

John 10:11-21

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Date: 14 December 2014

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[0 : 00] Right, I've brought a box. You spotted my box? It's a Christmas box. I wonder what's inside my box. Shall we have a look? Okay. Oh, whoever he is, he's a bit squashed.

What is he? A sheep. Yes, he is a sheep. Do you know what his name is? Do you want me to tell you?

Mischief. That's his name, but actually he's not a mischief at all. He's very well behaved. He's very quiet, and this is his Christmas box, and this is where he sits and just chills out, and that's what he's going to do today. I brought him because I knew you were going to be singing about shepherds and sheep, so I thought I'd introduce you to mischief, but that's it. He's not going to be involved again. He's just going to listen to what I have to say here. We'll just sit him up.

There we go. You just stay there. Right, well, that's mischief. Now, moving on to your song. I loved your song. I loved your song about a shepherd and sheep, but I wonder what did the song mean? What did it mean? I am the good shepherd, and I know my sheep. My sheep know me. I lay down my life for the sheep. I think some people have an idea of what it means, but let's do something. Let's just talk about it a little bit, and then at the end, we'll see how much we know about what the song means.

[1 : 48] Okay, right. Well, Jesus once told a story that I think can help us understand what the song means, so I'm going to just tell you the story that Jesus told, and I think that will help us.

Once upon a time, there was a shepherd who had 100 sheep. Not 99 sheep. Not 101 sheep. That's another story about dogs, spotty dogs. No, this was 100 sheep, and he looked after his sheep so well.

Every day, he made sure that the sheep had nice, luscious grass to eat. He would take them to find green pastures where they could have all that they needed to be fit and healthy.

And one day, after a long and tiring day, they came back home, and something just didn't seem right.

And the shepherd had a look around, and it just didn't seem right. And then he realized what was wrong. One of the sheep was missing. That's right. So how many were there if one was missing? Yes.

[3 : 11] 99. That's right. Not 100 anymore, but 99. And he thought, well, maybe he's hiding, or maybe he's hidden between the other sheep, and he had a look, and he kept on looking, and he counted his sheep. But no, he was definitely missing. It was only 99. What was he going to do? Maybe he could say, oh, well, I've got so many sheep. One missing. Not a problem. Could he say, well, he'll probably turn up. We'll just have a good night's sleep, and maybe in the morning we'll find him back. Or in any case, we'll wait till tomorrow when it's bright and sunny, and then we can go and look for the sheep. Is that what he thought?

Mm-mm. He said, no, I've got to find that missing sheep straight away. So off he went, into the dark, into the cold, into the danger of the night to find the missing sheep. Well, he searched everywhere. He searched in the hills, and he searched in streams. He searched in bushes until eventually he could see his sheep. There it was. It had been injured, and it was just lying, looking very sorry for itself. And he came up to his sheep, and his sheep heard his voice. How do you think his sheep felt when he heard the shepherd's voice? He felt good, didn't he? He certainly did. He thought, now I'm okay. He was injured. He was cold. He was frightened. But when he heard his shepherd's voice, the sheep thought, that's my shepherd. And the shepherd came, and he lifted him up, and he put him on his shoulders. And Jesus tells us that he was rejoicing. In the middle of the night, in the dark, in the cold, he was rejoicing. I wonder if he was singing or what he was doing. But he was so happy that he'd found his sheep. And he took his sheep home, and the sheep joined with all the other

sheep. And they were back to how many? Back to a hundred sheep, the way it was meant to be. And do you think that was the end of the story? No. The shepherd was so happy that he called all his friends and all his neighbors to celebrate that he'd found his sheep. Now, I don't know, because Jesus in the story doesn't tell us,

I don't know if that was in the middle of the night that he did that. Because if he did, I don't know if all of his neighbors would have been that chuffed, be woken up in the middle of the night to celebrate one sheep having been found. Well, I don't know. But the shepherd couldn't care. What do you think?

They would have rejoiced. Even in the middle of the night. Well, maybe they would have. Maybe they were very good neighbors, and they'd have rejoiced even in the middle of the night. Anyway, the shepherd certainly was rejoicing because he had found his sheep. Wow. Now, Jesus told that story. And when Jesus told stories, he always told them because there was a lesson that he wanted the people hearing the story to know about. I wonder what the lesson was from that story. Well, you know, I think the lesson was, in fact, I'm sure the lesson was that he wanted the people to know that he was like the shepherd.

But, you know, even though it was a great story with a great lesson, not everybody got it. Some people did. Some people understood. But some people didn't really know what he was talking about.

[7 : 06] So, Jesus wanted to make sure that they knew that he was like a shepherd, a good shepherd. So, that's why he said, on another occasion, the words that you've sung, so that it would be crystal clear.

He didn't just tell a story. He said, how does your song start? The very first few words of your song. I am the good shepherd. Is that right? Are they the first words? Yes. Good. Okay.

So, he said it crystal clear so that nobody would be confused. I am the good shepherd. But, you know, even then, some people didn't get it, even though it was so clear. I am the good shepherd.

But, what does that mean? I am the good shepherd and I know my sheep. How is Jesus a good shepherd? Well, I think we can learn a little bit about how he's a good shepherd from the story that he told.

Let's just think about the shepherd who realized one of his sheep was missing and went to look for and find his sheep. What does that tell us about the shepherd? How does that help us to see Jesus as the good shepherd? Well, one thing about a good shepherd and one thing about Jesus is that he knows his sheep. That's what he said when he said, I am the good shepherd and I know my sheep. He realized when just one sheep was missing out of the hundred. Now, I want you to do something for me. I want you to imagine you all live in a big city, but I want you to imagine you're out in the country, you're in a field, and there are one hundred sheep. Can you imagine that? Put your hand up if you can imagine that.

A hundred sheep in a field, okay? Okay, good. So, you're imagining that, okay? Right. They're right in front of you, a hundred sheep, and the farmer's there, and he says to you, how many sheep do you think they are? You haven't been told yet. I know you're already imagining it. Well, anyway, he tells you there are a hundred sheep, okay? That's fine. And then he does something interesting. He says, now I'm going to tell you all of their names. A hundred sheep. And he goes one by one, and he tells you all the names of all the sheep. Well, and then he says to you, right, I want you to turn around and close your eyes. So, you turn around and you close your eyes, and the sheep are behind you, and then a couple of minutes later, he says, turn around again. You turn around, and when you've been turned around, he's taken away one of the sheep, okay? But very quietly. And he says to you, now, how many sheep are there? Do you think you'd be able to realize that one was missing? Hannah would realize. You're very good at counting quickly, but I think most of us would find it very difficult to realize out of a hundred sheep that one was missing. But let's make it even more difficult, okay? Let's make it even more difficult. The farmer says, well, I'm going to tell you. I've taken one away. There's just 99. I've got another question for you. I want you to tell me which sheep it is. I gave you all the names. Which one's missing? Well, I don't think even Hannah would be able to work out which sheep was missing. No, you couldn't. Could you? No, that's just too difficult. How could you know all these sheep and all their names? But in the story that Jesus told about the good shepherd, he knew all his sheep, every single one. And what Jesus is teaching us is that he knows us, every single one. All of our names, what families we belong to, if we're happy, if we're sad, everything he knows us, every one of his sheep.

[11 : 09] So that's one thing the story helps us to understand what it means that Jesus is a good shepherd. He knows his sheep. But another thing we discover is that he loves his sheep. Now, we know that because of what he did for that one sheep. He went in the middle of the night, in the cold and in the danger to find just the one sheep, because he valued the sheep so much. And he searched and searched until he found the sheep. And that helps us understand how much he loved his sheep. And not only that, but remember in the story, the big celebration when he found the sheep, how he was rejoicing and how he wanted everybody to rejoice because he found his sheep. And all of that tells us how much he loves his sheep.

And it tells us how much Jesus loves us, each and every one. So he's a good shepherd because he knows his sheep, because he loves his sheep, and because what else did he do? Well, we've really worked it out. He rescued the sheep, didn't he? The sheep was lost, and he was in danger, and the shepherd rescued the sheep. And Jesus was teaching everybody who was listening, that's what I'm like. I'm the good shepherd. I know my sheep, I love my sheep, and I rescue my sheep when they're in danger. In fact, that's what Christmas is about. It's about Jesus coming into the world to seek and to save those who are lost. All of us, far from God, and Jesus has come to save us, to rescue us, and to bring us back into God's family. That's what the good shepherd does. So that's something that we've learned about the good shepherd, that he knows his sheep, that he loves his sheep, and that he rescues his sheep. But I wonder, where is that all? Well, there's something else, and it's something that we didn't learn in the story

Jesus told, but we do learn in the song that you've sung, and that Jesus said about himself. What did he say? He said, I'm the good shepherd, and I know my sheep, and my sheep knows me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And then, what was the next bit of the song? I laid down my life for the sheep. Good for you. That's the other thing I want you to think about. I laid down my life for the sheep. Now, I wonder what that's all about. Well, do you remember David, who became the king? Do you remember David and Goliath? You remember David and Goliath, don't you? Do you remember that story of David and Goliath? And do you know what happened when David decided he wanted to fight Goliath? And he went up to King Saul, and he said, I'll fight Goliath. And King Saul looked at David, and he said, oh, I don't think so. You're just a boy. You're not going to be able to fight Goliath. What did David say? Well, David said, he says, yes, I can. And you know why? Because I've been looking after my father's sheep, and when a lion comes to steal away one of the sheep, or when a bear comes to steal one of the sheep, I frighten them off, and I'll fight them if I have to. And I have done to rescue and to save the sheep. You see, to be a shepherd was very dangerous. But you know, even David didn't die for the sheep. He didn't lay down his life for the sheep. He fought for them, and he was very brave for them. But what Jesus is saying is that he was going to lay down his life. He was going to die for his sheep, for his followers, for his disciples.

And he wouldn't die kicking and screaming, but he would, of his own free will, deliberately and carefully hand himself over to death on behalf of, for his sheep. Now, what does that mean? Well, it meant that Jesus was going to die for us. He was going to die for our sins. He was going to die to take the punishment that we deserve. And that's what he did. He laid down his life for his sheep, for us. Now, I wonder if that's the end of the story. Well, it's not, because even in the verses that we've read, Jesus tells us that that wasn't going to be the end of the story. Because Jesus said, I lay down my life, and I take it back again. I take it up again.

And there he was talking about his resurrection, that he wasn't just going to die, but that he was going to rise again. And that's what happened. He died for us. He died for his disciples. But then he rose again from the grave.

[16 : 08] And he's alive today. And what's he doing now? Well, he's doing what you sang about. He's calling us to follow him. He's calling us all to be part of his flock, to be part of his father's family, to be part of his church. Jesus is the shepherd. Is he calling you? And yes, he is. He's calling us to be part of his family. So there's some wonderful things that we can learn as we think about the words that you've been singing and learning. So when you sing that song again, you remember all these wonderful things about Jesus, the good shepherd, who knows us, who loves us, and who rescues us. And he's calling us to be part of his flock, part of his family. Right. Well, thank you for listening so carefully to everything that we've had to say this morning. What we're going to do now is we're going to bow our heads, and we're going to pray, and we're going to thank God for Jesus, the good shepherd.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your son, Jesus. We thank you that he is indeed the good shepherd, shepherd, and we pray that he would be our good shepherd, that we would be able, as we sing in a moment, the Lord's my shepherd, that these would be words that come from our hearts and describe who we are, the ones who have discovered in Jesus, the one who knows us, the one who loves us, the one who rescues us. And we thank you for it, and we pray in his name. Amen.