

# A leader you can trust?

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[ 0 : 00 ] I was given this title to speak on during the general election campaign last November, No Wonder, A Leader We Can Trust.

Boris Johnson promised that he would deliver Brexit and today is Brexit Day, but the constant cry was whether the nation could trust a man when he had broken so many other promises, not least to his wife, to forsake all others till death us do part.

We're all used to fake news. We're not going to trust a newspaper like the sport when its leading headlines read, Aliens turned our son into a fish finger.

There is a serious cynicism about the trustworthiness of our leaders. Our trust in the police has been damaged. Look at the Rotherham scandal.

Between 1980 and 2013, over 1,400 children were sexually exploited by a group of men that the authorities knew about, but didn't dare report because of political correctness and corruption.

[ 1 : 14 ] Our trust in the royal family surely has been shaken with the revelations about Prince Andrew. And I'm very sorry to say that this is even true of some church leaders.

Anyone who covers up information about a priest abusing a child for the sake of the reputation of the church is just wicked. So no wonder we do not trust our leaders.

This has led to a whole new world where we feel we are justified in not submitting to our leaders.

Many of my children's peer group admire extinction rebellion. As Greta Kuttentberg said in her lovely accent, So everyone out there, it is now time for civil disobedience.

It is time to rebel. And I wonder if you are someone who does not want a leader. We don't submit to our husbands.

[ 2 : 20 ] We challenge our children's teachers. We tweet and post and blog about our corrupt leaders. And that may well be fine in the secular world.

But it's very serious in the spiritual world. Our world treats God as if he is a leader that we cannot trust.

As if he is a candidate in an election husking. We don't want to follow God. We don't want to listen to him. We don't want to obey him.

And this is called that technical word, sin. I want to run my own life, my own way. In either an aggressive atheist way or actually in a more polite, dullage way.

We think that we can do better at running our own lives than God can. I don't know God. I don't trust that his way is better than my own.

[ 3 : 22 ] And I'm not sure, to be honest, that I even like God. Perhaps you may recognise that kind of thought in your own personal life.

The reason that your Christian friends have invited you here to this fairly decent lunch is that they want you to know that Jesus is a leader you can trust.

They want you to be crystal clear about what the Bible teaches. I hope you don't think I'm being patronising. But if I was explaining this to a teenager, I would say that it's as though we have all got invisible hats on our heads.

With a label on the front that says, I don't want you, God. But when we die and face him in judgment, he sees our invisible hats.

I don't want you, God. And he rightly abandons us forever. So it is wonderful, this lunchtime, to have this opportunity to be able to talk to you about Jesus.

[ 4 : 38 ] And to try and explain why he is a leader that we can and need to trust. And this is where the passage comes in, on page 27.

And we're going to read from verse 14. Can you see second paragraph down? Glasses.

I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep, and my sheep know me. Just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep.

I have other sheep that are not of this sheepphold. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life, only to 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 authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.

[ 5 : 43 ] So, I'm going to talk to you at lunchtime about the good shepherd. I have three points. First of all, the good shepherd's commitment to us.

Secondly, Jesus' conquest over death. And thirdly, Jesus' character. So, we'll start with Jesus' commitment to us. And I just wanted us to look at those verses, 15, 17, and 18.

That phrase, he lays down his life for us. My husband and my father-in-law were both army officers in the green jackets.

And now my son, Archie, has also been commissioned. And he goes to Sandhurst in September. He is prepared, literally, to lay his life down for queen and country.

And if any of you are mothers here, you may know how I'm feeling about that. Happily, his training is very thorough. He will be armed with the best weaponry there is, and surrounded by a platoon of equally well-trained, fit men and women, who will protect him.

[ 6 : 58 ] So, the chances of him actually dying are slim. But I've realised that many of us think that Jesus laying down his life for us was a bit like that.

A very brave, unselfish act that could and should have been avoided. But our passage today, verse 15, says that Jesus intentionally laid down his life.

And that word, for his sheep, means on behalf of or in the place of. Our sin cannot just be ignored or swept under the carpet because God is just and good.

Imagine how awful it would be if God said to Hitler at the day of his judgment, I love you, Hitler. I ignore the fact that you are responsible for the death of six million Jewish people.

I will sweep your sin under the carpet. Come into paradise. Now, our sins may be very small in comparison.

[ 8 : 21 ] Cruel words, lies, greed. But God needs to punish sin in order to be just.

But, he also loves us. More than we can imagine. Love and justice.

How can you reconcile those two things? Well, it's through a technical word, substitution. We're all familiar, basically, with the idea, you know, substitute on the sports pitches, that kind of thing.

And the idea is that Jesus takes the punishment for sin that we deserve on himself. A substitution. His life for our life. Please allow me just to read an edited report from Wikipedia. In June 2018, 12 members of a junior football team in Thailand, aged 11 to 16, and their 25-year-old assistant coach, entered the Tan Luang Nang Nong cave after football practice.

[ 9 : 44 ] Shortly afterwards, heavy rains partially flooded the cave, blocking their way out. Efforts to locate the group were hampered by rising water levels and strong currents, and no contact was made for more than a week.

Oxygen levels dropped, and the boys were in serious trouble. The rescue effort, as we know, expanded into a massive operation amid intense worldwide interest.

And then, a 37-year-old man, Sarman Kunan, a former SEAL in the Thai Navy, who was then working in security in the local airport, came forward to volunteer.

On the 5th of July, he made a dive to deliver three air tanks to the boys. Tragically, during his return, he himself ran out of air and lost consciousness underwater.

His dive buddy attempted CPR, but he could not be resuscitated, and he was pronounced dead.

But, because of those three oxygen tanks that he had laid down his life to give, all 12 boys and their assistant coach were able to be rescued.

[ 11 : 12 ] His life for their life. If you like, Jesus took the sin hat that should be on my hat, the one that says, I don't want you, God, and he put it on himself.

So, God punishes Jesus for my sin. Out of his enormous love, he substitutes himself for me.

And that is why Christians love to follow Jesus. But his commitment to us in laying down his life to take God's judgment for us is only possible because he has also, secondly, conquered death.

So, my second point comes sort of verse 17 and 18, his conquest. Just read it again. I lay down my life. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.

I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. So, we have Jesus here claiming to have authority over death.

[12:34] that after he is dead, he can order death to let him go and he will come alive again. Wouldn't it be cool if we had authority over the physical world?

I mean, real authority. If we could go out onto this putting green here and control the ball, you know. It would be great.

What control do you have over your own body? Well, looking around the ladies of Dulwich, there are obviously a lot of women who know, and I quote, what vegetables you can eat on a keto or keto diet.

I'm so embarrassed. I don't even know how to answer it. Keto. Thank you. Or, quote, what is the best intermittent fasting window to lose belly fat?

as my app told me this week. Yay! So, but authority over a dead body and authority over your own dead body.

[13:50] Matthew, Mark, Luke and John have recorded provable historical facts explaining exactly what happened. Jesus was killed by a Roman centurion.

He was nailed to a wooden cross and left to die of suffocation, pain and loss of blood. This same Roman centurion checked that he was dead by sticking a spear into his side.

He was put in a tomb with a heavy stone blocking the entrance and he was guarded by two more Roman soldiers. And then, three days later, he was seen by individuals, crowds, groups, alive.

He still had signs of crucifixion in his body but he was able to eat, drink, cook, walk, talk. In his own words there in verse 18, Jesus claims to be able to conquer death.

So he is not someone that you can just take or leave. Some of you here will be brilliant doctors, nurses but you do not have authority over life and death.

[15:10] In my job I probably go to more funerals than many of us. Sometimes the funeral of a child. I wish, I wish that I had authority over death and life but I don't.

But Jesus does. Two weeks ago I went home basically to say goodbye for the very last time to my darling father.

He is a Christian and I read verses like verse 27 and 28 that you've got. I'll read them to you in our passage. I read My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.

I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand. It was very sad but what confidence for him in his last hours not to be frightened of death.

Actually he has since rallied and he is now sitting off in bed demanding a decent bottle of claret but you get the point.

[16:34] You are of the word. So Jesus' commitment to us is absolute. He has conquered death but what if Jesus doesn't deserve our trust?

As we look thirdly at his character I'd like us just to look at the little piece of paper that you had tucked into your John's Gospel.

It's a description of the good shepherd but this time from the Old Testament from the prophet Ezekiel. God is speaking saying that he is going to come to earth to shepherd his people because all the human leaders that he has set up were frankly corrupt.

So let me just read that to you. I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down declares the sovereign Lord. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays.

I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

[17:46] Jesus is explaining in our passage in John's Gospel that he is that good shepherd. Just as I finish, I have the feeling that many people in England have totally the wrong idea of following Jesus might be like.

I think that people think that Christianity is all about rules. So stifling, so rigid, so fixed.

But these verses tell us that it's not rules. Jesus offers us a relationship. Jesus says that he knows us, he knows what we are like on the inside.

Those dark moments of anxiety, of regret, he knows what our real potential is as women. I wonder if you have also the impression that Christianity is just full of condemnation.

well, look at those Ezekiel verses again. Shepherds look after their sheep, that's the very point of being a shepherd.

[ 19 : 07 ] Jesus notices the lost, those who are injured. Those who are brutal and unjust, if you look at the context of what he writes, they are condemned because of their brutal trampling of the sheep. but his sheep experience care and compassion. I go to church in central London, we're in the city of London, and in the most wonderful way we have been brought to us, some women recently who were trafficked as children and forced into prostitution.

Their lives have been unimaginably awful. but they talk about the compassion and care of the good shepherd.

And lastly, I know that some people say that God hides from us, that he is terribly difficult to follow and believe in.

This is so wrong. Look at verse 16 here. the shepherd goes out to seek for them wherever they have managed to get lost.

[ 20 : 29 ] And actually, that is exactly what is happening today. Now, not a hiding God, but a seeking God.

God's seeking out each one of us here, asking us to listen to his words and to follow him.

Jesus is the good shepherd. He is a leader we can trust because of his commitment to us. He has laid down his life for us.

He has conquered death and his character is unimaginably beautiful.