

John 10:1-19

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[0 : 00] Let us pray. Lord Jesus, you told us that you have other sheep who are not of this fold, and that you desire! that you desire to bring them also that they may listen to your voice and be one flock under one shepherd. So we ask that you would do this today. In our midst, would people encounter you, Jesus. And we pray also for all the churches in Vancouver and in Canada and around the world who gather now, that people would hear your voice clearly and follow you fully. For your glory, we pray. Amen. You may be seated. So there's a lot in this passage that we could talk about, and I kind of want to just get to the main thing. The big claim that Jesus makes twice in the passage, the big bold claim is, I am the good shepherd. Now there's a lot of different images that Jesus uses for himself throughout John. Lots of other big bold claims, like I'm the bread of life, or I'm the light of the world, or I'm the way, the truth, and the life, or I am the vine. All these big claims, but I am the good shepherd is a little different. It's a little more personal than some of those other images, because in it, Jesus uniquely tells us about how he feels about his followers.

Not just what does Jesus do for his followers, but how he feels about them and why he cares so deeply for them. I am the good shepherd. That's where we're landing today. But it's important to understand the context of Jesus' claim is that there are lots of bad shepherds in the world.

You can just pick up your phone and start reading the news headlines any given morning, and it's filled with stories of bad shepherds. There are lots of examples in Jesus' day as well.

In John chapter 9, which we heard Aaron preach last week, in the context of Jesus' own ministry, the Pharisees were bad shepherds. There was a man that Jesus healed. He was born blind, and Jesus healed him. And what do the Pharisees do? They interrogate him over and over and over again.

[2 : 21] They become increasingly blind to who Jesus is as this man becomes increasingly clear about who Jesus is. And eventually, the Pharisees get so frustrated that this man will not play along with their games that they kick him out of the synagogue. So in Jesus' own ministry, you have bad shepherds, and that's the context in which Jesus is speaking these words. But bad shepherds is not something that's just new in Jesus' day and age. There's a long history of it, and that's what our Ezekiel 34 reading was all about. It's about how religious leaders have abused and neglected God's people throughout history. And in Ezekiel 34, we get the problem of the fat shepherds and the skinny sheep.

The word of the Lord comes to Ezekiel and says, I want you to prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. They've been feeding themselves and not my sheep. In other words, they've been boosting their own egos. They've been boosting their own bank accounts. They've been trying to gain power and control and treating the sheep harshly. And that means those that are weak, they've not been strengthened.

Those who are lost, they have not been sought. Those who are injured, they have not been bandaged. And those who have strayed have not been brought back. And so God says, I'm going to feed my shepherds with justice. And I myself will be the shepherd that they have not been. And so it's not just the context of Jesus' ministry. It's tapping into a long history of bad shepherds. And I'm sure many of us could add our own examples of bad shepherds. Many of us could tell our own stories. I've come across this a lot in the church. People showing up on the doorstep of churches I have shepherded, battered and bruised and neglected and misled and isolated sheep because of bad shepherds. And there are too many people that are leaving the church and leaving Jesus because shepherds are not doing what they're supposed to do in pointing them clearly to the gracious and loving voice of Jesus. There's a woman who showed up at the church that I was at in Southern California and told me she had not been to church for 50 years.

And I came to find out that as a young child, she was actually abused by a priest in the church that she was in. And it's what kept her from showing up for 50 years. Add to this stories of sheep who have fled because they haven't been fed. So I was reading an article a week ago of a major denomination here in Canada where a third of, it said that attendance is a third of what it was 10 years ago in this major denomination in Canada. And they went on to talk about facilities. They went on to talk about all the different committees. They went on to talk about how they're going to start having to sell property.

And yet I heard nothing about Jesus. And it dawned on me, yeah, if you don't feed the sheep, eventually they're going to wander looking for pastors elsewhere. And so Jesus speaks this major bold claim, I am the good shepherd in the context of a world of bad shepherds. And what we need to know is that Jesus is unlike all these bad shepherds. And so there's two points of the sermon. It's Jesus is the good shepherd. What does this mean? What does it mean for him to be a good shepherd? And Jesus is the good shepherd. Number two, what does that mean for you and for me? So first, Jesus is the good shepherd. What does it mean? Let's begin in verse 14. I want to walk us through this passage in reverse.

[6 : 01] 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. Jesus is the good shepherd. What does this mean?

First, it means that Jesus knows his sheep. He knows his sheep, not just generally and distantly, but he knows his sheep intimately and personally as in the same way that the father knows him.

Comprehensively and unconditionally. There's nothing about the son that the father doesn't know. And there's nothing about the father that the son doesn't know. And likewise, Jesus knows everything about you and me. Why is this so important? It's because we're sheep. Now, I know lots of movies and kids' books and stuffed animals love to depict sheep as these warm, fuzzy, cute, adorable, lovely little creatures. But as Jacob was saying, they are mangy and they are muddy. I never understood this until I moved to Scotland and lived in Scotland for a few years. And I actually get up close to the sheep and there are some special creatures. I mean, seriously, not the brightest creatures in the world.

And this is Jacob, great example. He's reminding me of this YouTube video. He had that picture of the sheep that was stuck face down in a ditch. And if you actually look up the YouTube video, don't do it now. Do it afterwards. The shepherd pulls it out by its legs and its tail and gets it out. And what does the sheep do? It literally jumps head first into the ditch right after again. And sheep are really dumb. We just keep jumping into the same ditch after being saved over and over again.

And so being called sheep is not necessarily the greatest compliment in the world. It's kind of like a divine insult because it's pointing out that we are the most helpless of all animals and we're totally dependent on our shepherd. And without our shepherd digging us out of the ditch over and over again, we would wander and we would make horrible decisions and we would be just utterly lost. And Jesus is saying, not only do I know you because I know how God intricately and uniquely created you, but I know all your sheepiness and all your stupidness and silliness. And I know where you're most weak and vulnerable and most needy. And I know all your sin. I know you.

[8 : 46] There were, I know about a month ago, I was in a conversation with a group of people and I had baked something for this group and somebody tasted what I had baked and liked what I had made and proceeded to say to my wife, wow, Susie, it really seems that you married up.

This was an incredible statement over which my wife and I had to debrief for about the rest of the week. But I had the sense, I was like, ooh, you don't know what you just said.

It was great, actually. One of my wife's friends' card arrived in the mail from Australia later that week sending her condolences. But anyways, it was just this great moment where I was like, oh, if you knew me the way that my wife knew me, you would actually see it's not so pristine.

And even if my wife knew everything about me, she doesn't know everything about me, but if she knew everything that goes through my heart and mind every single day, it'd be a miracle, be a miracle that she would survive that.

And then just imagine how deeply Jesus knows us. That there's not a single intention of the heart or thought of the mind or desire or will that flies under his radar. He knows everything about us fully.

[10 : 17] And yet the amazing thing that we're told next is that he still values us. It's absolutely amazing. Jesus is the good shepherd, which means first he knows us and it means second that he values us. If you look at verse 11, we're going to see how this takes shape just a bit.

He says, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is not a hired hand or 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 up and scatters them.

He flees because he is a hired hand, and here it is, and cares nothing for the sheep. Do you notice that? And it begins with Jesus saying he will lay down his life, and it ends with it saying, Jesus is not like the hired hand who cares nothing.

In other words, the death of Jesus is the greatest evidence of your dearness to him. He lays down his life for you. He's not like a hired hand who sticks with you when it's comfortable and when it's convenient, and the second things get tough or danger comes his way or you get into a tricky situation, he goes the other way. That's not what Jesus is like.

An example of this, when leading up to the birth of my first child here in Vancouver, I got to participate in a midwifery group. The midwives were not for me, they were for my wife.

[11 : 45] But we got to go through this group where as 10 couples who were experiencing having children for the first time, we prepared for it, and then we walked together in the year after having our first kids. And it struck me, we met about a month after everybody had their babies, and we were all talking about what's the experience been like and all these sorts of things.

And my wife and I, I think, had cooked one meal in the month after having our first child, because you all supported us so wonderfully and deeply and fed us richly.

And I talked to all these parents, and they said, man, we are just struggling. We have no family in town, and none of our friends are helping us. And we kind of said, well, what happened to all your friends? And they said, all our friends before having kids were wonderful.

They knew how to party on Fridays. They knew how to have a good time on Saturdays and Sundays. But the second we had a kid, they had no clue what to do with us. So they were feeling desperately alone in their hour of greatest need.

And Jesus is not like that. What this is saying to us is Jesus is going to never leave, he will never leave you in a crisis. And he will never be unsure about how to shepherd you in a difficult situation.

[12:53] He sticks with his flock, even in the hardest and most dangerous of times. And this is part of what makes him completely different than a hired hand. This is something that he's not being paid to do.

This is something that he wants to do, that he came into the world to do, that he was sent by his father to do, that is his great mission and purpose in life to do. And one of the amazing things about this passage is not just that the shepherd is willing to risk his life for the sheep, as if we'll see if I die or don't, but I'm willing to take the risk.

It's that the shepherd actively lays down his life as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sheep. In other words, the good shepherd becomes the sacrificial lamb so that he can take away all the sins and sheepiness of the sheep.

We have been bought with a great price, and Jesus owns us. We are his great treasure. He values us beyond our highest hopes and our wildest dreams because he is the good shepherd.

He knows us, and he lays down his life because he values us. And third, it means that Jesus leads us. He leads those he values.

[14:08] Would you look at verse 2 with me? He who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. Verse 3, to him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name, and he leads them out.

He leads them out. And when he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. This is lovely.

And Jesus is drawing on quite a familiar image for shepherds in the Middle East. There are slightly different shepherding practices in the West and Middle East.

I won't get into all that. But at night in the Middle East, many shepherds and families would gather their sheep into one sheep pen. So you'd have five or six different flocks in one sheep pen, and it was a strength in numbers sort of thing.

And the idea was that there would be more collective body heat to stay warm at night when the temperatures drop. And it would also mean that you have strength in numbers, so the sheep are less vulnerable to attack, being singled out by wolves to attack.

[15:18] Then in the morning, shepherds would have to come and take their sheep out to pasture. So they would come to the doorway to the sheep pen, and they would call out with their voice, or they would have a unique whistle that they would be able to say to the sheep.

And the sheep that would just belong to them, none of the other sheep, would be the only ones that knew that call, that voice, that whistle. And so they would come out of the door, not the rest of the sheep, and they would follow the shepherd, and then the shepherd would lead them out to pasture for the day and then bring them back to the pen at night.

And this is a common rhythm in the Middle East. And so that's the image of Jesus leading his sheep. Notice in the Western world, often the way a shepherd leads his sheep is by driving them with like a sheepdog or a staff.

But here, the image is of Jesus not driving his sheep out, but drawing them to himself by the uniqueness and familiarity of his voice. So Jesus draws us to follow him by speaking, and by talking, and by calling us, and by attuning our ears to hear his voice.

And the amazing thing is that Jesus doesn't, he pushes the image even further. He doesn't just sit with what a shepherd would have expected in that culture. He takes it even further than any shepherd would have taken that in the culture.

[16:40] In verse 3, it says, he calls each of his sheep by name. So it's not just an impersonal call, like here's the one call that all my sheep will hear, although that's true.

It means he calls each one by name, personally and individually. We're not just an anonymous mass in the sight of the Lord Jesus. We are known and valued and led personally and individually, as well as communally and corporately.

He calls us by name. And when he calls us and leads us to pasture, he gives us everything we need to thrive. Look at verses 9 and 10.

This is part of the point of the image of a door. I can't unpack this image in all its fullness, but verse 9, I am a door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved.

Jesus provides salvation. And he will go in and out and find pasture. That going in and out. Jesus provides protection and security.

[17:46] Verse 10, The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. And I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. Jesus provides plenty. So Jesus leads us to pasture.

He gives us everything we need, salvation, security, and plenty. Why? Because he is the good shepherd. He knows us. He values us. And he leads us.

So the question I want to consider for just a few minutes now is what does this mean for you and me? I think it means listening to Jesus and following him comprehensively and unconditionally and confidently.

So listening to Jesus and following him comprehensively. Look back at verse 3 and 4 with me again. And we're going to work our way through the passage in the right direction this time. Verse 3 and 4, To him the gatekeeper opens, the sheep hear his voice, hearing, and 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. Here it is again. For they know his voice. This is like the great thread that holds together the different pieces of this chapter, listening to the voice of Jesus.

[19:06] And the major assumption of the Christian life is that Jesus is always speaking to us. That he's always calling out to us. That he's always speaking to us. That every time we gather in a small group to study the Bible, every time we open it to read as we gather in the congregation, every time we open it up to meditate and pray on God's holy word by ourselves, any time we speak an encouraging word of God to one another, Jesus is speaking.

And Jesus has confidence here. There's a lot of places in the scriptures where it talks about how deaf we are to God's voice. But here, Jesus has confidence that the sheep can and will hear his voice.

That there's no area of life into which Jesus doesn't speak and there's no situation that he can't shepherd you through. And so you can bring every aspect of your life to this good shepherd and you can let him speak into every area of your life.

And this is the thing about being a sheep is we tend to get a little bit selective about the areas of our lives that we want Jesus to speak into and shepherd us in. Jesus, would you lead me over here but not over there, please?

Jesus, I'm happy to follow you here but maybe not over there. Maybe to get a little more pointed, Jesus, would you speak into my marriage but please not my finances? Or maybe the other way around.

[20:33] Or Jesus, would you shepherd me through this work problem but please, please not through this sexual immorality problem. See, Jesus says, I am the good shepherd.

You're going to hear my voice. You can bring everything to me as my shepherd and you can listen to me and you can follow me comprehensively. And second, we can listen to him and we can follow him unconditionally.

Verses 8 and 9, let's look at that once again. All who came before me are thieves and robbers but the sheep did not listen to them.

Verse 9, I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. And here it is again, verse 10, the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy and I came that they may have life and I love that he adds and have it abundantly.

Jesus is clear. The thief comes to steal and kill and destroy. The bad shepherds want to steal and kill and destroy. And Jesus came that you may have life.

[21:39] In other words, your good is the mission and purpose of his life. And so you can trust and you can follow him unconditionally. Like no holding back, no reservations, no plan B's, you don't need it.

Because the very reason for his being in the world is that you may have abundant life. Now, the reality is is that our experience of being shepherded is sometimes confusing.

Being shepherded doesn't always feel easy and comfortable. So, in the ancient world, when a sheep goes astray and wanders, gets lost, a shepherd has to go find it.

So you get these great parables like in Luke of Jesus leaving the 99 sheep in order to go search for the one sheep. And we think of that as a nice cuddly thing. Like Jesus goes and finds the sheep and he says, hey, come back this direction, you got lost.

And the sheep goes, oh yeah, that sounds great. And turns around and starts following him again. But it doesn't exactly work like that. Often what the shepherd has to do is so that the sheep doesn't keep running away is the shepherd has to catch the sheep, flip it on its back, tie its hind feet together, tie its front feet together, put it on its shoulders, and then carry it back to the flock.

[23:02] It's not a flannel graph picture of Jesus meek and mild, you know. It's Jesus, the good shepherd, very strong to save. And often the loving thing that the shepherd has to do to save the sheep and to bring them home is something that the sheep don't understand.

It feels harsh or hard in the moment. Like maybe Jesus is strong arming them, but the reality is is that the sheep are on the shoulders of the shepherd. And Jesus is saying, even when it looks terrible, even when it feels terrible, stick with me, trust me.

I came that you may have life and have it abundantly. You can trust my intentions and my motivations even in the toughest times. You can follow me and listen to me unconditionally.

And third and finally, we can listen to Jesus and follow him not just comprehensively and unconditionally, but we can do it confidently. And I love this.

We're told in verse 19 that Jesus' words caused division amongst the Jewish people. Some said that he was demonic and insane.

[24:15] And others said that this made no sense of the fact that he could open the eyes of the blind, so he's not demonic or insane, but we still can't make sense of who he is. So they're divided. And the question that emerges in verse 20 is the question of our whole passage, why listen to him?

Why listen to Jesus? Why should you and I listen to Jesus? Now, there's the classic argument of C.S. Lewis in the book *Mere Christianity*.

C.S. Lewis just very clearly presents is Jesus a liar, is he a lunatic, or is he a lord? Liar, lunatic, lord. And he says it's a very important question. Given the sorts of things that Jesus claims about himself, it doesn't seem like there's any other option.

There's no fourth option. Either he's a liar and he's just making stuff up, or if he's not making stuff up and yet it's not true, then he's clearly delusional and he's a lunatic and he doesn't think straight, or if he's not making stuff up and it is true, then he must be the lord that he claims to be.

And if he's the lord, then surely we should listen to the lord. And yet, if you're convinced that he's lord, I would suggest that there's actually another question. There's the question, what kind of lord is he?

[25 : 30] Because we have a lot of examples in the world of lords. And they're not always necessarily great. Is this lord greedy or is he good? Is he fickle or is he faithful?

Is he tyrannical or is he trustworthy? And I want to suggest that that is the spiritual battle that's being fought in John chapter 10. What kind of lord is he? The charge against Jesus is not just that he's insane, it's that he is evil.

He's demonic. He is not good. And that's why Jesus' great claim in John chapter 10 is that he is good. He's pushing against the, he's trying to undo the great lie that was unleashed on the world in the garden of evil, the garden of Eden, that God's not good.

Why should you listen to Jesus? Because he is good. He's the good shepherd. And we know that because he laid down his life for you and for me. And it's really interesting to me that the only two words that we ever hear the Father speak directly about Jesus in the Gospels is I love him and listen to him.

On the mountain of transfiguration, Peter and James and John saw the heavens opened. They saw Jesus' glory in a new way. They heard a voice come from heaven and it said, this is my beloved son.

[26 : 52] I love him. Listen to him. And that's what Jesus is encouraging us in today. He says, I am the good shepherd. I lay down my life and the Father loves me.

I know you. I value you. I will lead you and provide everything you need. You can follow me. You can listen to me comprehensively and unconditionally and confidently.

I am your good shepherd. Brothers and sisters, I speak these things to you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.