

# The Good Shepherd

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Preacher: Rob Patterson

[ 0 : 00 ] If you could open your Bibles back to John chapter 10 verses 1 to 21. I think Ezekiel gives some sense of the background for what's going on in John chapter 10.

But John 10 is where we'll be at. How do you go with conflict? What are you like as a person in conflict?

We've just had Christmas. Everyone gets together. The whole family around a meal stays in the same place for an extended period of time, far longer than we normally would, would normally tolerate.

How did you go? Did you manage to avoid conflict? I'm actually pretty good at avoiding conflict. I think I've pretended to sleep through conflict. I've tried, yeah, pled ignorance.

This is just with Joe alone, let alone other people. I've blamed. There's all kinds of different ways that we actually avoid conflict, aren't there? And I think it's, well, it's basically because conflict is painful.

[ 1 : 08 ] We do it badly when we do it. And as we do it badly, we inflict blame and guilt, and that just kind of deepens the wounds that we're already feeling. Or if we don't do it badly, we actually avoid it altogether, which is like sentencing that relationship to a slow death.

Conflict is painful. Man, we do whatever we can to avoid it. But here's the thing. Even if we avoid it, that doesn't actually guarantee that we maintain that relationship.

Division can sometimes be the tragic result of conflict, the failure of actually being able to resolve it. We find ourselves disoriented. We're suspended in a perpetual state of unhappiness as we live in that broken down relational state.

And we can struggle to trust again, kind of closing down or struggling to trust existing relationships, cautious in them, or actually closing down to new relationships.

Division is tragic. It leaves us traumatized. Guys, not all conflict is avoidable. Some is, and some is good to avoid.

[ 2 : 22 ] But there are some conflicts that are absolutely necessary, and Jesus is in the middle of one right here. Jesus' teaching in this chapter is meant to address the division that's just been opened up so painfully in chapter 9.

The Pharisees hate Jesus, and they're demanding that everyone else do the same. But some who encounter Jesus are conflicted. They hear his voice, and they see hope in what he says.

So this passage, this teaching by Jesus, is meant to do two things. It's meant to comfort, on the one hand, and confront. Comfort in the sense that he'll comfort his confused and harassed sheep.

As we look at this passage, I mean, he talks about theological, he alludes to theological truths like propitiation, atonement, justification. They're implied in this passage. But what Jesus chooses to say, the package he places his message in, is, I am the true shepherd.

The good shepherd who loves his sheep, the provider of life, the protector through death. And the comfort that recognizing his voice and placing your life in his hands is the way to salvation.

[ 3 : 30 ] So he'll comfort, on the one hand, but he'll also confront. Those who reject Jesus are actually outed as thieves, murderers, and destroyers.

Jesus doesn't mince his words here. They'll be shocked by his method of salvation, and they will discover that they were never actually part of God's kingdom in the first place. If that's not confronting, I don't know what is.

And he begins by, Jesus begins this teaching by describing the character of a true leader. He does it in general terms, not specific terms. He starts off with general terms, and he invites comparison by presenting three qualities of a shepherd.

How he enters the sheepfold, whether he's recognized by the gatekeeper, and whether he's recognized by his sheep. So he starts off by saying, well, the one who breaks in, so how he enters the sheepfold, the one who breaks in is a thief.

And we see that straight up in verse 1. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.

[ 4 : 35 ] Now a thief, we know, is someone who takes what isn't rightfully his, usually either by stealth or by force. A robber, this is an interesting word. It kind of means the same thing, but it can also have the connotation of being a rebel, an insurrectionist, revolutionary, a terrorist.

Forced. Thieves and robbers are people who seek to upset the rightful order. They're trying to take something that isn't theirs by force, if necessary. Thieves and robbers are willing to deny the truth. They'll do anything to lead people, in this context, away from Jesus. And they did it, in this context, by pointing to something that they could control.

The law. They made themselves the gatekeepers. They extended the law with added rules. Rules that were such a burden that only the elite could actually keep in any kind of general sense.

They made themselves the gatekeepers of a law that was such a burden to the people. But I don't think that's how things work now. I don't think that's how people point away from Jesus these days. I don't think people tell us that we're guilty and that we're not able to live up to a standard, this high standard.

[ 5 : 46 ] I think people do the opposite. I think they point, they say to us that we don't need to, that we're okay. People who point away from Jesus these days, they don't tell us we're guilty.

They tell us we aren't. They tell us that sin isn't such a big problem. Our daughter Hannah, she moved down to Sydney last year and in moving to Sydney, she tried out a bunch of different churches, went to churches with friends and acquaintances.

She was just saying to me, the day before yesterday, that as she had done that trip around the different churches, one of the things she noticed was that the church that she's actually attending regularly and our church, Grace, she said, we talk about sin.

And a whole bunch of these other churches didn't at all. Why is that? Why is it that we talk about sin?

Are we avoiding it? I could go further and say that we're not just avoiding it, but I could say that our generation, our current generation, actually struggles with criticism.

[ 6 : 56 ] It crushes us. We want to be taught but not rebuked, corrected or trained in righteousness. But guys, if we play down the danger, then why do we even need a shepherd in the first place?

If we play down sin, why would we need this Jesus? How? The shepherd enters.

Does he enter by the gate? But the true shepherd is also known by the gatekeeper. It's the next point Jesus makes in verse 2. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

To him, the gatekeeper opens. At every point in Jesus' ministry, he is recognizable as the true shepherd. John says in chapter 20, verses 30 to 31, he says these words, Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book.

But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name. And John finishes his gospel with the words, Now there are many other things that Jesus did, were every one of them to be written.

[ 8 : 03 ] I suppose the whole world itself could not contain the books that could be written. Do you get the picture? The signs that Jesus did, that we know about, they're just the tip of the iceberg.

He was traveling through Israel, performing miracle upon miracle everywhere. Sick people touched him and were healed. People traveled on behalf of others, and they were told, Oh, go home, it's sorted.

Dead people were told to wake up. These things were just happening time and time again. An abundance of miracles. So many that they couldn't all be written down.

Jesus' own works declare, I am the true shepherd. The Jewish leaders kept trying to put it down to Satan, but the goodness of Jesus was undeniable.

This shepherd is recognized by the gatekeeper. And he's also recognized by the sheep. The final thing that Jesus says in this first section is, the sheep will recognize their true shepherd.

[ 9 : 04 ] In the second part of verse 3 and onwards, The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them.

The sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Ancient Near Eastern way of shepherding was very different to our way. You can probably see it from the analogy that Jesus is using.

The shepherd didn't drive this massive flock of sheep, amorphous massive sheep before him. He led his sheep. This only worked because the sheep knew him.

They recognized his call and they would follow him. They would move toward him. But Jesus actually goes one better even than this model. The shepherd's call was usually kind of a generic call.

So as a shepherd walked, he would make this call and the sheep would know, okay, we're on the move and they would follow him. But here Jesus says that he calls each sheep by name and each sheep hears and follows.

[10:06] That is the nature of our true shepherd. He knows us. He knows us. And we know him. But we find out that the people hear all this and they're confused.

Jesus is talking in general terms and they're not sure what he's saying. So Jesus moves from those general principles and he gets specific from verse 7 onwards. Jesus says to them, So he's taking this shepherding imagery and he's just turning around a little bit and looking at it from a slightly different angle this time.

It's not just one continuous parable like we see in some of the other gospels. He's actually turning this around and he's saying, Now I'm the door. Unambiguously, I am the door.

And as he does, he paints a stark contrast to his opponents. The Pharisees forced the blind man to choose them or Jesus in chapter 9. And now Jesus is saying, Time to make a choice.

It's them or me. It's thief or saviour. Where the thief comes to destroy. Jesus takes this contrast to the level of motives or goals when he says in verse 10, The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

[11:33] I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. A thief uses stealth or force. These thieves use force. They use, they consume, they feed themselves.

Just like Ezekiel described. But Jesus is different. Jesus comes to give his life, to save. He said in verse 9, I am the door.

If anyone enters by me, he'll be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. We see here that the door has two functions. It lets the sheep in and it lets them out.

In is the way to salvation. Jesus is the way we enter into salvation. The only way. We'll break that open a little bit more when we get to chapter 14. But there are no alternative options here.

This is it. The door. So Jesus is the way into salvation. And he is the way out to good pasture.

When we enter by Jesus, we have access to a new life.

[12:39] The imagery is kind of broad at this point. It could mean the life to come in the future. So heaven, new heaven and new earth. Or it could mean life beginning right now.

But Jesus tips it in favor of right now when he says in verse 10, I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. All the life we experience through Jesus is abundant life.

Because it is through Jesus. It's with Jesus, under God's care. So all of life now, whether good or bad, joyful or sorrowful, painful or pleasure, sickness or health, ease or persecution, all of these things exist as the abundance of life that God intended for us.

And we can say this because in Jesus we have God again. We are under his care, enjoying his love and protection for eternity, growing through his discipline, joining him as his kingdom is built.

Now we know this kind of thing. We know the warmth and friendship of being alongside someone in good times and bad. I played in the soccer team only a couple of times last year.

[13:55] And even though we lost pretty much every game, just playing with that team of other 11 guys, we built a bond, a friendship, a mutual trust in each other and enjoyment of each other's company.

I've been married to Joe for nearly 24 years. We've faced challenges and moments of immense joy. But, you know, both the challenges and the moments of immense joy have been enriched by the fact that we've shared those things.

We know what it's like to share, to share the challenges and the struggles and the joys of life with other people. And we know how that just kind of seems to lift them out and make them three-dimensional.

But think again on how much more this is true for us when we're united with God again, the one who we are created in the image of, the one who we were created to be in relationship for all

eternity.

Far more is on offer here than a couple of fortunate experiences in life.

[15:13] Salvation means that we get God. And this God is a good shepherd. Jesus turns a shepherd theme one last time in this section. He says in verse 11, I am the good shepherd.

He says it twice in this section. And as he does, he explores the divisions that all can see. And these divisions are actually played out at the level of leadership and within families.

It's the division between Jesus and the Jewish leaders and the level of leadership. We saw that in chapter 9 and chapter 8. And we'll continue to see that. But we also see the division between the sheep who hear and those who are hostile that starts to come to the surface.

Those who hear and those who say he's insane. So let's look at these contrasts. The good shepherd and the hired hand are the first way he takes on this Jesus and the Jewish leaders and our conflict.

Jesus starts with the essential difference between these two groups in verse 11. And he says this, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Jesus says, I will die for my sheep.

[16:24] They will run. Why? Well, Jesus diagnoses the reason. In verse 13, he says, He flees because he's a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

He doesn't know the sheep, so he doesn't care about them like the shepherd. He doesn't own them. They're not his. This is a crucial point of difference. Because he doesn't care for the sheep, he won't put his life on the line for them.

His life will always come first. But Jesus is different. He says again in verse 14, 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.

Notice this here. The good shepherd knows his sheep. And the foundation for this relationship is nothing other than the already existing relationship between the Father and the Son.

That is the foundation for the Son's relationship with us as his sheep. It's a rich relational foundation. And because it's such a rich relational foundation, we get to share in the richness of the benefits of that.

[17:39] Now there are some people in this room that I would die for. I would like to think that I would die for unquestioningly. Some of you, I'd have to think a little bit longer about.

Some of you might not even pass that test. That's a failing in me. But Jesus doesn't just say that he might or that he would die for his sheep.

He says that he is going to die for his sheep. It's going to happen. And on his terms, he says in verse 17, For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down. And I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.

This is the good shepherd. The one who is willing to die for his sheep. A purposeful death. One that rescues. A voluntary death. He's not coerced. In his own timing.

[18:45] Backed by the authority to take it up again. All because he cares for his sheep. This love that the Father has for the Son has always been there.

In verse 17, it's there before the Son dies. It's linked to the unqualified obedience that the Son has for the Father. And it's reciprocated in the authority Jesus receives to take up this life again.

The good shepherd compared to the hired hands. And then the sheep.

The sheep who hear. This is the final contrast that Jesus uses. And it's fair to say, as we go into this, it's fair to say that being described as a sheep, in any analogy really, is not going to be a flattering one.

Anyone here a farmer or lived on a farm? Sheep are stupid, aren't they? Sheep are stupid. Sheep need looking after.

[19:50] They're a domesticated animal. So domesticated that they cannot survive on their own. They actually need to be looked after. To be shorn regularly. To be shown pasture. Sheep are stupid.

And in this passage, they're relatively passive. Relatively. There is an active component to it though. See, actively, the main role of the sheep is to respond.

To hear the shepherd's voice and to follow him. As I've said, because sheep are generally stupid, they can't survive without a shepherd. So this is a really trusting thing.

This isn't just, oh, you know, plug into Jesus a little bit. He's got some good advice to give me. This is saying, I'm going to place my whole life into his hands.

It's the most trusting possible thing you can do. To place your life completely into the good shepherd's hands is a huge thing. This is what it means to follow, to hear our shepherd's voice, to follow him.

[ 20 : 52 ] Even when that voice says things that we're not so sure about. And that quite often happens for me. I don't know about you, but it quite often happens for me that I read truth in the Bible and I look at it and I think, man, you know, I can see an easier way through life than following this path.

But to place your life completely into the good shepherd's hands is the active role that we're given here. Passively, there are also some things to, important things to draw out that are really important here and really comforting.

You see, these sheep are owned by the good shepherd. They're owned in the sense that they are known before they're called, they're owned before they respond and they're gathered from many folds. Let's just go through those.

Known before they're called. These sheep are known before they're called. Jesus says, I know my own in verse 14. Known in the sense that he knew so intimately that he already knew he was going to die for us.

Known in the sense that the Father knows the Son with the kind of intimacy that the members of the Trinity share. That closeness of relationship known to such a depth.

[ 22 : 08 ] It's not reciprocal in the sense that we don't know God quite so well as he knows us. But it's something we'll grow into throughout eternity. I remember when I was dating Joe, I've got to have been at least two weeks into dating that I started to walk slowly past jewellery shops and look at, just point out, engagement rings.

Was it two weeks? Give or take a few hours? Yeah? I knew I was on to a good thing. I knew, I got to know Joe in part through her friends.

So I actually worked with her housemate. So I got to know Joe through her housemate and then when we started dating I found that she was absolutely everything that her housemate had said and even better. I knew, I was committed.

Joe on the other hand, she took a little bit longer to come round. It's kind of a little bit like that. But here's the thing is, this shepherd is fully invested, fully invested in his relationship with us way before, if we read Ephesians 1, way before he even created us.

Cannot match that in our relationships. We cannot imagine what it must be like to be known and to be so utterly cared for. This shepherd is fully invested in his relationship to us.

[ 23 : 32 ] We are known before we're called and we're owned before we respond. Jesus says in verse 3, he calls his own sheep by name. In verse 4 and 16 he says that his sheep will recognise his voice.

We are his own, he says in verse 14. In some way we belong to Jesus before we even hear his voice.

And this concept comes up time and time again throughout John's Gospel. It's not an accident. It's really the only way the Gospel can work if God knows us and God calls us and that our response is to trust in him because we already are his.

Perhaps you've heard the words predestination or election. People struggle over these words unnecessarily. But I'm actually going to talk about that when we come back to John in the weeks to come.

So more on the next week. A bit of a spoiler so you can get ready for that. We are known before we're called. Owned before we respond.

[ 24 : 49 ] And gathered from many folds. Now what Jesus says here is actually quite shocking to the people who are listening. Far more shocking than it is to us because Jesus says something really startling about his flock.

In verse 16 he says, I have other sheep that are not of this fold. This fold being the Jews. Other sheep from outside the Jews.

I must bring them also, he says, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. The Jews thought the law was the path to God. They thought that they were the chosen ones but they weren't listening to the good shepherd, the promised saviour.

And Jesus wasn't containing himself to calling out his flock from just among them. He was going to go beyond the borders of Israel. He was redefining Israel ultimately to include us.

A huge comfort for the sheep. He knows us. Even us who were not a part of the people of God for those centuries. He knows us.

[ 25 : 58 ] He's laid claim to us. He's gathering us together and he's rescuing us from death itself. But in verse 19 we read the inevitable words really.

There's an expected division. There was again a division amongst the Jews because of these words in John 10, 19. The division was not resolved by Jesus' words, not resolved by his acts.

But I hope you can now see that that division is necessary. It is that important that we choose Jesus, that we don't miss him in our whole understanding of what it means to be a Christian.

We don't go past him into beyond him even, into new ground after we've accepted him. There's no glossing over the choice that needs to be made here.

Only Jesus is the good shepherd. Only he would, could and did die for us. So let's hear the voice of the good shepherd and trust him.

[ 27 : 12 ] Follow him knowing that as we do we walk with God in deepening intimacy, in fullness of life for eternity.

praise God for that. Let me pray. Father God, we thank you that you know us.

We thank you that you've lifted the burden off us in such a significant way in initiating a relationship with us that we wouldn't have gone there at all. But you've sought us out throughout eternity and you've rescued us at your own expense.

You've proven yourself beyond any shadow of doubt that you are the good shepherd. and yet, Lord, we struggle to trust you. So we pray that in light of the truth of these words that you would teach us afresh how good it is to trust in you, our good shepherd.

How full life is living with you as our good shepherd. and how joyful we can be because you are a good shepherd regardless of what comes.

[ 28 : 32 ] In Jesus' name. Amen.