

The Good Shepherd

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[0 : 00] Well, if you would open, please, at John chapter 10, where we continue, page 896 in the Bible. Page 896, you need to be able to see a Bible to follow on. This is a great passage.

And if you are a teen, junior teen, senior teen with us today, and I see you outside after the service, I'm going to ask you, what was the main point of the sermon? And if you get that or close to it, I'm going to ask you, what was the second main point of the sermon?

And that might not be a bad test for the adults as well. So here we are on International Yoga Day. What's the main point of the sermon? That's not what's most important about today.

This is just one of the simplest, deepest, and most precious passages in all of the scriptures. One of the great realities, isn't it? The Lord is our shepherd, and we are his sheep. And most churches I've been in that have real stained glass windows have sheep.

[1 : 15] They'll have a shepherd, a nice shepherd, and then they'll have fluffy, woolly, cutesy, sheepy in the arms, bouncing around.

And when I was a child, my mother taught me to sing a song at night when I was going to sleep. And it went like this. Jesus, tender shepherd, hear me bless this little lamb tonight.

Through the darkness be thou near me. Keep me safe till morning light. And if I wanted to sing it again, I'd go, amen. I see it didn't make it to Canada.

Well, it's a great prayer when you're five or you're 55. And I think that's why it's a bit of a surprise when you come to John 10 that it's so serious and somber and solemn and threatening.

We have sheep, but we have wolves. We have a very best shepherd imaginable, but we have thugs and crooks inside the flock who want to fleece and eat the sheep as well.

[2 : 24] And I think the only thing that makes sense of this seriousness is how firmly connected the chapter is to chapter 9. You know, by the way, that these numbers, chapter 10, 11, and also the verses weren't introduced.

They weren't part of the original text. They were introduced for convenience. The chapters were introduced about 1200 AD. The verses about 1500. And sometimes the chapter divisions are really good.

This one's terrible. In my humble opinion. As you see, chapter 10, verse 1 says, Truly, truly, I say to you, and every time Jesus says that in John, he's explaining what's just happened.

And what has just happened is, you remember the story, chapter 9, is about a man who was born blind, who Jesus heals. And it's a double story of how this man, even though he's been healed, he's not yet a believer, but he comes to faith in Jesus Christ through this process.

Whereas the religious leaders get harder and harder and deeper and deeper into their spiritual darkness. And there's a nasty division at the end of it. These Pharisees react like every clergy, I think, when their authority is threatened.

[3 : 43] And you see verse 34, when they get to the end, they answer this young man, You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?

And they cast him out. Isn't that a great way to treat someone? So what Jesus is doing now is he's explaining what happened.

The Pharisees, this is very worrying. The Pharisees, they were the Bible guys. They knew the scriptures. But they were utterly spiritually blind. We have an amazing capacity for self-spiritual deception.

You can be so close to spiritual things. You could be teaching the Bible with your heart closed, your eyes blind. And the test always is what is the place of Jesus Christ in your heart and in your teaching?

And the chapter ends this way. Verse 39. This is the solemnity. Verse 39. Jesus said, For judgment I came into the world, that those who do not see may see.

[4 : 52] And those who see or think they see become blind. And the Pharisees hear him and they say, Are you saying we're blind? And Jesus said to them, If you were blind, you would have no guilt.

But now that you say we see, your guilt remains. You see, the starting point of any spiritual reality is a complete despair of your own ability and your own knowledge.

Humility is the way. It's to know that you don't know. It's to know that you are a sheep and in deep need of a shepherd. And I think this is a massively encouraging passage.

But it's not a sentimental pick-me-up. The solemnity and scariness of it comes from Jesus. Because the stakes are so high.

Because our salvation depends in the end on our response to Jesus' words. So as Jesus takes us into his heart and mind, he's explaining what's going on. The first paragraph, verses 1 to 6, is really from the sheep's point of view.

[5 : 54] And then from 7 to 18 is from the shepherd's point of view. So I've been very creative with my headings this week. My first heading is needy sheep. My second heading is good shepherd.

Thank you. So the first heading is needy sheep, verses 1 to 6. Now, if I was preaching on any other sheep shepherd passage in the Bible, I would have to point out to you that sheep are not intelligent, they are not hygienic, and they are unable to look after themselves.

In fact, they are filthy, defenceless, and stupid. And that's why we are called sheep. And yes, we ought to be offended. But that's not John 10's take.

John 10 is a very sheep-positive passage. The emphasis is not just on our defencelessness. It is this unique sheepish ability to hear the voice of their own shepherd.

It is astonishing. A woman came out of the 9 o'clock service. She says she's got a friend on a sheep farm. She went to dinner with this woman. The woman stood up and addressed the people who were there for the party.

[7 : 08] And as soon as she started speaking, the sheep who were outside the barn started bleating. They did not have lamb for dinner, I'm told. Most animals have a homing instinct.

They have a sort of an inbuilt GPS to get them home, right? Sheep have the opposite. They've got a getting lost instinct. They don't find their way home, despite Mary had a little lamb, what the nursery rhyme teaches.

But they do have an amazing ability to hear one voice, the voice of their shepherd. What's really important from the sheep's point of view is the voice of their sheep.

They've done tests. They did a recent test in the Middle East where they got 12 flocks of sheep and mixed them all up for a whole night. Then they got the 12 shepherds to stand around the ring of the sheep and at the same time called their sheep and every single sheep went to the right shepherd.

It's exactly what's just happened to this young man, you see. He heard the voice of Jesus calling him and against the opposition of his parents and against the terrible opposition and being cast out by the religious authorities, he knows the voice of Jesus Christ and he obeys that.

[8 : 25] That is the mark of a true sheep, a true Christian. We hear the voice of Jesus Christ calling us. You can tell his voice from other voices and we follow him.

And I wonder if that's true for you. I wonder if you know what his voice sounds like personally. The problem is there are all sorts of other voices to follow. There are all sorts of different people who put themselves forward as shepherds.

But not everyone who dresses as a shepherd is a true shepherd. Some of them, Jesus says in these first six verses, are villains, crooks, thieves and robbers.

They want nothing better than just to fleece the sheep and eat them. And I don't need to say this, it's terrible but true, but there are people claiming to be shepherds inside God's sheepfold who are not even sheep.

They're not even Christians. They haven't come through the door. They haven't come through Christ. They've crept in a different way. They've climbed in sneakily. And the one thing that's worse than a wolf in sheep's clothing is a wolf in shepherd's clothing.

[9 : 32] Not every pastor, I warn you again, not every bishop, not every minister is a real shepherd or even a real sheep. Titles, robes, they count for very little.

It all depends on how they relate to Jesus and whether they speak the words of Jesus Christ or not. You see, let's get back to the sheep. Here's a wonderful thing about the sheep. Look down at verse

five. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.

It doesn't mean that sheep are immune to false teaching. It simply means that when they hear the voice of the true shepherd, they recognize it. And therefore, if you're a sheep of Jesus Christ, you need to put yourself in the way of hearing the true teaching of Jesus Christ.

You need to keep hearing the teaching of the word of God. And if one of the teachers here at St. John stops speaking the word of God and starts teaching their own ideas, what should you do? You should bleat loudly and then run. But when Christian leaders do teach the word of God, what happens is in verse three and four, halfway through three, the sheep hear his voice.

[11:05] He calls his own sheep by name, by name, and he leads them out. When he's brought all his own out, he goes before them and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

It's wonderfully personal. It's individual. He calls every single one of us by name. He knows you. He knows me personally and entirely. He leads us out.

He goes before us. He doesn't relate to us with the stick. He speaks to us directly. Bromben and I are watching a terrible movie recently about someone saving planet Earth.

We had holidays and I flew on a plane recently and every movie I watched was about saving planet Earth. Every single one. Have you noticed this? And all the aliens, they always go to Los Angeles. Where was I? Oh, yeah. So this guy was saving planet Earth and he was high above a street somewhere on some wire getting away from the bad guys and his daughter was also on the wire, very, very frightened.

[12:06] And he said, and he was saying to her, just follow me. Come on, you can do it. Just follow me. Keep coming, keep coming, keep coming towards me. Don't look down. Don't look at the danger. It's a little bit like the picture here.

A lot of people think of Jesus like we think of a celebrity or a political figure or a hero. You know, we admire them and we follow them on the internet and we put likes up or whatever you do. There's no real sharing or intimacy or friendship.

But this is what it means to be a real Christian. It's hearing his voice. It's him sharing his life with you and you with him.

It's friendship. It's access. It's intimacy. Is that how you would describe your relationship with him? Being drawn by his voice, recognizing him as Lord and friend, as the one who calls you by name. And he still leads you out because he's not just a shepherd here in the church or in the fold. He also wants to lead you to obey him in your family and in your work and in your leisure.

[13:09] And he's calling you now. Are you hearing his voice? But verse seven, we change from the sheep's perspective to the good shepherd. And we should ask the question, why should I listen to this shepherd?

What's he done that I should listen to him? Why should I give my life to him? Verse 11. So I'm now moving into the second point, the good shepherd. Verse 11. I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I just need to remind you, shepherd in Bible terms is not a cuddly, just a cuddly intimate figure. Shepherd is a figure of massive authority and rule and kingship.

It's the shepherd who judges between sheep and goats. It's the shepherd who will rule the nations with a rod of iron. What Jesus is doing here, he's claiming to be God.

It's not romantic. It's not sentimental. But the one essential thing he wants to know about his shepherding is his goodness. I'm the good shepherd, he says.

[14:12] And there are lots of words for good. This word does not mean morally right, morally correct. It means beautiful, captivating. He's so anxious for our salvation and for us to have life.

He comes from heaven. He doesn't spare his own life but lays it down for us all. And the reason he does that is because there's something worse than false shepherds inside the sheepfold.

There is a wolf on the loose. One wolf. Verse 12. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, this is a minister who's in it for the money, who does not own the sheep, he sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees.

Naturally, the wolf snatches and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. Here's another thing about sheep. And you know this, don't you?

sheep are just not very good at defending themselves. They just, it doesn't occur to them to defend themselves. In my vast research, I have discovered cats do when they go wild.

[15 : 24] Cats, dogs, goats, pigs, camels, if they go, if they're left out on their own, they become feral. And their survival instincts take over and they defend themselves.

They even become predators. Can you believe it? Do you know Australia has a massive problem with camels, wild camels? They have to cull them. Yeah, true. It's not a nice picture. But not sheep. Sheep, they don't get it. They, everything in the wild eats sheep. And the poor old sheep, they don't, you know, they don't organise. They don't, they don't think to put a look out.

They just, it doesn't come to them. They don't work in packs like that. But the wolf, and this is wolf singular, the wolf is clever and hungry and he has brilliantly efficient ways of maiming and killing sheep.

And I've done some research on that and I can tell you about it later if you really want to know. It's pretty gruesome. They, they devour the entire sheep, bones and all.

[16 : 26] And the reason Jesus is saying this is because there is a wolf that stalks us all. And in John's gospel it is spiritual darkness and death.

It is spiritual blindness and doing what is evil. And there is no power on earth that can save us from this wolf. And the power of this wolf works to maim and to devour and to destroy there is only one who can save us.

The one who has come from heaven to give his life, lay down his life for the sheep, the good shepherd. And there is only one way that he can save us and it's by laying down his life. Do you think he would have laid down his life if there was a different way?

Verse 11, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He deliberately puts himself in the way of the wolf to lay down his life so that he might give to the sheep the life he speaks about in verse 10, the abundant life.

This is a key thing Jesus wants to know about his shepherding. It's about his death on the cross. And I, don't you think it is just amazing that the shepherd should do this for his sheep?

[17 : 47] I mean, aren't you amazed at how important you are to him? that he would give his own life to die in your place. This is the heart of the Christian faith we're talking about.

Jesus dying in my place to rescue me so that I might be forgiven. And notice he says, it's voluntary. I lay down my life. No one's forcing me to do this.

I'm choosing to do this. He says, it's costly. It's utter the end sacrifice. And finally, it's effective in saving us because it's a substitution.

He says, I lay down my life for the sheep on behalf of the sheep for the sake of the sheep. So don't let people tell you that the cross is just an example to follow.

It doesn't make any sense for the shepherd to die, throw himself off the cliff as a big example for the sheep to follow. No, there has to be an effect. Laying down his life, substituting his life for hours to save us from darkness and death.

[18 : 50] I think that's why Jesus calls himself the door. He is the only one through whom we have access to God. And when we have access to God and when we're in the sheepfold, his goodness doesn't stop.

He's not good to us until we get there. It keeps going and going and going. Jesus died for me. Jesus died for you.

this is the thing and this is what ought to melt our hearts. So anxious for our salvation that he comes from heaven. He doesn't just take a risk.

He lays down his life deliberately. He takes all the danger and all the result of our own evil into himself, pays for it and then draws us out of danger.

And I think one of the reasons why we find it hard to believe and one of the reasons we're so sceptical is because most of the human leaders we see are just interested in themselves. And the more interested they are in themselves, the more they kill and steal and destroy.

[19 : 53] I discovered Vladimir Putin is worth between 70 and 200 billion. Bashar al-Assad, Syria, he's worth 122 billion.

Kim Jong-un, how long has he been in charge of North Korea? He's amassed 5 billion. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, 95 billion. You don't need me to go on.

Jesus refers to these people in verse 8 when he says, all who came before me are thieves and robbers. Literally, it's all who come in front of me, who put themselves ahead of me, who put themselves out there as shepherd for people to follow.

Every utopian political saviour who offers themselves to us. This is how it ends up. That's why it's such a stunning contrast in verse 10.

The thief, they come to steal and kill and destroy. I came, they may have life and have it abundantly. Everything Jesus does for us is good. Sometimes we come to faith in Christ, we have this sneaking suspicion, you know, he's done it for his own good, he wants to use me and manipulate me, I can't quite trust him.

[21 : 04] Everything he does is for our benefit. And he wants to give us this life which is marked by newness and fullness and goodness and it doesn't mean things won't go difficult but it means that in the troubles he says, my grace is sufficient, more than sufficient, abundantly more than sufficient for you.

So how do we apply this? Well, it's very, very wonderful in this passage that Jesus makes the application for us. In fact, he makes three at the end of the passage. He puts sheep and shepherd together in three ways.

So we're coming to the end and the first is verses 14 to 15. It means he knows you. Verse 14, I am the good shepherd, I know my own and my own know me.

Wait for it. Just as the father knows me and I know the father and I lay down my life for this sheep. That is, that's just remarkable.

Jesus compares his knowledge and our knowledge of him and our involvement in each other's lives to the knowledge and involvement of the father and the son in God himself.

[22 : 19] Don't you find that amazing? This is something experiential and uniquely intimate. See, to be loved and to be known completely is what we really want and what we need but the one thing we're most frightened of as well and it's a very good thing that we do not know what is in each other's hearts.

I've said this before but if you knew what was in my heart you wouldn't listen to a word I was saying and the same goes for you as well. But Jesus knows you and me utterly, completely, individually and he still lays down his life and he still wishes to be our shepherd and he still calls us and goes ahead of us simply because he is a very good shepherd.

He doesn't value because you're a really clean-hearted sheep. You're a noble sheep. He values you because you're his and he's made you his own by giving his life.

He's not trying to get something out of us. He wants to bring us into the safety of the fold. He wants to share his life. He wants to know you and for you to know him and to go in and out and find pasture. Good shepherd, first application is knowing him.

Second application, verse 16, he has other sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice so there will be one flock, one shepherd.

[23 : 48] Jesus intends to reach beyond Israel and the good shepherd's purposes, they're bigger than you, they're bigger than me, they're bigger than our church, they're bigger than our denomination.

There are other sheep who are not in the sheepfold who Jesus says, I must, I must bring. So there are lots of wolves in the church and lots of sheep outside the church.

There are people in Vancouver who belong to Christ and the way he says, I'm going to reach them is they will listen to my voice. It is through the speaking and teaching of the people of God and the word of God they'll hear the voice of God.

The amazing testimony of the Christians in that church in Charleston after that young man had come in and killed nine of them speaking to him in court and saying, the Lord forgives you, I forgive you, turn to him.

Who's doing it? That's Jesus doing that through them. In their great weakness and pain, let's pray he hears Jesus' voice.

[25 : 01] I think this is a tough season for churches and particularly churches in Vancouver. You know, as we've been looking around to find permanent accommodation, we've come across quite a number of small churches that are closing and up for sale.

It's a hard time for churches in Vancouver. But the encouragement here in verse 16 is that Jesus himself takes responsibility for bringing the other sheep.

Isn't that great? He will do it. We have to look to him to gather the sheep. We have to continue to speak the words and be on mission like that people from Charleston were.

And above all, we have to pray to him to work, to work, to work. He knows us. First application. He has other sheep. Second application.

And the third and final application is it's all based on love. Verse 17. For this reason, the Father loves me because I lay down my life that I might take it up again.

[26 : 05] No one takes it from me. I lay it down on my own accord. I have authority to lay it down. I have authority to take it up again, this charge I've received from the Father. When he says the Father loves me because I lay down my life and take it up again, it's not that God holds back his love until Jesus does this great thing.

I mean, they lived in love together for all eternity. The Father always loved the Son as the Son always humbly, eternally sought the Father's glory. But when the Father looks down and sees Jesus giving his life and laying down his life on the cross, it is for God the Father the most wrenching, tragic, saddest moment as well as at the same time the wildest joy and love comes from the Father.

It's tragic because his only son is being wretchedly killed and if you're a parent can you imagine anything you'd give the life of your child for? But in the death of Jesus God the Father says I love you my son I love what you're doing.

What that means is that our salvation comes out of the inner life and the inner love of God himself. Here's a quote.

It's not surprising that Jesus says he's loved since our salvation is dearer to him than his own life. Here is a wonderful commendation of the divine goodness to us which should ravish our whole hearts into admiration.

[27 : 43] If you are a sheep of this shepherd this good shepherd listen for his voice enter by him all who enter will be saved and we will go in and out and we will find pasture and he will give us life life in all its abundance.

Amen.