

I AM the Good Shepherd

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- [0 : 00] Now I want to begin this morning by asking you to picture in your mind two things. First of all, I want you to picture in your mind our current world.! Tell me, what do you see?
- It probably isn't a very pretty picture, is it? There is war and conflict everywhere, Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Hamas, even Thailand and Cambodia.
- There are economic pressures here and there, rising food prices, increasing insurance premiums, job insecurity. And one big reason behind all this bad news, not the only reason but certainly a big one, is failed leadership.
- Corrupt leadership. Conflicts persist because some leaders are happy to treat human lives as disposable, sacrificing thousands of soldiers to serve their own delusions of grandeur.
- People suffer because money that is earmarked for worthwhile projects end up in the pockets of greedy leaders instead.
- [1 : 13] So, that's the first picture. Now let us shift gears. I want you this time to picture in your mind a typical Jesus scene during Christmas time.
- Not very hard, isn't it? We just witnessed one. What do you see? Almost certainly there will be a baby, nicely wrapped, lying in a manger.
- Perhaps he'll be sleeping, all quiet and peaceful. Perhaps even glowing. There might be an idealized family scene as this baby is surrounded by parents, by his parents and well-wishers.
- Jesus is there, perhaps as just one figure among lights, trees and presents. Now that you have those two pictures, I want you to do one more thing.
- I want you to try to relate the second picture to the first. It's a struggle, isn't it? Does that Jesus of Christmas have anything to say to the real world?
- [2 : 20] I mean, that picture, a Christmas picture is pretty cozy and homely. But at the same time, it almost has an imaginary quality to it. It feels more like an escape from reality, at least for a week or so.
- So, framed this way, Christmas doesn't really seem to have anything to say to our real world. Except Jesus himself says, nonsense.
- Because in today's passage, he declares, I am the good shepherd. I am not just some cute, cuddly child for you to coo at. There we go.
- Because that's not how we normally think of Jesus at Christmas, is it? When we think of shepherds during Christmas, we normally think of those shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem.
- But we don't think of that actual baby as the shepherd. But Jesus says, that's me. When you think about shepherds, you shouldn't just be thinking about those shepherds we saw earlier out here.
- [3 : 29] You should also be thinking about me. Because I am the good shepherd. So that's the big surprise of our Christmas passage this morning.

But once that surprise has worn off, we might then say, okay, but why should I care if Jesus is a shepherd? I mean, I think I am probably right in saying that no one here this morning is planning to go into the shepherding business.

So what's the big deal? Well, let's think briefly about what a shepherd is for a moment. Back in the ancient world, shepherds were basically the backbone of the community.

Some looked after their own livestock, while others were hired to manage massive flocks for wealthy owners. And at the end of the day, their whole lives revolved around three simple things.

Making sure that animals had enough to eat. Finding them water. And keeping them safe from predators or thieves. In other words, a shepherd is the ideal leader.

[4 : 43] He guides, provides, protects, and nurtures. And Jesus says, I am the good shepherd.

I am the good leader. But there is more going on. You see, put yourself in the shoes of Jesus' original audience for a moment.

You are almost certainly Jewish. And that means you know the Old Testament. And you would have heard the words of Ezekiel 34 before.

Our first Bible reading this morning. Now, Ezekiel 34 was written during a time when there were plenty of bad leaders. The king of Judah was corrupt and unjust.

The priests cared little for the sanctuary and they taught falsely. The prophets said peace was coming when the opposite was true. Not that the non-Israelite kings were any better.

[5 : 47] The kings of Tyre and Egypt were proud and self-serving. And it is in such a world that God says, Ezekiel 34 verse 11, I myself will search for my sheep and look after them.

Or, verses 23 and 24, I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them and be their shepherd.

I, the Lord, will be their God and my servant David will be prince among them. I, the Lord, have spoken. And now, hundreds of years after God spoke those words, Jesus stands up and declares, I am the good shepherd.

I am the Lord, the son of David, coming for my sheep to rescue them and look after them in a world filled with bad leaders.

And if what Jesus says is true, certainly, Christmas has never been more relevant in our present world.

[7 : 00] But how is Jesus the good shepherd? How is he different from shepherds who are careless, crooked, and corrupt? Well, today, John 10 shows us.

John 10 will show us three things about our good shepherd. And as we look at each of these characteristics, we'll see why this child in the manger is not just an escapist fantasy, but truly good news for a bad news world.

So firstly, The good shepherd knows his sheep. Did you pick that up in verse 14? Jesus says, I know my sheep and my sheep know me.

You see, earlier in John 10 verse 3, we discover Jesus already knows our name. And we like it whenever people know our names, don't we? You know, I often read the posts in the Malaysia Airlines Facebook group, and over and over again, people flying business class love it when the air stewardess greets them by name.

And they complain loudly when that doesn't happen. Because it is nice not to feel like just a random passenger. But of course, just because I know your name doesn't mean that I truly know you.

[8 : 30] After all, it is very unlikely that those stewardesses know your hopes and your dreams, or your fears and your worries, let alone your true inner self.

But Jesus is different. You see, in what way does he know his sheep? Look at verse 15. He knows his sheep just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father.

In other words, Jesus doesn't just know what is stated on your IC, but he knows you with the same personal, loving intimacy, that marks his relationship with the Father.

Let me try to illustrate. So imagine that later today, your friend gives you a gift. And when you get home and you unwrap it, you are over the moon.

Because your friend has bought you exactly what you wanted. Even though you've never mentioned it to him. You say to yourself, wow, he really knows me.

[9 : 45] That's the kind of knowledge we're talking about here. Or, if you are married, sometimes it is so gratifying, isn't it, when your spouse can read your mind perfectly.

So, before you even say that you're feeling cold, he's already got the blanket ready. Or, she's already putting the chili sauce on your Christmas turkey later on, because she knows that's exactly how you like it.

Because they know you inside out. That's how Jesus knows you. Except he knows you a thousand times better than even your spouse or your best friend.

But perhaps that isn't such good news for you. Because as the pastor Tim Keller once said, to be known and not loved is our greatest fear.

And so we're scared that Jesus knows everything about us. Because that means he knows all the stuff we prefer people not to know about.

[10 : 51] You see, there is a reason why God causes sheep. And trust me, it's not because we are smart. Sheep are well known for being a little bit stupid.

They get lost easily. In fact, even if they can see their home, sometimes they can't still quite navigate their way back there. And they can't really protect themselves as well.

Take the horse as a point of comparison, for example. If an enemy comes, a horse can run. Or it can at least kick out with its powerful hind legs.

But sheep, they're pretty useless. Can you imagine sheep kicking out or running swiftly?

But that is what we are. You see, we might be able to project a good image to our fellow sheep. We project confidence, righteousness, decency, competence to others.

[11 : 59] But deep down, even if others might not see it, we know the ways in which we have been dumb, the way in which we have sabotaged ourselves by doing wrong stuff.

We are people who easily get lost and can be a bit stupid. I know I've done lots of stupid stuff in my life. And by stupid, I mean sinful stuff.

Stuff that was displeasing to God. And the Bible says that's what every single person is like. That's why the world is in such a mess. And my greatest fear is that God sees all that and he exposes all that.

And then he walks away shaking his head and muttering what a horrible sheep I am. But here is the amazing truth John 10 tells us.

Jesus says we are not just known but love. Because remember, he knows the sheep just as the Father knows him and he knows the Father.

[13 : 18] Because to say the Father knows Jesus and Jesus knows the Father is, in this case, the same as saying the Father loves Jesus and Jesus loves the Father.

That's how the Trinity works. I recently read how a tombstone that was being transported got accidentally left behind at Dublin Airport.

and here is the ironic thing. On that tombstone was this inscription you will always be remembered never forgotten.

But Jesus says I am the good shepherd and that means you will never be forgotten but love.

love. Just imagine that. Remember what Tim Keller said earlier to be known and not love is our greatest fear. But then he goes on to say to be fully known and truly love is a lot like being loved by God.

[14 : 28] It's what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our own self-righteousness and fortifies us for any difficulty life can show at us.

That's how Jesus is our good shepherd. He is the leader who knows us. But then comes the natural follow-up question.

How do we know Jesus truly loves us like this? After all anyone can say I love you. But what's the evidence he loves us like this?

Well that brings me to the second thing John 10 shows us about the good shepherd. Secondly, the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

That's what he keeps saying, doesn't he? It's right there in verse 11. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. And it is there again in verses 14 and 18.

[15 : 38] That's how we know Jesus loves us. And to bring this out, Jesus contrasts himself with what he calls the hired hand. Now who is that?

He's the guy who doesn't own the sheep, but is simply paid to look after them. That means his main interest isn't actually in the sheep, but in his wages.

As Jesus says in verse 13, he cares nothing for the sheep. So that means when the wolf comes, he does a cost-benefit analysis.

And he will come to the conclusion, these sheep are not worth his very life. So when the wolf comes, he says, bye-bye, I'm out of here.

And I think we can all resonate with that, can't we? Perhaps some of you have taken a part-time job before, maybe doing something like moving tons and tons of parcels in a warehouse, and every day you are moving hundreds of them, and whatever is in them is all the same to you.

[16 : 52] And then one day a robber breaks in, waving a gun, and shouts at you, those boxes are your life. Easy decision, isn't it?

We completely understand the mindset of the hired hand. But here's the thing, Jesus, he's not like that.

He's ready to take the hit for the sheep. And by the way, we must remember what these sheep are like. These are sheep who often pay no attention to his voice.

These are sheep who might even sometimes get angry with him and bite him. But he is ready to take the hit for them. But there is more than that.

You see, so far what I've been talking about is the willingness of the shepherd to die for his sheep. But actually, no shepherd in the ancient world goes deliberately looking to die for their sheep.

[18 : 00] No shepherd would deliberately go and look for wolves and say, come now, attack me so that I can go and die for my sheep. So think of that recent attack at Bondi Beach in Sydney on the Jewish community, for example.

You might have heard about that heroic food seller who decided to risk his life by trying to take down the armed attacker. In fact, he said something like how he knew he might die doing that.

But if it meant saving the lives of others, he was willing to. But here is the thing. He didn't go looking for it.

He didn't wake up that morning saying, oh, let me go sacrifice my life by looking for a terrorist to take down today. If he had died, he would have died a hero, yes, but it would also have been seen as a tragedy, something that he did not go looking for.

But once again, Jesus is different because look at verses 17 and 18. The reason my father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again.

[19 : 18] 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, this command I receive from my father.

Now, do you see what Jesus is saying? He's saying he isn't just willing to die, but he deliberately made the choice to die.

he is saying the reason Christmas happened was precisely so that he could come and die. Now, that doesn't make sense at first glance, does it?

I mean, if the shepherd dies, who's going to take care of the sheep? But Jesus is clear. Look again at verse 11. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

And that word for in that verse is incredibly important. Jesus is saying that his death will result in life for the sheep.

[20 : 25] By his death, they are saved. It is a direct substitution. You see, the Bible says we all like sheep have gone astray.

We have told God I don't need you as my shepherd, my leader, my guide, my authority. I'll go my own way. That's what the Bible means by sin.

And because we have all sin, all sin carries a penalty. And because our sin is against the creator of this universe, that penalty is eternal death.

perhaps think of it this way. If you were driving recklessly and you ran over a cockroach, are there any consequences?

No. Now, let us say you ran over someone's cat instead. Are there any consequences? Now, there might be.

[21 : 33] now, let us say you ran over someone's child. Are there any consequences? Absolutely.

The penalty will be severe. Why? Because of who you have committed that offense against. Now, consider that it is the eternal living God whom we have committed an offense against.

that's why the penalty is eternal death. But Jesus now comes and says, I'm going to come into this world as a baby.

But I'm going to grow up to be a shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. In other words, I'll take the penalty so that they don't have to.

And from the manger, he proceeds to the cross and accomplishes exactly that. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep on their behalf in their place.

[22 : 46] That's why Christmas exists. And as he does so, thirdly, the good shepherd gathers his sheep.

That's the third thing we want to see today. You see, Christmas doesn't just tell us that Jesus is the good shepherd. It also tells us we can know this good shepherd.

Did you see the end of verse 14? Let's have a look at it again on the screen. I know my sheep and my sheep know me.

But the question is, how can we know the Jesus of Christmas? And the answer is by responding to his voice. That's what he also says earlier in chapter 10 verse 3, my sheep hear my voice.

So, if you are Jesus' sheep, you will respond to his voice. Now, there are so many voices in this world, aren't there?

[23 : 55] There are so many shepherds who want to lead you a certain way. For example, there are shepherds who promise you satisfaction if you just indulge in the world's pleasures, chase riches, chase experiences, and you'll be filled, the shepherd says.

But this shepherd never delivers on his promise. Then there is the other kind of shepherd, the one that is constantly prodding you to keep chasing the next best thing.

Oh, you got straight A's? Fantastic. Now, go work yourself to the bone so that you can finally be someone. Oh, done that? Great.

Now, quick, get on a plane and document every corner of the globe. Not because you actually want to see it, but just to make sure that everyone else knows you are living a life worth envying.

And this kind of shepherd is plain exhausting. But Jesus says, why not come to this good shepherd instead?

[25 : 03] The one who already knows you at your very worst and yet was also willing to die for you. For this is the very invitation of Christmas.

But maybe you're not sure. After all, how can I be certain he really did what he said? There are so many scammers nowadays after all. Well, look again at verse 18.

What did Jesus say? I have authority to lay my life down and authority to take it up again. So this shepherd says not only will he die, but he will rise again.

And that's exactly what he did. He backed up his words. By rising again, he guaranteed a new creation is coming, one in which our current bad news world will be no more.

And more than that, he showed he is absolutely qualified to be our shepherd. He is the one we should follow and obey. And he invites everyone on this journey.

[26 : 18] Did you see what he says in verse 16? I have other sheep that are not of this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and they shall be one flock and one shepherd.

In other words, Jesus is basically saying, guys, I didn't just come for my own people group. I didn't just come for the Jews. No, I have come for all the non-Jews too.

It really doesn't matter what your background is. You might be someone who did badly at school, who never felt like you would amount to anything. You might be someone who has made a lot of mistakes in your past relationships and you carry many regrets.

You might be someone whom everyone has looked down on and you kind of believe you deserve it. But Jesus says, I don't have an A-class flock, a B-class flock, and a C-class flock.

I only have one flock. And you can be part of it if you only do one thing, if you listen to my voice.

[27 : 36] you submit to me as a good shepherd, and you follow the one who values you as much as he does his heavenly father. And in a world filled with bad leaders, you can be certain you are following the best leader ever.

So will you do that today? You see, when you come face to face with Jesus, you only have two choices. excuses. You can make all sorts of excuses and say, verse 20, why listen to him?

Or, you could actually listen to him and let him open your spiritual eyes. Since we learn in verse 21, he specializes in opening blind eyes.

So which one will you do today? Well, I'm not going to force you into anything you don't want to do this morning, but perhaps there are some of you who feel like you need to talk to the shepherd today.

And if that's you, in a moment, I'm going to pray a prayer which you can echo in your own heart. And indeed, we would love it if you tell us whether you pray or you want to know more about Jesus by simply scanning the QR code that will appear on the screen a bit later on and leaving us your details and we will get in touch with you.

[29 : 08] But whatever you do this morning, don't ignore the good shepherd. So will you get ready to pray with me?

There will be a prayer that will be fleshed up on the screen. I'll give you a few seconds to just have a look at it so that you know exactly what you are praying and then after that I will lead us in prayer.

Let's pray now. Dear God, thank you so much that Christmas exists. Thank you so much that you sent Jesus into this world as the good shepherd.

shepherd. I admit that I am like a sheep who has gone astray and have not listened to your voice. But today I want to trust Jesus as my shepherd, trusting that he has died for my sin in my place.

And with his help, I want to follow him as he leads me through the hills and valleys of life, submitting to him as the leader of my life.

[30 : 23] All this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.