

# The Gifts of the Good Shepherd

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- [ 0 : 00 ] Well, folks, if you turn with me to that chapter that we read, John chapter 10. Now, quite literally, we have John organizing his gospel in a very deliberate way. In this chapter, we have two of the seven I am sayings, I am the gate and I am the good shepherd.
- And these statements from Jesus about Jesus are sandwiched between two of the seven miraculous signs, John 9, the man born blind who was healed, and John 11, the raising of Lazarus from the dead.
- Now, as we come to John's gospel, I always think it's important to remind ourselves of the author's purpose. Sometimes the Bible tells us exactly what it is going to do or intending to do, and John's gospel is a great example of this.
- At the end of John 20, the author, John, wrote these words. After Thomas had confessed Jesus as my Lord and my God, we're told then that Jesus told him, because you have seen me, you have believed.
- Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Jesus performed many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.
- [ 1 : 23 ] But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name. So John tells us what he's doing.
- He's gathering these miraculous signs. He's gathering these sermons, these teachings of Jesus, so that we might believe. And in believing, we might have life.
- And that word life, we're going to come back to that in a few moments, because that word life is key to the chapter that we read. Jesus wants us to have life.
- And that life is found in his name and in his name alone. Now, if you think of the ministry of Jesus, the first 30 years of Jesus, we don't know all that much about him.
- We have a few scenes captured. His birth, yes. A flight to Egypt. A couple scenes in his childhood and early adolescence. But then, age 30, he comes onto the scene preaching and teaching.
- [ 2 : 28 ] He's baptized. He's tempted in the wilderness. And then his three-year ministry begins. Now, you might find this helpful. The commentators divide those three years into three periods.
- The first year of Jesus' ministry is described as the year of inauguration, the year of beginnings, his first sermon, his first miracle, his first parables, his first disciples, etc.
- The second year is described as the year of popularity. And we see that in John chapter 6, the beginning of John 6, when Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming towards him.
- He said to Philip, where shall we buy bread for these people to eat? And the account of the feeding of the 5,000. But the year of popularity gave way to the year of opposition.
- And we see this transition itself in John 6. Because at the end of John 6, we're told that many of his disciples said to him, this is a hard teaching.

[ 3 : 34 ] Who can accept it? And from that time, many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. So this is the time in which the enemies of Jesus are increasing in number, increasing in ferocity, that the opponents are in the ascendancy.

And it's becoming more and more clear as we move towards the end of the gospel, that Jesus is on a one-way journey to Jerusalem that will end with his death, with his resurrection, and ultimately with his ascension back to heaven.

So here we are in John chapter 10. I am the gate. I am the good shepherd. So what we find here in this chapter is that hearers, those that hear Jesus' voice, become followers.

It's an interesting companion piece to John 9. Because in John 9, what do we have? We have a blind man. A blind man becomes a seer. He can now see.

But the seer becomes a believer. The one who now can see Jesus becomes a believer in Jesus. So seers become believers. And hearers become followers.

[ 4 : 50 ] So turn with me to John chapter 10. And we're going to look just very briefly at three points, I think, that come to our attention in the text. The first is that Jesus establishes his own credentials.

There are no shortage of opinions about Jesus. Some may be orthodox. Others less so. There may be many things that people have to say about him.

Many ways in which they would describe him. But I think there's something powerful about letting him speak for himself. Letting him explain to us who he is.

And letting him explain to us what he has come to do. Because, again, theologically, the central truth of the Bible is the person and the work of Jesus.

And in these descriptors that Jesus gives of himself, he captures both. He answers the question who he is. And he answers the question what he has come to do.

[ 5 : 58 ] Who and what. So let's see what Jesus has to say about himself. What are his credentials? What are his qualifications? Well, we read in John chapter 10 and verse 3, The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.

That he is identified as the genuine shepherd. Not the false. Not the thief. Not the hired hand. But the shepherd. The one who is in charge.

The one who cares. The one who looks after the sheep. So he is the genuine shepherd. And he is the one who speaks. He calls his sheep by name.

And he leads them out. Now, the commentators will tell us that shepherding in the Near East, in the ancient Near East, was a matter of leading the sheep.

Rather than what we might be accustomed to in Scotland of driving the sheep. Where the shepherd takes the front position and the sheep follow him. Rather than the shepherd taking the rear position and the sheep or the sheep dogs move the sheep forward.

[ 7 : 06 ] So the shepherd calls his sheep by name. And we read in verses 14 and 15 that he knows his sheep. And he knows them thoroughly.

He knows us. He knows you. He knows me. He knows us by name. And by comparison in verse 13, the hired hand cares nothing. But the shepherd.

Oh, he cares greatly about his sheep. Their welfare is his great concern. He is the one who brings us access to every blessing.

He is the one who opens the door that we can come in. He is the one who provides abundant life. And we'll see in a moment that he is the one who provides eternal life.

And as we establish his credentials, we can do no better than repeating those words of verse 7 and verse 11. Verse 7, Jesus said again, I tell you the truth.

- [ 8 : 10 ] I am the gate for the sheep. You see, Jesus always tells the truth. In fact, he is the truth. I am the way, the truth, and the life, says Jesus in John chapter 14 and verse 6.
- But Jesus here is highlighting. I tell you the truth. It's kind of a way of underlining. It's a pattern of speech where he will say, verily, verily, or amen, amen.
- It's a way of emphasizing that what follows is of significant importance. Jesus says, I am the gate. And this gate is no ordinary gate.
- Because this is the gate by which the sheep come in and experience salvation. Jesus says, I am the gate in verse 9. Whoever enters through me will be saved.
- He will come in and go out and find pasture. So this gate brings us into a place of safety. And this gate brings us into a place of abundance.
- [ 9 : 12 ] Where our needs are met and met fully. So Jesus says, I am the gate. He's emphasizing, he's underscoring his personal identity.
- Who he is. But in describing who he is, he is also telling us what he's come to do. That the shepherd has come to lead, to call, and to save his sheep.
- To provide for their needs in time. And to provide for their needs to eternity. So I am the gate, says Jesus, verse 7.
- And then again in verse 9. Jesus in verse 11 says, I am the good shepherd. A line which he repeats again in verse 14. Now in the Bible, there are no spare words.
- When Jesus repeats himself, he does so not just for literary effect. But he does so to underline and to highlight the importance of what he is saying.
- [ 10 : 17 ] I am the gate. I am the good shepherd. This is monumental in its significance. Because he's identifying himself with that great Old Testament motif.
- Of the shepherd. That God himself is the shepherd of the sheep. God is the shepherd of his people Israel. That's why David, the king. Remember the shepherd king?
- Could say the Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. But David, who has power and authority. Recognizes that ultimate power and ultimate authority.
- He rests not with himself. But with the God whom he serves. And the God who keeps him safe. And the God who provides for his needs. So God is the shepherd.
- And Jesus is identifying himself as God. As the gate. And as the good shepherd. Because he's describing himself in a way that only God can do.
- [ 11 : 19 ] He's describing himself in terms and phrases that only could truly apply to God. Now, I think to be fair, the disciples were quite slow in picking this up.
- But the enemies of Jesus got it straight away. Because the enemies of Jesus were about to stone him at the end of the passage in verse 31. And Jesus said, I have shown you many great miracles from the Father.
- For which of these do you stone me? And they replied, we are not stoning you for any of these. But for blasphemy. Because you, a mere man, claim to be God.
- You see, Jesus is identifying himself as God. He's taking upon himself the very language of God. Remember in Exodus chapter 3. When God revealed himself at the burning bush.
- Moses, who was reluctant to lead, said, God, I need to know your name. The people will ask, who sent you? I need to tell them what your name is. So I can say, who sent me?
- [ 12 : 22 ] And God said to Moses, I am that I am. Or those words that we now know as Jehovah. It's the old form. Or Yahweh is the more contemporary transliteration.
- But I am. That I am. It's an unusual name. But it speaks of the fact that God is. That God was. And that God will be. Meaning he has no beginning.

He has no end. He always is. He's there in the past. He's there in the present. And he's there in the future. So when Jesus seven times says, I am.

I am. I am. I am the light of the world. I am the gate. I am the good shepherd. I am the resurrection and the life. And all seven of the I am sayings.

He's not just describing himself. But he's making a stupendous claim about himself. As to his real identity.

[ 13 : 22 ] That he is in fact God in the flesh. You've probably heard this quoted before. But I'm going to quote it again from C.S. Lewis. The first book I ever read before I became a Christian about Christianity was C.S. Lewis's Mere Christianity.

And I think there's a lot of people in that category. A friend handed them a book saying you might find this interesting. And maybe if you're not yet a Christian. I mean, I couldn't commend anything better than the Bible itself.

But reading a book like Mere Christianity introduces you to the claims of Jesus from the point of view of one who he described himself as the most reluctant convert in all of Christendom.

But he said this at the end of one of his chapters. C.S. Lewis said, I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him, about Jesus.

I am ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher. But I don't accept his claim to be God. This is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.

[ 14 : 32 ] He would either be a lunatic on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg. Or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the son of God or else a madman or something worse.

You can shut him up for a fool. You can spit at him and kill him as a demon. Or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher.

He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to do so. Who would say, I am the gate? Whoever enters through me will be saved.

Who would say, I am the good shepherd? I lay down my life for the sheep. So these are the descriptions that Jesus gives of himself. These are his credentials.

Who he is and what he has come to do. The second point has to do with us. Who we are. What are the qualifications or the criteria for those who would follow Jesus?

[ 15 : 43 ] Because remember, followers, those who hear, become followers. Hearers become followers. Seers become believers. Jesus says who he is.

And by defining who he is, he defines who we ought to be. If he is the shepherd, we are to be the sheep. If he speaks, we are to listen.

If he calls, we are to follow. If he is the gate, we are to enter in. And this reminds me of a message that I heard a long time ago. It's interesting the things that stick in your mind over a long time.

I was at a prayer breakfast, a Scottish national prayer breakfast. So a lot of the good and the great, the political leaders and the community activists.

And we're all gathered in the EICC. It was when the EICC was a new building. And the guest speaker over breakfast and coffee and whatever, the guest speaker was a woman called Anne Graham Lotz.

[ 16 : 42 ] One of the daughters of Billy and Ruth Graham. And Anne Graham, in her very distinctive and very polished, very effective public speaking, she began her after breakfast address by asking us the question, are you in a relationship with God that God would recognize?

And John chapter 10 is asking us that same question. Are you in a relationship with God that God would recognize? And she used the illustrations.

She said, if I were to point at the queen or the queen was on television, I would say, look, that's the queen. You wouldn't be very impressed. But she said, if the queen were to point to me and said, that's Anne Graham Lotz, you might be impressed then.

Because you see, the relationship that we are talking about here is not just that we identify Jesus, but that Jesus identifies us.

And that's what a relationship is. It's a two-way thing. He is our Lord. We are his. He is our Lord and Savior. We are his people. He is our shepherd.

[ 17 : 52 ] We are the sheep. He is the speaker. We're the listener. He gives the terms and conditions, and we accept and we believe. So the key here is today, if you hear his voice, you don't just hear it, but the words in verse 3, listen to his voice, is that we pay attention.

We don't just hear that somebody is speaking, but we hear what he says, and we do what he says. Verse 4 tells us that we hear his voice, and when he has brought out all of his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

There's a recognition. There's a familiarity. There's a familiarity. I would laugh every time. I would, ages ago, when my mother would phone the house, she would phone, and she would say, Bob, it's mom.

And I have the heart to tell her, but I knew who it was. I knew her voice. I would know it anywhere. But she would just want to make sure that I knew who it was phoning me because it was a long-distance phone call.

But just like we recognize the people in our lives that we know and love, we recognize the voice of Jesus. And we recognize that voice as the one who has authority, the one who has power, but also the one who knows what's right and who knows what's best.

[ 19 : 21 ] There was a great logo, which, you know, younger people might know HMV. Well, HMV stands for his master's voice.

And the logo of his master's voice used to be a dog sitting next to a phonograph, an old-fashioned record player. And the idea was that the dog called Nipper knew his master's voice, that these records were so good, RCA Victor records were so good, that you played a record of the master, and the dog could recognize the master's voice and respond to it.

We recognize the master's voice. We recognize him for who he is. We recognize him when he speaks. We recognize him when he acts.

And when we read of him on the pages of Scripture, we can identify him, not just as the good shepherd, not just as the gate, but we recognize him as David would, as my shepherd, as my savior.

Now, among many jobs that I've had in the past, I was teaching English. And one of the lessons with English that you want to teach are the uses of pronouns. And English pronouns can be a bit complicated.

[ 20 : 41 ] But what we're talking about here is the use of personal possessive pronouns. My, our, your. There's something powerful about these possessive pronouns.

Because I want to ask you this question. I'm not just going to ask you, is Jesus the savior of the world? Is Jesus the good shepherd? As important as those questions are. But I want to ask you, is Jesus your savior?

Is he your shepherd? Is he the one that you hear? Is he the one that you listen to? Is he the one that you pay attention to? Because throughout this passage, we're told that the shepherd knows the sheep, verse 15, and the sheep know me.

My sheep know me, says Jesus. So you see, this is a two-way relationship. Are you in a relationship with God that God himself would recognize? Now, the answer to that question is this.

The only relationship that God recognizes is a relationship that's based on his son. So do you hear the voice of Jesus? Do you heed the voice of Jesus?

[ 21 : 53 ] Do you recognize him as the gate? But not just recognize, do you enter in through him? Do you believe? Do you trust? Do you hear his voice?

And do you follow him? And again, that image of the Near Eastern shepherd is a helpful one. Because Jesus goes off ahead. He speaks. And he expects his sheep to follow him.

He expects us to follow in his footsteps. Where he goes, where we go. He sets the example. And we follow him, literally, in his footsteps.

So these are the credentials of Jesus, the gate, the good shepherd. These are the criteria by which we are identified as belonging to him.

We hear his voice. We follow him. We recognize him and we do what he tells us to do. If he invites, we accept. If he commands, we obey.

[ 22 : 53 ] If he leads, we follow. If he prohibits, we acknowledge and avoid. Why? Because he's the gate. He's the shepherd. And finally, I just want to emphasize the essential nature of Jesus himself.

You see, one of the classes that I teach is a class in world religions. And technically, Christianity is a world religion. There's Buddhism. There's Islam. There's Judaism.

There's Jainism. There's atheism. There's animism. There's a lot of isms. And Christianity is one of many different world religions.

You can describe it, if you prefer, as a world philosophy. But actually, it really isn't like any other world religion. It really isn't like any other world philosophy.

Because most of the world's religions will suggest that the primary problems are outside of ourselves. And the primary solution is inside.

[ 24 : 01 ] Christianity takes a different tack entirely. Christianity says that the primary problem that you and I have is within us. And the solution to that problem cannot be found there.

We can't fix the problems of our heart. We can't fix the problems of our life. So we need a solution that is outside of ourselves.

Most world religions, most world philosophies that have at least a theistic framework encourage people to reach up, to somehow attain to a level whereby they may obtain God.

Christianity, on the other hand, tells us about how God has reached down to our level. He's come down to earth in the person of his son to experience our life, to experience our hardships, and to go to that place of judgment on our behalf.

To go to that place of separation on our behalf so that we would never have to go there. So you see, the difference about Christianity and any other world religion is the difference of night and day.

[ 25 : 16 ] So it's not so much that you are sincere. It's quite possible that people may be sincere, but they may be sincerely wrong. They may have chosen to follow a course, a path, a way of thinking, a way of believing.

But unless that path is Jesus, they're in danger of missing the mark. They're in danger of finding themselves not in their intended destination.

Great example given my children's address this morning was about food. And this illustration is also about food, which maybe tells you a bit about me as the illustrator. But in the last century or two centuries ago now, the 19th century, in Chicago, there was a very large man called D.L. Moody.

He was physically large, but he also had a very large heart. He loved people. So much so that one of the biographies of Moody was entitled, Love Them In, The Life and Theology of D.L. Moody.

Well, D.L. Moody wanted to stress the fact that Christianity is about Jesus. It's all about Jesus. And it's not just that we have a creed, a statement of what we believe.

[ 26 : 29 ] It's not just that we have a confession, but we have him, Jesus himself. And he used this illustration. He said, doctrines are all right in their places.

But when you put them in the place of faith or salvation, they become sin. If a man should ask me to his house to dinner tomorrow, the street would be a very good thing to take me to his house.

But if I didn't get into the house, I wouldn't get any dinner. Now, a creed is a road or a street. It is very good as far as it goes. But if it doesn't take us to Christ, it is worthless.

He went on to say, he said, a rule I have had for years is to treat the Lord Jesus Christ as a personal friend. He is not a creed, a mere doctrine.

But it is he himself we have. And with this, I want to bring just before you a very simply but profoundly. We've looked at the credentials of Jesus.

[ 27 : 28 ] We've looked at the criteria of the followers of Jesus. But I now want to just tell you the terms and conditions of the Christian life. And these are established by Jesus himself.

These aren't my terms. These aren't the terms or conditions of the free church. But these are the terms and conditions of the head of the church, namely Jesus himself. And Jesus tells us that these terms and conditions are focused upon two gifts.

Two gifts that only Jesus gives. And two gifts that Jesus gives to all of his followers. To all those who see and believe.

To all those who hear and follow. What does he give? Well, you'll see this in verse 10. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

Gift one, abundant life. Gift two, verse 28. Jesus said, I give them eternal life and they shall never perish.

[ 28 : 34 ] No one can snatch them out of my hand. You see, the thief can offer, but the thief never delivers. The evil one offered a lot to Adam and Eve, but delivered nothing.

The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. Jesus says, I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. So these are the terms and conditions of the Christian life.

That Jesus wants to give you abundant life. And Jesus wants to give you eternal life. And these are gifts. You don't deserve them. You can't earn them.

You can't purchase them. But they are given to you and given to you freely. So Jesus is the gate. Jesus is the good shepherd.

We enter through him. We hear his voice. We follow him. We recognize that he knows us. We realize that he cares for us. And we accept what he gives us.

[ 29 : 33 ] So tonight, if you're a Christian, you have life that is full. And tonight, if you're a Christian, you have life that will never end. But one thing I want to stress, again, theologically, we often speak about assurance, being assured that we are Christians.

And sometimes we think, actually, my faith is quite weak. Actually, my confidence is quite limited. Actually, if I'm honest, I sometimes feel as if I am hanging on by a thread.

But the good news is this, is that our assurance is not based on the strength of our commitment to us. But our assurance or confidence is based on Jesus' commitment to us.

And let me just tell you what his commitment to you is tonight. Well, first of all, he has laid down his life. He cares for you. But listen in verse 28, where he says, I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.

No one can snatch them out of my hand. Jesus is staking his reputation, his credibility, and his authority on this propositional statement.

[ 30 : 50 ] Who we are, what we have, and what he will do to keep us, to protect us, and preserve us. If we didn't get that in verse 28, he goes on to say, My father who has given them to me is greater than all.

No one can snatch them out of my father's hand. I and the father are one. This is who Jesus is. This is who the followers of Jesus are.

And these are the terms and conditions of the Christian life. He gives us life, abundant and eternal. And he guarantees that no one can be snatched.

No one can be lost. No one can lose hold of him. Why? Because he will lose hold of none of us. That's why the apostle Paul said there is nothing.

Nothing in heaven, nothing on earth. Nothing above, nothing below that can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Why? Because he's the gate.

[ 31 : 56 ] We enter in and our safety and our salvation is secure. Why? He's the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life. Why? So that we don't lose our lives, but rather we gain life, abundant and eternal.

This is who Jesus is. And my prayer is tonight that you are in a relationship with Jesus that God himself recognizes. And there is no other relationship that God recognizes than one that is based on faith in Christ, trust in him, and that he, the good shepherd, goes ahead.

We hear, we heed, we follow, and we receive these good and precious gifts. And he holds us, and he keeps us, and he brings us to be with him forever and ever.

That's his promise. That's his commitment. And that is the foundation for our assurance. May God bless his word to each of our hearts.

Amen.