

(6) The good shepherd

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[0 : 00] Today's reading is taken from John 10, verses 1 to 21. 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. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

To him the gatekeeper opens. 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, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So Jesus again said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers.

But the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out, and find pasture.

[1 : 16] The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees, and the wolf snatches them, and scatters them.

He flees because he is a hired hand, and cares nothing for the sheep. 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. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice.

So there will be one flock, one shepherd. 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.

[2 : 26] I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father. There was again a division among the Jews because of these words.

Many of them said, He has a demon, and is insane. Why listen to him? Others said, These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon.

Can a demon open the eyes of the blind? For most of us, the question for authentic spiritual experience is never far away.

Of course, we've always been there to have frankly spared of the possibility for a true spiritual experience. The Italian pilgrim, the Italian pilgrim, the Italian pilgrim, is already said that like many people, I have no religion.

I am just sitting on a small base, drinking the tide. I am still on cutting, assessing, chasing, looking at life. What I am waiting for, I do not know.

[3 : 30] I aminity is about to be educated. That is not the highest qualityieni that I do not know, but may I use own this gift to help me get the people because I have nothing to say. or suggestions as the how that authentic spiritual experience may be found and discovered.

Perhaps the music of the great cathedral, or the silence of a mountain top, or the chanting of a religious ceremony, or the excitement of a pilgrimage, or perhaps some mystical experience that makes us sense the presence of the divine.

Well, shortly we come to the end of this central section of John's Gospel, chapter 5 and 10, which we're looking at through the autumn. And we've seen that there's a section above all about the work that Jesus came to do, that he came to do God's work, that he came to do God's work both of giving life, and also of judging.

And so it should come as no surprise to hear that authentic spiritual experience is to be found in Jesus Christ, alive. Because he is God in the flesh to come to do God's work. And therefore, of course, as we hear his work, we hear his teaching, as we hear his voice, while we are hearing the voice of the living God himself. And this morning in John chapter 10, we're going to see what that looks like in practice.

[4 : 52] What it looks like in practice to know the living God in Jesus Christ. And as well as seeing the positive like that, where the very spiritual experience lies, there is also a warning for us in this chapter.

Because Jesus will tell us that there is such a thing as spurious spiritual experience, which is very destructive. And therefore, as we look at this chapter together, it would be worth having asking ourselves, is my spiritual experience authentic?

In other words, is it what Jesus describes for us here in John chapter 10? Now to help us by, as usual, there is an outline on the back of the search sheet, and then we will take questions after the talk as well.

So first of all, Jesus is the true shepherd of God's people. Jesus is the true shepherd of God's people. Now the important lesson for us when we come to the living Bible, it's remember that the chapter divisions and the verses as we have them here in our own Bible, are not in the original, and they have been put in by the church.

Yes, they are a useful way to kind of help to navigate our way around the Bible, but John did not sit down after a common break and say, right, I'm now going to describe chapter 10.

[6 : 10] And remember, chapter 10 of John's Gospel, followed straight off from chapter 9. And that one of the days of the school is looking at chapter 10 in isolation from chapter 9 and missing the links in between.

Because John chapter 10 is a commentary on the way we looked at last week in John chapter 9. Last week we remember that Jesus healed, a man who had been born blind.

And the extraordinary contrast on the one hand between that man who had been born blind, who came not even had physical insight, but spiritual insight, so to speak, as it came to his trust in Jesus.

Contrast between him on the one hand and on the other hand, the Pharisees and the religious of savagery, who refused to believe in Jesus and who betrayed the man out of the synagogue.

And it is the matter of religious of savagery that Jesus continues to speak of here in John chapter 10 verses 1 and 2. Come up with those two verses.

[7 : 15] Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in by another door, that man is a thief and a robber.

But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. Can you see how he enlightens himself to the true shepherd of his people, in contrast with those who are thieves and robbers who come to steal the sheep?

It is there again in Cunecon in verse 11, as Jesus says, I am a good shepherd, and verse 14, I am a good shepherd. Now I guess in many ways this is one of the most famous chapters and books of John's Gospel.

But in the first century the word shepherd would not have generated the same kind of sort of sentimentality that it does for us in our context. For some reason the English culture of shepherds is seen as rather romantic figures, who spend their time walking down hillsides, hunting their sheep, followed by their faithful sheepdogs.

The first century shepherd in Israel by contrast is a dangerous shepherd. His life is to protect his sheep from wild animals and from bandits, a dangerous job.

[8 : 33] which is why at the time the title of shepherd was often used as a title for Israel's kings. Because their job too was to protect their people from their enemies.

In fact the language that Jesus uses here is a deliberate echo of a passage early on in the Old Testament. So why don't you look in John 10 and turn back to Ezekiel 34 on page 873.

It's a passage, we're going to look at a couple of types of stories, so this is worth turning to it, page 873, Ezekiel 34.

Now Ezekiel was writing several hundred years before Jesus came. But this chapter is an indictment of the loose leaders of his own day.

And in the chapter God also said what he was going to do about us. So I have a look at verse 2 to 4, halfway through verse 2. This is what God is saying to Ezekiel and telling Ezekiel to write and to pass on.

[9 : 48] Thus said the Father of Israel, Our shepherds of Israel, who have been feeding yourselves, should not shepherds feed the sheep. You eat the fat, you play with yourselves for the war, you slaughter the fat ones, you cannot feed the sheep.

The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strange you have not brought back, the lost you have not sourced, and with force and harshness you have ruled them.

You see, the point they're meant to have laughed at the sheep, that actually all they're interested in is looking after themselves. Now keep your finger in the sick, you're not very cool, this will come back to me in just a moment.

But then turn back to John chapter 10. Because I hope you can see that Jesus is saying in his day, things have changed. Verse 8, For you came before me and he leaves the robbers, but the sheep have got this into them.

Or verse 10, The sheep of the thief comes only to steal and build and destroy. I pray that they may have life and have it abundantly.

[10 : 58] Now clearly, in the context of the people of the daughters of the Pharisees and religious authorities that we saw in chapter 9, and those who are like them, we saw clearly their attitude towards the man who gave the whole life in his field as they picked him out of the synagogue, simply because he had put his trust in Jesus Christ.

Here are people who have been given responsibility for looking after these people, yet they have lately been bound to do so. And that's why of course these false shepherds, who Jesus pinpoint in John chapter 10, they spell that anyone who point people away from Jesus, the good shepherds. Because by doing so they lead God's people only to death and to destruction. They may point to other religious experiences, like those of Jesus' faith, they may masquerade as religious leaders as the leaders of God's people.

But because they don't point to Jesus Christ as the life lived in him, so as Jesus said to him, they lead people only to death.

Now I'm about to think of a parallel to help us grasp the seriousness of what Jesus is describing him. Perhaps the outrage that people felt a couple of years ago, when discovering that Ian currently had been employed as a school caretaker, when actually he intended to do harm to the very children he was helping or meant to be looking after.

[12 : 36] Or the outrage that a Dr Harold Shippen could be given the care of family to elderly patients and to kill them. Can we see the warning here that Jesus gives us?

You see we ought to underestimate the significance of false teaching. False teaching is not harmless. If we take Jesus seriously on this point, we are to be aware of anyone who points away from Jesus as the end of his God.

Of anyone who, although they may mention the name of Jesus, although they may use the language of the Bible, while they may be the church leaders, but the teaching of Jesus is not their central message.

According to Jesus they kill and destroy them. Although they set themselves up as those who do follow Jesus. Like the figure of a meeting our ministry on Thursday evening in the West End, he stood up and said that we then need to explain the message of Jesus to people who belong to other things.

He went on to say we live in the United States because of course they have to struggle their own path to God. I didn't talk to him personally as he stood up and seemed to be like one of them.

[13 : 55] But clearly Jesus leads us in no doubt that he is a thief and a robber. But that's how I make the answers to Ezekiel, Robert 1.4 once again.

Page 833 if you've lost it. Because in Ezekiel 34 God says to him, what is that these false shepherds?

He says you're going to intervene. Have a look down to verse 11. For thus says the Lord God, behold I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.

As a shepherd seek out his flock when he is above the sheep who have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day

of clouds and thick darkness.

And then look down to verse 15. Here's the wonderful voice. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them my name, declares the Lord God.

[15:02] And clearly back to John chapter 10, Jesus sees himself as fulfilling that voice. Here is Jesus Christ. There is God within the flesh.

Come to shepherd his people. Verse 10. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I am heaven. That they may have life and have it abundantly.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life in his sheep. Now the event of that feeling has changed a bit.

You can see that in verse 9. Jesus refers to himself not out of the shepherd, but as the door or the gate. Now the point here is the point of access to God.

But the point is still that he is the one who gives love to the full. Now I think I've had such a phrase which is misunderstood in John chapter 10. It's often misunderstood as a promise that Jesus offers a sort of healthy, wealthy, happy life.

[16:06] Life in his fullness. But remember the man that happened in John chapter 9 we saw last week. He has experienced life to the full, the life of Jesus offers.

He has been persecuted by the images of amishments, rejectivising parents and thrown out of the synagogues. So clearly the life that Jesus is talking about here, he is not simply saying, help, well and so on.

Now I think I've put it in a line of course in verse 9. I am the Lord. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will get him and find him pasture.

Life is so rescue. It is security. It is provision. It is knowing Jesus. It is being given eternal life by him. Life with the Lord in this world and the next.

We see that up in the crowd in chapter 5 and 10. That is the life of Jesus offers. Life with the Lord both in this world and the next. So I think in the first place what it is to do, have an authentic spiritual experience, one of the source of authentic spiritual life.

[17:19] It is knowing Jesus, the true shepherd and ruler of what we call. Secondly, Jesus, the true shepherd, committed to his people.

That is what we're talking about in verse 11 to 18. It is between the good shepherd on the one hand and the highest hand on the other. Have a look at verse 11.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down the night on the sheep. He who is the highest hand and not the shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the Lord coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the Lord statues them and statues them.

He flees because he is the highest hand and has nothing for the sheep. Well, it is a kind of obvious point, isn't it? That unlike the highest hand, he doesn't own the sheep and that thought of sin and the times when the danger comes along, he's not.

The good shepherd is committed, proudly committed to the sheep. What I want to do in Acts, as we read the passage for us, the wonderful intimacy with which Jesus the shepherd lays his sheep.

[18:36] Have a look at verse 14. The Lord says, I am the good shepherd and says, I know my own and my men know me. Just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. Now I know a great about sheep, who have been brought up in North London.

Apparently the third century shepherd knew the sheep, I know him. He could pan his sheep all together at night, in a pen, in a sheep pen, with sheep who belong to another shepherd.

And in the morning he would get to his sheep pen, and he could name the sheep by name. They didn't have any branding on them or anything like that. He simply knew them, and knew them each one by name.

You see, when Jesus looks at the world, he doesn't see what we see. He doesn't see the place of his multitudes on the tube, and the thousands of football stadiums, all wearing identical team colours.

They instead perceive individuals, as he sees the individuals who belong to him. He knows those with sheep pen, who are his.

[19:43] He knows them. Those with football stadium, who are his. He lays them. And wonderfully we see the authentic mark of the shepherd, is that he is willing to delve for his sheep.

Can you see how Jesus says that three times? So verse 11, The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Verse 15, I lay there my life for the sheep. Verse 17, For this reason the Father

knows me, because I made that one my life.

For Jesus, the key characteristic of the good shepherd, is that he lays down his life for his people. Which of course is a strange thing, because we might have thought that those useful kind of shepherds would be a live shepherd.

You could protect a sheep, rather than a dead shepherd. So Jesus' assumption must be, or something of a sheep in mortal danger.

And we've seen that, we've been here, over the last few weeks, looking at John chapter 7 and 8. We've seen, haven't we, that how sin leads to judgment, how our revenge against God means that all of us are by nature under God's wrong.

[20 : 55] But the shepherd loses his life in their defense. By his death they are saved, and he can't save. Yet Jesus is the true shepherd, who is now committed to his people.

And so he lays down his life voluntarily, because he is committed to verse 18, No one takes it from me, but I lay it down at my own report, I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.

So one of the things that you see, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, teaches us many things. It teaches us that sin is serious, it teaches us that God is just, but here we see that it teaches us that Jesus, in this form of message, to his people, to voluntarily lay his life down for them.

That is the dual penitentiary mark of Jesus' ministry, that he will lay the life down for his people. I hope that you get too bad that he adopts it, as the officers' mess that the royal signalmen's court.

There is a picture of a brand moving scene from the personal wall. It is a picture where the signalman is clearly declined out of his bench, and gone over the top, internet man-pads, to repair a broken telecoding cable.

[22 : 18] And he is lying there, and we see holding together both ends of the cable, so that communication is restored, and presumably the due calls to help the battle to be won, and save the lives of others.

But I told you about this, in fact, as you look at that picture, you see that the signalman himself has done it, giving his life voluntarily for the sake of others.

Well, I guess it's all real after that, when we hear of one person who has done that, brothers, of one human being who has done that, brothers, but how deeply extraordinary that Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, should be made committed to his people, to lay down his love, to give love, life in this world of God and the rest, to his people.

So then what is authentic spiritual experience? It is to be known by this Jesus, who is committed to his people. Which I guess makes a question of, well, in our experience this morning, here is the wonderful truth you see, for a Christmas this morning.

Jesus knows our name, he knows our family, he knows where we live, he knows our certain characters, he knows our history, he knows our experiences, he knows our trials.

[23 : 47] You may be despised by the family for following Christ. I was talking to a Christian from a Muslim background recently, who told me he had been taken in this oath by his natural family.

Another friend of ours who has been cut off from his inheritance for the same reason. Or you may be ignored by the authorities for being a Christian. Get us from this time of our Christian, you were saying, they think they despise men following Jesus.

Yet wonderfully, we are created by Jesus. As he guards his people, as he protects them, the true shepherd, who is thoroughly committed to these people.

It shows a bit, the wonderful security of a Christian. It is no wonder that later on in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul declares, For I am convinced that neither them nor I, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any purpose, neither light nor death, nor anything else from your creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Jesus was the true shepherd, committed to his people. Thirdly, God's people listen to the true shepherd.

[25 : 08] And here in this third section contrasts between the shepherd who the sheep listen to you, on the one hand, and the stranger who they don't listen to you, on the other.

And we couldn't have failed, I guess, through the passage of course, to see that right through this passage, runs from the rest of the day, that those who walk not into Jesus, and those who know Jesus, listen to his voice. Have a look at verse 3-5, for example.

To him the gatekeeper opens, the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name, and leaving them out. When he is brought out of his own, he hears them forth, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

Or verse 8, All who came before me have eaten from us, but the sheep did not listen to them. Or verse 16, I have other sheep that are not at this point, I just bring them also, and they will listen to my Lord.

Verse 27, My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. So Jesus is very clear to you. See what is the authentic, what is the hallmark of the parliament of the people, what is the hallmark of the sheep, so to speak?

[26 : 25] Why is it that they listen to the true shepherds, they follow him, he leads them, they know his voice, and negatively, they will not listen to anyone else.

And once again, exactly what we saw in John chapter 9, last week. Do you ever have a man, who is blind, and listening to Jesus? Just to take back a page of John chapter 9, verses 6 and 7.

John chapter 9 verse 6, Having said these things, Jesus smashed on the ground, and made blood from the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes from the mouth, and said to him, Go and watch the pool of Siloam.

So he went, and watched, and came back seeing. He listens to Jesus. And you remember too, how by contrast, you refused to listen to the phantias, and the rinds.

He told them in a certain terms, verse 32, never took the world again, and if he had heard that anyone in the eyes of a man would advise. If this man would not be good, he would do nothing. He later shouted, he listens to his voice.

[27 : 30] He won't listen to anyone else. Just to take a moment. You can't do anything. In a certain terms, the man would not be good. He would do nothing. He later shouted. He listened to his voice. He won't listen to anyone else.

Just to take a moment, and he said, he said, he said, he said, he said, he said, that's the last one. Now I'm going to go to the next episode, you go and see some friends with one-month-old baby. In that next episode, you get it very easy. Let's imagine that you Scarf and Juliet wanted this, and you decide to go and see them. You send them your baby seat for a couple of hours, and they have their first child-free morning.

Well, the old man would be true who would be quite absolute five, and Scarf and Juliet wander around Dalek for a couple of hours. And in fact, to begin with, But just as you think of sort of getting a hang of the whole thing, looking after a poor children, looking after a one-month-old baby, things begin to go wrong and Mark begins to cry. The crying gets louder and louder. As you look at his facial expressions, you think to himself, yes, he looks just like his father. Finally, after what seems like weeks, Gar and he gets on the return. Mark hears the voice of his parents and he stops crying. And of course, at that point, everyone knows exactly who it is that Mark Williams belongs to. What simply can we see the hallmark of God's true people is that they listen to the voice of Jesus? Well, we may have Jesus physically present with us, next to us, as they compare. But the way we listen to Jesus is a revival of the Bible that God is speaking to us. Negatively, of course, is why God's people won't go to some churches. Because they know that what they'll get is a diet of music, disciples, or physical and social, incremental, endless harmony, rather than hearing the words of Jesus himself. It's why the hallmark of this is the genuine church is that God's people seek to gather together to hear God's voice, to hear the voice of Jesus as the Bible is raised and explained. So let me ask, is that how we view Grace Church on a Sunday morning? Is that how we view our Sunday groups on a Tuesday evening? Is that how we think by a time of the priest revival during the day ourselves? Is this simply become a routine that we've got ourselves into? It's easy to think like, that's what we say Sunday morning we go to church, it's Tuesday evening, we'll go to our Sunday group, yes I know, I'm in three of my heart. So easy for it to become a routine, rather than actually listening to the voice of the good shepherd himself. And what greater privilege could there be than that? I guess it'll be some of us who actually don't really go round to even farther away. In which case why not visit the book school afterwards, I'm sure some of them will be hands of reference and Bible movements. Because to hear the noise of the shepherd, the shepherd who lays down the line of our pork is sheep, and to know the meaning, that is all kinds of spiritual experience. Why don't you praise God? I don't know if you've got time to any questions. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down the line of the sheep.

[31 : 05] Heavenly God we praise you very much for the Lord Jesus Christ, that he is the good shepherd, the true ruler of the people, committed to his people, who came to lay down his life for his people, that we may have life like you in this world and the past. We're sorry about the part that we take knowing Jesus' name through the chapter that grants us. And we pray that we would be those who are keen to hear his voice and to follow. And we ask it for Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen.