

The Good Shepherd

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[0 : 00] Good. Well, let's turn now to our Bible reading, which is John's Gospel, chapter 10. And I'm going to read verses 1 to 30.

John's Gospel, chapter 10. We're continuing in our studies in Jesus' I Am sayings from John's Gospel. And here we have I Am the Good Shepherd in John, chapter 10.

John 10, then, chapter 10, verse 1, words of Jesus. Speaking to Pharisees who are hostile towards him. 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.

But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him, the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.

[1 : 15] This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So Jesus again said to them, Truly, truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 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.

He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep.

[2 : 32] 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.

For this reason, the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may 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 I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father. There was again a division among the Jews because of these words.

Many of them said, he has a demon and is insane. Why listen to him? Others said, these are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?

At that time, the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the colonnade of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, How long will you keep us in suspense?

[3 : 42] If you are the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe, because you are not part of my flock.

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.

The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Amen. This is the word of the Lord, and may it be a blessing to us this morning.

Well, let me ask you to turn up our passage, John's Gospel, chapter 10, if you would, please. John, chapter 10. And the key text here, I think, is verse 11, where Jesus says, I am the good shepherd. [4 : 57] The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Well, we're continuing our series in these I am sayings in John's Gospel, and my title for the whole series is Jesus Locked in Controversy.

And I picked that title because most of these I am sayings were spoken to people who disliked Jesus very deeply, in fact, so deeply that they wanted to kill him. You'll see in verse 31 of chapter 10 that these Jewish enemies of Jesus picked up stones again to stone him. Again. It wasn't the first time. They tried it out at the end of chapter 8. And they weren't just wanting to chuck a few pebbles at him to express their displeasure. They wanted to hurl great rocks at him, to kill him.

That was the official Jewish form of capital punishment, to stone someone to death. It was their version of the electric chair or the hangman's noose. So these I am sayings were not given in an atmosphere of tranquility and peace.

Jesus' listeners here were not his followers, but his enemies for the most part. And we know that because this chapter 10 follows chapter 9 without any break.

[6 : 13] And in chapter 9, Jesus has been speaking to some angry Jewish leaders. They're referred to in chapter 9, verse 40, as the Pharisees. And chapter 10 is simply carrying on the same conversation with this same group of senior Jewish people.

And when Jesus has finished speaking, at chapter 10, verse 18, you'll see from verse 19 that his words divided his listeners. Many of them said, he has a demon.

He's insane. Why listen to him? Whereas others in verse 21 took a more supportive view. But it's quite clear that many who heard him developed a profound and murderous hatred of him because of what he was saying about himself in verses 1 to 18.

Now, if he'd been giving a gentle lecture on the flora and fauna of Palestine, they would have listened to him with pleasure. If he'd been giving a scholarly review of the five books of Moses, they would have smiled and nodded their heads and said, thank you, Rabbi.

Thank you so much. Your views are really most interesting. But he was talking about himself. He was always talking about himself because the whole of God's plan of salvation for the world centered on him and depended on him.

[7 : 35] It did then and it still does. So for Jesus to take the holy name, I am on his lips, the name of God that you hardly dared utter and then apply it to himself, declaring thereby that he was God incarnate, this was viewed by his enemies as utter blasphemy.

His enemies put it very clearly in verse 33. The Jews answered him, it is not for some good work that we're going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God. Now, that was the issue. That was the outrageous crime in their eyes. It was impossible in their view for a man to be God. So the great central theme of John's gospel is the revelation of the true identity of Jesus.

John is presenting his account of Jesus with the explicit aim of seeking to persuade his readers, both Jewish and Gentile, that Jesus is both the Christ, that is the king of David's line, and the son of God, meaning one who is fully divine like the father.

If you want to see John's explicit aim, don't turn it up now, but you'll find it in the final two verses of chapter 20. Now, these I am sayings are a central part of this revelation of the identity of Jesus.

[8 : 57] Each of the sayings is a clear claim to be God. That's what I am means. But each of the sayings describes a different aspect of Jesus's character and function.

Some of the I am sayings, not all of them, but some of them, show how Jesus fulfills and supersedes an important element in the Old Testament. Take, for example, I am the bread of life from chapter 6.

Jesus is the bread, the nourishment, that sustains his people for life, meaning for eternal life, in contrast with the manner which sustained God's people for a mere 40 years in the wilderness. So that manner was a diminutive, short-term local prophecy of the real bread, Jesus, who was still to come. Or think of the I am the true vine saying in John chapter 15.

The old vine was the people of Israel prior to Jesus's day who proved in the end to be fruitless and fit only to be cast out. But Jesus embodies the true people of God who live a life of true fruitfulness, real godliness, because they are organically united to Jesus and are part of his very self.

[10:12] So the sap from the true vine floods up into the branches and makes them fruitful. He is the vital source of our fruitfulness. Now the Good Shepherd saying here in chapter 10 is similar in that it supersedes something that came before.

And you'll see that in verse 8 Jesus contrasts himself with other shepherds of former days. He says in verse 8, All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. Look on to verse 10 for a bit more. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. So who are these thieves and robbers of back in the day?

Certainly the ungodly kings who ruled both Israel and Judah in former times, along with many false prophets and faithless priests. But Jesus is probably also speaking of the Jewish leaders of his own day.

In fact, chapter 9 provides a powerful example of this. Because in chapter 9, Jesus heals a blind man and restores his sight fully. And the Jewish leaders hate Jesus for doing this because he does it on a Sabbath day.

[11:30] And far from rejoicing with this poor man who's now been healed, far from saying to him, This is terrific. Let's have a celebration. Let's throw a party. They end up casting him out of the synagogue in chapter 9, verse 34, banning him from fellowship.

So they exactly exemplify the thieves and robbers of chapter 10, verse 10, who steal and kill and destroy. They have no concern for this poor sheep who needs help and comfort, this blind man. Now we'll get into the meat of chapter 10 in just a moment. But before we go any further, let's pause to think about sheep and shepherds in the Bible. Do you like to think of yourself as a sheep? Do you say, three times before eating your breakfast of mangle worsels and hay? Sheep are interesting creatures.

We have a few acres of pasture behind our house and currently there are 21 sheep grazing it. They're not my sheep, but they belong to a young man who's a neighbor of ours. And in payment for the grazing, he doesn't pay me money, but he gives us half a lamb every Christmas, all packaged and ready for the deep freeze and served with my wife's red currant jelly.

[12:44] It is most delicious. Now I look at these sheep every day, I count them just to keep an eye on them, but I'm not impressed by their intelligence. Horses are much more canny.

Pigs are much more sagacious and thoughtful than sheep. Even the hens in our hen pen have more presence of mind than the sheep. Sheep are not the Einsteins of the farmyard.

And I'm sure you've noticed that when you've been out in the country. And yet, in the Old Testament and here in John 10 and in several other places in the New Testament, God's people are likened to sheep and God himself is the shepherd.

Now if this is God's metaphor, the metaphor that he has written himself and developed in his own book, the Bible, it must be profoundly true and we need to accept it gladly and learn from it, even though it's rather unflattering to us.

Think of Isaiah chapter 53 where the prophet says, all we like sheep have gone astray. Now how true that is. All of us are sinners.

[13:51] We've all strayed from the path of truth and godliness. So this metaphor of sheep points to our moral frailty. But there are other things. It also shows our complete dependence on the great shepherd.

Think of David's 23rd Psalm. David says gladly, the Lord is my shepherd. Therefore, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

It's such a relief to David to be looked after by the great shepherd and to be disciplined by him. You are with me, he says, your rod and your staff comfort me.

Now the rod and staff are used by the shepherd to nudge the sheep, to chivvy them if necessary, so as to keep them in line. There's something disciplinary about the rod and staff.

Then think of Jesus in Matthew chapter 9 when he is surrounded by literally thousands of people, hordes of people. And Matthew says this, when Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

[14:57] Jesus longed to shepherd them if they would only come to him and put their hearts trust in him. So this sheep metaphor is a metaphor that really does instruct us about our true nature.

It shows us our moral frailty, our dependence on the shepherd and our need to be disciplined by him as well as cared for by him. So let's turn now to John chapter 10.

I am the good shepherd. My predecessors, who should have been looking after the sheep, all turned out to be thieves and robbers, wishing only to steal and kill and destroy. But I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. Now this is a rich and detailed chapter. We shan't be able to look at everything in it. But I'd like to pick out three main points which I think will greatly gladden our hearts.

First, Jesus knows his own sheep by name. Look at the first three verses of the chapter. Jesus begins by picturing the sheep thief, the robber in verse 1.

[16:05] He who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. He's a sheep rustler. He climbs in over the wall hoping not to be noticed so that he can steal a sheep and make off with it and butcher it.

But the true shepherd in verse 2, the one who has nothing to be ashamed of, no need to be secretive, he walks straight into the sheepfold by the proper door. The gatekeeper knows him and opens the gate to him.

And the sheep hear his voice and they know his voice. And says Jesus, he calls his own sheep. He calls his own sheep. Notice the word own. He is their true owner.

They belong to him and he belongs to them. And he calls them by name. Black ears, one eye, stumpy tail, pot gut. And out they all come.

We need to understand something about how sheep were looked after in the ancient Near East because it was really very different from our modern systems of shepherding in Britain. In this country, as you know, some sheep run out on the hills but the majority are kept in fenced fields.

[17:16] And sheepdogs are used to round them up when the farmer needs to move them. But back then in first century Israel, the sheep were brought into a walled enclosure, a sheepfold, every evening.

They would come in through the gate and then they were safe overnight from predators, from wolves and bears and so on. And a gatekeeper employed by the sheep's owners would guard the entrance through the night while the owner went home to sleep.

Then the following morning, the owner, the shepherd, would come to the gate. The gatekeeper would open the gate to him and he would call his flock out, each animal by name, and lead them out to the pasture.

And he would stay with them through the day before bringing them back to the safety of the sheepfold for the coming night. Now this meant that there was a real personal relationship between the shepherd and each one of his own sheep.

He knows them and he calls them by name. And look at how Jesus develops the metaphor in verse 4. When he is brought out all his own in the morning, he goes before them and the sheep follow him for they know his voice.

[18:28] A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him for they do not know the voice of strangers. They avoid somebody they don't know. They'll flee from him. There's no relationship there of belonging and trust.

But they know and trust the voice of their own shepherd. They know his voice. Do you remember the little picture logo on records and CDs produced on the HMV label?

HMV, his master's voice. This logo pictures an old-fashioned gramophone bell, a bit like the bell on a tuba or a euphonium. And sitting in front of the bell is a little dog, a Jack Russell Terrier.

And this little dog is listening with great attention and obvious pleasure to the voice that's coming out of the microphone, the gramophone, because it's his master's voice.

He knows that voice so well. It's the voice of the man who owns him and cares for him. So what does it mean for Jesus the shepherd to know his own sheep by name?

[19:32] Well, I think perhaps it works at two levels. First, it means that he knows every believer deeply and thoroughly. Look at the way he explains it in verses 14 and 15.

I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me. Now put on your seatbelts, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father.

Now that is a mind-boggling thought. How deeply does the Father know the Son, and how well does the Son know the Father? Well, surely they know each other to the very depths.

Theirs is a perfect relationship of love and mutual understanding. They have no secrets from each other. Their mind and will and purpose is one mind, one will, and one purpose.

Now we people, we don't know each other like that, do we? As we get to know each other, we only see the tip of the iceberg. We talk to each other, of course. We express our views.

[20 : 34] We share with each other our joys and our sorrows, our fears and our frustrations. But there is so much below the surface that we simply don't know. Even with our closest friends, we don't divulge everything that goes on in the hidden recesses of our hearts.

But we can be sure that God the Father and the Lord Jesus know everything about each other. And here's the extraordinary thing in verse 15. This perfect mutual knowledge between Father and Son is, says Jesus, the pattern for his knowledge of us and our knowledge of him.

He knows everything about each one of his beloved sheep. This is what David expressed also in Psalm 139 when he wrote, Lord, you have searched me and known me.

Now, friends, to think of Jesus knowing us like that, does that make us feel glad or does it make us feel a bit uncomfortable? I guess a bit of both. Where there is discomfort in us, that's probably sin which has not been faced up to and repented of.

And his total knowledge of our hearts will now encourage us to bring our sins and frailties to him so that we can ask for his help and give us strength to turn away from what is wrong.

[21 : 55] We cannot hide anything from him. But there's an enormous encouragement here in verse 15. Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father and I lay down my life for the sheep.

So he has died. He's laid down his life to pay the penalty for our sins, to deal with our sins. That's why we can have the courage to bring those dark and sinful corners of our hearts to him so that he should help us.

He helps us to learn to hate sin and he reassures us that his death has totally cleared our account. He knows us. So let's rejoice in that knowledge and not be frightened of it.

But there's a second sense, a second level in which the Good Shepherd knows each of his sheep. And that is that he recognizes us as belonging to him.

He knows who are his own. The names of all his people are written in his book of life. He knows every page of that book and he knows every name that is written there.

[23 : 01] To be a Christian is to belong to Jesus, to be incorporated into the very fabric of his being. That is the greatest blessing possible. And the opposite of that to be not known by Jesus is the greatest misery and wretchedness possible.

Do you remember his chilling words in Matthew chapter 7 where he's speaking about the day of judgment? And he says, On that day many people will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name?

And then I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. I never knew you.

Clearly these people thought that they were very successful religionists. They did spectacular things, even exorcisms. But Jesus dismisses them from his presence as workers of lawlessness because they were not obedient to him.

They'd never submitted to his lordship. They were spectacularists and had no wish to be true followers of Jesus. So he's saying to them, You claim to be mine, but you've never been real disciples.

[24 : 15] You've neglected obedience. You're strangers to me. I never knew you. But if you and I are real Christians, if we have turned to the Lord Jesus in repentance and trust, if we have set out on the road of obedience to him, we can be sure that he knows us and has called us by name.

So there's the first thing. He knows his own sheep. Then secondly, Jesus has died for his own sheep. I want to read verse 11, but I'll slightly alter it.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd bottle feeds his lambs. Oh no, that's wrong, isn't it? I'll try again. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd medicates his sick sheep.

No, that's wrong too, isn't it? Now the Lord does feed his sheep. He nourishes our hearts and wills and understanding wonderfully by his teaching, by the teaching of the whole Bible.

That man shall not live, cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. His words are our food. And one of our main reasons for coming to church on a Sunday is to be nourished by our shepherd's words, strengthened to have our spiritual bellies filled.

[25 : 36] And yes, he also medicates us. The gospel brings health and strength to our bruised and battered souls. There is real medication there. But our verse 11 is not talking about feeding the sheep or medicating the sheep.

It's telling us something much more radical and much more important. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Now this brings us right to the heart of the gospel. And it will knock out of our hearts any kind of sentimentality about the good shepherd that might be lurking in our hearts.

I'm aware that in many parish churches in England and possibly in Scotland as well, you'll find 19th century stained glass windows picturing the good shepherd. So you'll see the window and you'll see the words engraved there.

I am the good shepherd. And there's the shepherd pictured holding a lamb in his arms, sometimes a lamb under each arm. And at his feet there are children playing, sometimes rabbits.

[26 : 41] It's a sentimentalized picture. But the reality of verse 11 is brutal. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Now a thoughtful sheep might well want to ask, how can it be good for the flock if the shepherd dies? Don't we need a living shepherd to look after us?

If our shepherd is dead, we've lost our protector. We just picture a flock of sheep grazing out on the hills. The shepherd, first century Palestine, the shepherd has brought them out.

He's found some good grass out in the hills. He's close to them. He's watching them carefully. If a wolf comes along, he deals with it. He picks up a stout stick. He chases it off.

The sheep are enjoying themselves. Everything is exactly as it should be. Then as they travel, they reach the edge of a high cliff. They look over the cliff, down a vertical precipice, to rocks that are hundreds of feet below.

[27 : 46] Suddenly, the shepherd walks to the edge of the precipice. He looks at the sheep and he cries out, I'm doing this because I love you. And he throws himself off, killing himself on the rocks far below.

Two of the sheep walk to the edge of the precipice and look down at the mangled corpse of their late shepherd. And one says to the other, In what conceivable way, erm intrude, could that be thought of as an act of love?

Well, she has raised a good question, hasn't she? Isn't a living shepherd better than a dead shepherd? Now, under normal circumstances of woolly sheep and shepherds out on the hills, that is certainly true.

The sheep need their living shepherd. But here in John 10, it's different. We have to look beyond the metaphor of sheep and shepherd to see what the metaphor is really indicating.

And that is human beings and the God who loves them. The point of verse 11 is that the good shepherd in laying down his life for the sheep is actually rescuing them from destruction.

[28 : 54] Whereas if he didn't lay down his life for them, they would be lost. It's his life for ours. It's the great exchange. He has laid down his life for the sheep.

And that word for is a word that speaks of sacrifice. The death of Jesus is a sacrificial death. It's a self-sacrificial death. A sacrifice willingly offered by Jesus so that we should not have to bear the penalty of our sins, so that we should not have to receive the wages of sin, which is death.

This is the greatest expression of love in the world. As Jesus puts it in John chapter 15, greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

If you were to see a child drowning in a river and you jumped in and saved the child, but in the act of saving the child lost your own life, that would illustrate perfectly what Jesus has done for us.

He was willing to lose his life in order to save our lives. And if he had not laid down his life, we could not have been rescued for eternity. The greatest thank you we can ever say to him is thank you, Lord Jesus, for dying for me.

[30 : 13] So if we ask, in what sense is the good shepherd good? He gives the answer in verse 11. The good shepherd is good precisely because he has laid down his life for the sheep.

It's not because he nourishes us or feeds us or protects us, though he does those things wonderfully. No, he is the good shepherd because he has laid down his life for us.

That verse 11 makes the indissoluble link between the good shepherd and his laying down of his life. And the link is made equally strongly in verses 14 and 15.

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep. So let's each of us try to remember and never forget that the good shepherd shows his goodness in laying down his life for each of us.

Here's a little idea for you. How about every day this coming week, say to the Lord Jesus in the privacy of your own home, Lord Jesus, you are the good shepherd because you have laid down your life for the sheep and I am one of your sheep.

[31 : 26] Thank you so much. Your death means eternal life for me. Now Jesus has not exhausted his teaching on this subject.

He's got something else to say about it which is really thrilling. Really thrilling. When we think of him hanging on the cross, we're so much aware of his physical frailty and vulnerability.

What could be weaker than a man nailed to a cross? On the cross, he was utterly humiliated. In the words of Isaiah, despised and rejected, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.

Acquainted with grief. Acquainted with the sin of the world. And then finally, he takes his last breath, becomes a corpse. Gone.

But it wasn't the end for him. Look at verse 17. I don't know if you've ever noticed this verse. Verse 17. For this reason, the Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

[32 : 32] Now you might expect him to say, my Father loves me because I'm willing to lay down my life. But the Father takes a longer view. He loves me because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

So the Father is not just loving Jesus because he is willing to go to the cross. He's loving him because Jesus is going to die and then be raised. It's that glorious prospect of Good Friday and Easter Sunday that fills the Father's heart brimful with love for the Lord Jesus.

God's pattern in the Bible is never death full stop. It is always death and resurrection. As Jesus puts it at the end of Luke's Gospel, talking to the Emmaus Road disciples, he says, was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?

Death and resurrection. Now look at John 10, verse 18. Because here, we have not the weakness of Jesus, but his indomitable power.

Verse 18. No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again.

[33 : 48] This charge I've received from my Father. Now if that verse is true, and of course it is true, what was actually happening when Jesus was being nailed to the cross?

I want you to think for a moment of the process of the crucifixion. Picture Jesus. The main pole of the cross and the cross beam are lying down on the ground.

Jesus is taken by the soldiers and he's forced down onto his back. His arms are then stretched out and the soldiers hammer the nails through his hands and his feet.

So there he is, flat out on his back, nailed down. He can't move an inch. Now here's the question. Who is in charge at that point?

Who is in the driving seat? It appears to be the Roman soldiers. At the physical level, it is the Roman soldiers. Jesus appears to be completely at their mercy and they are showing him no mercy.

[34 : 51] He appears to be completely powerless. But here in verse 18, Jesus shows us that it was he who was in charge, he who was in the driving seat.

No one takes my life from me, he says, but I lay it down of my own accord. In other words, the Roman soldiers and the Jewish chief priests who were urging them on had no idea that what they were doing to Jesus was what Jesus himself had purposed.

They thought that he was doing their will, but it was they who were doing his will. They weren't taking his life from him. He was laying it down of his own accord.

He was the master and they were his servants. Now, don't you think that's glorious? Those Jewish leaders would have gone home on that Friday afternoon congratulating themselves that they'd been victorious.

They'd finally rid themselves of their enemy. Their plot to have him put to death had succeeded. That's what they thought. But the reality was that Jesus was indomitable and invincible.

[36 : 01] Why? Because of the command of God the Father. Look at the middle of verse 18. I have authority to lay my life down and I have authority to take it up again.

And where does this authority come from? He tells us at the end of verse 18. This charge, this command, I've received from my Father. The Father's command.

So this means that there was a point somewhere in the midst of eternity when God the Father said to the Lord Jesus, my son, I'm commanding you to lay down your life but I'm also commanding you

to take it up again on the third day following.

I'm giving you authority to do these things and authority which you will then carry within yourself.

Jesus always knew that he was going to be raised on the third day following.

If I can just speak personally for a moment. In recent years I've come to love this 18th verse of John chapter 10. I think it is one of the most thrilling verses in the whole Bible because it shows us something of the almighty power and authority of our King Jesus.

[37 : 14] And we need to see that. We sometimes get a bit discouraged because we look around at the world and he's so dishonored in the world. We're aware that so much of society disregards him totally.

We're aware that he is despised and rejected to use Isaiah's words. But this verse 18 in John 10 gives us a taste of his glory and his power.

It helps us to see why he has the keys to death and Hades. This is the King speaking. No one takes my life from me. I lay it down of my own accord.

I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again. So friends, we mustn't be afraid for Jesus' reputation if he has that level of authority.

He is the King of life. He is the conqueror of death. He is the sovereign. He is, in the end, invincible.

Well, we've seen so far that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, knows his sheep each by name.

[38 : 18] Each one is deeply known to him and deeply loved by him. And we've seen that the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Why? So as to secure each one in the eternal sheepfold, if I can describe heaven as the eternal sheepfold.

Now, thirdly, and more briefly, let's notice Jesus' promise to keep each of his own sheep safe forever. And we'll look on here to verses 26 to 29.

In verse 26, Jesus says to his hostile audience, you do not believe because you're not part of my flock. What he means is, you've hardened your hearts against me.

You refuse to come to me. I've been sent to the world by God the Father, but you cannot and you will not recognize me. And thus you shut yourselves out of eternal life.

But by contrast, verse 27, my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. So you'll see verse 27 more or less repeats verses 3 and 4.

[39 : 26] But in verse 28, he says something that we have not heard before in this chapter. He says, I give them eternal life. I give it to them.

Let me ask, what might have been the most valuable gift that you've ever been given in this world? A fine piece of jewelry?

Perhaps a flat in the city left to you by your great aunt in her will? Maybe a Labrador puppy? Now these earthly gifts can be very enjoyable.

I should warn you, by the way, that a puppy can be a mixed blessing. But these are earthly things which we only enjoy, can only enjoy for a few short years. They're here today, they're gone tomorrow.

You can't hold on to them. They slip through your fingers like sand. But Jesus gives to each of his sheep as a permanent gift, eternal life.

[40 : 26] And he tells us more in verse 28. I give them eternal life and they will never perish. So if you're a sheep in the Lord's flock, you will never perish.

That seems so strange to think of oneself like that because these physical bodies of ours are so obviously perishable. We feel them perishing from year to year.

Look at my head. It was once covered with bright, shiny brown hair. Look at it now. I'm becoming a cauliflower top rapidly. All of us, we're all creeping towards physical dissolution and we know it.

And yet our good shepherd says to each of his sheep, you will never perish. Paul the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 15 writes about the final resurrection of Christians, that moment when we shall be given a resurrection body.

And he says this, he's talking about the corpse of a Christian going into the grave. He says, what is sown is perishable. What is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor.

[41 : 29] It is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power. And Paul is simply expanding on what Jesus says here in John 10 verse 28.

They will never perish. But Jesus hasn't finished yet. There's more to come. They will never perish, he says, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

No one. Not the devil himself. Again, to get some light from Paul, from Romans. Paul says, neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We are un snatchable. We are inseparable from him. But Jesus hasn't finished yet. Look at verse 29. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

So in verse 28, no one can snatch them out of my hand. Verse 29, no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. So the believing Christian has two almighty hands holding us secure forever.

[42 : 54] So why does Jesus say these things? And why has John recorded them for posterity? As we've seen in their original context, they were said to hostile unbelievers, who in verse 31 pick up stones to stone Jesus.

But John has written these things down for the sake of believers. And Jesus also spoke them for the sake of his own sheep. Why? Because he wants us to know with absolute certainty that if we have turned to him and trusted him, we are his forever and we are safe forever.

The human heart is a fragile little thing. We're sometimes assailed by fears and there are shadows of doubt that cross our minds. And the Lord Jesus knows that.

That's why he says these things so clearly to us. He knows the fragile nature of the human heart. But he is saying to each one of his own sheep, trust me.

I've laid down my life for you. I've opened the way for you into the kingdom of heaven. Eternal life is my gift to you, a permanent gift. And you will never perish.

[44 : 04] And no one, not the devil, not death, can snatch you out of my hand. So be assured. Don't look to your own little heart for reassurance. You won't find it there.

Look to my sure words. Look to my promises. I will do what I say. You will not perish. For any who are listening today who are not Christians, surely you know what you must do.

You must come to him, submit to him, bow to him as your Lord and Savior. And then you too will be able to build your whole life on these words of promise.

I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand. Well, let's pray together now.

Our dear Lord Jesus, how we thank you that you give to each of your people eternal life.

[45 : 14] You have made us for eternal fellowship with you, that we should be with you forever. and you've gone ahead of us to prepare a place for us so that we should always be with you.

Sustain us with your promises as we make our journey through this difficult world and hasten the day when we shall be with you and with God the Father in your eternal kingdom.

And we ask it for your name's sake. Amen.