

The Voice of the Shepherd and the Safety of the Gate

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Preacher: Robbie Laidlaw

[0 : 00] This morning's reading is from John chapter 10, verses 1 to 10, and that's found on page 1076 from the Church Bibles. So that is John chapter 10, verses 1 to 10, on page 1076.

The Good Shepherd and His Sheep. 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 the name and leads them out.

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.

Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them. Therefore, Jesus said again, Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.

[1 : 05] All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. So, this is the word of the Lord. Thanks, George, for reading.

Morning, everyone. My name is Robbie, if we haven't met. I'm a member of the staff team here and a member of the church as well. And it's a joy to get a look at John chapter 10 with you. I wonder what it would take for you to say you are living a full life.

How might you define that full life? Maybe it would look like filling life with all the things you've always wanted to do, be the person you've always wanted to be. You know, life won't be filled until you've finally finished that Duolingo course, until you've learned to play guitar and fiddle and drums and piano, and finally learned to sing.

Or maybe it won't be full until you see your friends every week as often as you can. Or you've got that perfect family, a loving husband, perfect children who are all brilliantly successful. Or maybe it's until you've got the job you're really craving for.

[2 : 16] All these things are possible answers to what does a full life look like. But I think we'll get to acknowledge that actually that life, that kind of full life, it's a bit of a myth.

You can have a very empty life even if you have all of those things. In fact, what John 10 tells us is that a full life relies on only one thing. And this morning's passage, we're going to look at who that one thing is.

Maybe you already caught it as it was read out there, but we're going to dig into it. And this morning we're starting our new summer series in John chapters 10 and 11. And it's going to be a real joy over summer, a real refresher for those who need it.

It's an opportunity to dig deep into who Jesus is. What is he really like? What has he come to do? We're going to see his love for his people poured out in the way he teaches, in his tears, and in his actions.

But this morning we're focusing on just those first 10 verses. And we're going to think about this passage in three parts. The shepherd and his sheep, the shepherd and the strangers, and the goal of the gate. They will come up on screen.

[3 : 23] You've noticed I've taken after Jonathan with a very high quality slideshow. I apologize, I didn't think that the white would show up so badly. But I'll talk through the points as we go.

So let me pray before we dig into the beauty of the shepherds. Father God, help us to hear your voice this morning. May your spirit speak to us and guide us.

Keep us from distractions and show us the beauty of Jesus Christ. Amen. So let's think about the shepherd and his sheep. I'm going to reread verses 2 to 4 for us.

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 them his own sheep by name and leads them out.

When he's brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. Now Jesus here is using a picture that we maybe don't necessarily understand in our kind of modern understanding of sheep and shepherds and these kind of things.

[4 : 26] But back in the ancient Near East, during the night, several different flocks of sheep would be led by their shepherd into one sheep pen. And it would have a wall and it would have a gate.

And it would have one man whose job was to protect the sheep. He was the gatekeeper. And every morning, the shepherd would arrive. He'd go to the gates. The gatekeeper would say, I know that man. It's okay.

He can come in. And then the shepherd calls his sheep and they follow him. And he leads them on to save grass and to munch on during the day and have that great sheep kind of life.

Now notice how intimately the shepherd knows his flock in verse 3. He knows them and calls them by name. Honestly, when I kind of dug into this, I was like, that can't be right.

Like, when we think of shepherds today, they have hundreds of sheep. There's no chance our shepherds in Scotland name every sheep and know them. But this shepherd does. And that was quite common back then.

[5 : 20] They'd have had a much more personal relationship with their sheep because they're with them all the time. These shepherds have their entire life staked on the sheep. And they spend their entire days, weeks, lives with them.

So they know them by name. So every time this shepherd turns up in the morning to collect his sheep, he calls the ones by name. He sees which of his sheep are still in the pen further back and he calls them by name and they follow him.

This shepherd makes sure he has every single one of his flock because he knows them. But he doesn't just know them. He leads them. This shepherd is not driving from behind. He's not got a whip and making sure they go forwards.

Instead, this shepherd leads the way. He goes before them. The shepherd ensures that the way is safe and he leads his flock through every toil and snare, every issue, every problem.

And again, something to pick up on here, right, when we look at this shepherd in this picture, is that the sheep are led by the sound of his voice. He goes on ahead of them and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

[6 : 27] We often think of sheep as really dumb animals. It's actually quite an insult today to call somebody a sheep, right? The reality is a bit more complicated than sheep just being dumb. The actuality, right, is that sheep can learn up to 50 human faces, which, you know, is not a lot for us.

But for sheep, that's pretty impressive. But they can also learn voices. They can recognize who is calling them and they can associate certain voices with safety or certain voices with danger.

What that means is when, in this story, these sheep hear the shepherd's voice, they know it is safe, and they know wherever that voice is, they can go without problem.

It means they recognize his voice against other shepherds' voices. Because if all the shepherds go in and just call, like, sheep, come to me, they have to know whose voice it is to know who to follow.

And that's how much these sheep understand their shepherd's voice. How on earth can sheep learn their shepherd's voice? Well, simply by hearing it over and over again, and trusting that every time they hear it, they are in safety.

[7 : 31] Seeing that the voice leads to good places, you know, the nice grass, the scenic view of that Israelite hillsides, these sheep listen and follow and were led to safety.

For these sheep, knowing their shepherd's voice keeps them safe. They would not follow anyone else. Strangers may have tried to come and take them away, but knowing the shepherd's voice kept the sheep safe.

Verse 5, these sheep never follow a stranger. Because they run away from a voice they don't know. The sheep know the shepherd by his voice and follow his instructions alone. What Jesus is doing in this picture, right, he's painting a broad image of what a shepherd looks like and a shepherd who knows his sheep.

And what he's doing is helping us see what kind of shepherd he is. And if I'm being honest, as we look at John 10, this is the kind of shepherd I want to follow, and I think it's going to be the kind of shepherd we all want to follow.

He is the good shepherds. And what Jesus is doing in this image is actually comparing himself with the Pharisees, that is, the local religious leaders, right? That's the people who are speaking against him.

[8 : 41] We're going to get to that point in a minute. But let's just reflect on Jesus as our right shepherds, the shepherd who comes to collect and is known by the gatekeeper. Jesus Christ is the shepherd who knows each and every single one of us perfectly, intimately.

He knows us by name. He knows the very hairs on our heads is what it says in Luke. Psalm 139 says he knitted us in the womb. For all of history, he has known who you are, who you're going to be.

He's known the depth of intimacy with which you have never been known before. Now, we live in an era where the world is so connected online, and we all have our Facebooks, our Instagrams, all these things, where we have so many people that we're connected to.

But I think a lot of us will feel like actually we are not truly known. Just because I post a photo on Instagram and it's liked by 100 people doesn't mean 100 people know me. That is not true of Jesus.

He is the shepherd who knows you intimately, who knows your hearts. He knows who you are and calls you by name to follow him into a good pasture, into the good grass to use our image.

[9 : 55] And not only does he know us, not only does he know you, he leads us. That means wherever we are in life, we are following a shepherd who is taking us through the darkest times.

He leads us through the darkest valleys. Now, it may seem to you right now, wherever you are in life, you are in a deep, dark valley. It might feel that you are completely alone and no one is with you.

But what this image is showing us is that actually Jesus is ahead of us. He is leading his flock. He is calling you to follow him through the darkest valleys because he will then lead us on to the safest and greenest fields.

There is no evil or darkness that can get between us and our shepherd. He is there to comfort you and to lead you. Notice once again, how does the shepherd lead in this image?

It is through his voice. It is his spoken words. The sheep know him by his words. They listen to him and do as he says because they trust that that is where safety is found.

[11 : 03] So for these sheep, the vital thing they can do is know the shepherd's voice. As the shepherd calls his sheep, the sheep's only job is to listen and obey.

So for us today, what does it look like to listen to the Lord? How are we going to be led through the darkest valleys and into the green pastures?

Well, it is through the words Jesus has given us and he's written them down in perpetuity forever. In his words, the Bible, we have everything our shepherd wants us to know.

He speaks to us loud and clear as we read his words. And thankfully, we can continually ask him to speak to us more and more and make his voice clearer and clearer as we dig into his word more and more.

It's why, since as we prioritize the preaching of God's word every Sunday, we work through book by book of the Bible because we know that is where we will hear Jesus and that is how we are to be led. As we see how good the shepherd is in John chapter 10, what it does is it drives us back to the shepherd more and more.

[12 : 11] As we trust and go, this shepherd is guiding me into the safest place. The more I realize that, the more I want to go back to him because he's going to continue leading me. When we see the tender care he has for his flock throughout the whole of biblical history, it means I can trust him today because he's still doing that for me as a part of his flock and as for you as his sheep.

So as we come to the darkest valleys in our lives where it seems like we are alone, we have access to the sweetest voice who is calling us onwards, to the person who knows us by name and takes us forwards, who has gone ahead of us through these valleys.

It is in his written words, we have all the promises where he assures us that we will not be left alone. We are not isolated. We are not a stranger, unconnected from the people around us.

Too often when we think of Jesus as our shepherds, we jump straight to what does it mean to be a sheep? How am I a good sheep? What does it mean to be a good sheep? Well, we don't need to turn the attention on ourselves that quickly.

John 10 is telling us loud and clear that to be a good sheep, all you have to do to be a good sheep and to be a good sheep is to be a good disciple of Jesus. All you have to do is listen to the shepherds. Listen to the shepherd and love his voice.

[13 : 30] That is all we are called to do. Now, if you're someone who, maybe you're in a period of struggling with reading God's words. This is not a passage to make you feel guilty.

I'm not a period to beat you with the Bible for not doing that because that is the opposite of what Jesus is trying to do and of what John is trying to do. Instead, as we reflect on the goodness of the voice of Jesus, we can be reminded it is worth making the effort to listen to him.

It is worth learning his voice, learning his words, and following him even when it seems so, so hard. And there are ways to listen to his voice without the half an hour every single morning rigid kind of style.

Ideas like listening to an audio Bible on your way to work or as you walk the dog or listen to podcasts, all these kind of things. Help us to know the shepherd's voice. There is no minimum entry.

All we have to do is love Jesus, see that he knows us and wants us to follow him. Listen to your master and love him for who he is. Listen to him wherever you can, whenever you can, however you can.

[14 : 44] Brothers and sisters, we are not his sheep because of how good a sheep we are. You are not his sheep because you have the best wool of all the sheep around you. You're his sheep because you follow his voice and love the sweet sound of it.

You're his sheep because he has called you. So being a good sheep, all it means is listening, loving and obeying. So be encouraged by the picture of a shepherd who knows you, who cares for you and who leads you.

Now all these wonderful truths are about Jesus as shepherd, but they're found in the context of John 10. So as we go on to our second point, the shepherd and the strangers, we're going to see who he's speaking to.

And specifically, that is the Pharisees who he's in conflict with. Now as I said earlier, the Pharisees are religious leaders who oppose Jesus. So Jesus isn't only telling us something about himself, he's also highlighting something about the Pharisees.

Let me just pick out, so you can look down with me at John 10. I'm going to pick out some verses that highlight this contrast. So verse one, anyone who does not enter by the sheep pen, does not enter the sheep pen by the gates, but climbs in by some other way is a thief and a robber.

[15 : 54] The sheep will never follow a stranger. In fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice. Or there's verse 10, all who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them.

Verse 10, the most condemning of all, the sheep comes only to steal and kill and destroy. Now these strangers, these thieves and robbers, they sound pretty awful, don't they?

And what we're seeing is that there are others out there who want to take the sheep from their shepherds. They want to steal and destroy them and they sneak in because they have no real access.

Now Jesus is describing here those who oppose him, the Pharisees of his day, but in verse one, we see that it is anyone who does not enter the sheepfolds by the gates. The Pharisees opposed Jesus at every chance they got.

At every stage in Jesus' life, they were, at this stage, sorry, in John 10, they were looking to kill him already. The Pharisees were doing all they could to get in Jesus' way to stop people listening to him. Now as I said, John 10 is where it is in John for a reason and helpfully actually it comes straight after John 9.

[17 : 01] Big takeaway, I know. But realizing that John 10 comes after John 9 gives us a really helpful example of what exactly it looks like to be a sheep who listens to the voice of the shepherds and runs away from the strangers and the thieves and the robbers.

Now, I'm just going to give a quick summary of that story. Basically, Jesus heals a man who was born blind, which had never been done before and so the Pharisees, these religious leaders, they call the man into their court and they interrogate him and he says, a man of God has helped me see.

I don't know who he was because the man was blind. He didn't see Jesus and he had to go and wash his eyes. The Pharisees don't believe him. They say, no, this is false. So they call the man's parents in and they interrogate his parents and now the parents are terrified because these Pharisees have power.

They can excommunicate anybody they want. So the parents say, we don't know who it was, we don't know what happened, all we know is that this is our son and he can see. So the Pharisees call the man back and go, no, tell us the truth and the man goes, I am.

There was a man who made me see and the Pharisees go, this man must be a sinner and the man says, how can you call him a sinner? He's doing something no man has ever done before.

[18 : 12] This blind man, he never saw Jesus before it happened. All he did was hear his voice as Jesus said, go and wash your eyes. Now the Pharisees were a threatening bunch who had power, intimidation, they were the leaders of their day but this blind man, he runs away from them.

He says, no, no, no, no, no, what you are saying is wrong. I'm not listening to your lies anymore. I've been called by the shepherd, I've been called by a man who has made me see, I will go and follow him.

The blind man does not follow any other voices calling him their way. Even when he could not see Jesus, he heard his voice and followed him, obeying without delay.

And Jesus' voice led him to the pool of cleansing and to sight, both physical and spiritual, as he realizes exactly who Jesus is. The Pharisees have nothing to offer him like that.

So the Pharisees are revealed to be strangers and thieves in the way they act and the way they respond to Jesus. They've snuck into the sheep pen. They have entered by the way of worldly power and politicking and scraping their way at the ladder to become these leaders and they are trying to steal the sheep for their own desires.

[19 : 34] But they are not the true shepherds. The blind man, he heard Jesus and followed him. He heard the voice, ignored the noise and received a life he never thought he could have.

John 9 shows us an example of a sheep listening to the shepherds and ignoring the strangers. So the inclusion of strangers in John chapter 10 gives us a bit of a warning that this is going to happen to us.

It helps us realize that there are other voices who are trying to steal away the flock of the shepherds. Sometimes these false voices are false teachers who are perverting the truth of Christianity.

The institutions and the people who have a false gospel, who have manipulated God's word for their own goods or to fit in with the world. They are calling the flock to follow them and they are trying to steal them away from the shepherds.

These voices offer something like what the shepherd offers but they do not offer life. They offer safety but only ever steal the sheep and lead them to destruction.

[20 : 44] These voices could also be people in our world who pretend to know exactly what we all need. These are the voices in culture who tell us that if we follow their way, if we read their book, if we do what they say, we will have the best life we can.

And these voices, they come from all directions. They can be overwhelming but the one thing they have in common is they're trying to take the sheep away from his shepherds. Now the only way we can identify these voices as the strangers that they are is by knowing the voice of our shepherds so intimately we can recognize them as lies.

We need to recognize that there are strangers trying to take us away, offering us the secrets of the good life, whether it's by shouting from the rooftops, if you buy my product, you'll have a great life. Or they're whispering in your ear saying, if you don't get married, you have nothing.

Or the other voices that say, if you're too old to be of use to anyone. These are the real voices that are taking us away from the shepherd and the truths he has for us. So we recognize there are strangers but also we see that following them is a one-way trip to destruction.

Look again at verse 10. The thief, that is the stranger, comes only to steal and kill and destroy. These voices that whisper in our ears or shout trying to drown out the shepherds, they are leading only one way.

[22 : 12] They only want to steal or kill or destroy. The strangers, they do not know their sheep. They do not know what the sheep need or want or where they should be. All the strangers want is to steal the sheep away.

They don't want to lead the sheep, they want to use them and kill them for their own goods. Jesus offers us a very clear comparison here. Who are we going to listen to?

The stranger or the shepherds? Now if the goal of the stranger is theft, death and destruction, Jesus also tells us exactly why he's come.

He tells us exactly what his goal is as the shepherds, which is our final point today. The goal of the gate. If you look really closely, there is actually a little image of a gate on that PowerPoint, but not very well.

So what Jesus does in verse 7 in the end of our passage, he moves on, he shifts imagery. Rather than Jesus being the rightful shepherds, in this section, Jesus is the gate.

[23 : 12] This is the third great I am statement of John. We'll be looking at the next one next week when Jamie preaches to us. But let's think about what does it mean that Jesus is the gate? Well, it takes us back to that overnight sheep pen because in those pens, there's only ever one entrance.

Sheep can only go in and they go out one way. Otherwise, it would be unsafe. It'd be really dumb to have a sheep pen with two gates and one gatekeeper because the people in the back would just walk in and take all the sheep.

So what Jesus is saying is that he is the only entrance to safety. He's the only way his sheep can remain safe. There is no side entrance, no back door. It is only in Christ because there is no risk of being whisked away by the stranger when we're using the one gate.

You might notice that the footnote says, in verse 9, it says, being kept safe rather than will be saved. Jesus' image isn't about how we are saved to become Christians.

It's about how we are kept safe as Christians. And the reason I say that, kind of the next sentence helps us because the sheep will come in and go out and they will find pasture. Jesus is talking about, again, literally leading sheep in and out into the gates to safety in the sheep pen or they're being led out of the gate to find pasture in all the greatest green grass they can have.

[24 : 36] But for it to both to be true, it has to be about safety in pasture and not about salvation because we can't go in and out of that. So if you're a sheep and you just love wandering around eating grass and enjoying the views, well, you need to go in and out of the gates.

You need to be led. You need to have that safety of knowing that if I go this way, it'll all be okay. Because sheep constantly need to take an in and out to find the right field to chow down on during the day and to be safe in the evening and the darkness.

Jesus is saying that if we follow him as the true gate, we will have all that we need. So long as we use him, as we follow him, we're being directed towards all the safest places.

As sheep, when we follow Jesus, when we enter by that gate, we are safe and secure. No one can come into the sheep pen because no one can get through that gate.

As we enter through the gate, we listen to Jesus Christ. we are promised the thing that we will all long for. We are promised in verse 10 and this is why Jesus has come.

[25 : 46] I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. So when we enter by the gate, we are promised all that we could ever need. All the grass that we want to chow down on is there in Christ.

We are promised the very fullness of life itself. A full life is found in only one place and that is only one person, our shepherd Jesus. We are not going to find the safety of a full life if we think a full life is filled with experiences or stuff because they will all pass away.

We will not find the safety of a full life in the relationships we have with other people because people either let us down or those relationships will end. A full life can only be found as we follow the good shepherd who knows us, who feeds us, who leads us and protects us.

This shepherd will refresh our souls by quiet waters. Through that good gate we will walk in and out to green pastures and lack nothing. We can have this full life because the good shepherd laid down his for us.

The full life is found as we listen to the promises of Jesus, as he tells us our worth, as he tells us his love for us and what he's done for us.

[27 : 12] And as we see the truths of scripture, as we read his word, as we hear his voice and learn it, we will be confident that his goodness and love will follow us all the days of our lives. Life can only be found in fullness when we dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

And that is the promise we have. There's a great green pasture waiting for us. The voices all around us are looking to steal away the sheep just like the Pharisees did with that blind man.

They want to stop people seeing and hearing who Jesus is. But Jesus is the shepherd who knows you personally. He knows you intimately.

He cares for you and is calling you now. Follow him. Hear his voice. He is leading you forward ahead of the flock through the darkest valley and into the safest green pastures.

Embed yourself so thoroughly in his words by listening to his voice that all the other voices are muffled and you only hear him speaking clearly. Brothers and sisters, we have a good shepherd.

[28 : 21] shepherds. So let's listen to his voice. Not because we are the best sheep but because he is calling us. He is the only way to life to the full.

Let me pray. Father God, we are so thankful that you have sent us Jesus as our good shepherds.

Lord, thank you that he is calling us and we have heard his voice. Lord, I pray that you would speak to us more and more that we'd hear his voice louder and louder and that we would follow him as he leads us through the darkest valleys.

Lord, for those of us who are struggling, help us to hear him clearly. For those of us who don't know you yet, speak to them that they may follow you just like the blind man did and be led to life in its fullness.

Lord, I pray that none of us would be taken away by strangers and thieves and robbers but you would protect us always as we live in the safety of the gates in Jesus Christ. We pray these things in your holy name.

[29 : 22] Amen. Amen. Amen.