

Season 10: John 6-12

Episode 8: Jesus the Promised Shepherd (John 10:1-21)

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Sarah: We're so thankful for the sponsorship of crossway this season. They're the publishers of the Lord of Psalm 23 by David Gibson, the book that we've both talked about so much to other people over the last couple of months. It's a book unashamedly about Christ's fulfillment of psalm 23 as our good shepherd. It's a book that's truly helped us to see psalm 23 and the Exodus and by extension, John, chapter ten in a whole new light. And thanks to the author's exceptional gift for pastoral depth and insight, I find myself returning to its themes and praying in the psalm for myself and for others almost daily. It is a really wonderful book and well worth your time. Do pick up a copy from wherever you buy your books.

Felicity: Welcome to two sisters in a cup of tea. My name is Felicity and I'm here in the States. I'm here with my sister Sarah. She's in the UK. And we're excited to be continuing our season in John's Gospel. This episode we are going to be in John, chapter ten, verses one through to 21. And it is full of goodness. I've got to say, Sarah, I have been continuing on my gluten free biscuit journey, and the biscuit I've come across, I'm not sure it's full of goodness and I'm not sure it really counts as a biscuit, but it is crunchy and a little bit sweet and it goes quite well with a cup of tea.

Sarah: I think that sounds about right.

Felicity: Yeah, it is a coconut crisp. That's what they call. It's like an Aldi kind of special. I'm still undecided. I was even unsure as to whether to mention it to you, whether it really counts in the category of what we're talking about exactly. But it brought me a little bit of joy with my Earl Grey cup of tea.

Sarah: Did you feel like you needed more than one to kind of.

Felicity: Yes, because they're really small and really skinny.

Sarah: They're called crisps. They're probably quite like thin as well, aren't?

Felicity: Yes. Yes. But in America, crisps is a different word. They don't quite know. We call crisps chips. There's a whole world of confusion out there.

Sarah: But let's not do that now, though.

Felicity: Let's not get into it. Let's instead talk about something else. Sarah, let me ask you this question. You and I are always talking about being in the word. We clearly love being in the word and we're encouraging our listeners to do the same. But what does church have to do with being in the word. Can you help us think a little bit about that?

Sarah: Well, I guess the Bible is very clear, isn't it, that our local church families are the primary place where we can extend that word to one another. Where we can speak the word of truth in love to one another. Where we can hear that word preached and then therefore speak it into one another's lives and build one another up in it. The experience of God and his people is never an individual experience. It's always in community throughout the whole Bible. And so the church reflects that. And so, wherever possible. And there'll be so many complexities to this. But wherever possible, get yourselves into a Bible believing church. Where the word is preached and taught and kind of spoken amongst one another. Because that is God's primary means of grace to us.

Felicity: And I think we've been fortunate to have had those experiences where the sweetness of being in a church, that kind of chats God's word, that hears it and speaks it to one another and brings one another back to the word that is life giving. And that is actually a pretty key means of keeping going. As a Christian, I feel really grateful for that in my life.

Sarah: It's life giving, but it takes work and it takes intentionality. And I think we need to be on the front foot in terms of speaking that word to others. As much as expecting it to just happen in the congregation as you meet on a Sunday. But we're going to be thinking about kind of hearing God's voice, actually in today's passage. So why don't I read that for us? We're in chapter ten and starting from verse one, let me read very truly, I tell you, Pharisees.

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 has brought out all his own. He goes on ahead of them. And his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they'll never follow a stranger. In fact, they'll run away from him. Because they do not recognize a stranger's voice. Jesus used this figure of speech. But the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them. Therefore, Jesus said again, 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. 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. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he's a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me. Just as the father knows me. And I know the father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of the sheepfold. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice. And there shall be one flock and one shepherd. 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 received from my father. The Jews who heard these words were again divided. Many of them said, he's 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?

Felicity: I just want to acknowledge that I've been overwhelmed by this passage with just how wonderful it is. And as we start this conversation, I'm not even sure how to start in order that we get all that we want to say out in only a short time. But what is notable is that we do have two I am statements. We have I am the gate and I am the shepherd. And Jesus says he is both of those things. Take us to the gate, Sarah. To begin with, I would love to.

Sarah: Take us to the gate because we so often miss the gate for the shepherd, don't we? Like, I am the shepherd is the one that trumps the gate so much, I think. But the gate is here and it comes first. And I just love what the gate does. He says in verse nine, I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. I love Courtney. Doctor, in her Bible study, she was saying that actually the shepherds would literally lie down in the doorway to the sheepfold to stop anyone coming in and any sheep going out. And just that idea of you're saved through Jesus. Through Jesus you find pasture through Jesus. You found life to the full. He is the entrance, the gateway to life. And it's just a really powerful image that, isn't it? And it's a real contrast to the thieves who come only to steal and kill and destroy. Jesus is the opposite of all those things. And I just love that.

Felicity: I love that too. And that he is literally, this is it. This is the way to life. And I love that sort of picture of going in and out, finding pasture. That's a theme which we have all the way through this passage, I think, is that the rich abundance of what Jesus is giving, he gives life and he gives life to the full. And so then, in classic John style, I feel, and we have, I am the gate. And then Jesus goes on and says, I am the shepherd. And for a while when I was reading this, I was like, but how can you be both? How does that work? Are you the gate or are you the shepherd? And then John's not linear. He's not like, I am the gate. There, four, I am the shepherd. Actually, the two different things and two different aspects of who Jesus is. And so then he goes on to say in verse eleven, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. So it's the same thing, isn't it? But what we have here then is the shepherd who knows my sheep and my sheep know me. And one of the things which struck me so much as I was reading was just the intimacy of the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep. You have that kind of the gateway that means that the sheep come into the pasture. But not only that, it's not like kind of just saved and left to their own devices. Actually, the shepherd knows his sheep. He continues to speak to his sheep. His sheep know his voice. There's just so much in that relational aspect here.

Sarah: It's so beautiful, isn't it? And the first few verses kind of talk about that as well, don't they? In terms of the sheep follow him because they know his voice, they listen to him. And that is in contrast to the stranger and in contrast to the hired hands and in contrast to the wolves. I think the contrasts are brought out so much here, aren't they? And I think that's what therefore shines a light on the goodness of Jesus as the good shepherd when you see it, in contrast. And so if we cast our minds back to chapter nine and Jesus saying, I have come to judge, I think it's impossible to not connect the two that actually he's saying, I'm the good shepherd, because the context here is all that he's seeing is bad shepherds in play. He's seeing the Pharisees, he's seeing the religious leaders doing the opposite of what they should be doing. And that in itself harks back to the Old Testament passages in Ezekiel and Jeremiah who talk of bad shepherds, who are doing nothing but killing, destroying and stealing from the people rather than enabling to flourish. And so this is such a weighty loaded phrase, isn't it? But when we see it in the context of what we've just been seeing with the leaders, and actually that he says in verse one, very truly, I tell you, pharisees, he is speaking directly to them, you cannot but help see the judgment loaded in here as well.

Felicity: Yes, I think that's right. And so helpful to see that. That is a big part of what's going on here. Always thinking about the context, the fact that it comes after the passage before and that Ezekiel 34 and so indicting of the pharisees. It's such a mixed thing, isn't it? Because I think you read this picture of the shepherd, of Jesus as the shepherd. And it is so persuasive that I would want to follow this shepherd. And in that, it highlights to me that I definitely don't want to be following any other sort of shepherd. I mean, Jesus is basically saying, there is no other shepherd. They're wolves, they're thieves, they're all sorts of other things. But this is what it is to be shepherded. And as we're going back to the Old Testament, let's just remember the kind of exodus, big picture we get there. God does lead his people. And that happens again and again and again throughout scripture. God is continually leading his people. He is with his people through and through. And what we get so explicitly here, verse 17, the reason my father is that I laid down my life. And what we have, the really real clear picture of Jesus's sacrifice for his people.

Sarah: It's really striking that, isn't it? That actually the goodness of this good shepherd is inextricably linked to him laying down his life. You can't have one without the other. And I just think, I don't know. I don't know how much I've kind of seen that before. But just really, it's so clear here, isn't it, for us to see that?

Felicity: Yes. And I really enjoyed that truth being shared within the intimate picture of this relationship of sheep hearing and following and the shepherd being with his people. It's not just a kind of doctrinal fact, Jesus died for his people. But actually this is Jesus the shepherd, the one who loves, the one who gives life to the full, the one who never abandons his sheep. He died for you. And that is just.

Sarah: And even more than that, which David Gibson has really, really helped us to see. Like, we can't recommend this book highly enough. But even more than that, loading into that I am statement. The Lord, the covenant God Yahweh, he is the good shepherd. And therefore, as we see that in psalm 23, just that kind of all the kind of weighty significance of this is the Lord who's doing the laying down of his life as well. It's stunning, isn't it?

Felicity: It is stunning. And I think, and David Gibson helped us see this more. So the sufficiency of that shepherd. Like this is the shepherd that we need. And I think as we've been going through John's gospel, the Pharisees have been ramping up. We know where it's heading. They're going to obviously kill Jesus soon. And that's quite scary. They're quite a threatening presence. They are powerful. And for the original readers, it would be really very real. And I think it's really comforting. And really, it makes me want to shelter in Jesus. Like, whatever happens, whatever the world looks like, whatever is going on, whoever is threatening this shepherd, as we get depicted throughout the Bible, psalm 23, exodus throughout the scriptures, is resilient and strong and sufficient and he is with us and that is all we need. Life is secure in his hands. And I think that he talks about eternal life and I've given, delivered them in order to give them eternal life and that life can never be taken away because we are with the shepherd.

Sarah: Beautiful, isn't it? Really beautiful. I just wanted to go back to verse three briefly where it says again, the kind of personal nature of who he's describing himself to be saying

he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And just again, that kind of connotation of psalm 23, where he leads, he guides, he is with them, he's with the psalmist, he's with David in the depths of the darkest valley and he will lead him home. And just, you can't read this without seeing all of that psalm in this as well. And I just love how Jesus is like, I am it. I am this shepherd, I am the fulfillment of all. Like, all these promises are met in me and therefore do rejoice in me in that way. Do let your heart be comforted. Yeah, I just think we can never tire from hearing that and being encouraged to dwell on the goodness of his shepherding.

Felicity: Yes. And which is helpful just to help us see how it has impacted our hearts in that way. And just stopping and just pausing. Like you said at the start, we all know Jesus says I am the good shepherd, but actually to just dwell on that for a moment and what does that mean for my everyday life? How does that change? And for me, I think it's given me reassurance and a feeling of, it's okay, it's okay, whatever happens, I have the shepherd with me. I have life in his hands. He's not going to let me go. And I think circumstances can roller coaster around us. But he is the shepherd and that doesn't change. That's been quite a big thing for me as I've been in this.

Sarah: That's really helpful. I think I'm struck with. Struck with all of it.

Felicity: Clearly, we're both like.

Sarah: I can't pinpoint any of it. And I feel that it's quite hard to know where to land this, but going back to the voice, hearing his voice, there seems to be a trajectory of the sheep listen to his voice. The sheep follow him because they know his voice. So in verse three and four, and just that, the distinction between you can hear his voice, you can listen to God's word, you can hear it preached on a Sunday. And there's a difference between follow and then kind of following him and knowing his voice. And the more that I listen, the more that I kind of imbibe what he's saying, the more that I'm going to be able to discern his voice from other voices in the world and therefore follow him more closely and experience these joys more wholeheartedly, I think.

Felicity: Yes, I think that's right. I think also there's great assurance in the simplicity of it is about just hearing his voice. It's not about having some sort of theological highfaluting training. It's not about getting everything right. It's not even about living the most godly life ever. It is simply about hearing his voice and responding to that. And I just think that's really reassuring for us personally, but also as we think about others. And, yeah, it's helped help me to sort of listen. The simplicity of that has really ministered to me, I think.

Sarah: I mean, all of this is ministering to.

Felicity: There's so much so good. Well, in what we've been saying, we have gone to the Old Testament a fair bit here, haven't we? And we've talked about this as we've been in John's gospel, choosing when and where to go there. Let us just encourage you to give psalm 23 a read as a simple way of just seeing Old Testament things here. And for me, that has really helped me to see the depth of what's being said here. There's loads more that we could say. As you can tell from the way that we're speaking. We have really enjoyed this chapter. Sarah, why don't you pray for us as we tie things up here?

Sarah: I'd love to, Father. We just thank you so much that Jesus is the good shepherd and the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. We thank you so much for the truth, the wonder, the joy, the beauty of that massive statement. And we thank you, Lord, that you protect, that you lead, that you guide. We thank you so much that we are the recipients of your care and we pray. Father, please, would you help us to keep growing in knowing your voice, in hearing your voice, in following your ways? Because we know that those are the things that lead us to life. And that, Lord, it's not just any old life, it's life to the soul. So, Lord, please, we pray, keep growing us and keep delighting our hearts in Jesus. We pray. Amen.

Felicity: Amen. Thank you, Sarah. Well, just good stuff as ever. Do remember that we have show note questions and the aim of them is to help you get into this word with a group of women or a friend or just for yourself, just to help push on the discussion. We're very aware this is only the start of the conversation, so do have a look at the show notes. Use the questions for your own advancement of that chat, and we will look forward to being with you next time as we do the rest of chapter ten.

Sarah: See you next Friday. This season has been sponsored by Crossway.