

# The Good Shepherd

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[ 0 : 00 ] Thank you, Martin, very much indeed.

And if you are here, you may, well, you will know if you're here, but you may like to follow along that passage that has just been read for us, or if you're at home and have access to a Bible on your phone or in paper form.

Then please do follow along. In the bit immediately after this sermon, there will be what's called an exhortation and examination of James.

Let me give you a sneaky peek as to what I will say then. It says this, You have heard during the church's discernment of your vocation in the sermon just preached, and in the Holy Scriptures themselves, of what dignity and of how great importance this office is to which you are called.

That is to say, to be a messenger, watchman, and steward of the Lord, to teach and to warn, to feed and provide for the Lord's family, and to seek for Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad, that they may be saved through Christ forever.

[ 1 : 33 ] Therefore, always remember how great a treasure is committed to your charge, for they are the sheep of Christ, which he bought with his death, and for whom he shed his blood.

Lord, well, as I'm going to say that, and say that you have heard this in the sermon just preached, we ought to pray that the preacher would now deliver on that, and that the Lord would feed his sheep.

So let's pray. Father, we pray this evening that you will open your Word to us by your Holy Spirit, and pray that it will be applied to each of our lives.

For Jesus' sake, amen. Amen. Now, in those words that I have just been reading, they are based on the Anglican Book of Common Prayer from 1662.

And you will probably notice that those words, as are all the words in the Book of Common Prayer, are soaked in the Scriptures. And they refer to various descriptions of the function of a presbyter or elder.

[ 2 : 58 ] And we talked, we heard about those just now, a messenger, a watchman, and a steward. But in the earlier version of the Book of Common Prayer, a hundred or so years earlier, in 1552, it spoke of the messengers, the watchmen, the pastors, and the stewards of the Lord.

But apparently, at the time of the English Civil War, the word pastor or shepherd became associated with some anti-bishop sentiment.

And seeing as we can't have that, we now have what we have. But as I read, the language of sheep and shepherds is clear in all those words, but without using the word pastor.

But that's what it is. Well, John chapter 10, verses 1 to 16, was the gospel passage earmarked for presbyteral ordination in both the 1552 and the 1662 prayer books, and is steeped in shepherd-sheep language.

So let us look at that passage. And as always, the context is pretty important. And it is slightly obscured by the more modern chapter divisions.

[ 4 : 22 ] Jesus, in these chapters, is in Jerusalem and has already made stupendous claims about himself. He is the fount of life-giving water.

He is the light of the world. And now, in chapter 9, just before our chapter, he has just healed a man born blind.

Sounds terrific. But the Pharisees decide to investigate and find that it is conducted on the Sabbath day, and for that is to be rejected along with the healer himself.

The man who had been born blind, gradually, in a very hostile atmosphere, discovers who Jesus really is and comes to put his trust in him, even as he is thrown out of the synagogue by the Pharisees.

And Jesus concludes in the last verse of chapter 9, verse 39, For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see, and those who see will become blind.

[ 5 : 40 ] The Pharisees who thought they could see and taught others are shown to be blind, blind guides. But the one who knows he cannot see, the man blind from birth, is brought by grace into God's people, God's flock.

That then leads us into our passage, and verse 1 begins, 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 robber.

Where Jesus, therefore, clarifies the difference between the Pharisees and himself, the thieves and robbers being the Pharisees and the good shepherd or pastor being Jesus.

And by chapter 10, verse 21, shortly after the end of the passage that was read, it's clear that the story of the blind man is still in mind.

So three points, which I hope will be of help to James, but are there for all of us too. Now, when we meet someone new, even in these COVID days, what are the standard questions that, well, particularly men, tend to put to them?

[ 7 : 09 ] Who are you, and what do you do? And we'll ask that as some of the figures in our passage. So the first one is, who is the good shepherd and what does he do?

Now, that question, or at least the answer, may seem a little obvious. Of course, Jesus is the good shepherd, verse 11. But we need to see that it was not that obvious to the Pharisees that Jesus addresses in this passage, verse 6.

But the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them, emphasizing their blindness. And the point is made by contrast with the thieves and robbers of his own day, verse 1, the stranger, verse 5, some other thieves and robbers who came before in verse 8, and with the hired hand in verse 12.

So let's have a look at that contrast. The good shepherd is the shepherd of the sheep and enters by the gate, verse 2, whilst the thieves and robbers climb in by some other way, verse 1.

The shepherd, however, having been let in by the night watchman, calls his own sheep by name and leads them out, verse 3. When his sheep are all out, he goes ahead of them, leading them with his voice, which is how they know and recognize him, verse 4.

[ 8 : 48 ] The shepherd's aim is clear, to save the sheep by getting them into the protection of the sheepfold and to lead the sheep in and out and, verse 9, to find pasture and the shepherd has come that the sheep may have life to the full, verse 10.

A reminder of the purpose of John's writing in this gospel that he says in chapter 20, that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

By contrast, the thief's aim, verse 10, is to steal, kill, and destroy. And then we move to the contrast of the good shepherd with the hired hand in verse 12.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep instead of, in place of, as a substitute for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd.

He does not own the sheep. He abandons the sheep and runs away when he sees the wolf coming, verse 12. He runs away because he is hired, he is a hired hand and cares nothing, we're told, for the sheep, verse 13.

[ 10 : 07 ] The good shepherd knows his sheep, verse 14, and this is like the intimate relationship between Jesus and his heavenly Father, verse 15. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, again, instead of or in place of, verse 15.

The good shepherd owns other sheep whom he also loves outside the sheepfold and he must bring them in together with the others by the sound of his voice so that there will be one flock under the one shepherd, verse 16.

Well, in the context, the thieves and robbers are the Pharisees, the religious leaders, who refused to come to Jesus, the gate, and who tried to prevent the blind man from coming to follow Jesus.

The stranger is the one the sheep will not follow because they do not know him or his voice. The thieves and robbers who came before are the leaders of God's people who had consistently and constantly exploited the sheep.

And perhaps the most notable biblical example of this is in Ezekiel chapter 34, verses 1 to 6. Listen to this. The word of the Lord came to me, that's Ezekiel, son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, this is what the sovereign Lord says, woe to you, shepherds of Israel, who only take care of yourselves.

[ 11 : 49 ] Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool, and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock.

You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost.

You have ruled them harshly and brutally, so they were scattered because there was no shepherd. And when they were scattered, they became food for all the wild animals.

My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill and they were scattered over the whole earth and no one searched or looked for them. By contrast, Jesus is the way to salvation and the good shepherd.

In fact, the one that God promised through Ezekiel in later on in chapter 34 who would rescue the sheep. So what for today?

[ 12 : 57 ] James, you are not the good shepherd. You don't have to save the sheep. You cannot save the sheep. You mustn't try to save the sheep.

James, Jesus is the good shepherd and he is the sole way for anyone to be saved and to be protected and led. So your job is to point people to him.

You can learn much by emulating the amazing good shepherd who knows and loves his sheep, who lays down his life voluntarily for the sheep.

Secondly, who are the sheep and what do they do? Well, in the context, the man born blind is the sheep.

He is helpless until he is found by Jesus. He is healed by Jesus and he is the one who responds to the voice of Jesus.

[ 13 : 59 ] And that is a picture of all of us. It's not a flattering picture of us. We are vulnerable to theft, verse 1. We are easily scattered by the wolf, verse 12.

but we listen to the voice of Jesus, verse 3, and we know him intimately, 14. We are known by name by Jesus and led by him, verse 3.

We are known by Jesus just as Jesus knew the Father and he is known by the Father. We follow Jesus because we recognize his voice, his word.

We run away from strangers whose voice we do not recognize, verse 5. We are saved and cared for by Jesus who gives us life in all its fullness, verses 9 and 10.

We are owned by Jesus who loves us enough as to die for us, 11 and 15. We belong to one flock under the one shepherd and that will include many who are not already in the flock.

[ 15 : 18 ] In the context, that was the Gentiles, the non-Jews in verse 16. So what for today? James, don't go away because there's more for you in a moment.

This is for everyone, including James. We are not to think more of ourselves than we ought. We are vulnerable to thieves, wolves, and robbers, and we're even told in Acts 20 that the wolves will arise even from among us.

Secondly, we should come to Jesus who knows us and loves us and has died for us. There is no other way to be saved except through Jesus and by joining his flock.

God's Lord. We don't have to do much. Just listen to his voice. Trust him.

Follow him and obey him and we will have life to the full. Thirdly and finally, what then is James and what does he do?

[ 16 : 26 ] Well, we now know who the Good Shepherd is and who the sheep are. Therefore, James, your prime responsibility is to be a sheep, not a Good Shepherd. That means that you are to seek to hear His voice and get to know Him deeply for yourself so that you will recognize His voice as opposed to that of strangers. That is why I will say to you in a few minutes, and seeing that the Holy Scriptures have been provided as a basis for doctrine and guide for the holy living, devote yourself to reading and learning the Scriptures and in framing the conduct of yourself. You don't stop being a sheep. You will be tempted to think of yourself as more than a sheep or even perhaps a special marine sheep. Others will be tempted to put you on a pedestal, surprisingly, and you will actually want to be on that pedestal. James, being a presbyter or pastor in the Church of God means that you are really an under-shepherd. We have a Good Shepherd. We don't need another one. We do need to know the Good Shepherd, and your job is not only to know Him through His Word, but to make Him known to others by teaching them His Word. As Paul says, for what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as

Lord and ourselves merely as your servants for Jesus' sake. Remember that a few chapters after this, in John's Gospel, as the Greeks who went up to Jerusalem in John 12, approached Philip with a request, Sir, we would like to see Jesus. People are to be pointed to the Good Shepherd, Jesus, by the under-shepherd. We are signposts, and however wonderful you are, you must point people to Him and not to yourself. The sheep are His and have been bought at the great price of His blood shed for them.

Having said that, you are not the shepherd. One Peter reminds us that we are to be shepherds of God's flock as leaders, that is, under your care, watching over them not because you must, but because you are willing as God wants you to be, not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve, not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. How do you do this? By teaching God's Word. What a privilege and what a promise. As well as providing for the Lord's family, you are to seek Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad, that they may be saved through Christ forever. You are to care for and to seek out the lost. We will in a moment say this office is of such importance and so demanding, you cannot do this by yourself, for that will and ability is given by God alone. Therefore, pray earnestly for His Holy Spirit. Prayer is the other key and is unseen by people and therefore often neglected, but it is a key part of your role as a presbyter and we'll pray now.

Let's pray. Father, these standards are impossibly high for us, Your people, but by Your Spirit, we pray that You will make James into an effective, humble and good shepherd who directs people to the good shepherd, the good shepherd.

[ 20 : 36 ] And we thank You that we have access to that one good shepherd and those of us here are members of that one flock. For Jesus' sake, Amen.