

The Good Shepherd

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[0:00] Amen. Well, when I was training for ministry, I did a summer placement on the Isle of Arran, which! Arran, you'll know, is called Scotland in miniature, a beautiful island, and I worked for a minister! who was responsible for three different congregations on the island, one in Shiskin, one in Pern Mill, and one in Loch Ranza.

And how it would work would be on one Sunday, one of us would preach in two locations and the other in one, and then the following Sunday we'd switch and do two and one. And the churches were spread across the island, and so we'd have to drive between the churches for the services. And what sticks in my mind about those early morning Sunday drives is the amount of sheep on the Isle of Arran. And it's not just the amount of sheep, it's being held up by sheep as they wander across the road.

And there aren't many roads on Arran, and so when you were stuck behind sheep, you just had to wait until the shepherd came and he moved his sheep to wherever he wanted them to go.

And as I sat in the car watching behind the wheel, it was obvious, really obvious, that the shepherd cared for his sheep and that he actually knew these sheep, and the sheep responded to him by going where he wanted them to go.

[1:24] And he interacted with them, and you could see that he cared for them. He knew them, they listened to him, and they followed him. And I guess you only see that in rural life, don't you?

You don't see that in Addie's Land or Knightswood or Bearsden or wherever. But it's an image that Jesus uses here, isn't it, to describe his relationship with his people.

Jesus is the good shepherd, the shepherd who knows and who leads and protects his people. And he also gives his life for his sheep.

Now, of course, it's an image that Jesus' listeners would have been familiar with, not just because it was part of their society, but because the Old Testament scriptures all the way through are rich with this imagery of shepherds and sheep.

And shepherds and sheep are used to describe God's relationship with his people. That's why we sang earlier Psalm 23, the Lord's my shepherds, because all through the Old Testament, the people of Israel, the Jewish nation, are likened to sheep, and God is the shepherd.

[2:39] But at the same time, in the Old Testament, Israel's leaders are also regarded as shepherds, but they're denounced as bad shepherds because they don't care for the sheep.

They don't care for the flock that God has entrusted to them. And so in the Old Testament, God had promised to give a true shepherd. From David's line, who would rescue his people, who would rescue and care for his flock.

And here, Jesus identifies himself as this good shepherd, coming to fulfill all of the Old Testament promises for a shepherd who would unite God's people as one under his loving leadership.

All those who will listen to his voice and follow him. And so Jesus here is claiming to be the only way that we can enter into God's flock to become one of his people.

And so let's look then at this passage under three headings this afternoon. First of all, the authority of the shepherd, verse 1 to 10. Second, the sacrifice of the shepherd, verse 11 to 21.

[3:47] And then thirdly, the security of the shepherd, verse 22 to 42. So first, the authority of the shepherd. Jesus here states his authority as the true shepherd of God's people.

As opposed to the Pharisees, who he mentions, they are the false shepherds who are a danger to God's people. And Jesus speaks in what is like a parable to emphasize this.

So when we read from verse 1, very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by some other way is a thief and a robber.

The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. Now you'll notice there's no break from the end of chapter 9 and the beginning of chapter 10. So Jesus was debating with the Pharisees in chapter 9 and he judged them for their spiritual blindness. [4:49] And now in chapter 10, what he does is he accuses the Pharisees of being bad shepherds. While, of course, he is the good shepherd. Now we've already said that the Old Testament scriptures are rich with this imagery of shepherd sheep.

And the closest parallel to what Jesus says here in John 10 is Ezekiel chapter 34, which we had as our call to worship at the beginning of the service.

Now in Ezekiel chapter 34, you can read it later. It is really a turning point in the book of Ezekiel. Because before this, Ezekiel had been proclaiming judgment on God's people.

But then in chapter 34 of Ezekiel, he promises restoration for God's people. And this restoration will happen with judgment on the failed shepherds who didn't take care of the flock and resulted in the sheep being scattered.

But then God himself promises that he will rescue the sheep who've been lost and scattered. And he will send a true shepherd to tend and nourish his flock.

[6:03] And then Jesus comes and he claims to be this promised shepherd. And it's a massive claim because Jesus is in effect saying that he is the Messiah.

He is God's King who has come to rescue his people. He's the true shepherd. So verse 4 says, When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

But they will never follow a stranger. In fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice. And so Jesus identifies his sheep as those who listen, those who know, and those who follow his voice.

So Jesus calls his own sheep by name, which means if we're a Christian, Jesus knows us personally.

There's a closeness. There's an intimacy, a belonging to him. And you'll understand that if you are a follower of Jesus. But the Pharisees didn't get this.

[7:10] Look at verse 6. Jesus used this figure of speech like a parable, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them. John's saying that Jesus had given this parable, shepherd sheep, but they don't get it.

So Jesus identifies himself as the gate for the sheep in verse 7 and 8. I am the gate for the sheep. That's the third I am statement that Jesus gives in the Gospel of John.

He is the gate for the sheep. He's the one. He's the only one who opens up the door into God's people. So verse 9 tells us, I am the gate.

Whoever comes through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture. He's saying he alone gives us access into God's family.

And so his sheep will listen to his voice, the voice of Jesus, and no other. Because of who he is and because of what he gives, we must listen to him.

[8:21] Verse 10 says, The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. He gives life to the full, abundant life, because he's our shepherd and we're his sheep.

And that's why the shepherd has authority over our lives. And so we'll gladly listen and follow and obey him because if he is our shepherd, then he knows what's best for his sheep.

He knows what's best for your life and for my life. And so before we move on, the application here is clear. Firstly, it is that Jesus is the gate for the sheep, so we must enter into God's salvation through Jesus.

There's no other way to be in a relationship with God. And then when we have entered through the gate, then we must listen to Jesus' voice because it's the voice that speaks for our good.

And if only people would realize that today when it comes to Jesus. Realize that what Jesus says doesn't harm our lives.

[9:35] It doesn't restrict our freedom like some people might think. What he says gives us life to the full, abundant life. And so listening to the voice of Jesus and following him leads to our flourishing and our freedom as human beings and to our enjoyment.

Whereas he says, we come in and go out and find pasture. We receive and experience rich blessing by following Jesus.

Because the voice that addresses us by name comes from one who knows us and who knows everything about us. And yet he loves us despite what we are.

And he welcomes us into his flock where he watches over us. And he protects us because he has come to shepherd our lives.

And so the question is, do you know him as your shepherd? Have you bowed to his authority? And have you experienced what he gives?

[10 : 50] Are you listening to his voice above all other voices? Because your heart's desire is to follow him. If not, then it's likely that you aren't one of his sheep.

But as one of his sheep, you'll know the sweetness of his voice. You will listen out for it above the cacophony of all other voices in our culture.

And there are plenty of voices in our culture that will preach to you a message of how you should think, how you should live, how you should be. But that won't do you good.

It will only do you harm. This is the voice, the voice of the shepherd that we need to hear. And he speaks with authority to lead us and give us life.

So that's our first point, the authority of the shepherd. Second, the sacrifice of the shepherd in verse 11 to 21. That's highlighted by Jesus in these verses.

[11 : 52] But his words are surprising given what he's just claimed. Because he's just said that he is God's long-promised shepherd. He's the Messiah. He's God's king.

And yet he's saying he is going to sacrifice his life for the sheep. Doesn't seem to make sense, does it? But this is fundamental to the good shepherd's mission.

So much so that he doesn't just say it once. Did you notice that? Verse 11. I'm the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. That's once.

He doesn't even say it twice. Verse 15. Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father and I lay down my life for the sheep. That's twice. But he doesn't just say it twice.

He says it three times. Verse 17. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again. Three times in the short space of verses.

[12 : 52] Jesus is emphatically saying I lay down my life for the sheep. Saying how absolutely central his sacrifice is to his work.

What's his sacrifice? Well his sacrifice is his willing death on a cross. That's how committed the good shepherd is to his sheep.

And it's a total contrast to the hired hand. There in verse 12 and 13. The hired hand is like the false shepherds of Israel. In Ezekiel chapter 34.

Who are only interested in themselves and looking after themselves. They don't own the sheep. They don't protect the sheep. They don't actually care for the sheep because they are false shepherds.

So different from the true shepherd who's saying he'll never abandon his sheep. He'll even die for his sheep. He'll lay down his life.

[13 : 49] Now why would the good shepherd lay down his life for the sheep? Well obviously because the sheep are in danger. And they need their shepherd to save them. Just like a good shepherd with a real sheep would rescue his sheep if it was in trouble.

And so all of this is speaking of Jesus' death on the cross. To take away our sin and to take away the punishment that we deserve for our sin.

Because if we mix metaphors for a moment in John's gospel Jesus is not only the good shepherd but he is described as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Because the sacrifice of Jesus is the fulfillment of all these Old Testament promises. Like in Isaiah chapter 53 where the Lord promises that his servant would suffer for our sin.

Just listen to the language in Isaiah 53 where the shepherd is the sacrificial lamb for the sheep. We all like sheep have gone astray.

[14 : 59] Each of us has turned to our own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed He was oppressed and afflicted yet he did not open his mouth.

He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before its shearers is silent. So he did not open his mouth. Can you see what the prophet Isaiah is saying here?

He's giving us this picture of the Lord Jesus sacrificed for the sins of his people laying down his life for the sheep. But who are the sheep?

Verse 16 says I have other sheep that are not of this sheepfold I must bring them also they too will listen to my voice and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

So there are other sheep who aren't of this sheepfold so the sheepfold that Jesus is speaking about here is Israel the Jewish people and so the other sheep who are outside this sheepfold of Israel are the Gentiles.

[16:07] the Gentiles of course who first read these words of Jesus but Jesus is also talking about us. We're the other sheep if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Jesus says I must bring them also. So Jesus came for you and for me. And Jesus calls us into his flock so that there would be one flock and one shepherd.

He's the shepherd and we're the flock. So the people of Christ Church Glasgow and every other church and every other believer all over the world and throughout history are his flock.

and all of this comes together in verse 17 and verse 18 where Jesus says that he lays down his life voluntarily. Let's read.

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.

[17:22] This command I received from my father. Jesus is saying he willingly gave up his life. Not only that but he says he will take it up again meaning that he'll die but he will also rise to life because he has absolute control over his death and resurrection and so his sacrifice was a willing sacrifice.

Saying to us he loves his sheep so much that he was willing to lay down his life for them. But there's more to Jesus' death than this because Jesus lays down his life out of perfect obedience to his father.

He does whatever his father commands and so his sacrifice is related to his father's love for him. The father loves the son because the son loved us to death.

Sinclair Ferguson uses this relationship between parents and children to help explain this because those of us who are parents will know something of this with our children.

So we love our children we have always loved them and we will always love them. And yet when we see them do something special score a goal perhaps or win a prize for some kind of personal achievement or do a kind act instinctively or whatever it is when we see our child do something good as a father or as a mother our heart is full of love for them in that moment or when we see them perhaps dealing with some kind of difficulty or enduring some kind of suffering our heart just swells with love for them as we watch them face that particular challenge.

[19:20] And we think well you're my child and I have always loved you but now my heart goes out to you in love because you've either accomplished this great thing or you have responded so well to this tough thing.

And so as Jesus hung on the cross watched by his father and even under the judgment of his father for the sins of the world Jesus says the father loved the son.

What does he say? The reason my father loves me is that I lay down my life. God loved him Jesus for his willingness to lay down his life for us.

Jesus became obedient to death even death on a cross. And so as Jesus says this his listeners are divided some say he's deemed possessed and raving mad others say this couldn't possibly be the case.

And so the application is well what's your response to who Jesus says he is and what Jesus says he came to do.

[20:43] Because if he is the good shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep then do you realize you need to be in his flock? You're in danger without him.

So first the authority of the shepherd second the sacrifice of the shepherd and third the security of the shepherd. This is explained by Jesus in this debate he has with the Jews.

Now interestingly in verse 22 this debate takes place some months later. It doesn't just follow on immediately. So verse 22 23 the setting has changed and the Jews want to know who Jesus is and so they demand that he reveals his true identity.

Verse 24 the Jews who were there gathered around him saying how long will you keep us in suspense if you're the Messiah tell us plainly. So is he God's Messiah they're asking because he also claims to be God's son.

But Jesus has already revealed his true identity to them. So why don't they believe in him? The answer is simple it's because they aren't his sheep.

[21:53] Verse 25 Jesus answered I did tell you but you do not believe. The works I do in my father's name testify about me but you do not believe because you are not my sheep.

Jesus makes it clear that all the works he's done all the signs they point to his identity. They testify to who Jesus is.

He's the son of God and so the works he does are done in the father's name but they won't accept these miracles that Jesus has done and what they say about him.

They don't believe because they aren't his sheep. And that's what leads on to Jesus speaking about the security that he gives his sheep as their shepherds.

Let's read these great verses verse 27 to 30. My sheep listen to my voice I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish.

[22:53] No one will snatch them out of my hand. My father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my father's hand. I and the father are one.

He's talking about his sheep. About you if you're one of his followers. Because his sheep are the only people who are safe and secure.

His sheep listen to his voice and follow him. And so if you aren't listening to the voice of Jesus and following him then you can't be his sheep.

but if you are one of his sheep just listen to how safe you are. You've been brought into a relationship with Jesus.

He knows you. He knows you personally and he knows everything about you. He knows everything about your past. All of your mistakes.

[23:52] All of your failures. He knows everything that's going on in your life right now. All of your fears. All of your struggles. All of your difficulties.

And he loves you. He laid down his life so you could be his. And so he's never going to abandon you is he?

That's why he wants you to keep following him. To know that his way for you is best even if it isn't always easy. And you don't have to follow Jesus for long to realize that life with Jesus is never an easy ride.

It is going to have difficulties. It is going to have challenges. It is even going to have pain and suffering. But continuing to follow Jesus through it all is the proof that you are saved.

You are one of his people. One of his flock. And Jesus says he gives us eternal life. So we'll never perish.

[25:02] That's our security in this life and our security forever after we die. Because eternal life is both life to the full abundant life now but it is also life everlasting in the life to come.

And so Jesus is saying my sheep are safe and secure right now in this life as I lead them but also after death I will be with them forever.

And he expresses this with such a powerful image by saying no one can snatch them out of my hand. That's the strength of commitment that Jesus has for his people.

For you if you're one of his people. But if that wasn't secure enough, Jesus goes on to say my father who has given them to me is greater than all.

No one can snatch them out of my father's hand. I and the father are one. So we're Jesus' possession given to him by the father who will never let us be snatched out of his hand.

[26:21] This is the ultimate security. He is never going to let you go. And maybe that's what you need to hear right now.

This afternoon you need to hear he will never ever let you go because you've got your doubts. And life is just really tough.

It's really difficult. Everything's so hard and you feel like giving up. Giving up on following Jesus perhaps. Maybe even giving up on life itself because the world just seems to be caving in on you. Well do you hear what your good shepherd says to you? Are you listening to his voice because his hold of you as one of his sheep is completely secure?

He's promised that there is no one, there is nothing that can ever snatch you out of his hand or his father's hand. Think of it this way, if Jesus laid down his life for you then you can be sure that his love for you is never in doubt.

[27 : 36] He'll always be with you and he will stop at nothing to lead you safely into his presence. He's got you now and forever.

It's actually impossible to conceive of being any more secure than this, isn't it? With a father and the son working as one for our salvation.

So Jesus is the good shepherd who came to save us. He alone is the way to God who laid down his life as a sacrifice for us. And so we must recognize who he is, listen to his voice, and follow him. Only then can we know the security of eternal life. Only then are we able to say, the Lord is my shepherd. shepherd.