

# It is good to be a Sheep!

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Preacher: Jamie Payton

[ 0 : 00 ]     After all, isn't his life worth more than theirs? They're just sheep. He has no connection to them. It's just his job. And so this flock is now scattered.

The wolf got its way, certainly munching on a few helpless lambs as it did so. And John uses the scattering language to remind us of the exile, and in particular, Ezekiel chapter 34, where we see more bad shepherding.

Ezekiel is explaining why God's judgment came on the rebellious people of God. And in chapter 34, we see the heart of the issue. The leaders of God's people were meant to be good shepherds, pointing them to God, but they utterly, utterly failed.

They're like these hired hands. They're ultimately selfish, and only leading and protecting in ways that suits them. The priests and the prophets were meant to lead the people in obedience, and the king, well, the kings were meant to be like their father David, the boy shepherd, who later became king.

And so this is what the sovereign Lord says to the shepherds of Israel through Ezekiel. Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves. Should not the shepherds take care of the flock?

[ 1 : 17 ]     You have not bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays. You rule them harshly. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd.

The Lord, the Lord loves his flock. And so he is against and hates the shepherds who have failed their duty. Remember who Jesus is speaking to back in John.

Look back at the beginning of the chapter. It's the Pharisees. He's warning them they have been bad shepherds like their ancestors, caring for themselves and not the sheep.

We saw that in the last chapter. A poor and blind beggar is not cared for by them. In fact, the healing and restoration the blind man receives from Jesus, it doesn't bring the religious leaders joy.

It brings them outrage. So what does the Lord promise his lost and scattered sheep in exile? He promises to search for them, rescue them, gather them and tend to them with personal care.

[ 2 : 21 ]     Through Ezekiel, this is what he proclaims. This is what the sovereign Lord says. I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. I will tend them in good pasture.

I myself will tend my sheep and make them lie down. And a little later, he promises this. I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them and be their shepherd.

Two promises from the Lord. He himself will bring his sheep home and provide for them and protect them. And he will place over them one shepherd king, the promised one, the true and better David.

How does the Lord deal with the problem of bad shepherds? Well, with a good one. The hired hand doesn't care for the sheep because he doesn't own the sheep. The sheep don't belong to him.

And so the Lord, the one who does own the sheep, the one to whom they belong, he will shepherd them. And that's what's so utterly remarkable about what Jesus says.

[ 3 : 23 ] When he says, I am the good shepherd, he is claiming three things. When he says, I am, he is using the name by which God himself introduced him to Moses. Jesus is claiming to be divine.

And Jesus is claiming to fulfill both promises given by Ezekiel. He is the Lord himself who brings his own sheep home. And he's the true shepherd king from the line of David who will provide and protect the flock.

So what more do we learn about this good shepherd? Well, our second point, the good shepherd knows his flock. Jesus, the Lord himself and the Christ, does what the shepherd should do.

Unlike the hired hand who runs away when the wolf comes, Jesus, the good shepherd, lays down his life for the sheep. And as he does so, he proves that he is the shepherd of this flock, no one else.

He is the one who will bring in the scattered. See verse 16. I have other sheep that are not of this sheepfold. I must bring them also.

[ 4 : 30 ] They too will listen to my voice and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. Instead of stealing and slaughtering the sheep, Jesus looks on the crowds and has compassion on them because they are without a shepherd.

But it's not just the lost sheep of Israel that Jesus came for. From every tribe and nation. Jesus has sheep that he will go out and find and bring home.

It's remarkable. As Amy was commenting earlier, even with us this morning, we have church members not just from across the British Isles, from across Europe, but from across the world.

The negligent shepherd lets his sheep. The negligent shepherd lets his sheep wander away. Not so Jesus, the good shepherd. He goes out to find his sheep. Nothing will stop him in his pursuit of bringing his sheep home wherever they are.

So if you, this morning, find yourself a little bit lost. Find that the ups and downs of 2024 have been a bit too much, then remember this Jesus.

[ 5 : 36 ] Take comfort that he's already come and found you. He's already brought you into the flock. He's not going to fail to look after you now. And as we read, did you see that the one flock is truly his own?

That Jesus knows his flock? Have a look at verse 14. I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me. Well, in what way does Jesus know his sheep?

Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. What? I mean, wow. Just as the Father and the Son know one another, so Jesus and his sheep know one another.

As J.C. Ryle puts it, a knowledge so high, so deep, so intimate, so ineffable, that no words can fully convey it. Yet the mutual knowledge and communion of Christ and his believers is something so deep and wonderful that the only thing that it can be compared to, though at a vast distance, is the knowledge that exists between the Father and the Son.

In other words, the only thing that you can compare Christ's knowledge of his church to is the eternal, infinite knowledge within the Trinity of our God. And that goes for his church, knowing him too.

[ 6 : 53 ] It's hard to get your head around. But we are familiar with the idea that it is nice to be known. It's wonderful when a friend buys you a gift that hits exactly right because they know you.

For those of you who are married, I'm sure there are times when your spouse preempts your actions. That lovely and simple moment when they pass a tissue before you sneeze. Or they know to order that extra side that you won't admit you want.

Parents do it all the time. There's the noticing the signs of hunger and tiredness in toddlers, right through to discerning whether the fine after school means your teenager actually is fine or isn't.

When your mother or brother or husband or wife or bestie or whoever it is knows you and they know when to speak and when to listen. They know when to push you more and when to comfort you.

It's good to be known. And the Lord Jesus knows his sheep. Not that we're all rows of information somewhere on his infinite database with our height and weight and family tree and history.

[ 7 : 57 ] It's far, far more than that. Though that does strangely appeal to me. But no, he doesn't just know about me. He knows me. He knows you.

Before he made the world, he knew every fiber of your being. And do you know what blows me away the most about that?

That means that he knows not just the kindest words I've said, but the most hurtful ones. He knows the ugliest thoughts of my heart and he knows how I continually turn my back on him.

And yet still, as one of his sheep, I can say that he loves me. That's pretty good, isn't it? Because I know him. Not fully, of course.

My piddly little head couldn't get my head around that. No, I don't know him fully, but I do know him truly. If you know the good shepherd who laid down his life for you, then that's it.

[ 8 : 55 ] Nothing more complicated than that. You know Jesus. Any one of you here who trusts Jesus is one of his sheep. You know his voice and you listen to him.

And if you're here this morning and you don't know Jesus, why not keep coming to church? Keep hearing his voice in the scriptures. I hope you see he is worth knowing.

Jesus knows his sheep. He brings them home. He is the one shepherd of the one flock. I mentioned earlier that Jesus fulfills the promises that he is the true and better David.

And King David himself knew that even though he was the greatest shepherd king in the Old Testament, he knew that ultimately it was the Lord who was his shepherd. In the 23rd Psalm, which we'll sing a version of later, we have these wonderful, beautiful words.

If you keep a finger in John 10, but why don't we turn there briefly now? It's page 555 in the Church Bibles. Psalm 23. Page 555.

[ 10 : 03 ] Went too far. Should have prepared this in advance. There we go, Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing.

We saw that last week when Robbie took us through the start of John 10. Jesus gives life and life to the full. He gives abundant provision. He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside quiet waters. I mean, what more do sheep need? I mean, I'm no expert, but I'm pretty sure this is the sheep dream. The flock's jackpot rollover bonus prize.

Not just beautiful, delicious green grass, but being able to lie down in them. Being able to munch away in peace and quiet and comfort.

The quiet waters too. Thirst satisfied. Does your soul need refreshed? I'm sure it does. Well, who can do that?

[ 11 : 02 ] Who refreshes weary souls? The Lord. The good shepherd. He does. And the shepherd also protects the sheep. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil.

For you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. When Jesus says he is the good shepherd, he points to the most marvelous safety and security.

So much danger, so many wolves, and yet no fear. For the shepherd is with us. Comfort indeed. But back in John 10, we see that this all causes division.

Some hear the claims of Jesus and they don't get it. They don't believe. They think he's mad. Which is tragically sad, actually, because it means they're not one of his sheep. Because Jesus' sheep, they know his voice.

Notice how the argument is all about listening to Jesus. They've heard his words, verse 19. They're arguing about what he's saying in verse 21. And in verse 20, they ask, why listen to him?

[ 12 : 13 ] Those who aren't his sheep don't listen. They don't understand. They don't recognize what he's doing. And so they don't follow. In fact, they don't know their God at all.

Remember that these are Jews that Jesus is speaking to. People who know their Old Testaments inside out. Or at least claim to. For the true sheep are the ones who know the voice of the Father.

And because they know his voice, they know Jesus' voice. For he and the Father are one. The Pharisees and the Jews on the other side of the division, they prove that they don't know the Father because they don't know the Son.

I mean, it's actually quite simple, isn't it? See verse 21 again. These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind? Who opens the eyes of the blind?

The Lord does. Only God can do that. And yet Jesus did exactly this in chapter 9. So rejecting the Son means rejecting the Father. Something we'll spend more time thinking about next week.

[ 13 : 16 ] Jesus speaks the truth. His sheep know him and recognize him, even when others don't. And as we reflect on the goodness of the good shepherd, we see the best thing of all, the thing at the heart of this passage.

Our third point. The good shepherd dies for his flock. There's a repeated phrase in these words of Jesus. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Verse 11. I lay down my life for the sheep. Verse 15. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life.

Verse 17. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down. Verse 18. Jesus Christ laid down his life.

It's astonishing. Sacrifice for others is something we're familiar with. Many of the great heroes do it in the movies. You've got the epic superhero sacrifice against the supervillain, like Tony Stark in The Avengers.

[ 14 : 27 ] And then there's the tender acts of intimacy. One of my favorite kids' films is Kung Fu Panda. It's hilarious. It's clever. And please see me afterwards if you want to know why it's the perfect trilogy.

Anyway, I digress. In amidst all the action and comedy, there is a heart-wrenching scene in the second film, where we discover that when Po, Kung Fu Panda, when he was a baby, his mother died to save his life.

She delicately hides him in a box of radishes, says goodbye, and then runs away to distract the evil wolves burning down the village. It's awful. It's beautiful.

Well, it's love, isn't it? She dies to save him. And there is no greater thing. But with Jesus, we see love beyond even that. For all of these stories, whether they know it or not, they point to Jesus' sacrifice.

They point to it because it is the greatest love story ever told. Jesus dies for his sheep. That is, he dies so they can live. He dies instead of them.

[ 15 : 30 ] I love this phrase, this language of laying down. Yes, it's an epic, world-changing sacrifice, but somehow it's also gentle. The shepherd becomes a sacrificial lamb to save the flock.

And yet, never mistake this gentleness for weakness. Because it was in great strength that the shepherd became a lamb and died. No one forced him.

Judas' betrayal, Pilate's apathy, the Jews riling up the crowd. None of these things could possibly have killed Jesus, who is one with the Father, unless Jesus had voluntarily, willingly, in love, given up his life.

Notice how emphatically he says this in verse 18. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. No room for ambiguity.

Jesus Christ gladly died for his sheep. Notice again the Father and the Son working inseparably together. The Father gives the Son authority. In fact, he commands Jesus to lay down his life and to take it up again.

[ 16 : 34 ] And yet, there is not a hint of disobedience. Jesus would never do anything other than voluntarily do what is commanded. Jesus loves his sheep. He cares for them.

They are his. He knows them. When we say that Jesus died for you, we don't just mean that you're part of the lump that he came to save. Jesus died for you by name, personally.

He thought of you when he laid down his life. And just as a shepherd spends his days walking with the flock, seeing every inch of their lives, so Jesus is with his sheep at all times, in all situations.

And because those sheep are his, he lays down his life in place of them. He faces the death they deserve. And so it's no surprise that this is why in verse 17, we see that the father loves him.

How could he not love the son that loves his sheep so much? I mean, is the shepherd's life worth more than the sheep's? I mean, I think it is, but that just makes it more remarkable that Jesus died for his sheep.

[ 17 : 46 ] Life can be rough. It's confusing and painful, and it is easy to get lost. So remember your shepherd. He'll guide you. He'll lead. He'll even take the hits for you.

Know and be comforted by the beauty and simplicity of a shepherd king who lays down his life for you. That's why we can sing that we do not fear in the darkest valley, because he went through the valley for us.

He died for us, for us silly little sheep. And he, in love and joy, went to a Roman cross and bled. To buy us life. And life he bought.

Jesus, once again, gives us no wiggle room. He didn't just die in humility. He rose in triumph. He has authority to lay down his life, yes, but he has authority to take it up again.

His death wasn't meaningless. It wasn't futile. It worked. The father loves Jesus. Loves that he lays down his life only to take it up again. He's done it all for you.

[ 18 : 51 ] So we can live our little sheep lives. We don't need to worry about the danger of wolves or dark valleys. Like the crowd listening, we don't need to worry if our shepherd is just a hired hand who is only in it for the pay and will run away when it's too much.

When it was too much for us, he died in our place. When all hope was lost, he rose again. That's a good shepherd. In Revelation, we finally see the flock together as one.

One flock with one shepherd. And with the slain and resurrected lamb at the center of the throne, we see that he will be their shepherd forever. He will lead them to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

It's good to be a sheep of Jesus Christ. It's good to be a Christian, to be part of his flock. Be comforted. Have joy. Follow the good shepherd. Jesus says, I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Let me pray. Oh, great shepherd, we praise you.

[ 20 : 02 ] We praise you for how you love us, for how you know your sheep. Lord, we pray that we would know and listen to your voice.

Lord, that we would trust you. Lord, that in the midst of the messiness and the difficulties of life, Lord, that we would know that we have a good shepherd.

One who leads us, one who protects us, one who provides for us. And Lord, we pray that we would know that he died for us. Dying so that we might live.

So we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.