

The Good Shepherd

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[0 : 00] If you could turn again to that passage in John chapter 10. John chapter 10 and today I would like to look with you from verses 1 to 21 of that chapter.

As George Bush addressed the nation on September 11, he closed his speech with the following words, Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me.

In the David Lynch film, The Elephant Man, John Merrick begins to recite the 23rd Psalm. After having failed to impress the hospital administrator and with expulsion from the hospital looming over him.

Mr. Echo in the series of Lost, as he remembers all those memories of his brother and how he died, he begins to quote to himself the 23rd Psalm.

Even when we begin to look at our own lives, we draw much comfort from the 23rd Psalm. We often hear these words sung or read at funerals and at other times.

[1 : 17] Why is it such a comforting thought? Why is it such a comforting thought to know that there is a good shepherd somewhere out there, looking after us, guiding us, being with us every minute of our lives?

Why is this idea that there is a shepherd out there in the world so prominent within society the world over? Our longing for shepherding has meant that each one of us, every person, is relying on somebody or something to guide them through life.

We all have our own shepherds. Now the shepherds we have might be totally different from the next person. They come in all shapes and sizes and they are for any period of our own lives.

Some of us may decide that we are the person best able to shepherd us throughout our daily lives, that we are the person who is best able to direct and control our lives.

We know the best course of action that we must take to get through this life. Others, however, may go to their family and friends and say, OK, how should I next proceed? How should I go about living this good life?

[2 : 29] Others may choose philosophies or ideals. Some may choose the media. There are countless shepherds available to us. However, all these little shepherds that we set up in our world soon lead to confusion.

They soon fail. The shepherds that we place in our lives so often come to nothing. So often we eventually reach the point where they fail us and we need to find a replacement shepherd because that one is no longer good for us.

However, as we look at these verses in John, the writer is adamant that there is one shepherd, one shepherd who gives hope for us all, one shepherd who is not like these little shepherds that we have in our lives, one shepherd who is able to direct and guide our lives to the very end, one who will not fail, one who is always there, one who will never let us down.

John tells us in his gospel that this good shepherd is none other than Jesus. He is the one the world is looking for. He is the one everybody on planet Earth needs to guide them through this life.

He is the one that leads them to the abundant life that each person so desperately craves. And so in our time together, I would like to look at three lessons which we learn from this passage.

[3 : 51] First, in verses 1 to 6, we learn that Jesus is the true shepherd. The second thing I want to learn is that in verses 7 to 10, Jesus is the one that offers us life to the full.

And finally, from verses 11 to 18, Jesus is the shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. To put it more simply, we will be asking, who is Jesus, what does he offer, and how can he make this offer?

First of all, Jesus is the true shepherd, verses 1 to 6. To appreciate the imagery of these opening verses, we kind of have to have in view the context of that situation.

The setting for the sermon is the sheepfold. And to appreciate the sermon, we must appreciate and understand what a sheepfold was like in those ancient days. What was common at this time was for a number of families to hire out a large enclosure which would contain a number of different flocks, each belonging to the different member families.

The families would then join together, and they would employ a servant, a hireling, a watchman, to look after the sheep in this enclosure. Each morning, one by one, the shepherds would come to this enclosure, and from out with the enclosure, they would call out to their sheep, and one by one, each member of their flock would come out of the pen.

[5 : 24] And the shepherd would then lead his flock to the new pasture. However, if someone who was not a shepherd wants to come and wants to harm the sheep within the enclosure, he has to sneak in a different way.

He goes over the wall, and then when he is in the sheepfold, he can then reap the havoc that he so desperately wishes to do. He can either go about stealing or killing the sheep. So this is the kind of scenario that Jesus brings up to the listeners of his time.

Jesus uses this setting to build up to the announcement that he will make concerning himself. Jesus is going to say that I am the shepherd you have been waiting for.

Jesus is the shepherd that the people have been waiting for. But why? Why does Jesus choose to describe himself as the good shepherd? What is the significance of that phrase to the people who are listening?

Well, the Jews at that time are waiting for a promised shepherd. One who had been predicted throughout the Old Testament. For example, the prophet Jeremiah had talked about the Lord looking after the people like a shepherd looks after the flock.

[6 : 35] The shepherd King David speaks in Psalm 23 about the Lord being a shepherd. However, the prophecy that would be ringing in their ears as Jesus speaks is found in Ezekiel.

And in Ezekiel it is declared that God will be the shepherd who looks after the sheep. Ezekiel 34 verses 11 to 16. I'll quickly read these verses.

Ezekiel 34. For thus says the Lord God, Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that 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 I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and will bring them into their own land.

And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel by the ravines and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land.

[7 : 40] There they shall lie down in good grazing land and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God.

I will seek the lost and I will bring back the strayed and I will bind up the injured and I will strengthen the weak and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

Verse 23 then says, and I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them. He shall feed them and be their shepherd.

And so when Jesus uses the imagery of the good shepherd, there is no mistake. This Jesus is deliberately setting himself apart from all the other little shepherds in the world and he is saying, I am the shepherd promised by God.

I am the good shepherd, the one you have been waiting for. I am God and I have come to lead and to guide you to that promised heavenly pasture.

[8 : 44] After making this declaration, he then goes on to declare what the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep will be like. There is something about the shepherd that marks him out, that makes him different from every other shepherd.

And it's found in verse 3. And what is unique about this shepherd is he calls his sheep by name. You may wonder, what's the significance of this?

The significance of this is that, do you know any shepherd that names his sheep? Sheep are a source of income. Sheep and a shepherd, it's a mutual thing.

The sheep are the source of income for the shepherd. The sheep are not a family pet. You don't call your sheep Fifi or Rex. They are sheep. They're your source of income. And so Jesus is different because the good shepherd knows his sheep by name.

We are a name to Jesus. We are a Bill, a Bob, a Margaret or a Sarah to Jesus. We have an intimate relationship with him. He knows our rising up and our setting down.

[9 : 49] He knows every little detail about us. He knew our first day at school. He was there when we went through our times of trouble. He was there when we had that times of momentous joy. He was always there for us.

Jesus is the shepherd that knows his sheep intimately and loves them intimately. In a world that wishes to depersonalize us, to reduce us to a list of numbers or statistics, this is wonderful news. This is amazing news that the good shepherd knows his sheep by name, that the good shepherd loves his sheep intimately, and the good shepherd will lead his sheep.

However, not only does the good shepherd know his sheep personally and intimately, but he also leads his sheep. This relationship is active. It is moving.

It is not simply that God knows everything about us and leaves us to struggle in this world on our own. No. The shepherd helps us daily. The shepherd guides and leads us in our lives.

[10 : 50] The Middle Eastern shepherd is the one who stands in the front and walks before the sheep, protecting them from the dangers of the bear, of the lion, or other dangerous animals.

And as Jesus calls out to us who are his sheep, we must listen to his voice and we must go where he directs us. And he is directing us to the heavenly pasture, that place of perfect peace and rest as described in Psalm 23.

That is our privilege of being part of the flock, that the God of the universe knows us intimately, and he is directing us to a better place.

Let this be your comfort, that the shepherd knows his sheep, and he is leading his sheep to that promised land. There is no situation that he is not in.

There is no situation that he cannot overcome. He is aware of your every fear, your every worry, your every joy, your every doubt, your every hope. He knows you and all the specific issues that are yours.

[11 : 59] And he is gently leading you to that promised pasture. So the first thing we can take from this passage is that Jesus is the divine shepherd that was promised to the people in the Old Testament.

And this shepherd knows his sheep, and he leads his sheep. Second, Jesus offers us life to the full. Verses 7 to 10. We all want a good life.

We all want to make the most of this life. We all want to make the most of every minute of every day. We are desperate to be fulfilled. But so often, life just doesn't happen like that.

Life seems to slip away so often. It is not as fulfilling as we would first like it to be. And I think Douglas Copeland, the writer in his book, *Life After God*, sums up life very well when he says this. When you are young, you always feel that life hasn't yet begun. That life is always scheduled to begin next week, next month, next year, after the holidays, whenever. But then suddenly you are old, and the scheduled life didn't begin.

[13 : 04] Life can feel as if we are always chasing shadows. We have this inner thing that tells us there must be more to life than meets the eye. There must be more to it, but it seems to slip through our fingers, seems to elude us.

However, the news that Jesus brings to us today is that we can attain that inner satisfaction that we desperately require. We can have that satisfaction in life if we are willing to let Jesus be our shepherd.

Verse 6 indicates indicates that the people listening haven't really understood what Jesus was talking about. And so to amplify his teaching, he again uses another picture.

And this time it's a picture of a sheep pen in a rural area. And in the rural area, it's not as complex as the sheep pen in the urban area. What would happen is that there would just be a kind of rough wall, and inside the wall would be the sheep, and there would be no gate, no fixed gate across the door of the entrance.

And so what would happen? The shepherd would simply be the door. He would lie across the door. He would be the one guarding who would come in and who would come out of the sheep pen. And what we have in verse 9 is the clear indication that Jesus says, I am the door.

[14:25] Jesus is saying that if you want to enter into the sheep pen, there is only one way. There is only one way to enter, and that is through Jesus. He is the door to this sheep pen.

There are no other options available to us. Later on in this gospel, Jesus is going to declare, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

I love the fact that the image is of a gate, because the image of a gate is that it's easy to get through. On the other occasion I get out on the hills and go for a walk, I do not like stiles.

I hate them, because you're usually wet, you're usually tired, and you have to weak your leg over the stile and try and clamber over it. However, you want a gate, because you open the gate and you just fall through it.

It's very easy to get through a gate. You just want to collapse into the next area. Jesus is the gate. You may be tired from life.

[15:23] You may be tired by all the things that life has thrown at you, but the wonderful news for us today is that you don't need to struggle to get into the sheep pen. You don't need to put any effort in.

You just need to fall into the sheep pen and you will be accepted. Though the entrance is narrow, the invitation is wide. Verse 9, it says, whoever enters through me will be saved.

This is the wonderful message of the gospel. This is the message of the Bible. Christ is for you.

That should fill us with hope. The message is illustrated time and time throughout the Bible.

Previously in the chapter, we have a blind man. He is an outcast. He is never going to be able to fulfill the responsibilities of looking after his family. He is an outsider.

He is left begging on the streets, but he comes to Jesus and he is saved. Saul, the great persecutor of the church, so feared was he amongst the church leaders of the day. The leaders refused to believe that he was converted, but he came and he was saved.

[16:26] This is the promise that we are all asked to come, that all are invited into this sheep pen, that Jesus does not bar the door to anybody.

Life to the full is about finding a deep spiritual satisfaction. It is not about cluttering up our lives with various different things.

It's all about a new relationship, a relationship with God, a relationship which enables us to appreciate our true value. As members of the sheepfold, we, however, do not only have contentment in this world, but we have a promise of a wonderful life to come, an eternal life with the Father, as John writes in Revelation 21, 2-4, I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne say, Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. So the second thing we notice in this passage is that Jesus is the one that offers us life to the full.

[17:59] Jesus is the one in whom we have that deep inner satisfaction. We've seen, first of all, that Jesus is the shepherd, then we've seen that Jesus is the one that offers us life to the full.

But how can Jesus offer us life to the full? What sets him out? What marks him apart from all the other shepherds? Well, verses 11 to 18 explains why Jesus can offer us this life to the full.

We find exactly why Jesus can make such a bold claim. He lays down his life for his sheep. This is why he designates himself the good shepherd in verse 11.

Unlike the hireling who speeds off for the first sign of trouble, Jesus displays the depth of his love by putting the life of the sheep before the life of the shepherd.

He does not withhold anything, but offers it all so that the sheep may be saved. There is a story from the First World War which recounts the story of a medic who came to treat the soldier on the field of battle and the medic said to the soldier, I am sorry soldier, but you have lost your arm.

[19:18] To which the young soldier replied, Doc, I didn't lose it, I gave it. This is similar to what Jesus teaches you. His death was not some stroke of misfortune.

It was not an accidental death. Rather, it was intentional. Jesus comes into the world knowing exactly what the world will do to him.

That is the strength of his love for us. That is the strength and the power of his love. Even though he knows exactly how man will treat him, he still comes.

He adds flesh to himself and comes into our world and takes upon himself our sin so that we will be saved. Notice in verse 15, he does this for the sheep, me and you.

He comes into this world so me and you can be saved. But you may ask yourself, why does he need to die? Surely his example is all we need.

[20 : 21] Surely his example of living a good life is all that we need. If you think like this, you've missed the point. He has to die because the sheep are in danger.

Verse 12, 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.

The reason why the hired hand turns and runs is that a wolf has come. The sheep will be savaged if nothing is done about it. Jesus knows the sheep are in trouble and we know it too if we look deep into our own hearts.

sinner like us are going to face the wrath of God's judgment. We are the ones who will stand before the fearsome wolf as it were of God's judgment and we cannot escape it.

This is why we need the good shepherd. This is why we need a shepherd who will stand, a shepherd who will not run, a shepherd who will stay and who will act on our behalf.

[21 : 33] We don't need someone who is going to bolt at the first sign of trouble. We need a saviour who can take our guilt and sin and bear it on the cross. Jesus' death is a saving death.

He who knew no sin became sin so that we would be spared the wrath of God's judgment.

However, look at verse 18. Jesus quite clearly states that this has been his plan and the father's plan from the very start.

Jesus and God have prearranged this great event to happen. This is the wonderful news of the Bible. This is the news that the good shepherd sees the trouble we're in and does something about it.

He enables us to become one of his flock to find that green pasture. That is the wonderful news of the Bible that God does not leave us on our own to stand and be savaged by the fearsome wolf of his judgment.

No. He sends someone someone who will stand for us who will take away the sin that we have who will face the punishment that we deserve. Do we see the situation that will face us that we are going to confront one day?

[22 : 46] Do we realize our need of a shepherd of a saviour? Jesus is the good shepherd.

shepherd. Jesus is the one who has taken upon himself the wrath of God so that we may experience the love of God the Father.

He is the one that can save us and will save us. He is the one if we turn to him will enable us to stand. Who is our shepherd this morning?

Is it the everlasting shepherd? The good shepherd who is God? Or are we still trying to rely on little shepherds? Are we cluttering our lives with trying to follow the various little shepherds?

Or have we decided that we don't need the wisdom of man we need God on our side? Do we understand that God has done it all so that we may be part of that sheepfold?

[23 : 55] Do we understand that Jesus as the good shepherd is leading us to a better place? A place of pasture? A heavenly kingdom? Where one day the problems of this world will vanish?

Do we realize this? For those of us who are already part of the sheepfold what an encouragement to have a great shepherd what a joy to have Jesus guiding and directing us intimately involved in every aspect of our lives taking us to be home with our father that is what the good shepherd does that is what the good shepherd offers the good shepherd lays down his life for us my prayer is that each one of us will listen to the good shepherd and will follow him and will put aside the little shepherds which we may have been following Amen Let us pray