

The Good Shepherd and His True Sheep

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 February 2022

Preacher: Joe Hall

[0 : 0 0] Well, how do we know who to follow? Leadership is maybe a part of our lives that we don't give too much thought to, but at every level of our lives, there are leaders.

Think for a minute about the leaders in your life. You have national leaders, a UK government, a prime minister, a Scottish government, and a first minister, and, of course, a monarch.

You have local leaders too, MPs, MSPs, local councillors. You have leaders at work, managers, perhaps your own manager, project leaders, or at uni, lecturers, supervisors, or perhaps even at school, teachers.

You have church leaders, your elders and deacons. You have leaders at home, particularly if you're a husband or wife, a parent or a child, or even if you're leading your own life, you are still leading and being led.

And those are the obvious ones, aren't they? What about the hidden leaders in your life? Companies seeking to shape your decision-making, to sell you a way of life?

[1 : 3 0] TV series, news sites seeking to form your values and your vision of the world? And everyone, of course, on social media, all clamoring to be heard and to be followed, which makes this a difficult question to answer, doesn't it?

Who leads you? And for some reason, we think it's the first thing an alien might ask. If you landed on Earth, take me to your leader. But perhaps that request is trickier than it first seems.

Who leads us? Who should lead us? And how do we, in our lives, know who to follow? Well, these are the questions, really, that lie at the heart of John's Gospel, chapter 10.

There's a lot of talk, isn't there, as there has been through our whole service, about shepherds and sheep. And that's a really key way that the Bible speaks about leadership. We saw that from our reading from Ezekiel, didn't we?

God was angry with the shepherds, or leaders, of his people for using and abusing his flock or people. And so, verse 12, God promised, as a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so I will look after my sheep.

[2 : 5 3] Leadership. And Jesus, in this chapter, is really just picking up that promise and that picture from Ezekiel and saying it is about him. And it's about the leaders of his day and how they treated his people and ultimately who God's people follow, namely him.

We have lots of leaders in our lives. So how do we recognize our true leader? And how do we know when we're truly following him?

Well, firstly, Jesus teaches us that our true leader or good shepherd makes himself known to us by laying down his life for us, his sheep.

Firstly, then, the good shepherd lays down his life for the life of his sheep. Now, we touched last Sunday on the way that Jesus uses everyday realities to help us understand who he is.

And this is one of them, isn't it? We're out in the wild. The sheep are grazing on the hills. But when night falls, the shepherd gathers them back into the field behind closed doors in the sheep pen.

[4 : 08] The wild is a dangerous place to be a sheep. There are robbers, thieves, to come and snatch you away. There are wild animals, wolves, that might tear you to pieces.

And in this pastoral scene, the only thing standing between you as a sheep from being stolen, being killed, being destroyed, is the shepherd.

And so listen to what Jesus is saying then in verses 1 to 6. If you glance down and read with me. Very truly, I tell you Pharisees, religious leaders, 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 name and leads them out.

When he is 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.

[5 : 20] Jesus used this figure of speech but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them. So the sheep only know the voice of one shepherd and so they follow him.

But there are plenty of thieves and robbers and strangers to the sheep, aren't there? Whose voices the sheep don't recognize and therefore they don't follow them.

And Jesus is saying this to the religious leaders, the Pharisees. Do you see? I wonder what they don't see here.

Do you get what they don't get? That they are the thieves and robbers. It's a good job they didn't pick up on that, isn't it? You have hopped over the wall to lead my sheep away, says Jesus, from me.

But let me make it clearer, he says, verse 7. Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers. But the sheep have not listened to them.

[6 : 25] 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. This is one of Jesus' lesser known I am sayings, isn't it? I am the gate.

Whoever wants to get to my people, says Jesus, has to go through me first. It might sound like a strange way to think of Jesus as a gate, but it helps to know that back then a sheep pen, where the sheep would have been at night time, was just a circle of rocks, basically, in a field with an opening in it.

And when the sheep were in it, and it was night, the shepherd would lay himself across the gap to keep them in. So nothing could get in or get out without getting past him.

And so the gate, in Jesus' mind, is his body. And to fill out the picture fully, verse 9, Jesus says, whoever enters through me will be saved.

[7 : 35] And so the sheep recognize his voice, they follow him home, and behind the safety which his body gives, they are not only safe, but saved, rescued from death to life.

And not just day-to-day life. What is Jesus talking about? Life to the full. What he's called before, eternal life. Remember, if you hear that great and wonderful man's name, Henry Scugel, the life of God in the soul of man, was the book he wrote.

The life of God in the soul of man. Life does not get any fuller than that. And so here's the rescue then that Jesus is bringing, that he says he's bringing, that Ezekiel spoke about, that God said he would come and rescue and gather and save his lost sheep from wherever they were scattered throughout the world as a result of the heavy-handed neglect of false shepherds.

And here is Jesus doing that, isn't he? Whoever comes through him, he says, will be saved. Whoever. Again, Jesus is so inviting.

Come to him, he says, enter through him and he will give you life forever, full and free. Rest for your souls. It's as simple as that. It's as simple as that.

[9 : 09] But Jesus' point is pointier still than that, isn't it? Because at this point, he's speaking mainly to the Pharisees. So it's not so much an offer here as a confrontation.

He is sticking it to the false shepherds, isn't he? Notice the contrast there in verse 10. The thief, cough, cough, says Jesus, comes only to steal, kill and destroy.

I have come, by contrast, that they may have life and have it to the full. He is something totally different to the religious leaders.

They are like night and day, Jesus, and religious leaders. We've seen this play out in real life, haven't we? As stepping out of the parable for a little minute, when have we seen the Pharisees steal, kill and destroy?

Is Jesus being unfair, a bit harsh, maybe? Well, what about the man Jesus healed back in verse 9? Whom they tore down and threw away.

[10 : 12] They told him, you were steeped in sin at birth, how dare you lecture us? And they threw him out. What about the man's mum and dad, who we read in chapter 9, were afraid of the Jewish leaders?

Afraid of their leaders? What about Jesus himself? Back in chapter 5, we read, for this reason, they, the Pharisees, tried to kill him all the more, because he wasn't only breaking the Sabbath, but calling God his own father, making himself equal with God.

Good shepherds? God's shepherds? No, says Jesus. thieves, robbers, murderers, destroyers, because they have not cared for the sheep, and they have not recognized the shepherd.

And as shocking as that is to hear about religious leaders, that is still God's verdict on any leader that misleads his people, that would carry them away from Jesus.

And sadly, that's not only true of leaders out there in the world, perhaps the obvious ones who come to mind, who can be guilty of that, but church leaders too.

[11 : 28] And one of the most common ways in our circle is like the Pharisees to preach and teach the Bible, but quietly replace Jesus' leadership with my human leadership.

speaking wrongly, out of place, of the church as my church, my people. Not saying, but suggesting in small ways that you are only pleasing Jesus when you are pleasing me.

Seeing Sundays as a way to boost my ego rather than feed the sheep, point the church to the shepherd. To church leaders like that, Jesus says, thieves, sheep rustlers, because Jesus is the gate.

No pastor, no minister, not me, not ye. Whoever enters through him, not me, not you, will be saved. Every year or two it comes out, doesn't it, a big name, who should have known better, who has been doing this.

But in much smaller ways, this kind of thievery can go on week by week, month by month, Sunday by Sunday, year after year. Even this past week I heard of a really sad situation.

[12 : 55] I don't know where it's going to end, a ministry that on the face of it looks faithful and fruitful, but the stories are trickling out. And that is sobering and humbling.

And things like that, they tempt me to hang John the Baptist's words up in my office. I am not the Christ. I am not the Christ because that is Christian ministry. And friends, I need to remember that and so do ye.

He must become greater, I must become less. And friends, if you ever see anything other than that going on in this pulpit, in this church, then run for the hills.

Run for the hills. And Mark Sterling, who's one of our lecturers at ETS, had a great way of capturing this truth. He said, you can't do Jesus' work in non-Jesus ways.

You can't do Jesus' work in non-Jesus ways. In other words, you can't bully, control people into God's kingdom because you can only come into God's kingdom or work in God's service or share God's priorities through Jesus.

[14 : 10] And that's not the way Jesus does it. You can't do Jesus' work in non-Jesus ways. So how then does Jesus lead us? Well, look what he says in verse 11.

That may be the best-known I am. I am, he says, the good shepherd. The good shepherd. In what way is he good? Well, he explains, doesn't he?

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The good shepherd, the true leader, is not self-seeking, self-serving, but self-sacrificing.

Now, if there was ever anyone who had a right to be self-seeking or self-serving, it was Jesus, wasn't it? And yet he wasn't.

You think about who it is who is saying this. Have a glance down at verse 17, where Jesus says, the reason my father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again.

[15 : 12] No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. Who in the world has ever had control over their own death?

Had such a grip on life that no one and nothing could take it from them, and yet chosen freely to open his hand and let go of his life to give life to others.

Unlike us, if Jesus had not chosen to die, he would not have died. But because his father sent him with that mission, with that command, he willingly did it.

And the father loves him for it. And brothers and sisters, do we not love him for that? To you? On the one hand, for the son of God to have died is the most costly thing that has ever happened.

And yet, on the other hand, for Jesus, he says, to die and to rise again is as simple as him setting down a crown of life and picking it back up again because he is the king over life and over death.

[16 : 33] And what makes him our rightful leader and our good shepherd and the only gate that we have to get to God is not the fact that he can do that, but the fact that he chose to do that and that he did it to die in our place, to carry our sins so that me and you could have life to the full.

He used his infinite power, his eternal life, he gave, not to use us, but to save us. And so, in one sense, there is no leader like him because who else can do that for us?

Not me, not you, even the most faithful husband or parent or pastor can only ever be a pale imitation, a shadow of his self-giving love and leadership.

And so, friends, who is leading you tonight? We have lots of leaders in our lives, but here is Jesus giving himself to us as the good shepherd, God's shepherd, to rescue us, bind up our wounds, feed us full, give us life, lay down his life for us, and take it up again.

And so, if you are not being led by Jesus, well, who is leading you? Who else is there to lead you like this? No one will ever give you more for your good than he has already given.

[18 : 03] And if you are being led by Jesus this evening, don't let anyone come between you and him. Even if you have faithful under-shepherds, so trust you do, here at Bon Accord and your elders, you still only have one good and true and faithful shepherd, and that is Jesus Christ.

So follow him, for the good shepherd lays down his life for his people. And because of this, our second point, the true sheep follow the shepherd's voice only.

how do we follow Jesus? Well, have a look with me down at verse 19 and 21. The Jews who heard these words were again divided. Many of them said, he is demon-possessed and raving mad.

Why listen to him? But others said, these are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind? So again, as we've seen before, the crowd is now divided over who they think Jesus is.

But notice the dividing line is now his words. Those who heard his words were divided. Why listen to him, ask some.

[19 : 15] These are not the sayings of a demon-possessed man, say others. Jesus has spoken. And now the crowd must listen to his voice. But Jesus says, the way that the crowd responds tells us more about who they are than about who he is.

You know, stepping back into the parable, if you glance back at verse 3, the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. Verse 4, the sheep follow him because they know his voice.

Verse 5, they don't recognize a stranger's voice. So then, how do we follow Jesus, our shepherd? We follow his voice. You know, when he tells the unbelieving crowd in verse 26, you don't believe me because you are not my sheep, how does he know that?

It's not a guess, is it? Nor is he using his divine knowledge. He knows, verse 27, because the sheep listen to my voice. And if they are not listening to his voice, they are not his sheep.

So we know we recognize the good shepherd by his self-giving sacrifice and we follow the good shepherd by listening to his voice. Now, this has been a problem for a few chapters in this gospel, hasn't it?

[20 : 34] The people of Jesus, they were not so good at listening. I wonder if you call it the howling irony in verse 24. Jesus has spoken so openly, hasn't he, for 22 verses about who he is and what he's come to do.

He's the gate that God's people go through to get eternal life. He's the shepherd that God's people follow into life to the full. And then, verse 24, the Jews gathered around him and said, how long will you keep us in suspense?

If you're the Messiah, tell us plainly. Tell us plainly? You could Jesus have put it any more plainly than he has? Who he is and what he's here for?

No, the suspense is long worn off and Jesus tells them so, doesn't he? I did tell you. I did tell you, but you do not believe. So the issue isn't that Jesus hasn't been clear, but that they have tuned out his voice.

They will not hear him. But Jesus' voice was and is still the primary way we follow him. Now, for them back then, they heard Jesus' voice, didn't they, from his own lips?

[21 : 45] He was there in front of them, telling them the truth. But for us now, we hear Jesus' voice when we read his words recorded for us in the Bible. That is where Jesus tells us plainly who he is and what he came to do, isn't it?

So when I say we follow the good shepherd's voice, I'm not saying that we wait to kind of hear a literal or metaphorical voice inside of us, directing us or speaking to us.

Our conscience under God's spirit can help us, but we cannot rely on our own instincts, feelings to lead us.

In our life, our conscience, it isn't pure or holy or whole enough to do that, for us to rely on what it tells us. No, it is the word of God, the written word of God in the hands of the spirit that tells us who Jesus truly is and that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever and tells us what he came to do for us.

And so for us now, we follow Jesus as we recognize his voice speaking to us in the scriptures and we follow his words. And that is how we know if we are following him day to day, week to week, month to month.

[23 : 08] And so the question for us this evening is, are you listening? Are you listening? If you've believed in Jesus as Messiah and trust his saving work, then I trust you are listening.

And so the message for those of us who do follow Jesus is, don't lose his voice in the sea of voices that are all around us. Okay, don't tune out his voice.

Don't lose it. There are other voices, aren't there, in this parable, strangers' voices. Here they are religious voices, but they could be any voices, couldn't they, that as they speak lead our trust and confidence away from Jesus only.

It could be the voice of the constantly updating news feed, or the voices of influencers or the masses on Twitter, on Instagram. It could be the voice of a politician, or a sports personality, or a singer, or a celebrity.

It could be the voice of a lifestyle magazine or website. It could be the voice of our own hearts. If it is not Jesus' voice, then it does not have a right to our hearts.

[24 : 23] And as much as it's on our leaders not to mislead us, it is for each of us also not to let ourselves be misled. Let me be clear that Jesus is always more angry with those who mislead than those who are misled.

Okay? The false teachers than the falsely taught. But today, if you hear his voice, Jesus would say, do not harden your hearts. Don't tune him out.

Don't follow the voice of strangers. Don't lose the sound of his voice in the background noise of everyday life in this world. Jesus says his sheep don't recognize the voice of strangers.

Instead, they follow his voice only as he calls us each by name and leads us out. And if you don't yet follow Jesus, you don't trust his voice to lead you through the darkness, the question to ask yourself is who do you listen to instead?

Who do you follow instead? Even if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian or even religious, you're all being led by someone or something.

[25 : 37] Our culture really loves and promotes this idea of autonomy. That I am the captain of my fate. I am the master of my soul. I don't have any leader but myself. but none of us lives in a vacuum or an echo chamber.

There are always voices battling for our hearts, minds, and souls. Sometimes Christians are mocked for being sheep, following quietly after their shepherd.

But the reality is that we are all like sheep. We all follow someone or something. The only difference is that Christians know the shepherd that they are following. But who is leading ye?

And is that leader better as a leader than the good shepherd is? Can that person, can that thing keep you from death and give you life, bring you to safety when you're in danger or you're hurt, give its life for you?

Would that leader give its life, his life, her life, for you and your life? And if there was such a leader who would give his life for you, would you not give him a hearing?

[26 : 50] Would you not listen to what he had to say? Would you not want to see where his words were to lead you? Would you not follow him to eternal life? My sheep listen to my voice, says Jesus.

I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. And so our answer to those questions, our response to what Jesus is saying here, well it tells us more about ourselves than about him, doesn't it?

Because here he is speaking plainly. And he would not take him up on his words if only we believed him. He will never lose a single one of us.

He follows his voice. We know that because verse 29, no one can snatch us out of the father's hand and says Jesus, I and the father are one.

Here is God telling us that he will give us life forever. Jesus works, they tell us so, don't they, the signs that the father gave him to do. God's word tells us so that Jesus uses in his defense in verse 34.

[28 : 01] And while it would be utter blasphemy and ridiculous for anyone else to claim what Jesus is claiming, to say what he said that he is God's son, that he is one with the father, that he is equal with God, well it is not blasphemy for Jesus because everything that he says and everything that he does proves that it is so.

And so he leaves us with the question then, are we listening? Are we listening? This is where Jesus' Jerusalem tour ends.

He's been there something like four months. We've seen his time there marked by conflict, division, and ultimately unbelief. And in verse 40, Jesus goes back across the Jordan away from Jerusalem where, by contrast, verse 41, many came to believe in Jesus.

Which is a suggestion, isn't it, that Jerusalem has a problem with Jesus. And indeed, the next time that Jesus goes there will be his last. But for those who believe in him, that final visit will not be the end of the story, but the beginning of eternal life.

As the good shepherd goes to lay down his life for the sheep, and after three days to take it up again. Let's come to him now as we pray.

[29 : 25] Let's pray together. Amen. God, our Father, how we thank you for our good shepherd, the Lord Jesus.

We thank you because there is none like him in heaven above or on the earth below. Lord, we thank you that he is our true and self-giving and loving leader, Lord, in a world of corrupt leaders, Lord, and where so-called leaders would mislead your people.

Lord, we pray that that would never be us, and that you would protect us, Lord, from false shepherds, and that you would do that, our Father, by keeping us by your Spirit close to the good shepherd.

Lord, we rest in his sacrifice for us, and we rest in his rising again from the dead for our eternal life. And we pray, Lord, at the beginning of this new week, that you would lead us hard after him.

Lord, give us ears every day to hear his voice, to listen to him, and to follow him. Lord, keep our hearts, we pray, from ever becoming hard towards him. And lead us, we pray, to life forever, a life to the full in him.

[30 : 50] For we ask in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.