

The Good Shepherd

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[0 : 0 0] Oh folks, John chapter 10. My soul needed this this week in John chapter 10 and it needs it this morning. And can I suggest that you need the truth of John chapter 10 this morning.

And just in terms of being reminded this week of one of the things we know to be true about God, that he is sovereign. He knows the end from the beginning. He knows what is happening in each of our lives.

He knows what we would be facing this week as a church. And in his sovereignty, his total control, I could not have picked a better passage to be preaching today had I been given the whole Bible to pick from as the one that we're in.

And so John chapter 10 is just the most profound of passages. So please do have it open in front of you as we get into this today.

But let me just to get us into it. Let me ask us at the start. If you were an animal, what would you be? Right? Have a think about it. It's one of those awkward icebreaker questions that we all love.

[1 : 0 5] And we're all so glad when people ask it, aren't we? If you were an animal, what would you be? And I have to be honest and say that everything inside me wants to answer that question and say tiger.

Okay? King of the jungle. These guys are top of the food chain. They're brave. They're powerful. They're large. They're in charge.

You fend for yourself. And I want everything that's true of a tiger to be true of me. And I hear Katy Perry sing in the background. I've got the eye of the tiger, a fighter dancing through the fire because I am a champion.

And you're going to hear me roar. And I think to myself, I would love to be a tiger. I would love to have the things that are true of a tiger and have them true of my life as I lead it in the world.

Except the thing is, I know none of that is true for me. Right? Powerful. How about he needs his eight hours sleep a night minimum or he's a walking zombie the next day?

[2 : 0 6] How about brave? Well, how about somebody who gets so easily distracted, his emotions are up and down, and so often I sit under a dark cloud of discouragement?

Okay? I am no lion. And that's why I think I have found, by God's goodness, such strength in being reminded of the wonderful and liberating truth that comes if you and I embrace the animal that Jesus says we are in this passage.

This animal is not top of the food chain. This animal has fleas. This animal doesn't know what it's doing, and yet this animal is where we will find freedom today in embracing that we are it.

Because what this has done this week, in all honesty, is being in this place again and reminding myself of this truth. It's taken the eyes of my heart off of a weak me, and it's flung them onto a strong Christ.

It's taken them off of how I'm feeling, which is always such a sugary peg on which to build the foundation of our lives, and instead it's fixed them on what I know to be true.

[3 : 33] Can I suggest if that's you here this morning, and you're coming in here and you're not feeling great, what you need this morning is not people telling you that you should be feeling better. What you need to be this morning is to be in a place where you're reminded of what is true.

Because Jesus says quite simply, and this is one of the most simple yet profound statements I think any human being has ever made. Jesus says, I am the good shepherd.

And it's unique among the I am statements, the other ones that we get in John's gospel. All the others reveal something about him, except this one also reveals something humbling and freeing about us.

You know, years ago there was a Scottish minister and hymn writer called Horatius Bonnard. They don't do first names like that anymore, do they? Horatius Bonnard.

He lived in Broughton on the other side of the city early 1800s. I've loved learning about Horatius Bonnard over the years. That's why many of you know the Bonnard Trust that we're involved with as a church, is where they take their name.

[4 : 48] I think it was Andrew Bonnard, Horatius Bonnard. Anyway, big brain, he penned these words to a hymn to describe what his soul found in Jesus.

And this is one of my favourite hymns. And if you want to go home and go on YouTube, you'll find a wonderful version of it by a lady called Audrey Assad. Simply says this, here it is.

I heard the voice of Jesus say, come unto me and rest. That's what Luke I read at the start. Lay down thou weary one, lay down thy head upon my breast.

I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad. And I found in him a resting place. And he has made me glad.

And that is the song of someone who's embraced what it is to be a sheep. I find myself coming back to that song again and again and again and again in the Christian life.

[5 : 49] And so what we're going to do over the next half hour or so, is we're just going to bleat our way through this passage of scripture. And here's the beat of the bleat.

It just says, how good is our shepherd? Now if we're going to savour the sweetness of what Jesus says here even more, we need to understand that he's saying it at a particular time in this gospel.

With Jesus, if you've learnt anything, it's that timing is everything with him. No opportunity is wasted. No moment is squandered. No, Jesus says it in John chapter 10.

Here's the first thing that we need to understand. is that there's bad shepherds in the background of this. So come with me. Verse 1, Jesus says, Truly I say to you. And immediately we should be asking who is the you that he's speaking to.

And if you glance back to verse 40 of chapter 9, you just go back a few verses, you will see that Jesus is still talking to the Pharisees. In the immediate context of John chapter 9, Ian took us through that last week.

[6 : 54] Jesus has just given sight to this blind man. And he has become, verse 38, look at that little description there we get of him. What did he do?

He worships the Lord. He worships Jesus. This man has become a worshipper of the living God. And is that not a wonderful description of what it is to be a Christian? Worshipping Jesus.

Jesus has quite literally given this man his life back. And you think everybody should be rejoicing in this scene, but verse 34, the Pharisees cast him out of the synagogue.

You're a liar. You're not speaking the truth. And so when Jesus speaks in this passage of thieves and robbers, when he speaks about hired hands, who don't give two hoots about the sheep, this is a jab at the Pharisees.

Now these men would know that this isn't the first time that God's had some really chilling words to say about bad and selfish leaders of his people.

[7 : 58] Ezekiel chapter 34. Ezekiel, one of the prophets that we get in the Old Testament, speaks to his generation. God, through Ezekiel, speaks to his generation of really, really bad and selfish leaders.

And you get it in Ezekiel 34. You can read it in your own time, a little snapshot of it there. These leaders are not feeding the sheep. They're not caring for the sheep.

They're not running to meet the needs of the sheep. They're not tracking down the sheep who have run way, way off course. And as a result of that, God's people are massively suffering at the neglect of this generation of God's leaders.

And the root cause of it, I think, is that the relationship between God's leaders, if you like, the under shepherds, and God the great shepherd, that relationship that's meant to be driving everything that they do, is non-existing.

Now it was Robert Murray McShane, who was another Scottish pastor from way back, he observed that what his people needed most from him was his own holiness.

[9 : 12] Now what he meant by that is if he's saying, if I'm not pursuing the Lord, if I'm not loving him and worshipping him, I've got nothing to pass on to my people. I'm in no fit place to lead them in worship of the Lord.

He recognized that in order to serve and love God's people, you need to do so out of an overflow of a heart that's captivated by a wonderful Christ. Something that we're always asking ourselves as elders of this church.

We did it a few weeks ago as we went away. Is this job, is this role still a joy to us? Because we love the Lord Jesus. We love him, and that love for him spills out in a love for his people.

Because no one is more committed to his people than Jesus, as we'll see. We serve you, dear friends, and it is a joy to do that, because we love him.

And we love him, and get this right, because he first loved us. And there's none of that going on in Ezekiel 34, and God says to those shepherds, I am against you.

[10 : 23] But in the very next breath, God promises, not only to deal with the bad shepherds, but also gloriously and graciously, God promises, not to post an advert on S1 jobs for a better shepherd.

Not to try and recruit and go head hunting to get more shepherds. God says, he promises to be to his people. He will come and be the good shepherd that they need.

John chapter 10, that's the context. There's bad shepherds in the background, but the good shepherd is in the foreground. And I just want us to hear, if we can do this today, right, as we hear his voice, I just want us to hear, as he speaks, three wonderful tones in the voice of our good shepherd today.

If you're a note taker, these are three C's. And hear him speak to you today. He says, I want to be your shepherd. I want to be your shepherd.

Here's the first. Hear in his voice, him express, his complete care of us. Jesus says, verse 3, and just take it what he's saying here.

[11 : 38] I call my own by name. Verse 14, he says, I know my own, and my own know me. So in terms of his relationship with his sheep, Jesus doesn't know of his sheep.

He doesn't just know about his sheep. He knows his sheep. Now many of you will have that experience of running a race, right?

It's marathon day today. I didn't even know that until yesterday. Marathon day today in our city. You know what it's like when you do these races and what do you get on your chest to put on? You get a number, don't you?

And nothing makes you feel special and known like knowing that you are number 44978, does it? That's not far off being a telephone number, in truth, is it?

44978. We cannot get our heads around knowing that amount of people. But Jesus is not like us. He's not just like us on our best day.

[12 : 44] Right? The all-knowing one. When Jesus says he knows his sheep, we need to understand that we are not a number to him. You are a name to him. These are wonderfully intimate words that convey his wonderful and perfect knowledge of every detail of our lives.

And that's the metaphors what a shepherd in this day would do. He would sleep beside the sheep. He would camp out and eat with the sheep. He'd even have nicknames for his sheep. Because in this day, his flock is his livelihood.

Right? It is his bank account, if you want to put it like that. He loves his sheep. They are his sheep. And Jesus is saying in a greater way, he knows his sheep. Right?

And you need to take this in today if you are his. He knows every single struggle that's going on in your heart today. And he knows every single weakness that you're carrying in your life today.

And he knows every fear that's in your mind that's dominating you today. And he knows every need of your soul. And so when we call out to him, this is not like when you phone your insurance company and you get the customer services line that says, your call is important to us, your number 18 in the queue.

[14 : 03] And you think, how can I be important to you if I'm 18 in the queue? Friends, when we pray to our Father in the name of Jesus, we need to understand that he is right there at the right hand of God interceding for us by name, by need.

And when we pray, we have the ear of God. Not begrudgingly, but delightfully. He loves us. He loves us.

You know, Chloe did that the other day. She came down into our room at one o'clock in the morning. I want a drink of water. I can't get to sleep. Now, who does that? Only somebody who's got the confidence that they're going to a parent, not a teacher, right?

That we have that kind of access before this God. We can pray to him knowing that he loves us because of the son. In the words of the late Tim Keller who died and went to be with Jesus last week, Tim Keller, profound influence on my life and many others in the world, he says this and take this in.

To be loved but not fully known is superficial. To be known but not loved is our worst nightmare. Only Jesus knows us to the bottom and he loves us to the sky.

[15 : 23] Hear the complete care this morning of your shepherd's voice. And hear secondly, hear the total commitment to you in his voice. Verse 10, Jesus says, others have come to steal, kill and destroy.

And you see, it's just a contrast that he's setting up here. He talks about the hired hand. The hired hand sees the wolf coming and he thinks to himself, I'm getting out of there.

This is not my job. I did not sign up for this. I'm not taking on the wolf for this sheep. I'm not paid enough for this. Right? I remember doing that one of my first ever jobs as a student during the summers.

One of those old school restaurants we used to have to go to. Some of you remember this kind of thing. You had to clock in and stamp. Yeah? Stamp, clock, that was you in. When you left, stamp, clock, that was you out.

I'm doing my shift. And that's the hired hand. I'm only paid to do this. I don't care about the sheep. It's my job.

[16 : 24] But with Jesus, it's not a job. With Jesus, this is his calling. They say that, verse 12, because they don't own the sheep.

They don't care what happens to the sheep. They just want to care themselves. Jesus, on the other hand, he could not be more in it for his sheep because he owns his sheep. Do you see that word?

He owns them. And it's a wonderful thought today that if you're a Christian here this morning, that Jesus called you. Jesus bought you with his precious blood.

Jesus took responsibility for you and I's sin. Jesus pulled out all the stops to make you and I his sheep.

And the truth that we need to understand this morning is that this good shepherd, he has us. He has us. Our times are in his hands.

[17 : 25] No one is getting to us because our shepherd will defend us. Our shepherd has our times. Our shepherd has our lives. And as dark and as scary as the valley gets and as painful and as long as the path might be, even through death, this shepherd, not only is he with us in the darkest valley, this shepherd will lead us through to the other side.

And no one will snatch us from his hand. We'll see that next week. No one will snatch us from his hand. And what I want us to know this morning as a church family is that no one is more committed to loving us than Jesus is.

Jesus will never run away from us. Jesus knew exactly what he was taking on when he called us to himself. What makes him the good shepherd is verse 15.

He says, I lay down my life for the sheep. He's talking there about the cross. In other words, if you were a roaming reporter going around the streets of Jerusalem on the day that Jesus was crucified and you held up a microphone to his mouth and said, Jesus, what are you doing up there?

The answer which he could have given is I am laying down my life for my sheep. Friends, if you want to know his commitment to you, if you want to see his love for you demonstrated, that's where we look today.

[19 : 11] Hear in his voice his total commitment to you and thirdly, hear the absolute control in his voice.

Jesus says, I lay down my life. That's verse 17. I lay, now just take that in, I lay down my life. In other words, he's no tragic hero. If you grew up in Scotland, you'll know Macbeth was standard reading.

Shakespeare kind of created that term, didn't he? Tragic hero, classic, you take a good character, you show them making a bad choice, audience sympathizes, classic tragic hero. Jesus is no tragic hero.

He lays down his life. He is in complete control of that. That is the very reason he came. He lays down his life. He's in charge.

He lays it down and he takes it up again. He's talking about the resurrection. He lays down his life. He takes it up again. Jesus is in total control.

[20 : 15] And it reminded me this week of that song, Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf? And as I think about the biggest wolf that's facing each of us in our lives, the wolf of death, we have to understand that Jesus has taken care of it.

Because he laid down his life, because he took my sin, because he took my place, because the Father raised him in power, he took on death, which is the biggest wolf facing us, and he won.

And in him, his victory is our victory. And what's driving all of this? What's driving all of this? You've got to see this. See the glorious answer at verse 15 and 17.

What's the reason? 15 and 17. It's because of the loving relationship that exists between the Father and the Son. Jesus, the Son, obedient to death.

The Father in heaven who sent the Son loves him for it. The Holy Spirit sent to apply that work to our lives. Salvation is the overflow of that loving relationship of our triune God that has existed for all eternity.

[21 : 38] And so when Jesus talks about life to the full, the life that he has come to give his sheep, life to the full, is life with our three-in-one God.

And see the promise that Jesus makes at verse 16. He says, I have other sheep. Now in the context there, who's in his mind's eye? It's the Gentiles.

Yeah? It's other sheep who in the years to come will hear the voice of the shepherd and will respond to his voice as his word goes forth.

Before we move to Edinburgh, Alex and I spent five months in Malawi in this place called Blantyre. And it's called Blantyre because it's after one of Scotland's leading explorers slash missionaries called David Livingston.

David Livingston takes the gospel to the people of Malawi. There's that close relationship that exists between Scotland and Malawi still to this day. I didn't know this, but in David Livingston's grave down in Westminster Abbey is this verse from John 10.

[22 : 50] I've got other sheep, says Jesus. I've got other sheep. In other words, I've got people all over the world, down the years, through the ages, who are going to respond to my voice as I call them to me.

And here's the blessed thought this morning of you're a Christian. However weak you're feeling, however messy you think your life is, it's if your trust is in Jesus, you're here because you are in Jesus' mind as he said this.

He called you by name. That should be a great evangelistic comfort to us, that Jesus is in the calling business. You know, my calls have little effect.

We were at the Meadows Park yesterday, couldn't find one of our kids, shouting her name, no response. But Jesus calls his sheep and they respond to his voice.

It's what's happening now. What gives us any confidence in evangelism is that Jesus, through his word as it goes forth, he has his people who will respond to his voice. As Danny goes off this morning, as she goes, and in her heart to go to Asia, what gives her any confidence this morning, and what gives us as we support her this morning as a church, any confidence that the Lord will do things through her and through her work, is this verse, that Jesus has other sheep.

[24 : 18] He has sheep all over the world who he wants to call to himself. I don't think anyone's expressed this better than American missionary D.L. Moody. He says this, and think about this, and I know for many of you God has laid things like this international mission work on your heart.

He said this, God doesn't expect the impossible from us, but he wants us to expect the impossible from him. And you have to say, what a shepherd.

Verse 20, some in this crowd say he's insane. Others, verse 21, say he couldn't have opened the eyes of the blind man if he wasn't who he says he is. And the question we've got to ask ourselves is how do we respond to the news of the good shepherd?

Do you know his voice in your life presently? Maybe for some of us we've never heard nor responded to his voice.

Well, I take it that as Jesus has walked off the pages of John chapter 10, and as his voice has gone forth, that some of us need to stop and think about his claims about himself and about us.

[25 : 29] Dear friends, it is foolishness to go alone in life. But for us who know Jesus as our shepherd, I wonder if some of us just need to be still this morning and listen to him, to fix our eyes on him and follow.

Let me ask you, are you, are we, letting the good shepherd feed and lead our souls as he speaks to us in his word? You know, there's a reason that so often the funerals that I've done over the years, 90% of them have featured Psalm 23.

We don't have time this morning to go into the connections between Psalm 23 and John chapter 10. I would love to do that, except to say that Jesus steps right in to fulfill that psalm. But I love that bit in Psalm 23, as Jesus is the shepherd, leads us by still waters.

What happens to our souls? He restores them by his word. What are you doing by means of cultivating that deep trust in and love for the great shepherd as he leads us through the ups and the downs of life?

What a shepherd. You know, I heard, went for a walk with Ross this week and he said something about his dad. He said, my dad keeps saying, I just don't know how you would do this.

[26 : 48] I don't know how you would do this without Jesus. And it's so true, isn't it? It's so true. I just don't know how you would do it.

I don't know how you would fathom it and get beyond it if it wasn't for the good shepherd. So friends, what animal would you be? And just as we close and as we think on that, and as we think about embracing the posture of a dependent sheep who's totally reliant on the good shepherd.

You know, I had another shepherd in my mind this week. Life staging that. That I'm at. She's a shepherdess actually. I had little Bo Peep in my mind all this week.

And I didn't know it until I googled it this week. And I don't know if you know this as well, that there's several verses to that nursery rhyme. Third verse. There's a lot of them.

Goes like this. Little Bo Peep began to weep and lay down to rest for a while. She fell fast asleep while counting her sheep.

[27 : 56] Then dreamt they came home with a smile. And you have to say that's lovely and cute. And credit where credit's due, Bo Peep right there. She clearly loves her sheep. She loves her sheep.

But she's also powerless to do anything to help them. And it strikes me that the Pharisees in John chapter 10, sorry, in the background of John chapter 10, do the opposite of Bo Peep.

They've got all the power in the world to help people. All the power in the world to help the sheep. But because they don't love the sheep, they're not bothering. But what I want us to understand as we finish this morning about Jesus.

Jesus is one who has both the power to help his sheep and the love for them that drives him to act. He is all power and he is all compassion.

And they are married, both of those things, in the person of Jesus. Friends, our lives could not be in better hands than the hands of the good shepherd.

[29 : 02] And so three quick things as we close. Let's know his voice. Let's trust his heart. And let's follow his lead. Let's pray together.

And so Father, I just pray in the silence now. Lord Jesus, as we've heard your voice in John chapter 10, as you walk off the pages of the Bible.

Lord, I pray that this voice would come as a challenge to many of us. I pray that it would come as a comforting balm to some of us.

And Lord, it would come with great strength to all of us. And I pray particularly for those here today who are walking some of the darkest paths, through some of the darkest and scariest valleys, that they would be so aware of your rod and your staff in their lives.

Lord, they would be so aware of your presence with them as you lead them and love them through the good shepherd. So I just close with that thought that Fraser brought this week to me.

[30 : 20] That I just don't know how you would do this without Jesus. And so Lord, I pray that as we finish our service and as we spend time together and as you, as we speak, Lord, that your spirit would be ministering to us in our conversations, that we would be bringing the truth of God's word to bear on our lives.

Father, help us to be a community that is founded on the truth of the gospel. Father, we just thank you as we close for your incomparable love and commitment to us.

In Jesus is worthy and in his precious name we pray. Amen.