

Session Six: Gathered as Jesus' Sheep

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[0:00] Hello, and welcome back to Gospel Growth.

We've been looking for a while at what it means to be the church, specifically how the gospel gathers us together. And what we've looked at is how the gospel actually gives us these amazing pictures and metaphors of what it means to be the church.

And these metaphors are actually meant to give us this really strong identity, but also an understanding of who we are because of what the gospel has done and how it brings us together. And out of that, it really in turn directs us how we then should live, right? And so far, we've looked at being the body of Christ, the family of God, God's temple, and the bride of Christ.

And we're going to talk about one that probably most of us are really familiar with. John 10, verses 14 to 15 says this. This is Jesus talking. He says, I am the good shepherd.

[1:00] 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 so to be a Christian is to be gathered as Jesus' sheep.

That's what he's saying. And you know, we kind of like this image. Many of us probably have pictures of Jesus hanging somewhere on our office wall or in our home where it's like Jesus on a hillside in his shepherd's tunic, leaning on a staff with this solemn, compassionate face looking at his sheep on the hillside.

And we kind of think, oh, that's so nice, so comforting, so secure. And that's a cool picture. And it actually, we can take a lot away of what it means that Jesus is our shepherd and how encouraging that is and how we need to know that.

But there's another side of that too. And it means what it means to be a sheep. And the first thing we have to reckon with is that we need to be led. Sheep need to be led. You know, shepherd is one of the most common pictures we have of Jesus.

Jesus calls himself a shepherd quite often. And then he calls us sheep. And the Bible calls us sheep all over the place. And we have to see, why is that?

[2:11] You know, is it because like we're cute and we're fluffy? No, it's because we actually need leadership. Sheep cannot survive on their own.

They are one of the lamest, weakest animals. They have no creature powers at all. I mean, they can't defend themselves against predators. They can't bite back. They don't kick hard. They can't run fast.

Like nothing that they have helps them survive. And the other thing about it is they aren't very smart either. Check out this newspaper article. This is a recent newspaper article.

It says this, hundreds of sheep followed their leader, a sheep, off a cliff in eastern Turkey, plunging to their deaths this week while shepherds looked on in dismay.

400 sheep fell 15 meters, about four stories, to their deaths in a ravine in Van Province near Iran. Shepherds from a nearby village neglected the flock while eating breakfast, leaving the sheep to roam free.

[3:12] That really happened. Sheep need a shepherd. On their own, they get lost, walk around in circles, or eat things that kill them.

But also, we see that they are incapable, or they're very capable of walking straight off a cliff, one after another. So you can see, being a sheep, isn't this flattering comparison that we hope it to be? Most of us, I would say, after we think about it, it's like, man, I don't see myself as a sheep. I know how to tie my shoes. I put conditioner in my hair. When I drive my car, I don't go full Thelma and Louise off a cliff.

It's like, hey, we know what we're doing. We got this, right? But that's not why the Bible calls us sheep. It's not about the regular competencies of going through life. It's we're like sheep because we are spiritually helpless.

We don't know how to care for our souls and lead ourselves to spiritual health. We don't know what the right thing to do is for every situation. We don't know how to save ourselves.

[4:11] Often our instinctive response proves to be the worst impulse. I mean, Proverbs 14, 12 says this. There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

See, just like sheep, we think we know the right way. We see a path and we see it like, man, that path, it leads to freedom and it leads to happiness and joy.

And that's the path I need to walk down. But in the best case, what we end up doing is we just end up walking around in circles, exhausting ourselves and frustrating ourselves. And the worst case, we're headed straight off a cliff.

Now, in a very real spiritual sense, we have to realize we can't make our own way in the world. We get lost. We are sheep. And if we are sheep, then either we follow a shepherd or we end up spiritually dead.

And to admit that we need a shepherd means that we are totally unable to manage our lives by ourselves. That's a humbling thing to think about. But that's at the heart of what it means to be a Christian.

[5:17] We let Jesus come and we let him shepherd us. He calls the shots now. Jesus' sheep are under his guidance and his authority. I mean, first and foremost, Jesus is our Lord.

He is our boss. What he says goes, which is, and so there's no such thing as a Christian that runs his or her own life. We don't get to just call the shots and do things our way whenever we want.

Being a Christian means laying down your life, laying down your rights, dying to yourself and submitting to the one who laid his life down for you.

Because that's the kind of shepherd we have. John 10, 11, it says, Jesus says of himself, I am the good shepherd. And the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

There is no other shepherd in the world like this. You know, that newspaper article we read, man, the shepherds neglected the flock. And while they're sipping lattes, their flock plunged off a cliff to their death.

[6:16] Jesus isn't like that. Man, he is the leader and the shepherd that never neglects us. He's always there. He's always searching for us. He's always caring for us. And he cared about you and I enough to die for us.

So out of that, we can see, man, he's a good shepherd. We can entrust ourselves to him. But this metaphor of being a part of Jesus's flock as his sheep under a shepherd actually goes beyond coming under the guidance and authority of Jesus.

If that's all it meant, it would be kind of simple, right? That's just like, hey, I just need Jesus to be telling me what to do. But the problem is with that and what makes it difficult.

He's not right in front of you and me telling us what to do, is he? Certainly, he does give us guidance as we read his word. There's wisdom there and direction and commands. And we'd say, okay, we know how we should live.

But he isn't physically in front of us commanding us. So the temptation for us as sheep can be to reject any other kind of human leadership and just say like, you know what?

[7:18] Hey, I'm only following Jesus. He's my shepherd. Nobody else can be. But that would actually be very wrong and not at all what God encouraged us to do.

See, following Jesus doesn't mean rejecting every other kind of leadership. Actually, if we are following Jesus, then we must submit to other leaders. This shepherd metaphor is used later in the New Testament to talk about the elders in the church.

First Peter five, the beginning of verse one, it says, so I exhort the elders among you. Peter, he's talking to the church leaders right now. And it says this in verse two, shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly as God would have you, not for shameful gain, but eagerly, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

And when the chief shepherd, when Jesus appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. So if we are in Jesus's flock, if we are his sheep, then what it looks like to practically follow Jesus, the good shepherd in this world, is that we follow shepherds in the church who lead like Jesus.

That's what he calls us to do. That's what Jesus calls it. That's how we set it up. Peter gives us this amazing picture of shepherds leading Jesus's sheep under his authority as the chief shepherd.

[8:42] And actually, in fact, that word pastor that we're really familiar with, that basically translated as shepherd. Now, of course, these shepherds aren't like Jesus.

They don't own the sheep. The sheep don't belong to them. It's as if they were given stewardship to lead like Jesus and for Jesus. So their leadership shouldn't be domineering like Peter says.

No, no, it's got to be selfless. It's got to be sacrificial like Jesus. And shepherds in the church have to remember this. They are still sheep too. They're sheep to Jesus, first of all.

Before a pastor is a shepherd, he is one of Jesus's sheep. And that never stops being true. Even if you become a pastor, an elder in a church, you never stop being a sheep, even though you are also a shepherd.

But that doesn't mean that their authority is not legitimate. Now, Jesus left human leaders to guard his flock. That's what he did. So listen, one of the very practical ways that we can submit to Jesus's shepherding is through his church.

[9:49] Jesus leads us through his church, which is his body. Now, if you're not submitted to any kind of local church body, then how can you be accountable to brothers and sisters in Christ?

How can you be accountable to church leaders, Christian leaders? And if you're not, then you probably aren't really remembering that you're a sheep and that you need leadership.

And you're likely to wander off cliffs. See, we have to remember this. No Christian leader is perfect. No church elder is Jesus.

But you want to find pastors and elders who trust, you can trust, who are submitted to Jesus, who know that they are sheep, and you have to make yourself accountable to them.

Hebrews 3, 17, the very beginning of it says this, obey your leaders. Right? It's a command. It's not a suggestion. Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account.

[10:53] And when we see commands like this throughout the New Testament, it becomes clear that we really can't say that we are committed to following Jesus without being committed to a local church. It's an impossibility.

We don't, now that doesn't mean we follow a church instead of following Jesus, but we commit to a local church because we are following Jesus. And this can be difficult because, let's be honest, we don't often naturally like to be submitted.

We like to call our own shots. And relating properly to our pastors and Christian leaders can sometimes be difficult. And so, here's a few practical applications of being a good sheep in Jesus' flock.

First, support your shepherds. Some of us, let's, we've been hurt by leadership. And if that's you, man, our heart goes out to you. And I'm so sorry. We hate that that happens in the church. And if that's you, man, we really encourage you, man, share that with the group.

Talk to them about it. The best way to deal with wounds and hurts is to bring it in the open and share your story with people that you can trust and love. And they can carry that with you and help you in that. But our hurt can sometimes drive us to react in ways that are sinful.

[12:05] It's easy to question our authorities and to assume the worst about them or fail to give them the benefit of the doubt. Hebrews 13, 17 says, obey your leaders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account.

Then it goes on to say, let them do this with joy and not with groaning for that would be of no advantage to you. Right? A bunch of sheep questioning the shepherd's motives, responding with rebellion and cynicism and coming from a place of fear of authority, cutting down the leader's decisions, that leads to groaning.

All of that is groaning. Instead, what we should be doing is seeking to cultivate trust of your leaders, friendship with them, man, pray for them, back them up. The passage says, we follow our leaders with the realization that they are going to stand before God and they are going to give an account for how they have led.

And that should give us incredible grace for our leaders. They are going to have to answer to God one day. Every bad call they made, every sinful motivation, every poor leadership decision, maybe even harshness that had come out, they're going to have to answer to God one day for all those things.

So our attitude towards our leaders should be one of support and encouragement and trust. And much like a family, the church is built on a foundation of trust.

[13:34] If you're in a church and you're unable to give the leadership the benefit of the doubt, but you're instead interpreting everything they do through a negative grid, you're going to have a very difficult time finding joy in the church.

And so we have to guard our hearts, right? Each of us do. Every sheep has to guard their heart against cynicism. It's easy to be cynical because one of the things the New Testament warns us about more severely than anything is division.

It says, man, division is bad. Acts 20 verses 29 to 30 says this, I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

And from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them. And so encouragement number two, don't divide the flock.

We have to be so careful about our own hearts because our problems with authority can quickly turn into division. It's true. It's easy. And it's a very dangerous response.

[14:36] We can begin to draw away the flock if we aren't careful. I'm not telling you that you can't disagree with your leaders. That's not what I'm saying. In fact, I'm saying at some point you will.

But there's a big difference between having an issue and going to talk to your leader about that issue and saying, hey, help me understand versus going around spreading gossip and slander and sowing discord with other people.

That's not good. Right? That's not being a sheep. That's being more like a wolf. And when people do this, what happens is really what the bottom is, is they're trying to convince themselves and convince everyone else that they're right and the leaders are wrong.

And you know what? You actually might be right in any given situation. You might be right about that specific issue, but you're just handling it in the wrong way.

You're being divisive. Now, it's very easy to look for bad motives in other people's hearts. We can be really good at that, right? Try to find the bad motive, the evil in other people. And it's easy to do with our leaders as well.

[15:43] But what we see here should cause us to take pause, to sober up. And before looking for bad motives in someone else's heart, first, we need to look and see if, man, if there's bad motives, and maybe there's some divisiveness in our own hearts.

Now, the final pitfall that I want to bring us to you in relating to shepherds in the church isn't dividing from them or just mistrusting them, but actually it's the other side of that, which is putting them on a pedestal, right?

It's thinking of them too highly, like, but Jesus is the only leader worthy of glory. That's what we have to realize. There's only one pedestal. There's only one throne in God's kingdom, and that is occupied by one person, and that is Jesus Christ himself.

He is the one exalted. He was the one lifted up as he was lifted up on the cross. We respect our pastors, but we don't boast in them. We don't glorify them.

Our hope isn't in our pastor. It can be easy, very easily, to overly exalt a very talented pastor, but we can't expect under shepherds to be the chief shepherd.

[16:51] We can't do that. And as long as you have that expectation, you are going to be let down, and it's going to hurt because under shepherds aren't perfect people, and they will let you down.

Sometimes people get so deeply hurt and let down by the leaders because they've done that.

They've put them in the place of Jesus. They put them on the throne. Under shepherds, man, we have to watch out for this.

We don't want, we have to fight against that. We have to fight against our people trying to put us on thrones. It's like our job is to actually not point people to our greatness. It's to point people to the great shepherd and his greatness.

Sometimes the most pastoral thing we can say is talk to Jesus. Only Jesus is the shepherd that leads our hearts to green pastures and restores our souls. You and I, we need godly people in our lives to love and lead us, right?

And that's what pastors are called to do. But the leader you need most of all is Jesus. And let's not forget that because no one could possibly love you like he loves you. He's the one who laid his life down for you.

[17 : 56] And only he can bring us all the way home. So as we gather and discuss in groups tonight, ask yourselves and ask the group how you've related to the shepherds in your life.

Consider that. Consider that for yourself. How have you related to the shepherds in your life? How have you realized your own need for leadership or maybe even resisted it? Have you supported and prayed for the leaders in your church?

Or have you had a cynical and divisive spirit? And then finally, a good question is, is Jesus your chief shepherd? Or have you revered another man or a leader where only Jesus belongs?

Hey guys, so happy that you get to gather in groups and trust they're going to go well tonight. Enjoy.