

Christ Alone is the Good Shepherd

Let's turn together to the gospel of John 10. We're in the series Christ Alone and next week we'll be wrapping up and the following week starting a study of the book of 2 Corinthians. This morning's message is titled Christ Alone is the Good Shepherd

Let's pray and then read vv. 1-15

10 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. ² But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." ⁶ This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷ So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Many years ago our youth group was invited to hold a meeting at a family's house, and they had a sheep named Joy. Joy decided she was a teenager and became a part of our youth group that night. Joy played Ultimate Frisbee with us. Joy sang with us during the worship and made frequent comments during the discussion. I think Joy would have joined us for brownies and ice cream if we had invited her to!

In John 10 Jesus says he is the Good Shepherd and those who follow him are his sheep and it's popular for preachers to then highlight how dumb, how stupid, sheep are and then draw a line from those dumb sheep to the congregation. I've done it. I was all set to do it this morning. But then I read a study on sheep and it maybe offers us a little different take on the poor, misunderstood sheep. And it offers some fresh insight into our relationship as sheep with Jesus, our Good Shepherd and insight into our humanity – with all its strengths and its weaknesses.

Let's look at four truths this reveals about who we are as sheep and who Jesus, our Good Shepherd, is.

I. The Good Shepherd knows his sheep and his sheep know him

⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." ¹⁴ "I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father,

and I lay down my life for the sheep." Vs 4-5, 14-15

A 2001 study by Keith Kendrick discovered that sheep, far from being the stupid creatures we may think they are, are actually quite intelligent. Sheep experience a wide range of emotions from playfulness to sadness to fear to joy (hence the name Joy!). They are sociable and have complex social relationships, developing loyal friendships.

Sheep also have impressive memory and recognition skills. Kendrick discovered that sheep can recognize and remember at least 50 individual faces for more than two years. Sometimes I can't remember someone I met two weeks ago, much less two years ago!

This helps us understand Jesus' statement that sheep know his voice. In Jesus' day, sheep were kept in stone enclosures, with a door on one side. Often there would be more than one flock in the fold, but all a shepherd had to do was call out and his sheep would recognize his voice and follow him.

The point of this isn't about sheep, it's about relationship. When God made us, He made us relational beings. We were created for relationships, and we long for relationships. Sin has added the risk of being hurt in relationships so along with longing for relationships we also fear relationships, but like sheep we want to, and are able to, have complex friendships and deep loyalty. We want to know and be known.

We know Jesus' voice because we know Jesus. Someone can come to us in the name of Jesus and we know that it's not Jesus. We recognize his voice, and we recognize when it's not his voice.

But how do we know when it's Jesus speaking and not our own thoughts? Or worse, the enemy speaking? Many deceived people think they hear from God just fine. I've heard people say Jesus told them to do everything from committing adultery to teaching heresy. Hearing Jesus' voice has to be more than a subjective thing.

That's where the Bible comes in. As we spend time in the Bible, with open and honest hearts wanting to know God and Jesus better, we get to know Jesus' voice better and better. His voice has a truth, a grace, a wisdom, a God-centeredness, a robust biblical timbre to it that we grow to know.

Years ago I received an email from a pastor friend, that had an attachment and just one sentence that said "check this out" with a wink icon. The attachment contained the name Anna Kournikova. I had no idea what it was, but I knew this pastor, and it didn't sound like him. This didn't sound like how he would communicate, especially sending an attachment about Anna K with a wink icon. I decided it wasn't from him and never opened it. Found out later the attachment contained a virus.

Satan will send attachments to us in the name of Jesus. Sin and deceivers will send attachments in the name of Jesus. And we will be tempted to open them up to our own harm, so we need to get to know the voice of Jesus. Read the Bible prayerfully. Read it honestly – not to hear what you want to hear, but to hear what God wants you to hear. Read it lovingly, knowing that it is God's love letter to you.

In verse 3 Jesus says he calls us by name. Did you know that Jesus knows your name? When we stand

before the Lord we won't have to introduce ourselves to him. He will call you by your name. When he calls us to follow him, he calls us by name. Intimate friendship. Listen again to verse 14:

"I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father"

Jesus is comparing the love the Father and Son have shared from eternity past to the love he has for us and us for him. Your Good Shepherd knows your name, he knows you, and he is working in your life to help you get to know him. There is no greater thing than knowing Jesus.

II. The Good Shepherd leads his sheep

Sheep may be really good at relationships, but they are terrible with directions. Sheep have no sense of direction. They will follow whoever is leading them no matter where they take them.

ILL: In Eastern Turkey a couple shepherds left their flock of 1500 sheep to eat breakfast. One sheep wandered away and walked straight off a cliff, and the other 1499 followed right over the cliff after him!

The first 400 sheep died from the fall, but then the sheep started piling up so high that the remaining 1100 sheep found a soft and cushy place to land.

We need a shepherd to lead us or we lose direction. Our compass is broken, we think we're going in the right direction when we may be walking right off a cliff.

Jesus leads us by the Holy Spirit.

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. John 16:13

And the Holy Spirit inspired Jesus' disciples to write the Bible. When we read the Bible we are reading God's revelation of Who He is, who we are, and what is true. All truth. As we read the Bible, filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus leads us into all truth.

But what about those decisions, those crossroads in life that the Bible doesn't speak to?

Whenever I am talking to someone who is in a place of indecision about a major choice, I often encourage them with something that has encouraged my soul many times: As the Good Shepherd Jesus is a better leader than we are followers. When we come to forks in the road that call for a decision, and there isn't a right or wrong choice, we can trust Jesus to guide us. We pray, we ask for guidance, we seek to do his will, and we trust that He will guide us.

III. The Good Shepherd protects his sheep

I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief

comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. John 10:9-12

Jesus affirms what we all know: we live in a dangerous world. We have an enemy who lives to steal, kill, and destroy. Put those three things together and we're looking at a life completely devastated.

Sheep may not be as dumb as we thought they were, but they are totally defenseless. To the predator a sheep is basically a walking lamb chop. Throw in a jar of mint jelly and they've got a complete dinner. Wolves normally kill only what they can eat, but when they come across a flock of sheep they go crazy, killing over and over again, much more than they can eat. The world is a very dangerous place for a sheep.

The only defense for the flock is a shepherd who won't run when danger approaches. Jesus says the hireling will run rather than risk his life, but the Good Shepherd will lay down his life for his sheep. Jesus laid down his life on the cross in order to protect us from the wolves that want to ravage our eternal destinies. The Good Shepherd will deliver us safely to eternal life.

Until we arrive safely to our eternal home we can trust Jesus' protection in the day to day. One of my kids went through a season of dealing with fear some years ago. Janice had him memorize the 23rd psalm and whenever he felt afraid, quote it to his heart. Good medicine for fear. *The Lord is my shepherd.*

Do you ever feel afraid? Wake up in middle of the night and terrified about something, or maybe nothing you can put finger on? Terrified that something is going to destroy your life? Worry about loved ones that you have committed to the Lord?

Good shepherd speaks into that fear the only antidote to every kind of fear: I am with you. We can quote, like my son did:

The Lord is my shepherd...Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff comfort me. Ps 23:4

IV. The Good Shepherd provides for his sheep

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. Ps. 23:1-2

I shall not want. Jesus provides what we need. Of course this has to do with our physical needs: food, clothing, shelter. But those things are the easy things to provide, this is really speaking to the deeper soul needs we have.

It's a picture of peace. A picture of our souls be replenished. Lying down in green pastures, being led beside still waters. A soul that was weary and depleted being restored. We shall not want as we follow

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Jesus, our Good Shepherd.

Let's remind ourselves that Jesus is all we need. We can try to dull the emptiness with food or loud music or entertainment or busyness. We can try to fill the depletion with relationships that never quite do it. But Jesus is what our souls need and long for.

If you are feeling weary, or scattered – thoughts everywhere, jumbled – or fearful, do this. Make plans this week – as soon as possible – to get alone, just you, your Bible, and Jesus, and let the Lord restore your soul. Let him feed your soul in green pastures, let him satiate your thirst with still waters. Let him give you rest, and restoration.

Jesus is our Good Shepherd. Let this promise ring in your heart:

My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. John 10:27-28