

John 10

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[0 : 00] The way I want to approach the passage this morning is to look at it under three headings. I want to think first of all about the shepherd and his flock, the central limits that run through this passage.

And that in fact will take most of our time. And then I want to look at the shepherd's voice. And then finally to think about the unity of the flock.

So the shepherd and his flock, the shepherd's voice, and the unity of the flock. And the first of those points will take most of our time. First of all then, let's think about this image of the shepherd and his flock.

Now I grew up, some of you will know this, some of you won't. I grew up in a shepherding community and in shepherding backgrounds. I grew up with an uncle who ran a croft in the Western Isles.

When I was a teenager, I worked on local estates as a shepherd. And when I was a student, I used to hire myself out as a lambing shepherd during the Easter period and during those weeks.

[1 : 05] So I've had a good deal of experience of being a shepherd. And you might think that that would give me a huge bag of anecdotes that I could use to illustrate this passage.

But it would give me some wonderful resources by which I can understand this image of Jesus as a shepherd of his flock. You might think that, but you would be wrong. Except insofar as those anecdotes and stories provide a contrast to the image of Jesus as a shepherd.

Because the kind of shepherding that is practiced in this country is very different from the model of shepherding that is practiced in the Middle East.

In this country, shepherding proceeds on the basis of the fundamental assumptions that sheep are stupid. And that those that are not stupid are vindictive and despise a shepherd.

So sheep will find themselves in all kinds of scrapes and disasters. I have been in a rowing boat trying to rescue a sheep from halfway down a cliff. I have pulled sheep from bogs.

[2 : 14] I have tried desperately to get sheep out of some of the scrapes that they have found themselves in. And sheep are vindictive. The intelligent sheep die purely because they know it will annoy the shepherd.

And so the experience of shepherding in this country is of a warfare, of a struggle between sheep and shepherd. And that's why, and this is the key point, that's why shepherds in this country get their sheep to do things by terrifying them.

If you want sheep to go somewhere, you have to frighten the life out of them with a dog, or with a sick, or with a bunch of guys yelling at them to hoard them in a particular direction.

For as the model of shepherding in the Middle East is of a shepherd whose sheep follow him because they know him. They follow him because they know him, because they trust him, and because they depend upon him.

The very image that we see there in verse 4. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his thoughts.

[3 : 26] The relationship of the sheep to the shepherd is one based not on fear, but based on love and on trust. Now I think there are two reasons why the sheep within this passage are portrayed as trusting the shepherd.

The first is that the shepherd leads them to pasture and to life. Now this involves thinking about another image, but the language of pasture is found in verse 9, where Jesus says, I am the gate, whoever enters through me will be saved, he will come in and go out and find pasture.

And that language of coming in and going out mirrors the language of verse 4, where sheep are called by name and are brought out, led out by the shepherd, led out to pasture.

So you have an interesting combination of ideas here. Jesus is the shepherd leading the sheep to pasture, but he's also the gate through whom the sheep must come in order to find it.

Now the imagery of Jesus as a gate, I think, is a very important image to think about. A gate, of course, is not a person. It's a thing. It's impersonal imagery.

[4 : 45] But I think it's a way of explaining Jesus' role or describing Jesus' role as an intermediary. An intermediary is someone through whom we must go in order to gain access to someone else.

If you want to meet the queen, you can't just turn up on her doorstep and say, Hi. You have to go through various intermediaries who can introduce you.

In the same way, Jesus is presented as the one through whom we must go in order to encounter God and to encounter the life that God will give us.

And the image of the gate is precisely that image that we must go through Jesus if we are to be genuine members of the sheepfold, genuine members of the flock.

We must go through Jesus if we are to find pasture. And, of course, that's something that is emphasised by the language of I am. If you're familiar with John's Gospel, you'll know that Jesus uses the language of I am a number of times through it.

[5 : 54] There are seven points where he says, I am, and then uses an image. I am the bread of life. I am the good shepherd. I am the gate. And so on.

Now, there are various resonances to that language. There's a background in Exodus when Moses asked God who he was and God said, I am.

That's my name. When people ask who sent you to them, say, I am has sent me to you. And Jesus using this language of I am has often rightly been taken as an echo of that.

But there's also the fact that it emphasises the centrality of Jesus. It's a way of saying, I am, and nobody else.

I am the gate. I am the shepherd. There is no other way to be a legitimate member of this flock than to come through me. If you have not come through me, you don't really belong among the flock.

[6 : 57] It's a way of emphasising Jesus' centrality. Now, the imagery of pasture is the imagery of life, of feeding. Pasture, of course, to us in a sense, it doesn't mean a lot because we're surrounded by green fields all year round.

But in the Middle East, pasture is precious, pasture is life. Shepherds will lead their sheep to find the rare and sparse grasses that they can feed upon.

And so the image of pasture is a profound image of life, of oasis life in the midst of wilderness. And it echoes the fact that throughout John's Gospel, these I am sayings that Jesus uses are part of an ongoing strategy that Jesus uses to say, when you come to me, what you find is life.

I am the bread of life. Come to me and you will be fed. I will give you waters welling up to give you life within yourself. And until you come to me, until you experience what only I can give you, surprising though it might be, you're dead.

Something profound, something vital is missing from your life. Without me, you just have no life within you. The language he uses in John 5 is that if anyone comes to me, he has crossed over from death into life.

[8 : 24] You become a whole new creature. So, the shepherd leads the flock. And the flock follow him because they know that in him, they will find life.

But the flock also love and trust the shepherd because of his sacrifice for them. That's the second thing. I am the good shepherd, he says in verse 11. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

And then further on in verse 17, Jesus says, The reason my father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again. 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. This command I receive from my father. Now here, of course, Jesus is speaking of his death on the cross.

He is speaking of the fact that he will lay down his life to pay for the sins of his people. And perhaps one of the keys to acknowledging the significance of his death is acknowledging that from the very beginning of John's Gospel, Jesus is described as the Lamb.

[9 : 35] The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. In the way that picks up on the Old Testament image of the guilt offering, of a Lamb that was offered as a payment, as a price for sin.

A Lamb that was offered as something that would take your place, would die the death that your sins deserve. And that's the image that lays behind Jesus' death upon the cross in John's Gospel.

He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And Jesus' flock follow him, because they know him and they trust him as the one who has laid down his life on their behalf.

As the one who truly and genuinely cares for them. His love for them is not in question, because he has done this incredible act of self-sacrifice and self-giving.

So taken together, we have an image, an impression of a shepherd who is trusted and loved by his flock. Because he leads them, because he gives them life.

[10:47] And because he has laid down his own life for them. They adore him for that, and they know that he will bring them no harm and no ill, because of what they have seen of the shape and the reality of his love.

In his giving of life. In his giving of his own life. Now in terms of ourselves this morning, the challenge for each of us is that that is reflected in our attitude to Jesus.

That we follow Jesus' voice. Not because of fear. Not because of anxiety. But because of love and adoration. That we serve Jesus transparently.

Because we love him. Because we trust him. Because we know him to be good. The problem is that so often, our service to Jesus can become a matter of legalism.

Can become a matter of doing things, because those are the things that we feel we ought to be doing. So easily we can lose sight of Jesus in the midst of our Christian walks.

[11:58] We can do things because we feel we ought to do them. We can do things because we feel that the community, the church, expects them of us. We can do things because we want to please the community, to maintain our status in the eyes of the community.

And so often in the midst of that, we can lose sight of the centrality, the beauty at the heart of Christianity, which is the beauty of the Lord Jesus himself.

And as John and Shirley bring their daughter to stay for baptism, as they commit to raise her as a believer, and as many here are parents who have baptized their children, or at least raised their children within the Christian community, the challenge to each of us is whether that is the way in which we are raising people.

That is the way in which we are raising children. Do we raise them to live a certain way because they love the Lord? And when they look at us, do they see people who live a certain way because they love the Lord?

Or do they see people who live a certain way because they fear other people? Because they fear what other people in the church will think of them?

[13:20] Because they fear that their status may be jeopardized if they do or don't do certain things? Because they fear, perhaps, the Lord in a wrong way.

Do they see people who obey or who live in a certain way out of fear? Or do they see people who live in a certain way out of love? That is a challenge before each one of us.

And that is a challenge in terms of parents raising their children. It is a challenge in terms of a community of the church that has children within it. Is this Christian community one that serves Jesus transparently out of love?

That is a challenge that comes to each one of us. So the first thing is then is of the shepherd and his flock and of the nature of that relationship. It is a relationship of love.

Secondly, let us think about the shepherd's voice. The language of the shepherd's voice runs through this passage. Look at verse 3. The watchman opens the gate for him and the sheep listen to his voice.

[14:29] He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. In verse 4, his sheep follow him because they know his voice. In verse 16, they too will listen to my voice and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

This language of the shepherd's voice runs through the passage. And I think, again, it's very important language because it emphasizes the intimacy and, to use a big word, the reciprocity of the relationship between Jesus and his flock.

It's possible to love people from afar and to try to please them from a distance. This is a terrible illustration and this probably doesn't help, but it's just what popped into my mind this morning.

People very often adore certain stars. Maybe they're musical stars, maybe they're film stars. They adore them and they want to delight them, they want to emulate them.

And, of course, this is something that's often in the media. It's particularly in the media at the moment, perhaps, as regards body image. Because, of course, many stars have a particular body

image which can often be emulated by people who want to be like them by going on trash diets and things like that.

[15 : 57] The point is, you can have a kind of love for people. That is, people who you don't really know, who you don't have any kind of genuine relationship with because the relationship is one way.

It's just about your fondness for them. But the image here of the shepherd's voice is of a two-way relationship and an intimate two-way relationship. It's of sheep that follow a shepherd because they recognize his voice.

Because that voice is one that they hear and listen to. And the crucial thing is that that voice is one that speaks their name. In verse 3, he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

There's a sense of Jesus' care, not for the flock simply as a big lump, but for each individual sheep within that flock.

There's an emphasis on the closeness of relationship, on the reciprocity of relationship. It's a reciprocal relationship. The sheep love the shepherd, but the shepherd loves each sheep by name.

[17 : 10] And again, I want to think about that in terms of each one of us. It's a challenge, I think, to us to ensure that we have a sense of that within our own faith, a sense of intimacy with Jesus, of fellowship with Jesus, that we don't regard Jesus as someone or something remote, but that we recognize that Jesus is someone who is in our lives as a real person with whom you have a real relationship.

And that we acknowledge that that real person is nothing less than God and nothing less than the man who walked in Palestine 2,000 years ago. And I think that's important for each one of us.

And I think it's important in terms of, again, the lambs and the children within this flock. Again, for John and Shirley bringing Rebecca this morning, they will baptize her, she will be part of the flock, but ultimately she must come and they must raise her to eventually put her faith into the shepherd himself, to listen herself to the shepherd's voice, to cease being part of the flock simply because she is John and Shirley's daughter and become part of the flock because she loves the shepherd and she knows that the shepherd loves her.

And that point can be extended to everyone here. There may be, I'm sure there are, children here who are in that category, that you have been part of this flock because of your parents.

And maybe you've never given thought to the fact that you ultimately must say to Jesus yourself, I love you and I will follow you. That you must acknowledge at some point that Jesus loves you.

[19 : 11] And perhaps that's true not simply of children within the congregation, but perhaps of adults within this congregation who have grown up in a Christian family, in a Christian context, who have always had a sense of being part of the flock, but have perhaps never placed themselves in commitment, in love, in following to the shepherd.

And the challenge to each one of us this morning is to do precisely that. To decide to follow him, to acknowledge that his voice speaks not just to us, but to me.

And that I will follow his voice, not just as part of the flock, but as one of the sheep who loves him and adores him. The final point then, we've seen the shepherd and his flock, thought about the shepherd's voice, the final thing I want to think about is the unity of the flock.

Look at the language that Jesus uses in verse 16. I have other sheep that are not of this pen, I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. Jesus here acknowledges the fact and speaks about the fact that there is not a worldwide bunch of people who have nothing to do with one another except that in common they have a relationship with Jesus.

[20 : 48] There is a flock, there is a community of people worldwide who belong to Jesus, who have a relationship with Jesus, and because of that they belong together.

They have relationships with one another. Whether they know one another or not, they are one flock. And that's an incredibly important theme within John's Gospel.

We'll see more of this tonight when we come to look at John 10. But there's an emphasis on the importance, on the centrality of the unity of the flock.

Now it's interesting even within this passage if you look at verse 12 that when he speaks about the wolf attacking the flock, the effect of the wolf's attack, of this evil figure's attack on the flock, is to scatter it, is to divide it.

In John chapter 17, as we'll look at tonight, Jesus prays for his people who will be under the attack of the evil one. And what does he pray?

[21 : 56] He prays that they might remain one because the evil one will seek to tear them apart. Now, it would be utterly naive to expect that the church will move away from the denominations that we have.

It would be nonsensical to expect that all of the different kinds of church cultures and subcultures that exist will vanish. That will never happen, I think, this side of eternity.

But I think there is a real challenge here because each of us can be so concerned with the particular branch of the church that we belong to and with the things that set that branch off from others, the boundaries that distinguish one community of believers from another, that we can lose sight of the unity.

We can so focus on those boundaries that separate us from them that then they become outsiders. And we can so emphasize that they are outsiders that we lose sight of the fact that in fact as far as the flock is concerned they are insiders. We can get to this crazy situation where we want to define who is in the flock and who is out and we try to exclude a whole pile of people from it.

[23 : 28] There is a real danger in that and there is a real challenge to us not to fall into that kind of sectarianism. And again that is a challenge for the parents of children.

Do we raise our children to be sectarians? Do we raise our children to be free church first and Christian second?

Or to think to equate free church with Christians rather than to acknowledge that to be a Christian is the first calling that we have and the free church is simply one branch of that one aspect of it.

That's one challenge. But there is also another challenge here in terms of unity and that's the challenge of peace. The challenge that within each community of believers each congregation within each locality in which believers exist there must be harmony and peace.

And what damage can we potentially do to our children to their faith to their attitudes if we raise them in a context where we squabble?

[24 : 50] You know there is a story that goes back to the times of the early church that people looked at the early church and said see how these people love one another. And that was a testimony to the world of the truth and the value and the integrity of Christianity.

And so many people have had a nascent faith twisted or damaged or even destroyed by the witness of churches that are consumed with hatred that show nothing of the peace and the love that Jesus brings.

And the challenge to each one of us then is to be peacemakers to be at peace with one another and where there are disagreements and conflicts to seek to resolve those as quickly as we may in peace and in love.

And as we raise children as we as a community have children among us there is a challenge not to model strife and conflict but to model love even when we disagree with one another.

And that of course was part of the challenge that Paul gave to the church in Corinth so divided among itself to the church in Philippi so divided within itself. The challenge not to ignore these disagreements but to resolve them and to deal with them in love.

[26 : 19] Let me finish with two final thoughts. The first essentially just picks up on that last comment about the unity of the flock.

And that's that as we actually participate in a baptism this morning we are participating in a sacrament that essentially speaks about the unity of the church.

The very act of baptising is a challenge to us to be together. Paul uses the lines that there is one baptism one faith one Lord one baptism and as we participate in this baptism we are challenged and held to account that we maintain the unity of the church.

The second thought though is maybe a little more subjective. I looked at this passage about six months ago because I was asked to look at it in the context of a service a worship service at St. Andrew's Union. And I was specifically asked to look at this passage and when I came to look at it the first thing that struck me reading through it was that there was so much that I didn't understand.

[27 : 38] because I'm not an expert in John's Gospel. I've preached through it I've lectured on it but I wouldn't regard myself as an expert. And there are ideas and language here in this passage that I'm sure an expert in John's Gospel would make a great deal of.

This language of the hired hand this idea of thieves and robbers who came before Jesus these are things that I've never looked into.

working in the background is the question of whether or not there is an anti-Semitism in John's Gospel that many scholars speak of and whether what's spoken of here reflects that.

I don't know much about these issues and I was very conscious when I came to look at this passage for that sermon that I didn't know really what these issues were all about.

I didn't really know what the thieves and the robbers were. I didn't really know about the hired hand an expert in John Woodo but I didn't. But whatever I didn't know about this passage I did know something because the central image of the shepherd and his flock is an image that resonates with us all that is simple and accessible.

[28 : 59] And in the midst of all that we fail to understand in God's word, we can cling to the core truths that God is our saviour, our lord and our shepherd.

And in the midst of all that we don't understand about life, as life confuses us, baffles us, hurts us, we can cling to these core truths that the lord is my shepherd.

I will not want. he will lead me through the valley of the shadow of death. He will lay a table of feasting before me. He will lead me to pasture.

He will maintain me alive. And I know this. I know this truth. And I can cling to it. Because in the middle of everything that is bad and bleak in the world, in the middle of everything that people hold against Christianity and say, how can there be such evil in the world?

How can God allow such evil? In the midst of all that I can't understand in life, I know this, and I believe this, that my God gave his son for me, and my Lord died for me.

[30 : 13] And I know that. I can cling to that. And that is the truth that challenges each one of us this morning. That is the truth that John and Shirley will raise their daughters to believe that my Savior gave himself for me.

And everything else in life is judged against that one glorious, splendid, awesome truth. Amen. Let's bow and pray.

Our gracious and loving Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are our shepherd, we thank you that you love us, we thank you that you gave yourself for us. And we ask that this morning we would serve you as your people, as your flock, as those who love you in response for your love for us.

We pray for John and Shirley, we ask that you would bless them as they bring Rebecca for baptism. We ask that you would help them to raise her in the love of the Lord, in the adoration of a Jesus who has given himself for her.

We pray that you would give them wisdom and guidance to know how to raise her in the truth of your word, how to model true faithfulness before her. And we ask that as a family, they would know your blessing upon them.

[31 : 39] Lord, we ask these things now and we pray that as we pray for them, we pray it for the whole congregation, for parents, for children, that all would come to know you and would serve you as their shepherd.

Amen. Well, we'll sing again, singing this time for Psalm 103 from the new versions of the Psalms. This is on page 135. We'll sing verses 8 to 14 and the tune is Hereford. The Lord is merciful and kind to anger, slow and full of grace.

He will not constantly reprove or in his anger hide his face. He does not punish our misfits or give our sins or just reward. How great is love as high as heaven towards all those who you go on.

The same verses 8 to 14, the tune is Hereford. That's it. It's important for John and Shirley and it's important for all of us that before we conduct this part of the service, we should be clear in our minds about the significance of what we are doing.

[33 : 08] We have a baptismal service, not because it's a pleasant custom which appeals widely. We have a baptismal service because Christ has commanded us to go into all the world and preach the gospel baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Now in these words themselves our Lord has made it clear that God is three as well as one. someone has said a three in one of whom love and fellowship is the very essence for he shares himself even within the depths of his own being.

And it's this kind of God who invites us into relationship with himself in the gospel. The sacrament doesn't tell us anything different from what is said to us in the preaching of the gospel which we have listened to already this morning.

The sacrament as we say is a sign. It symbolizes something the picture of the truth that we listen to in the preaching of the gospel.

[34 : 56] In order that we come into intimate relationship with a God who is holy it's obvious that we need to be cleansed from sin and that's why we use the element of water in this service.

It symbolizes the cleansing from sin that God has provided for us in Christ. It's also we say a seal. You seal a document as a guarantee of its validity. the sacrament of baptism is a kind of guarantee to us of the reality of those things of which the gospel speaks.

It is God showing us that he commits himself to us and that when we receive his son the Lord Jesus Christ as our saviour and put our faith in him that we are assured of the salvation in all its fullness that he came to purchase for us.

Now you're required to make certain vows John and Shirley. I asked you in the first place do you confess again before this congregation confession your belief in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the very word of God our only rule for our faith and our conduct.

[36 : 49] And do you publicly renew your own confession of faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your saviour?

And do you promise to bring up the little ones God has given you? Giving her every encouragement teaching her and by your example also encouraging her to trust in and to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

the better James I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord bless you and teach you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.

Let us pray. The congregation should stand to pray. Gracious God our Father in heaven what we have endeavored to do on earth in obedience to Christ's command we pray that you will acknowledge in heaven we pray that you will bless the family before us we thank you for them we thank you for the witness of their Christian home we thank you for the little one you have given to them and we pray that you will indeed be present with them in their home day by day and we pray that as

[39 : 00] Roberta grows up so she may grow in understanding of the truth about you and may she not only come to know about you but may she come to know you in the personal way of which we've been thinking this morning as her own Lord and Saviour may we know what it is to follow the Lord Jesus Christ the good shepherd of the flock which is his church and so may goodness and mercy follow her all the days of her life and may she dwell at last in your house forever more we pray not only for the family before us we pray for all the families of our congregation and all the children growing up amongst us that your grace may be upon them and we pray that as this sacrament reminds so many of us of the fact that perhaps many years ago we also were baptized we pray that this service may speak to us and we pray that the blessings spoken of in our baptism may be a real experience to us because we have received and put our trust in the

Lord Jesus Christ and if indeed we have done so we pray that our experience may be that whatever the trials and difficulties of our journey through this troubled world that we know the truth of what your word says when it says the path of the righteous is like the shining light that shines more and more unto the perfect day Amen Amen