book. The book contains words of wisdom.

There really are good and bad ways of spending our money and that's worthwhile actually listening to those in some way. But when I live by that wisdom, get the personal trainer, invest in relationships and so on, is it really enough to change my life?

Or do I go on to buy the next book in one of the largest growing industries in Western society, self-help industry?

And even a guru like Gretchen Rubin, who was interviewed for that article, she says, when she's asked if she is a self-help guru, she says, my work is self-helpful, not self-help.

And she calls her book on happiness, not how to be happy, but she calls it simply happier. So she can deliver to a certain point, but she really cannot address the core problems in our hearts and deal with it in a satisfactory way.

[5 : 18] So what we find is these bad shepherds, they're in it for themselves. They can't deliver. And finally, most importantly really, they lead us away from the one who can.

All the time that these bad shepherds are leading us down the path, they're actually leading us away from the right path, the life-giving path. Really, they're choking the life out of us and leading us away from the one who can truly give us life.

This is what Jesus is saying in these words. There are many bad shepherds, but there is only one good shepherd. Jesus says twice in this passage, in verse 11 and in verse 14, that he is that good shepherd.

Again, a huge claim. So it begs at least two questions that I can think of straight away, and that is, I'll give you them up front and then we'll actually try and address them, hopefully to your satisfaction.

But if not, come to me after the service and I'll be more than happy to continue the discussion. The two questions. What can he provide that others can't? What can Jesus provide that others can't? And secondly, why should we trust him above anyone else?

[6 : 26] So what can Jesus provide that others can't? Well, first, Jesus says, I care for my sheep. And we see that in the way that his explanation of how he shepherds unfolds.

Jesus says he knows his sheep by name. He knows them personally. He leads them. And he doesn't take them anywhere that he doesn't go first. Remember, that's what's implicit in leading. He's taking them where he first goes. They are his sheep, he explains. Now, we know this sense of bond, don't we, in terms of relationship, this bond of ownership.

I know because I've got three children that I call my children. And I would do all sorts of things for my children. When our first child was very young, still in nappies, we didn't realise that he actually had a milk intolerance problem.

And so we were still feeding him milk product type stuff. And it was kind of, shall we say, having an explosive effect. There were times when changing his nappy involved washing his hair.

[7 : 36] And then we just leave it there. But I knew exactly what to do. I didn't just leave him alone in that. I gave him to Joe. No, Joe and I, it was actually a two-man job when it got to that stage.

But we used to care for him. We didn't shirk that job. But I can tell you now, someone else's kids are in my arms and they've got, you know, a nappy like that. Even a dirty nappy. This has to be just a normal, I'm bailing on that kid.

It's not my child. We know what it means to have that bond of intimacy that pushes through all kinds of difficulties and challenges. That loves through flaws and faults and problems.

There's a bond there. And Jesus is saying, I have that with my sheep. So much so, Jesus says, that he would die for his sheep.

Jesus cares so much for his sheep that he would die for them. Bad shepherds, they don't do that. Heilings don't do that, says Jesus in this passage. But he does say, they won't.

[8 : 41] But he would. And he will. So, first thing he says is, Jesus cares for his sheep. And the second thing he says then, is it, well, the second thing he does is he actually tells us the truth.

And part of that truth is this, that we are actually made for relationship. From the beginning of the Bible, it's clear that we are made for relationship.

Relationship with God first and foremost. The God that we're actually made in the image of. And then relationship from there into relationship with each other. And instinctively we know the importance of relationships.

Gretchen, in her response, actually started with investing in relationships. Research has shown, unequivocally, that happiness comes from deep, enduring, loving relationships.

Comfort is nice. But comfort without relationship is empty. And experiences are nice. But experiences without relationship are lonely.

[9 : 50] In fact, we'll often take the experience of the relationship over the height of experience that we might otherwise look for. For example, Joe and I went away for an anniversary weekend.

We went to a really nice hotel in Sydney. We had a bridge climb booked. And when we got down there, Joe came down really quickly with the flu. And so for that whole weekend, Joe was basically bedridden.

We cancelled the bridge climb, which I wasn't too concerned about. I am secretly a little bit nervous about heights. But there was this whole city for me just to go shopping in, to eat in, to do whatever I wanted in.

But without Joe, it was kind of like, oh yeah, okay. So I would go out and get food. I'd bring it back in and I'd sit and watch movies on the bed next to Joe while she was just, you know, not very well at all.

We know instinctively that relationships actually provide a deep, something, a depth of experience of life that transcends anything else. But here's the problem.

[10 : 51] We know, we know we're made for a relationship. But we just can't do relationships. A philosopher called Arthur Schopenhauer, I'm hoping that's how it's said, describes this issue that we have with relationships as the hedgehog dilemma.

Like a number of porcupines huddled together for warmth on a cold day in winter. But as they begin to prick one another with their quills, they're obliged to disperse.

However, the cold drove them together again when just the same thing happens. At last, after many times of huddling and then dispersing, they discovered they'd be better off by remaining at a little distance from one another.

Frustratingly, just too far away to be satisfied with the level of intimacy we achieve, but unable to move closer without doing harm to each other.

Friends, those spines that hold us apart are our own failings. We long for an intimacy we just cannot produce. And even if we do, it only lasts for a short time before we spoil it.

[12 : 04] We're made for relationships. We can't do relationships. And Jesus gives us a reason for it because we've turned our backs on God. Jesus cares enough to tell us the truth.

He tells us straight that we are all sinners. We are all slaves to sin, he says in chapter 8, verse 34. That's just a couple of pages back. And that that sin has a consequence. It's unraveling the world we live in.

It's breaking down the relationships we experience. It's causing suffering and hardship. So the reason we can't achieve that relational sweet spot is because we're broken.

We get glimpses, but we just can't maintain it. The relational disconnect in our world is not down to our mobile phones. It's down to our problem of sin.

Our failure to actually be able to do what is right in relationship. He's struggling to see it. A fellow called Tim Keller uses an example, which I'll try on you now, and that's this.

[13 : 13] Imagine someone follows you around all day, every day, every waking hour with a notebook. And every time he sees you applying a rule to someone, judging someone, he writes down what that rule is that you've applied.

Oh, that was a bit harshly spoken. Oh, they're a really ignorant person. How rude. That person needs to learn how to indicate when they change lanes.

And imagine that after the term of your life, that that person then took that rule book, and that was the book that was used to judge you by and your life.

How would we actually cope with that? I can tell you now, I'm teaching my youngest child how to drive at the moment. And it all goes well when he's driving, and I can tell him what to do.

But it is amazing how well he knows that rule book. And he actually doesn't even need the rule, but he quotes me word for word when I'm driving. Well, you took that corner a bit fast, didn't you, Dad? You indicated a bit late then, didn't you?

[14 : 31] Man, we know what's right in relationships. And we expect it from each other. We just struggle to deliver it. And it hurts when we don't get it.

Jesus says we are slaves to sin. And sin is not the list of rules that you think it is. Sin is primarily relationship.

Relationship breaking. We look out for ourselves, but we struggle to give ourselves to each other. And we do this.

We have this struggle because we've turned away from God. Above all other relationships, we were made to be in relationship with God. He is the centre. But without God as our centre, well, we each have to find our own.

And what does that look like? Well, when I make myself the centre, I become selfish. And selfishness is easy to see, isn't it? You know when I'm being selfish. selfishness is selfish. But I don't always make myself the centre.

[15 : 40] Sometimes I make one of you the centre. And as I do, I crush you under the weight of my expectations. While I get picky and demanding and angry.

Or I get disillusioned and depressed and retreat. I can tell you now which one I'm more likely to be. I'm more likely to be the one that tends to get angry. I've been an angry husband.

Jo has carried the weight of my expectations over the years. And don't get me wrong. Jo is a great wife. But she makes a lousy God. And when I have God at the centre, how much better things are. Because then I have a great wife who I'm enjoying because I'm in relationship with an even greater God. Only God can bear the weight of our expectations.

But Jesus pushes further into this issue that we have. He pushes further with his honesty and says, Man, we're beyond any self-help. We suffer because we're sinners. You know, sometimes I hit a rough patch and I ask why.

[16 : 51] Sometimes I suffer as a result of my own stupidity. And you know that. And you recognise that. I currently have stitches in my ankle because I didn't wait for help to move a trailer. Too proud.

Thought I could do it myself. I couldn't. Mostly though, we suffer. Because we're living in a world that God designed.

And we're living in it against the grain of his design. We're meant to live in harmony with each other in this world. Now we're living in opposition to God and each other.

And we have no way to put it back together again. We suffer because we are sinners. But Jesus says in verse 9 that he is the door. The only one who can save us.

Only God can bear the weight of our expectations. Only he can save us from the mess we make. And Jesus says he can deliver more than we ever hoped for. Abundant life.

[17 : 55] But the only way back is to put God at the centre again. And if we're slaves to sin, we can't even do that. So he provides a solution.

Which brings me to my next question. Why trust Jesus above anyone else? Well, simply this. Because Jesus did what he said he would.

He died for his sheep. At the time Jesus first spoke these words. John first heard them and then he wrote them down later. But at the time Jesus first said these words, he hadn't died yet.

He was declaring his heart for his people. He was explaining his plan to save them. But he hadn't done it yet. But then he did. And it wasn't an accident.

Jesus explains that. It's not going to be an accident when I die. I am actually going to give my life over. The mob didn't finally get him. He says in this passage that he gave himself of his own accord.

[18 : 57] And it wasn't for nothing. Jesus died to take our place. We brought death on ourselves. And he chose to take that death for us. In return, he gave us abundant life.

He became our substitute. Why trust Jesus above anyone else? Because he did what he said he would. He died for his sheep.

And because he rose again from the dead. He died and he rose again to prove that it was done. To demonstrate without doubt that Jesus had actually conquered death for us.

That he could actually deliver on his promise of abundant life. And when he did, we need to bear in mind here that his friends and disciples were absolutely dumbfounded. If you don't know the end of the story, keep reading through in John.

And actually look at the effect that Jesus' death and resurrection has on them. When he dies, they're shocked. They're just heartbroken. But then when he rises again, some of them cannot believe it.

[20 : 06] One of them in particular, when you get to the story of Thomas, you'll love that bit. If you're struggling with believing this, then hang on to that part of the story at least. When his friends

and disciples discovered that he had both died as he said he would and risen again, they were dumbfounded.

So much so that they went and told every man and his dog what they discovered. And at least four of them that we know of wrote about it. That's why I can trust Jesus.

He didn't just tell me the way. You know, give me clearer, better instructions. But still instructions I couldn't keep. He lived the life that I should have lived.

And then he died the death that I deserve. To earn forgiveness for me. So that I could be back in relationship with God again. Also, that I could put God back at the centre where he belongs.

Why trust Jesus? Because he died like he said he would. He rose again like he said he would. So he alone can shepherd us through both life and death.

[21 : 23] You see, with God at the centre, everything starts to fall back into place. I'm not going to pretend to you that it's an instant in a moment type thing. But it does.

Even the challenges of life start to transform. I don't need God to take away every hardship to be happy. And let's face it, that's the method of achieving happiness that most of our friends, and perhaps even we've spent a fair bit of our time and energy doing, is by removing obstacles, removing hardships, removing suffering, removing difficulty.

I can actually celebrate now, even in the midst of loneliness, pain and suffering. Because I'm back in relationship with God.

And he is a good God. He loves me now like no other can or will. He gives me abundant life beginning now because I am back in relationship with him.

Nobody else has been able to do that. Every other way relies on a change of circumstances to make me happy. Or it requires me to lower my expectations.

[22 : 34] But only Jesus tells me, it's all my fault. And then rescues me from myself. And stays with me through the challenges of this life.

And into the life to come. So, how do I know if this is for me? What Jesus says in this passage is as well.

He says it at numerous points through this passage. My sheep, hear my voice. That's not code for some out of body or weird, you know, spiritual experience.

What Jesus is saying here is, the words that I'm speaking, you will hear them. And they will speak to your heart and they'll make sense to your minds.

And you'll want to follow me. Jesus, the good shepherd, offers what I cannot find anywhere else in life.

[23 : 41] By showing me the problem. By becoming the solution. And by inviting me, calling me to himself. Come and have life.

Abundant life. Can you hear his call? If you can, or if you want to hear more, learn more about Christianity, more about this story, then please come and speak to me afterward.

You've seen Andrew Wilkinson. He's the guy that's leading the service. So, my name's Rob.

Andrew's leading the service. You've seen Jen up the front already as well, who led the Quench program. Come and speak to one of us after the service.

We'd love nothing more than to talk to you more about what this means. We'd love nothing more to introduce you to the Jesus that we wholeheartedly follow. And to start to discover the abundant life that he promised for yourselves.

Let me pray. Father God, we thank you that you sent your son Jesus to be our good shepherd.

[24 : 51] Lord, we thank you that he did that by dying for us, by doing what we never could. We thank you that he was willing to tell us the truth about ourselves.

And that you showed your love for us, even knowing that truth about us. Lord, we pray too for the folk here who don't yet know you as their good shepherd. And we ask that at least something of what I've said today, and something of the passages they've heard read out, would actually be a starting point for them to really start thinking through who Jesus is, and discover the good shepherd for themselves.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.