

God Our Shepherd

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Date: 06 November 2016

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[0 : 00] I will turn back with me then to a reading in the New Testament, John chapter 10. We can read at verse 14.

Bearing in mind what we read in Ezekiel 34 of the false shepherds, Jesus says, 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. I am the good shepherd. This is the fourth of seven great I am sayings that John reveals to us.

I am the good shepherd. And I'll explain a bit about the meaning and significance of these I am sayings in just a moment. What we have here, what we read here in Ezekiel, and what we have here with Jesus proclaiming to be the good shepherd, shepherd.

[1 : 20] This whole idea of shepherding is an image that runs right through scripture, really. And to understand this shepherding, we understand that it was a hard and demanding and costly life.

Not just then, but as it is today as well for those who are shepherds throughout our country. And very often in these days, they had to defend sheep from wild animals, routing all weathers and moving through all kinds of different terrains.

A hard life, but always with a shepherd, the flock comes first. And in the first century with the shepherds at that time, then it's a bit different to the way it's done here for those who have sheep. And that time, the shepherd would be at the front, actually leading the sheep. So everybody who heard Jesus speak in this way about the shepherd and the sheep, they would all have known about it and they would have understood it.

And it's perhaps not quite so familiar to us today, but the people Jesus spoke to would definitely have understood it at that time. And in the passage we read in Ezekiel 34, we see there that the prophet, he speaks out strongly, really strongly about the failure of those appointed as shepherds of the people at that time.

[2 : 53] And he speaks of them just looking out for the best for themselves and that the sheep were scattered and so on. And according to Ezekiel, this failure among Israel's leaders who were effectively the under shepherds appointed at that time.

This failure amongst them is so serious that God is saying he himself is going to take their place. And the accusation against these shepherds in Ezekiel is directly set against the Jewish leaders at that time.

They were more concerned. We read there about feeding themselves, keeping themselves safe and also lining their own pockets. Much more concerned with these things than looking after the flock, the people who were entrusted to them.

When the flock was attacked by a wolf, the hireling is more concerned about his own safety than anything to do with the flock. More concerned with looking after himself.

And God is lifting himself up against those false shepherds, those that were entrusted to that task.

[4 : 13] And God says there in Ezekiel, I will do it. He spends a chapter saying, I will do it myself. I will come in their place and I will do it myself.

And this really is God at work. And we see three things from this passage now, the proof read in John chapter 10. Just three things that I wish to highlight here.

With regard to God as a shepherd and his care and concern and his love for the flock. First of all, that he is the God who gives. And he is secondly, the God who knows his flock.

And thirdly, he is the God who includes. So firstly, we see here with Jesus proclaiming to be, say, I am the good shepherd.

He is the God who gives. And ultimately, of course, he is the God who gives and who has given his life for us.

[5 : 16] This shepherding and the theme of shepherding takes us into the very heart of the atonement.

It takes us directly to Calvary because the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, for his flock.

And all of the Old Testament passages, they feed into this great moment and they feed into this great truth of Jehovah carrying, searching, feeding and pasturing his sheep.

And now Jesus links himself directly with all of that through this claim, I am the good shepherd. And it's so important that we understand the Old Testament leading itself into the New Testament, the fulfillment of prophecy.

In the Old Testament, ultimately, Jehovah, God led his people out of Egypt through Moses, as we mentioned earlier, with the young ones. And he protected them and he protected them and he protected them and he guided them and he settled them ultimately in the land of Canaan.

[6 : 31] He used Moses and then Joshua to take them into that land of Canaan. But what Jesus is telling us here is that he is the one who has been promised.

And this is culminating now in his person. He will do what is required. And all of the passages, they all point to Jesus.

And they all have their fulfillment in them. Because he is the good shepherd. So it's like Jesus brought all of the strands of the Old Testament, all the Old Testament shepherds strands together, culminating.

In the person of Jesus Christ. They all point to him. They all have their fulfillment in him. Because he is the good shepherd.

And there we had it through the prophecy of Ezekiel, as well as other prophecies. Where God says, I, I am the Lord God.

[7 : 40] And I will do it myself. I am the shepherd of my people. So here we have this, I am saying. There are seven I am sayings in John's gospel that are revealed to us.

And they're very significant to us. For example, I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the true vine. This one, another one. I am the good shepherd. And we'll go back to that same passage that we spoke of in the children's address. To that passage in Exodus chapter 3. When God revealed himself through that burning bush to Moses and called Moses to be the leader of the people.

And Moses said to God, well, who will I tell the people has sent me? And God said to him, you tell the people, I am has sent you. Because my name is I am who I am.

So you will say to the Israelites, I am has sent you. In other words, I am is God. And these I am metaphors that we have here in the gospel of John clearly identify Jesus as God.

[8 : 53] I am the one that is and that was and that is to come. I am Yahweh. I am Jehovah God. I am Lord over all. I am who I am.

So this is very significant that Jesus is here. I am the good shepherd. Because what we have here now in Jesus is God standing on earth in human history and telling us I am is here.

I am is now doing it. I am is fulfilling this role now in its entirety. This is the rescue mission of God and I am will fulfill that rescue mission.

God will fulfill it. The fulfillment of prophecy of God saying I am going to do it myself. And yet here again.

What we see is that Jesus has claimed they cause outrage and division amongst the Jews once again.

[10 : 01] And they are calling out to stone him and to get rid of him. Saying that you are just a man but you make yourself out to be God. And so this goes on and on with each claim Jesus makes in his ministry on earth.

And leading these religious leaders and many of the people to be determined that they were going to get rid of Jesus. And that he was going to be put to death and put out of the way.

Because he was spoiling their comfortable lifestyle. And he was coming with his new teaching. And they didn't agree with his teaching. They didn't believe he was the Messiah. The promised one of Israel.

They didn't believe that at all and they wanted rid of him. So it was causing outrage. Causing division. And causing a real stir amongst the people. And yet we are told by Jesus. Despite all of that I am the good shepherd. And the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. And as we are told there in John chapter 10.

[11:07] This laying down of his life is going to benefit the flock. Because it is going to give them life. And it is going to give them life in abundance.

And he. And he. Jesus. He never flinches from that responsibility. And the measure of the goodness of this shepherd.

Is what happened at Calvary. Because it is there that we see God's love for us. As it was. The people had their way.

Because God allowed the people to have their way. And in scripture we see. Jesus. On his way to Calvary. Stopping at Gethsemane.

Where. Much of the contents of the cup was revealed to him there. And he was sweating. As it were. Great drops of blood. God. Then the mob came for him. And he was through that mock trial.

[12:07] And he was convicted. On lies. That they had set up against him. And he is. Brought before the Roman soldiers. Where he is. Tortured.

And he is scourged. And the crown of thorns. Placed upon his head. And he is physically beaten. To. As scripture has it. Almost unrecognizable. In such a.

He was in such a state. And they crucify him. And on that cross. He endures. That three hours of darkness. Where he endures.

All these spiritual agonies. In our place. To the point. Where he lost the consciousness. The conscious awareness. Of God's presence with him. Crying out. My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me?

And yet he endures. And he overcomes. And he gives us that. Great victory. It is finished. And it's all for God's glory.

[13:10] And it's all for the safety. And the well-being. Of his flock. Of his people. That's the reason. He endures. And that's where we see.

The measure. The real measure. Of God's goodness. Towards us. And he now feeds the sheep. Food that. He has acquired for them.

Through his atoning work at Calvary. And he provides the best for their soul. Constantly. He leads them to good pasture. And his people's souls delight in that.

Just as we'll sing. In our closing. Psalm. Psalm 23. And just as it was in the Old Testament. With God leading his people.

By the pillar of cloud. By night. And. By day and the pillar of cloud. By night. And. He protects his people. Just as. Israel protected. By God's presence.

[14:10] In the Old Testament. So Jesus protects his people. His sheep. Even though. All of his people are exposed to. So many different kinds of dangers. Here in this world.

So vulnerable. In so many ways. With this. Spiritual warfare. That they are constantly battling. And yet he is keeping and protecting.

Each one of his people. Through it all. And how different that is. From the false shepherds. That we read about. In. A reading.

In Ezekiel. And yet we have this God. Who has done this work himself. On our behalf. And he is still seeking. He's still seeking.

For souls. Lost souls. To bring them into the flock. And I ask the question now. Are you part of this flock? Are you part of.

[15:07] Of. Jesus' own flock. His people. Are you still outside? Are you still wandering? Are you still lost? Are you still searching? Jesus is saying.

Come to me. Come to me. Because. I care for you. And I have given. I have given myself. For you. He is a God who gives.

And secondly. He is the God who knows. Many people today. They. They just want to be. On their own. And.

They don't want to be bothered. About anything to do. With the claims of Christ. And some people. They claim. God speaks to them. And yet. The strange thing is that. They never speak to him.

And they never read the book. That he has gifted to us. His word. And God says. I know my sheep. And.

[16:05] David. The psalmist. Acknowledges this. Particularly in Psalm. 139. Where. The psalmist. Acknowledges. Before God. He says. You know the words.

In my mouth. Before I speak them. You know even the thoughts. In my mind. Before I think them. He says. You know my sitting down. My rising up. My going in. My coming in. My going out.

You know everything about me. The shepherd. Knows. His sheep. You see.

Christianity is not like. Other religions. It's not. Some cold. Hard. Moral creed. Jesus is not a shepherd. Who is indifferent. To his own sheep.

To his own people. He is deeply personal. In this relationship. With each individual one. Because he knows them. And he also confirms.

[16:59] My sheep know me. It's a two way relationship. He knows them. They know him. And that's the relationship. All of his people have.

And he goes on to say. Not just that. They don't just know me. But they know my voice. Because. I speak to them. And they speak to me.

And we communicate. With each other. So he knows his sheep. He knows his people. And his people know him. And his people know his voice. And his people follow that voice. And that person. Through faith. And through his word. And the promises of his word. And he cares for his sheep. His sheep are all different.

But he knows them. And cares for them. At whatever level. They are at in this life. No matter how weak. Or strong they may be. No matter how. How timid.

[17:55] No matter. How fearful. No matter. How bold. Or forthright. He knows them. And this shepherd. Gives them. Just the right. Amount of care.

As well. He knows. Exactly. What they need. He carries them. When necessary. He gives them. His undivided attention.

At all times. And he lavishes. His personal care. On them. That's how great. This good shepherd is. He is the shepherd.

He is the shepherd who gives. And he is the shepherd who knows. And thirdly. He is the shepherd. Who includes. Christianity.

Is not an exclusive club. In any way. Shape or form. And we see that. Even at the beginning. As Jesus called. His disciples. He called them.

[18:54] From all walks of life. Tax collectors. Fishermen. So on. And yet. The Jewish religious leaders. At that time. They only allowed people in.

Who. Who were. Seemingly. Of good standing. And good. Upright. Looking people. They had no care. For. For the beggars. They had no care.

For. For anyone. Who was nothing. In Jewish society. You had to be something. In Jewish society. To be in. That club. As it were. That's the way. The Jewish. Religious leaders.

Operated. At that time. And they were rewarded. In many ways. Financially. And given places of honor. And so on. By the people. That they allowed.

Into. Into their. Religion. But what God says to us. Is this is a gospel. For all people. It's an invitation.

[19:50] To us all. There's nobody. Excluded. God is not. God. God is not. God. God is not. A middle class. God.

For middle class. People. As some would. Like to understand it. But if we look at scripture. We look at. We look at examples. Of. Of conversions. Of people. Being brought to faith.

From. From all walks of life. The blind beggar. Bartimaeus. The tax collector. Zacchaeus. The woman. Of Samaria. Who had.

Who had. Who had been. Divorced several times. And was now living in sin. We. We. We look at. The disciples themselves. They were. Brought in. We look at. All the blind people.

The lame people. The people. Who had. Who were demon possessed. The ones that these religious. Wouldn't. Leaders. Wouldn't look at. And yet. Jesus. Took them all. It's totally.

[20:44] Inclusive. This gospel. And we must be very careful. Ourselves. Never. To box. God in. As it were. And I say that. With all due respect. We mustn't box God in.

Because. His word. Does not allow for that. He loves. Everyone. Equally. As John 3.16. Puts it. So simply. And so beautifully. And this is a gospel.

For all people. Of all countries. And all nations. As his great commission. In Matthew 28. Tells us. Everybody. Is included. This good shepherd.

He finds. His own sheep. And he brings them back. And we're told. By Isaiah. In his prophecy. We're told. That. He says. All us. All we like sheep. We have gone as three. We have turned everyone. To his own way. And the Lord.

[21 : 44] Has laid on him. On Jesus. The iniquity. Of us all. And Peter tells us. He tells us. In his epistle. That.

We were like sheep. Going as three. But now. Those who have come to faith. Now. We have returned. To the shepherd. And overseer. Of our souls. Jesus. In that wonderful chapter. Of Luke. Chapter 15. We have. The parables. Of the lost sheep. And the lost coin. And the lost son. And each one of these parables. Emphasize. Jesus's love. For. Each individual. Sheep. And we look at the parable. Of the lost sheep. And we see his love.

For each individual sheep. There were a hundred sheep. We were told. In that parable. And one. Is lost. One is missing. So. The shepherd. Leaves.

[22 : 43] The ninety-nine. Together. In a safe place. And goes out. Searching. For that one sheep. That is missing. Each individual sheep. Is so valuable. And. Jesus's concern.

For the lost. Is so strongly. Emphasized here. And. It's worth us noting. The way that God counts. He counts.

One. By one. Stressing. The value. That he puts. On every soul. He counts. One by one. Notices. There's one missing. And goes out. To seek it.

And to bring it back. Into the fold. And we see. The shepherd's. Care for the sheep. Again. The sheep.

May have wandered. Away on its own. But it's the shepherd's. Responsibility. To see. That it comes back. To the flock. And. It's there. That we see. The perseverance.

[23 : 39] Of the shepherd. And the care. And love. That the shepherd. Has. For his own. Because he searches. Until he finds it. And then he puts it.

On his shoulders. And he carries it back. Again. Stressing the importance. Of each. And every soul. Before God. And he is a God.

Who is still in the business. Of seeking. And saving the lost. Taking them back. From all countries. And all nations. As we read. There. Places they have wandered off to.

And he brings them back. And he's bringing them back. To their own land. To be one flock. With one shepherd. With no. Ethnic divisions. And we read of that.

Especially I think. In. Revelation. And. Chapter 7. It's brought out. So clearly. For us there. At verse 9. In chapter 7.

[24 : 40] chapter 10. Where John. Was shown. This great vision. Of people in glory. And he says. After this. I looked. And behold. A great multitude. That no one could number. From every nation.

From all tribes. And peoples. And languages. Standing before the throne. And before the lamb. Clothed in white robes. And so on. he's a God who will ultimately and a shepherd who will ultimately take his own sheep to be home with himself in that place that he has prepared for them and we're told that in John 14 and at verse 3 there Jesus says and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and I will take you to myself that where I am you may be also because as a good shepherd at the end of time he will take all of his own to be with himself but here's the key thing only his own only his own people will be with him those who have placed their faith and trust and hope and confidence in him because as a good shepherd at the end of time a division will be made those who are his own will go with himself and those who are not his own will have that final separation banished away from his presence forever for eternity he laid down his life so that his own people could be with him for eternity a person is not saved because of any good they've done any of their own self-righteousness they're not saved because of any good works they're not saved because of any religion or knowledge they might have or anything else but it's all about this amazing grace and love of God this good shepherd who has laid down his life for his sheep and he's still searching but he tells us

I have come to save that which was lost and I ask are you following are you following him are you holding on to him because if not he wants you back as well and he is searching even this morning itself searching searching for souls that will that want to be with him that will that will trust him and believe in him this shepherd sheep image that we have here it's a great image that emphasizes the closeness of that relationship this unique relationship this bond that can never be broken as Paul tells us at the end of Romans chapter 8 he says for I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels

nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord that is how strong that bond is even death itself cannot break it when you need him he's there for you just as we read just as we sang there in Psalm 121 and as we're just about to sing now may it be that you won't just sing the words of the Psalm the Lord is my shepherd but that you would know this shepherd for yourself are you part of this flock do you know him is Jesus yours and are you his he says

I am the good shepherd let's pray our Father in heaven we bless you and thank you for the marvel of all that you have done for us and as we have been considering this this morning itself Lord we thank you for the shepherding of Jesus for all of his people and we thank you for your gospel that says come and that you are still searching and seeking out those who are lost who are yet unsaved we pray Lord that your word would just encourage your own people this day and we pray that that might be a means of bringing souls who are yet in darkness out of that darkness and into the marvelous light of the gospel from sheep that are straying and lost and wandering in their own way to be brought into the fold of all your sheep where the care of the shepherd is is a care that is loving and a care that is never ending bless our time together Lord may it be to the glory of your name forgive our sins in Christ amen well let's let's close we'll sing from

Scottish Psalter version of Psalm 23 it's on page 229 page 229 of the blue psalm because we'll sing the whole psalm to the tune Amazing Grace the Lord's my shepherd I know at want he makes me down to lie and pastures green he leadeth me the quiet water spy to the last verse goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me and in God's house forevermore my dwelling place shall be to the Lord's son the Lord's my shepherd I walk home he makes me down to lie in pastures me he leadeth me the quiet waters by my soul he hath restored again and me to walk the pain within the paths of righteousness in part his own in state time

[32 : 28] Hah h h Thou art with me and I ought, And some be come for still.

My table love has furnished In presence of my Lord, My head I would love with all the night, And my love overflows.

Goodness and mercy of my life Shall surely follow me, And in God's eyes forevermore, My dwelling place shall be.

Before I do the benediction, just a reminder please to remember to take one of the forms for each home and to fill out the detail we've asked for there as quickly as possible and return it when you can.

Thank you. Now, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest upon and abide with each one of you now and always.

[34 : 45] Amen.