

John 10:1-21

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[0 : 00] Now if you're not familiar with the Bible, if it's fairly new to you, you might still know and recognise this passage, mightn't you? John chapter 10, it is Jesus famously calling himself the Good Shepherd.

And it's full, isn't it, this passage of heartwarming pastoral imagery of sheep and shepherds. I don't want to take away from that, but I want you to see that there is a bite to what Jesus is teaching here.

Just for a minute try and forget images of shepherds in Yorkshire leaning on fences and chewing blades of grass. Because this claim of being a good shepherd in this section of John is a highly political claim.

It comes at a time of deep political tension and religious paranoia. The background of what Jesus says here is in the prophet Ezekiel and in other places of the Bible.

Ezekiel 34 when God promises that he is going to remove oppressive rulers who are influencing his people.

[1 : 16] He is going to wipe them away and he himself is going to come and be a shepherd. He is going to lead them and he is going to care over them. He himself will be the shepherd.

And John puts this passage here just after the incident of the blind man, do you remember last week? Where his eyes are opened to the hypocrisy and impotence of the oppressive religious leaders of the day.

Jesus stands out, doesn't he, in stark contrast as one who is really going to fulfil God's promises. That he is the ruler. That God is going to give them to shepherd them and to care for them.

And so John chapter 10 is Jesus continuing to expose the religious leaders as false shepherds. If you listen to some of the words that he uses, I think he's talking about them. Listen, verse 1, he uses the word thief, robber.

[2 : 25] Verse 5, strangers. Verses 7 to 10, he talks about thieves, stealing and killing. He talks about a hired hand.

Now, as we go through the gospel, you might wonder, why on earth is there so much opposition to Jesus? Why do the religious leaders hate him so much?

There is overwhelming evidence, isn't there, of the good that Jesus has come to do, that God has sent him to do. So why don't they like him? The leaders of the religious police state.

Why do they hate him so much? Well, Jesus says here, it is because they are thieves. And they are robbers. And God has sent Jesus to remove them.

And to replace them. And to be the shepherd that God's people need. He is the person God says that we need, apart from anybody else.

[3 : 31] He is making an exclusive claim here, isn't he? Not just to be a good shepherd, but the good shepherd. He is the only one we need.

And many of the leaders and guides come, don't they, and go in our lives. Many of the helpers. Good advisors. Good people to give us good advice.

But he is the good shepherd. He is good news from Jesus. Now, there are things about him, and about how people respond to him, that reveal his unique identity.

That he is this unique shepherd that God has sent. And I want to show you those this afternoon. First of all, Jesus is exclusive ownership of God's people.

Jesus has exclusive ownership of God's people. That's one of the repeated themes in this passage. Jesus is the one who has legitimate claim on God's people.

[4 : 32] He enters, verse 2, through the gate. And the gatekeeper opens to him. Now, if somebody doesn't own a house, they don't belong in the house, if they're not legitimately allowed there, how

do they get in to the house?

Well, it is not through the front door with a key, is it? If a person doesn't own the house, or has the right to be there, how do they get in?

They get in through the window, or they get in over the back fence. They get in in an illegal way. And Jesus is claiming, again and again, that there is an ownership of God's people that gives Jesus the right to enter in and begin pastoral care.

Look at verse 4. When he brought out all his own, he goes before them. That is the true shepherd. Verse 12.

He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, doesn't own the sheep. Or verse 16, Jesus says, I have other sheep that are not of this fold.

[5 : 44] See what he's saying? He has authority. He has the authorisation to be the shepherd you and I need. To be the one shepherd that we ought to follow.

Because Jesus Christ owns us. God's people have been given to Jesus Christ. Under his care. And so Jesus has the exclusive right to tell you what to do and to bring blessing to you. Nobody else is allowed to do that. And you shouldn't listen to anybody ultimately to do that.

Our three-year-old boy, when he goes to nursery, if Emma and I can't pick him up at the end, it happens occasionally, we could send a friend to go and pick him up. But to do that, we give them a password.

So that the nursery knows it's not just some random stranger trying to take our child away. I won't tell you the password. But the password gives authority for that person to care for our child.

[6 : 54] And Jesus is saying here, isn't he, that he has been given that authority from God. He owns the sheep. He's been given authority to come and to command God's people to go the places where he wants them to go.

Verse 3, he calls his own by name. And he leads them out. And so do you know, before a person hears Jesus, a person who is not a believer, maybe that's you today, Jesus is saying here, isn't he, that there is a prior connection, there is a prior knowledge, there is a kind of prior relationship between Jesus and that person.

There is a connection of ownership. You know, there are people in this town, and there are people in your family, there are people who live on your street, who live as if God doesn't exist, and who live as if Jesus is not their shepherd.

But God has chosen some of them to give to Jesus, even if they don't know that yet. And if they belong to him, as he calls them, that will be an irresistible thing to them.

Do you know, Jesus is not worried about the growth of his church. He is not worried about church growth statistics. Because he owns his people, even if they don't know it yet.

[8 : 29] And he will have them. That is why only he can be the good shepherd. Nobody else, not your imam, or your rabbi, or even your church minister.

Not your life coach, or your favourite celebrity on TV, or your favourite journalist or politician. None of those things have that right to be your one and only ultimate shepherd in life.

But Jesus has that right. He has exclusive ownership of God's people. Secondly, he has exclusive recognition from God's people.

He has exclusive recognition. There's a video going around online of a group of sheep in a field. And it's in a country somewhere, I'm not sure where it is.

And they do an experiment. They get a few people together to try and get the sheep to come over by calling to them. It's in a language that I don't know.

[9 : 31] Presumably they're shouting some like, you know, here, sheepy, sheepy, come over. Each person tries. They take it in turns. But it's hilarious. The sheep just ignore them.

They just carry on eating the grass. They couldn't care less. And then they bring the farmer along, who owns the sheep. And as soon as he calls them, their heads kind of pop up like this.

And they stop eating the grass and they start running over to the farmer. It's great. What differentiates Jesus from the false shepherds is that the people he has come to rescue and care for will instinctively recognise him.

Did you see that? Verse 3. The sheep hear his voice. And he calls his own sheep by name. They know his voice.

Verse 4. Verse 14. I know my sheep and my sheep know me. A stranger they won't follow, he says. They'll flee from him, but they'll recognise me when I speak to them.

[10:41] It is what happened to the blind man last week, if you were here. We might ask, might we, why do people like the blind man still keep giving evidence in favour of Jesus?

Why is he so tenacious? When the police state of the religious authorities are clamping down on people like him. John told us last week, didn't he, that they'll throw out anyone who stands with Jesus and gives evidence in his favour.

They will exile them. Socially, economically and religiously. Excommunicating them from the temple system. And why is it that today, people still give evidence in favour of Jesus?

When they know full well that they're going to be thrown out of their family. Or their job. Or society as a whole. Or even worse. I heard a story, a horrific story of a boy.

Who was shot in the stomach four times. Because he wouldn't renounce his faith in Jesus Christ. As men pointed a gun at him, he shouted out, I am so scared but I will not renounce Jesus.

[11:53] And they killed him. People in the Gospels, they face ridicule and much worse, don't they? The disciples, many of them were killed for their tenacity.

They kept giving evidence of who Jesus was. Why is that? It is because these people, God's people, recognise the voice of their shepherd when they hear it.

And they flee from anybody else, no matter what they throw at them. Earlier in John's Gospel, in chapter 4, the disciples are given a chance by Jesus to walk away.

If they want to. A group leaves Jesus. They stop listening to him. And he says to his disciples, guys, do you want to go away as well? And Peter says, Lord, to whom else shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life. You see, the sheep recognise the shepherd's voice when they hear it. And centuries of church history speaks of the identity of this man as the good shepherd.

[12:56] If you think about it, there are only a few explanations, aren't there? Either these people are so deluded that they die for something they think is true when it's just all made up.

Or they know that Jesus is false and his message is false and they die for it anyway. So the first argument, you want to say, well, have you read the written work of the New Testament?

These are not the words of some deluded, crazy people. They are brilliantly written. Coherent, logical, artistic, sane words.

The written work of the New Testament and the whole Bible is unprecedented in quality and in content. One secular writer comments, the subsequent impact of the English translation of the Bible in English literature might be traced in a thousand ways.

In the work of Milton, Bunyan, D.H. Lawrence, Walt Whitman and Defoe and he could go on and on. With the English Bible it's been said there would be no paradise lost, no pilgrim's progress, no negro spirituals, no Gettysburg Address.

[14:11] See, deluded, crazy people cannot produce something like the Bible. And dying for something that you know to be false, that is just ridiculous, isn't it?

Who is going to do that? It would be ridiculous to die for a cause that you know is wrong. And so the only explanation of these people who just keep giving evidence, the tenacity of the faith of God's people against the world, is that they just recognise the voice of their shepherds.

Sharing the Gospel is not a sort of hope for the best kind of thing. Do you know we run these talks, we share the words of Jesus with people, don't we?

With anyone, it doesn't matter where they come from, it doesn't matter what religion they have, it doesn't matter what their past is. It is totally indiscriminate, Jesus' Gospel, that the call is totally inclusive.

There is no one walking down the street this afternoon, who we can look at and go, oh, they won't be interested. They're not from sort of white, western, Christian tradition.

[15:25] We share the good news of Jesus without prejudice, because his chosen people will recognise his voice, no matter what their condition, and no matter what the opposition.

Evangelism is not a stab in the dark. It's true, not everyone will be his follower, isn't it? But it is certainly that there are some in the world who will.

And there are definitely some who will hear Jesus and know that he is different from every other voice that they've ever heard. I wonder when people ask you, you know, why do you believe?

Why are you a Christian? Again, we need to be much better, I think, at giving good answers on that. And we need to be better at helping you with that. But sometimes it's just hard to put your finger on it, isn't it?

And often it is just that something resonated with us in Jesus' words. That before I heard him, all other noises and voices of the world just seemed so inane.

[16:28] And if there is a voice that is shouting loudly, but it's not recognised by Christians, then it's not the right voice. If it doesn't resonate with Christians, it is not right.

Because Jesus has exclusive ownership, he has exclusive recognition from his people. And thirdly, exclusive mission for God's people.

Jesus has an exclusive mission for God's people. And this is the thing, really, isn't it, that Jesus focuses on in the passage, that makes him stand out as the good shepherd.

Look at verse 11. I am the good shepherd. Why is that? Because I lay my life down for the sheep.

Verse 15, he says it again. Now, why is that? How does that make sense? The story goes of a man who jumped into a rough sea off the coast of Italy.

[17:35] And he killed himself. He jumped off a cliff and killed himself. And I guess you could say that he laid his life down.

But doing that doesn't tell us anything about it, does it? The fact that he did that doesn't prove that that man was anyone special. And when Jesus allowed himself to die, that really in itself doesn't tell us anything about him, does it?

That doesn't make him a good shepherd. And Jesus died. So what? If Jesus says, I'm a good shepherd, and then he jumps under a bus, he hasn't proven anything, has he?

Just by dying. How does Jesus laying his life down mean that only he is the good shepherd that we need? The man who jumped off the cliff in Italy, his name was Simon Pearson.

And he jumped into the sea knowing that he would die. But that action makes a lot more sense when you realise the bigger picture, that his daughter was already in the sea.

[18:43] His 11-year-old daughter. She was in deep water. She got caught in the currents. And she was in big trouble. Her life was in danger. And he saw her from the comfort of the warm sand and the sun of that Italian beach.

And he was overwhelmed with love and instinct for her. And he didn't think about his own luxury. All he could think about was the life of his daughter. And so he plunged himself into the same death, in a way, of that water.

He shared with her in her sufferings. But he didn't do that just to give her moral support, did he? It wasn't just sort of put her arm around her and say, I know how you feel.

And to say, I'm a good daddy. I'm with you in this. No. He laid his life down to rescue her. That was the point. He died to give her life.

And then, when you understand the story, his death really does prove something, doesn't it? That he was a good father. Reports say that as he fought to save her, he urged her, saying, hold on to my hand.

[20:00] Hold on to my hand. And that is what stands out about Jesus as the good shepherd. He says to us, doesn't he, I am the good shepherd that you need.

And the reason his death proves that is because we, like that little girl, are in danger. And Jesus jumps into our death and he says, hold on to my hand.

And without his death, we have no life. Don't misunderstand what happens when Jesus died. He is not a victim. He says here, doesn't he, he is in control of his own death.

Verse 18. No one takes it from me. I lay my own life down. If that man had been pushed off the cliff into the sea, his rescue would have meant little, wouldn't it?

But Jesus comes voluntarily. And he goes down into death and he lifts us up in life. And Jesus cannot be your shepherd without laying his life down.

[21:09] And you cannot be looked after and cared for. And you cannot live unless he dies. Let me finish with one more story.

The Prince of Grenada, he was the heir to the Spanish crown. And he was sentenced to life confinement in Madrid's dreariest prison. And he was given only one book to read for the entire time.

He was in there for 33 years until he died. And he had one book. It was the Bible to read. When they came to clear out the cell after he died, they found notes written all around the walls.

Said things like this. Psalm 118 verse 8 is the middle verse in the Bible. Ezra 7.21 contains all the letters of the alphabet except the letter J.

The ninth verse of the eighth chapter of Esther is the longest verse in the Bible. See, the Prince of Grenada, he'd had 30 years of exposure to the Bible.

[22 : 14] He'd read it hundreds of times. But actually all he found in the Bible was meaningless trivia, wasn't it? Because he'd not listened to the shepherd's voice.

And he hadn't heard the shepherd's voice. And sadly that is true of the son, isn't it? But he says to you, as the good shepherd, hold my hand.

Because you are in danger. And there really is nobody else that you can trust. Nobody else who owns you.

And has the right to be trusted. Nobody else who has the password. No one else who has the familiar voice that his people know and love.

And nobody else who has given his life to keep you from that danger. And so listen to him. And hold on to him.

[23 : 20] Let us pray. Let us pray.