Westlake Church Lausanne (05.01.25)

The Good Shepherd – Jn 10:1-21

*Title slide

0. Introduction and context

How many meaningful relationships would you say that you have in which you really know the other person and are known by them?

A study done at Harvard University that followed several hundred people since 1938 showed that one of the most important factors in longevity is having close relationships.

A study done at Stanford University suggested that the risk of death due to lack of social connection is the equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes per day.

We have been made in the image of God to be relational beings.

What does this have to do with our study in the Gospel of John?

As we will see, the essence of being a Christian is having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and today's passage tells us something about the nature of that relationship.

But before we dive in, let's set the context of the passage.

In Chapter 9, which Mike Evan's preached on at the end of November, John describes Jesus healing a man who was blind from birth, and this healing occurred on the Sabbath.

The blind man was brought to the Pharisees who questioned him. At first, they didn't believe that he had been born blind, so they called in his parents who confirmed it. They then called the healed man back in and questioned him further, trying to get him to renounce Jesus. They were bent out of shape because Jesus healed him on the Sabbath, which they interpreted as doing work, which was forbidden by the Law. This was more important to them than the fact that the man was healed.

When the healed man didn't give them the answers they wanted, they cast him out of the synagogue.

Jesus then had a brief exchange with some of the Pharisees:*

Jn 9:39-41

> *39 Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." 40 Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" 41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt, but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.*

Our Bibles have a chapter break after this verse, but there are no such breaks in the original. We should consider todays passage in John Chapter 10 as a continuation of this previous exchange.

The audience for Jesus' discourse in Chapter 10 that Alistair read to you is thus the Pharisees, the healed man, Jesus' disciples, and other Jews.

So, let's dive in.

I would like us to focus on 4 things this morning related to Jesus' relationship with his followers – the first of which, in verses 1-6, is*

1. Self-righteousness vs. relationship (vv. 1-6)

Look at the first two verses of chapter 10. Jesus says:*

> [1]"*Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.* [2] *But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.* [3] *To him the gatekeeper opens*

Jesus uses the metaphor of sheep and a shepherd to describe his relationship to his followers.

Sheep are the most frequently mentioned animals in the Bible, and the metaphor of God as shepherd of His people is used frequently.

See for example **Ps. 23***

> [1] *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*
> [2] *He makes me lie down in green pastures.*
> *He leads me beside still waters.*
> [3] *He restores my soul.*
> *He leads me in paths of righteousness*
> *for his name's sake.*

or **Is 40:11***

> *He will tend his flock like a shepherd;*
> *he will gather the lambs in his arms;*
> *he will carry them in his bosom,*
> *and gently lead those that are with young.*

or Ps **100:3***

> *Know that the Lord, he is God!*
> *It is he who made us, and we are his;*
> *we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

Sheep and shepherds were common -- it was a metaphor to which anyone of that time could relate.

It was the task of a shepherd to lead sheep from protection in a sheepfold to places of grazing and watering.

To understand Jesus' statement in vv. 1-2, we need to think about what a sheepfold looked like in Jesus' day.

* (SHOW PICTURE OF SHEEPFOLD WITH A GATE)

In the villages, there was typically a doorkeeper who would open the door to let in shepherds and their sheep.

The Pharisees considered *themselves* shepherds of the people – and the doorkeepers of the sheepfold. They were the ones who interpreted and applied the Law of Moses and made judgements as to who obeyed it. You can see this by how they condemned Jesus for healing on the Sabbath and how they cast the blind man out of the synagogue. They took on the role of determining who is in and who is out.

Jesus is referring to the Pharisees here as the thieves and robbers that try to enter the sheepfold by their own way, rather than by the door.

Throughout the Bible, God calls out the leaders of the Israelites as being immoral and corrupt shepherds. One of the most well-known examples is from the prophet Ezekiel: *

Ezk 34:2-4

> *2 Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? 3 You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. 4 The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them.*

The Pharisees, like their predecessors, didn't seek the good of the sheep – in their self-righteousness they sought the prestige that went with being leaders of the synagogue.

True shepherds were providers, guides, protectors and companions of their sheep.

John describes this in vv. 3-5 of ch. 10: *

> *3 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."*

The sheep know the voice of their shepherd.

In the village sheepfolds, different flocks were often mixed. They could easily be separated because the sheep know their own shepherd's voice.

To this day Middle Eastern shepherds can divide flocks that have mingled during the night simply by calling their sheep, who follow their voice.

While it is not explicitly stated in these verses, it is clear that Jesus is the shepherd.

He knows their name. They know his voice.

He leads them and they follow him. They won't follow a stranger.

Now, it is perhaps worth stopping for a moment and asking how this might apply to us today.

First of all, who are the thieves and robbers of today – those who try to impose their own sense of righteousness.

If you think about it, there is a certain political correctness today that passes itself off as self-righteousness.

For example, one of the big issues in our society is that of reproductive rights – that a woman should be able to do whatever she wants to an unborn baby. It is presented in a self-righteous way such that anyone who would disagree is considered an oppressor.

Or issues of gender. We are told that a person should be free to choose whatever gender they prefer, even as a child. And if you don't agree you are considered to be tyrannical.

The forces behind these ideas present them as a type of self-righteousness that it imposes on modern society. You are only considered righteous if you conform to these principles.

In contrast, the righteousness of God comes through a relationship with our shepherd, Jesus Christ.

As a shepherd knows his sheep, *God knows us even better than we know ourselves.* As David wrote in Psalm 139: *

[1] O Lord, you have searched me and known me!
[2] You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
[3] You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
[4] Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.

And the sheep know the shepherd's voice.

What does it mean to know his voice? Should we expect to hear God audibly speaking to us?

God speaks to us through his Word, the Bible. As we study it, and meditate on it, we can recognize when God is speaking to us. We can know when something from God and when it is not, since His Word becomes implanted in our hearts.

When you sit here and listen to a sermon, or participate in a small group Bible study, or in your own quiet time reading the Bible, the Holy Spirit will impress upon you the truths of His word and apply it to your life.

This will lead us in different directions than the politically correct self-righteousness of today's society.

Following God is first-of-all a relationship – like that of sheep and a shepherd. Not simply following a set of rules or rituals.

John closes this section in v. 6 by saying:*

> [6] *This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.*

There is an obvious correspondence here with the end of Chapter 9 where Jesus questioned who was really blind. The Pharisees were the blind ones – they couldn't understand.

The irony is that the (formerly) blind man likely heard and understood!

The second thing I would like to focus on this morning, in vv. 7-10 is:*

2. The freedom of an exclusive relationship (vv. 7-10)

Because the Pharisees did not understand, Jesus goes on to unpack it for them, but here he uses a slightly different metaphor, still within with the imagery of sheep and their shepherd. *

> [7] *So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.* [8] *All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.* [9] *I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.* [10] *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*

To understand this, one needs to know a bit more about sheepfolds.

In the villages there would be grouped sheepfolds with a gate and a doorkeeper to keep watch at night.

However out in the countryside where the shepherd would often spend the night with his flock, the sheepfold would be much simpler – either made of stones or bramble with a simple opening.* In this case, the shepherd would sleep in the doorway to protect the sheep. He was literally the door to the sheepfold.

Jesus says: I am the door of the sheep. *

He doesn't say that I am a door, but I am THE door.

Later in his Gospel John records Jesus as saying (**Jn 14:6**): *

> [6] *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

The Pharisees presented themselves as the gatekeepers – those who determine who is in and who is out. As we read in Ezekiel, they were shepherds that did not care for the sheep. In this sense, they were thieves and robbers, who sought to benefit themselves.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus has this to say about their role as gatekeepers: *

Matt 23:13

> *13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.*

Jesus says: I am THE door of the sheep. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in out and find pasture.

Salvation comes through a relationship with Jesus.

How does one enter? John has already told us in his Gospel:

Jn 1:12*

> ***12** But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,*

Jn 3:16*

> *16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

And the Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans:

Rom 10:9*

> *9 . . . if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

Salvation comes from believing in Jesus, that he died for our sins and was raised from the dead. We must receive Him into our lives and trust Him

Jesus is THE ONLY DOOR to salvation – one must enter through Him to be saved.

If this sounds pretty narrow-minded and exclusive that's because IT IS!

In the book of Acts, when Saul (before his conversion) was hunting down Christian believers, those following Christ were referred to as THE WAY.

Once again, in the context of this passage, the thieves and robbers referred to in verse 8 were the Pharisees, who wanted to be the gatekeepers.

What might be the issue for us today?

It is almost the opposite -- the postmodern notion that there is no objective truth. Truth is whatever is true for you. The only thing that is heresy is that you might call something heresy. Any way is just as good as any other. Any door works.

However, Christians are people who believe in absolute truth. That Jesus really did live, die, and rise again. And because of this, we believe that He is ***the way, the truth, and the life.***

While this kind of exclusiveness is criticized in today's world as narrow-minded and oppressive, the irony is that the exclusiveness of salvation through Jesus brings incredible freedom!

Look again at verse 9: *

> [9] *I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.*

This phrase going in and out was a common OT expression that denoted the free activity of daily life without fear. For example,

Ps 121:7-8*

> [7] *The Lord will keep you from all evil;*
> *he will keep your life.*
> [8] *The Lord will keep*
> *your going out and your coming in*
> *from this time forth and forevermore.*

In the context of the sheepfold, they could go in and out in safety as they look for pasture.

But Jesus here goes even further in v. 10*

> [10] *. . . I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*

Some interpret the "abundant Christian life" as a life of material prosperity, but I don't think that this is what Jesus is referring to here. In other Gospels we are told that we need to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him. There are Christians that were (and still are) martyred for their faith.

However, in the context of our relationship with Jesus, we can have a life that is contented, despite the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Because of Jesus' sacrifice for us, we have freedom from the guilt of our sin.

The life of a Christian is not simply the escape from hell, it is a life of peace with God. A life of purpose, and of joy.

How many people who don't know Jesus plod through life without any sense of purpose.

Knowing why you are here and that Jesus has a purpose for your life can make all the difference in navigating difficult circumstances.

Thirdly, in verses 11-15, I would like us to see*

3. The motivation of self-sacrificial love

Jesus says*

> *11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.*

Here, Jesus explicitly refers to himself as the Good Shepherd.

Look at what He says next: * *The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

He then repeats it in verses 15, 17, and 18.

He contrasts the self-sacrifice of the good shepherd with that of a hired hand, who doesn't care for the sheep or protect them.

This has profound implications.

Contrast life following Jesus with that of a life simply following rules to be righteous, which was the approach of the Pharisees as well as much of organized religion – that one earns God's favor by being obedient.

I don't know about you, but giving me a set of rules to obey doesn't do much to motivate me to keep them.

What does motivate then?

The love of Jesus who laid down his life to save us – that is a different kind of motivation.

We are saved not by obeying rules – *we want to obey God because what has already done by saving us!*

It is a completely different way of living. A completely different motivation.

But there is more . . .

In verses 14 and 15* Jesus describes once again how He knows his sheep, but he brings it to another level. Not only does he know their name, but he compares his knowledge of the sheep to how He knows the Father and how the Father knows Him!

Yet, despite knowing us, and how sinful we are, he still laid down his life for us!

He doesn't wait for us to clean up our act so that we are worthy of his saving us. He laid down his life for us even when we were rebels, rejecting Him.

The Apostle Paul writes in **Romans 5:8***

[8] but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

This was part of God's plan from the beginning – that he would save sinners by sending Jesus as a sacrifice for our sins. And as Jesus says in verses 17 and 18 He does so willingly. This shows us something about the nature of God Himself.

Finally, I would like us to look at verse 16 and consider*

4. Relationships in a ransomed community (v. 16)*

***[16]** And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.*

Remember, Jesus is talking here to Jews. When he refers to sheep that are not of this fold, he is referring to the Gentiles. They are not of the same flock in that sense.

The Apostle Paul writes about this in detail in his letter to the Ephesian church. I won't read the entire passage (Eph 2:11-22), but only a few snippets: *

[11] Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh . . . [12]were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel . . . having no hope and without God in the world. [13] But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. . . .[15], that he might . . .[16] reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross.

Jews and Gentiles are together one flock with one shepherd. The church is a community of ransomed people – all saved by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

If you look around you, many, if not most, of us are expatriates. We come from different countries, have different traditions, speak different languages – but we have at least one thing in common – we are here because we have been redeemed by the Good Shepherd who laid down his life on the cross.

Because of this, there is a certain fellowship that we have with believers all around the world. One can walk into a church almost anywhere in the world and quickly find people who understand us, who share our values and our love for God.

Even if you have only been here for a very short time you can quickly integrate into the life of this redeemed community. As the church grows this may seem more difficult, but I would encourage all of you, to get involved in one of the homegroups where we meet during the week to read and study the Bible together and pray for one another.

And given the importance of relationships for our health and wellbeing, this is no small thing.

Finally, if we briefly look at verses 19-21 we see that there were divided opinions about Jesus: *

[19] There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. [20] Many of them said, "He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?" [21] Others said, "These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

The words that Jesus spoke were controversial at the time and will always be controversial. The life to which he calls his followers will always be counter-cultural – and it must be! The body of believers, the church, must help us not to conform to the ways of this world that are against the Gospel.

5. In closing

In closing, I would like to come back to where I started today's message – considering scientific evidence for the importance of relationship for longevity.

(One thinks about these things more when one gets to my age)

In light of today's message, it might be reasonable to ask whether Christians live longer than non-Christians because of the relationship we have with Christ and with other believers.

For this, I consulted an "authority" on such things: *Chat GPT.*

It indicated that there were some studies that suggested correlations between being a Christian and living a long life, but the answer was not straightforward.

- It mentioned lifestyle factors that might affect lifespan such as smoking or excessive drinking.
- It mentioned the importance of the social support of the community
- It also mentioned the importance of a sense of purpose and meaning, which may help in managing stress and promoting psychological well-being.

However, the result was somewhat inconclusive.

What ChatGPT certainly missed, however, was Jesus' statement in John, Chapter 17, as He prays for His disciples: *

> *[3] And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*

Eternal life is not something that starts when we die – it begins the moment you put your faith in Jesus.

At the start of this new year, I would encourage you to make an extra effort spend the time to hear His voice through His word.

And benefit from the relationships we have within the church as a community of redeemed people. If you are not already in a small group, join one!