

# The Mission of Jesus

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Date: 06 May 2012

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- [ 0 : 00 ] Well, let's turn now to God's Word, and we're going to read in John's Gospel, chapter 10. That's page 896, if you have one of our church visitors' Bibles. John's Gospel, chapter 10, and the first 21 verses.
- Truly, truly, I say to you, said the Lord Jesus, 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 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.
- 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, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.
- [ 1 : 14 ] All who came before me are thieves and robbers. The sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved, and he will go in and out and find pasture.
- The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they might 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 his sheep, he 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. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice.
- [ 2 : 23 ] 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've received from my Father. There was again division among the Jews because of these words. Many of them said, He is 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? Amen.
- May God bless his word to us. Well, let's turn to our passage tonight, John chapter 10. Let me lead us in a prayer.
- [ 3 : 36 ] Almighty God, we thank you indeed for the gift of your Holy Spirit. And we remember your apostle described your word as the sword of the Spirit.

And so we pray tonight, Lord, that by your Spirit, your word may be found sharp, living, active, and able to do your work in our hearts and minds.

For we ask it for Christ's name's sake. Amen. Amen. Well, everybody, it's lovely to be with you tonight.

And we do have a terrific passage. Now, I'm conscious that it may be a passage that is familiar to some. It may be fairly fresh to others.

But I hope by the time we walk out through the doors later, we can all agree that it is a tremendously interesting and I think enormously helpful thing that John has done for us in recording these words in the very heart of his gospel.

[ 4 : 47 ] It's pictorial language we're dealing with tonight. One writer said that the great thing about John's gospel is that it's like a watering hole where a child may paddle or an elephant swim.

So, if you're a child, if you're a new Christian tonight, then I hope that you're going to find some things you can paddle in and enjoy. And to the elephants who are here, well, I hope that you're going to enjoy a decent swim tonight.

It is the Lord Jesus who is speaking. And if you have a look down, verse 1, and again verse 7, we get a little phrase repeated.

Now, in the old Bibles, I mean the really old Bibles, it used to say in English, Verily, verily, say I am to thee. Which basically means, please sit up and listen.

Our Bible says much the same, truly, truly, I say to you. So, what Jesus is about to say is important. And he's asking that people hear.

[ 6 : 02 ] So, just, you know about the fellowship with a sharp elbow, do you know that? You just check your neighbor, and make sure your neighbor's not nodding off at the end of a Sunday, and use the fellowship with a sharp elbow, and because Jesus says, will you please pay attention.

Okay? Pay attention. Truly, truly, I say to you. Now, our passage breaks into two parts, pretty simply. Verses one to six, Jesus uses what John calls a figure of speech.

Now, in Matthew and Mark and Luke's gospel, we often find Jesus teaching in parables. There are no parables recorded in John's gospel, but there are figures of speech.

Jesus uses pictorial language. There's a figure of speech in verses one to six. We're going to do that in a moment. And then from verse seven onwards, what he does is to explain it in detail.

And the explanation includes two of the most memorable sayings of Jesus, two of the I am sayings.

[ 7 : 22 ] I am the good shepherd, really well known one, and then a rather less well known one when he says, I am the door or I am the gate. So that's where we're heading this evening.

First of all then, the figure of speech. Now I don't know whether you're somebody who uses figures of speech in your normal conversation. Perhaps you've come across people who describe a terrific meal as a king's feast.

You know that phrase? That's a figure of speech, isn't it? Other times people talk about a pig's breakfast, by which they mean making a complete mess of something.

Those are figures of speech. Well, Jesus uses a figure of speech here, which is all to do with sheep and a shepherd and a gate.

So it goes a bit like this. You need to imagine a sheep fold or a sheep pen. So think of a field, and in the field, maybe with a hedge or a fence, there's a sort of area marked out.

[ 8 : 34 ] And it's an area of safety for sheep. There is a gate, and the gate opens and closes and allows the sheep to go in and out of the area of safety, the sheep pen or the sheep fold.

There are sheep, and there is a shepherd to whom the sheep belong. Are you with me? Yes, I'm not losing it. Okay. Now, there are also thieves.

There are robbers. There are those who climb over the fence, if they can, not to care for the sheep, but to plunder them. And, says Jesus, the sheep can tell the difference between the shepherd and the robber by their words, by their voice.

Now, if you were living in first century Palestine, or indeed, if you were living in a rural farming community in our own day and generation, that would be a pretty simple figure of speech, wouldn't it?

For those of us who live in cities, it's perhaps less straightforward. My wife and I live right in the heart of central London. We don't see too many sheep where we are, so we have to make a bit of an effort just to get in our minds clearly the figure of speech.

[ 10 : 02 ] In first century Palestine, it would have been obviously true, but you'd have then said, well, all right, but so what?

And what John tells us, verse 6, this figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying.

now he obviously isn't simply telling them the story of sheep and a sheep pen and a shepherd and thieves and robbers, is he?

I mean, that would be obvious, everybody would know it, but so what? And so what happens from verse 7 onwards is we get a repeat of this summons, please to listen, truly, truly, I say to you, and then Jesus develops each of three ideas, something about the gate, something about the sheep, and something about the shepherd.

And what he does is to use those metaphors to teach about mission. This is the key chapter in John's gospel about mission.

[ 11 : 19 ] There's a very strong mission theology in John's gospel. I'm looking forward to being with the Cornhill training course people tomorrow and on Tuesday.

If there are any here tonight, here's a little tip for you. We're going to be doing John's mission theology a bit tomorrow, and then we're going to think about how we join in with that mission on Tuesday.

And in John's mission theology, the key chapter is this chapter. Because of the way Jesus now develops these three metaphors.

When you understand mission in John, you need to understand about the gate, about sheep, and about the shepherd. So, come with me. First of all, Jesus says, verse seven, I am the door or the gate of the sheep.

As I said, it's a rather less well-known I am saying. If we asked you to list the I am sayings, you'd be forgiven, I think, for missing this one out.

[ 12 : 26 ] But it's repeated there in verse nine, I am the door. And the question is, what is that teaching us? So, come back to the figure of speech.

Have you got it in your mind? Field, sheepfold, pen, yes, sheep inside, trouble outside, and there's a gate. And Jesus says that he is the gate.

He's the door by which the sheep, well, by which the sheep go into safety and security. So, at night, they can be protected from the wolves and from the thieves and the robbers.

And by day, they go out through the gate to munch the grass and enjoy the pasture and do whatever sheep do under the blue sky and the warm sun.

You get the picture? If you're a sheep, this is a pretty good deal. You need a sheep pen, you need a shepherd, and you need a gate to go in and out.

[ 13 : 37 ] This is the good life if you're a sheep. It doesn't get better than that. So, says Jesus, I am the door.

If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. He'll go in for safety and security, and he'll go out to find pasture and enjoy God's good earth.

And so, whereas the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy, I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

So, instead of ending up being stolen, killed, and eaten, these sheep, with a nice sheep pen to enter, are kept safe and secure, and in the daytime can go out and enjoy God's good earth.

There is, you see, only one way to find abundant life if you're a sheep, and that is to use that door. It's a figure of speech.

[ 14 : 48 ] It's a simple way, isn't it, of thinking of what it is that Jesus came to do. Only one way to find the good life.

Well, there's the gate. Now, what about this idea of the sheep? You'll notice that although Jesus' figure of speech is about sheep, as soon as he begins to explain it, it becomes about people, if anyone.

Now, I don't know whether you've ever thought of yourself as a sheep. To be likened to an animal can be a bit of an insult, doesn't it?

If somebody turns around and said to you, you dog, or you cow, I don't think you'd feel it was a particularly complimentary thing. I mean, it can be a term of endearment, can't it? My younger daughter lives in Manchester and slightly curiously, there, it seems that wherever you go to shop, you get called a duck.

You know, how are you today, duck? I don't understand it myself, but there we are. Now, in the Bible, the word sheep is the commonly used word for people, first of all for all people.

[ 16 : 08 ] The Bible says that all people, all we, you and I, all we like sheep have gone astray. It is a picture of what it means to belong to that vast mass of humanity who behave in a particularly dumb, stupid, sheep-like way.

That is, we go our own way, we don't follow the shepherd, and we get into our whole heap of trouble as a consequence. Now, the word is also used in the Old Testament of God's people.

We sung a hymn version, didn't we, of Psalm 23 earlier this evening. The Lord is my shepherd, are the words that a sheep would sing.

God is portrayed as a shepherd shepherd of his people. And in Isaiah, we have a very great and important mission promise from God.

Let me read to you some words from Isaiah chapter 40. verse 2. The prophet, speaking of God, says, Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him.

[ 17 : 29 ] Behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. 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. The shepherd then is a great portrait for God in the Old Testament and sheep is used of God's people, Israel, and of all people.

But let me say again, it isn't used as a compliment because sheep are fairly silly, foolish, stupid, dumb animals.

Sheep just follow the crowd. Sheep don't think for themselves. And it is a metaphor then that is used to remind us that on our own we will simply go astray.

That we will very likely end up lost, in which case we will need a shepherd to come and rescue us. Now, the contrast between a sheep wandering off on its own and getting lost and the kind of sheep described in verses 3 and 4 is quite stark, isn't it?

[ 18 : 55 ] Have a look at verse 3 and 4. Here's the contrast. Hear then a sheep who hear the shepherd's voice. The shepherd calls those sheep one by one.

He knows their names. He knows them individually. And he leads them out. A shepherd, as you probably know, in those days would typically walk in front of the sheep and they would follow him.

And when he's brought out all his own, he goes before them. And the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Here then is a close relationship, isn't it?

They hear his voice. They recognize it. They listen. They respond as they are called individually by name. And they follow him as their shepherd, as the one who teaches them, as the one who guides them, as the one who directs them.

It is a wonderful portrait of a found sheep, not a lost sheep. And it leads to great blessings. If you just look a bit further down in the passage, look down to verse 27.

[ 20 : 13 ] We didn't read this, but let's look on to it. Here are some of the blessings. Jesus says, 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. My friends, these are wonderful blessings, are they not? To be known by name, to be given eternal life, never to perish, to be kept safe and secure, so that none can snatch us out of his hands.

Are these not wonderful blessings? The gate, the sheep, and then the shepherd.

How is it possible that silly, dumb, foolish sheep who left to their own devices would go on their own way and just simply get lost, how is it that sheep like that can end up known and loved and safe and secure and never perish and have a gate through which to find safety and security and protection and through which to go and to enjoy the good blessings of God.

[ 21 : 51 ] How is that possible? Well, it is all possible because of the third metaphor, which is the shepherd. Now, I said there were two I am sayings here.

This is the second one. It comes in verse 11 and it's repeated again in verse 14. Do you see, Jesus says, I am the good shepherd.

That word good speaks of one who is noble, true, trustworthy.

The prophet Ezekiel lamented the fact that many of the Old Testament shepherds were no good. They were untrustworthy.

They were unfaithful. And the contrast is deliberate in the language that is used. The great claim that God would come as a shepherd has been fulfilled in the coming of the Lord Jesus.

[ 23 : 02 ] He picks up the divine name in the I am and declares himself in the language of Isaiah 40 to be the good shepherd.

shepherd. That is who he is. He is the good shepherd. But now notice what he says next. Look at verse 11.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Here, right in the heart of John's gospel is the great heart of Jesus' saving work and mission.

Now, it's a slightly curious thing, isn't it? If you think of a shepherd in first century Palestine, you might imagine that the good shepherd would build and maintain the sheep pen very nicely.

You might imagine the good shepherd would make sure the gate is secure. You might imagine the good shepherd would be careful to know the names of the sheep and count them and make sure that none is missing. And if there was one missing, he would go and find it and bring it back.

[ 24 : 13 ] You might imagine the good shepherd would feed them and lead them and guide them very well. But do you really suppose that the good shepherd would lay down his life for the sheep?

I mean, they're valuable, but they're not that valuable. It is an extraordinary thing. If we're familiar with it, it may be that the thought has never really struck us.

that actually that is somewhat over and above the call of duty, shall we say? I mean, there's a lot involved in being a shepherd, but laying down your life for the sheep falls somewhat beyond the job description, I think, doesn't it?

He says, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Well, he draws the contrast, doesn't he, between the hired hand and the one who owns the sheep.

The one to whom the sheep really, really matter. And he puts himself in that category. Have a look at verse 17 and 18.

[ 25 : 28 ] Here is Jesus expanding on this idea. For this reason, he says, the Father loves me. Why is it that God the Father loves God the Son?

For this reason, the Father loves me, because I lay down my life for the sheep, understand, that I may take it up again. No one takes it 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. Really? From where? Well, says Jesus, this charge I have received from my Father.

And Isaiah says, all we like sheep have gone astray. We've each gone our own way, and the Lord God has laid on him the suffering servant the sin of us or, Jesus here speaks of his imminent death, of his death being no accident, but a deliberate choice on his part, of his death not being an example of God's abusing him, but of God's permission that he might fulfill the will of the Father in obedience to death.

even death on a cross, that he might go to the cross for the sake of the sheep. I am the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.

[ 27 : 15 ] It is voluntary. It is on behalf of the sheep. It is in obedience to the will of the Father. and as we read to the end of the gospel, we find that it is vindicated in his resurrection.

Here then, right in the heart of God's, of John's gospel, Jesus speaks of his God given mission. But he does so in pictorial language by developing three metaphors of a gate, of the sheep and the shepherd.

So let's think now for a moment as we begin to move toward the end tonight. Let's think about what this might mean. Now let me ask you a question first of all.

Here you are tonight. You're here in church. I have no idea whether you're a regular or a visitor. I have no idea how familiar you are with these things.

Let me begin with this question. Have you entered through this gate? Has Jesus become for you the door or the gate into that wonderful security and safety that is God's salvation?

[ 28 : 42 ] I know it's a narrow gate. I know that you have to go through that single gate. And I know you have to go through it one at a time. So I'm asking, have you done that?

Have you entered through Jesus as the gate? It's a wonderfully rewarding gate. It's what we noticed, wasn't it, in those verses from verse 27 afterward and afterwards there, 28, 29, and 30.

It brings with it eternal life. It brings with it eternal security. They will never perish. It brings with it eternal protection.

No one will snatch them out of my hand. It's a thoroughly rewarding gate. It leads to the most abundant life that there is.

There's nothing better than being this kind of sheep. So my first question for us tonight is have you entered through Jesus as the gate?

[ 29 : 49 ] And if you have, have you thanked him for it lately? Here's my second question. Whatever your history, whatever your Christian story, how are you tonight?

Are you trusting in Jesus as your good shepherd tonight? Are you trusting in his death for your forgiveness so that you're not trying to add anything to it?

Are you trusting in his pastoral love and care for you, whatever your circumstances, that he is the good shepherd who knows your name, who understands your life, who knows your circumstances and that you matter to him?

He's not a hired hand. He cares. He loves. He is the one who gathers.

He's the one who carries. He's the one who leads. He is the good shepherd and he is good at it. We can have full confidence in him. God So where is your trust tonight for that decision you have to take, for that difficult and tough set of circumstances you're facing?

[ 31 : 13 ] In your joys as well as your sadnesses, are you trusting in Jesus as your good shepherd? shepherd. And then a third question.

Did you notice how in the middle of this passage there was set out the whole aim and goal of Jesus' mission? Did you notice that? Have a look at verse 16.

Jesus is speaking, of course, may need to a Jewish audience at this stage. But listen to what he says. Having just repeated his declaration that he lays down his life for the sheep, he says, verse 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 and one shepherd. Now that is a really interesting verse, isn't it?

It was again the prophet Ezekiel who looked forward to the time when there would be one flock under one shepherd. Jesus is picking up that Ezekiel language from chapter 34 and applying it to his own mission.

[ 32 : 34 ] Jesus is fulfilling what the prophet promised. Not only has he come to bring the lost sheep of the house of Israel back to God the shepherd, he has other sheep, sheep not of that fold, and he must bring them also.

The history of the mission of the Christian God, the history of the history of the outworking of John 10 16.

For Jesus is building his church of men and women, of young and old, from every people and language on the face of this planet.

It may be that you feel that there's a great deal of other things that you wish that God was doing. But the Bible tells us that God is building his church.

And that means that what is happening is that sheep are being called, lost sheep are being found from every language and people group that you can imagine.

[ 33 : 51 ] That God's church is a gathered flock of sheep from this fold and that fold and another fold. It includes white and black and brown and yellow.

It includes old and young, from every kind of background and language that this earth comprises.

It is an extraordinary vision. It is a vision which as John's gospel proceeds, begins to be understood.

Just turn the page over for a moment. Have a look at chapter 11 and verse 50. Now this is a little incident where the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, is in debate about what to do with this Jesus.

And Caiaphas says in verse 50, you do not understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people rather than the whole nation should perish.

[ 35 : 08 ] Now he said that meaning that it was a good idea for Jesus to be killed. But John says, verse 51, Caiaphas did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation.

He spoke more truly than he knew. But now notice what John adds. Look at verse 52. And not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God that are scattered abroad.

Is that not brilliant? to gather into one. There's the one flock idea, the children of God, those lost sheep that are scattered abroad.

And so John, when he rounds off the New Testament with a book of Revelation, pictures a great multitude that no man can number, gathered from every people and race and language and nation before the throne and before the Lamb.

So here's my third question then. Are you ready to join in with that mission?

[ 36 : 27 ] First question was, have you entered through Jesus as the gate? If the answer to that's yes, second question is, are you trusting Jesus today as your good shepherd? If the answer to that is yes, here's the last one.

Having noticed what Jesus' mission is, are you ready to join in with that? What is the vision of St. George's Tron? Is it to be that kind of flock where people from every language and nation can come together and find a home?

Is your vision to join in with this great mission of God that God is continuing throughout the world?

It's a big vision, isn't it? It's a big idea. What on earth is God doing? God is building his church and he's jolly good at it.

And how are we to think of it? Well, we're to think of it in pictorial language. Now, friends, this is not complicated, is it? We can get this in our heads.

[ 37 : 38 ] This can inform our lives. As you go through this week, wherever you are, how are you to think of yourself? You're to think of yourself as a sheep with a shepherd who knows your name, who laid down his life for you.

As a sheep who has safety and security and protection so that no one can snatch you out of his hand. As a sheep who has a shepherd who will lead and guide.

as a sheep who is included in the shepherd's business. As a sheep who by your prayers, who by your gifts, who by your witness, who by your activity, can play a part in the great ongoing work of this good shepherd to build his church.

church. Well, may God's Holy Spirit take these words and drive them into our hearts and minds that we might think in this language and let's pray for one another that it will help us indeed to see clearly.

Let's pray. there was again a division among the Jews because of these words.

[ 39 : 12 ] Many said, this man has a demon, he's insane, why listen to him? Others said, these are not the words of one oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?



Our Father, we thank you indeed for the great signs the Lord Jesus did, for the way he gave the man born blind sight. And we pray tonight that our eyes too may be opened, that we may see clearly who we are, sheep in need of a shepherd, that we may see clearly this gate through which we may enter to find eternal life, safety, security, the good life, that we may see clearly the Lord Jesus, as our good shepherd.

And Lord, please give us eyes to see your great work in our world today and to play our part in it. We ask for the praise and honor and glory of the name of Jesus.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.