

The Lord Our Shepherd

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[0 : 00] I'll just speak to you, there's a few of the younger ones upstairs there. I'll speak to you for a few moments now. I'm sure you're all aware of or unfamiliar with sheep because let's be honest, we see a lot of sheep around us in our community here.

I don't know, maybe some of you even have sheep in the family or maybe you've been looking after sheep but sheep take a lot of looking after. You have to do a lot with sheep.

You have to feed them, especially at certain times of the year, you have to take a lot of attention to make sure they're good enough food. You have to check them over, make sure they're healthy and they're well and that takes a lot of time as well, checking them over and checking everything about them to make sure they're well.

Similarly at lambing time as well, lambing time might be familiar with that time of year when the crofters are spending a lot of time with the sheep and making sure that everything's fine with the lambs and the sheep.

So they need a lot of attention. Sheep need a lot of attention. Sheep are very much reliant on the crofters as the Bible puts it, the shepherds.

[1 : 06] That's just the same with the shepherds, the Bible's way of talking about what we would say as crofters. In the passage that we're going to look at in a few moments, we're actually looking at the next passage we're going to read in John 10.

In that passage Jesus actually says that he is our shepherd and that picture of the shepherd, Jesus, the shepherd looking after his sheep, that describes how the Lord looks after us.

We are the flock, so we are the sheep and he is our shepherd and as our shepherd he does a few things for us. As our shepherd he feeds us. So he feeds you and he actually feeds you in two ways. He feeds you with physical food, so when you go home today and you open your cupboards or maybe look at your table, there'll be food to no doubt in the table, that's ultimately from the Lord. And that's why we give thanks, you know, before you eat you give thanks because it's ultimately from him.

So he feeds you in that way, but he also feeds you in another way. He feeds us with something called spiritual food. Now, I don't know if you've ever heard of spiritual food before, that's a bit different. You can't see spiritual food, but it is very real.

[2 : 10] And spiritual food is what we get from the Word of God. So when you learn about God and you read the Bible, you're feeding your soul or the Lord is feeding your soul. So the Lord as our shepherd, he feeds us with actual food, but he feeds us as well with this very important food, spiritual food as well.

But as well as that, our shepherd also protects us. A shepherd protects his sheep. We're going to see that later on as well. And our shepherd protects us and what he does is he kind of puts a fence around us.

He fences us around and he guards us and he stops our enemy getting to us. And who's our enemy? Well, our enemy is the devil himself. And if we are in God's fold, God's flock and if we're fenced protected by him, that means the devil can't destroy us.

He can never destroy us. He can roar at us and he can sometimes make us feel scared, but he can't get to us. He can't destroy us at all. We're protected. So our good shepherd, he feeds us, our good shepherd, he protects us, but also lastly, our good shepherd, he leads us as well.

That's important. See, when you see crofters around here and you see them with their dogs, they're probably chasing the sheep. That tends to be how we move sheep.

[3 : 26] We chase them. We push them wherever it is we want them to go. That's not how it was done in Jesus' states, not how it was done in the Bible times either. And those times what they did

was the shepherd went ahead and the sheep just followed.

It's quite amazing for us to think of that. That's the way it worked. The shepherd just went and the sheep followed. And if they followed the shepherd, they kept their eye on the shepherd, they'd be fine.

And that's the same for us. Jesus, as our shepherd, he goes before us. He's not chasing us behind. He's leading us and we have to keep our eye on him and we have to make sure we do that.

Keep our eye on him. Because if we lose sight of him and if we stray away from the flock of God by deciding to maybe when you're older to stop going to church or to stop reading your Bible, when you do that, what happens is you stray away.

And when you stray away like that, you very quickly get lost. And then when you get lost, you'll find yourself in all kind of danger as well. You have to be very careful. You keep your eye on the shepherd and you keep following him wherever it is that he leads you.

[4 : 29] And when you see the sheep around you here and when you see the crofters looking after them, you remember that picture of the way in which the Lord is our shepherd, that we are the sheep. He feeds us, protects us, he leads us as well.

And if you want to be part of that flock, it's very simple. You just come through the gate, you put your faith in Jesus. We'll see that later on as well. He is the door, he is the gate. You put your faith in Jesus and you'll be in that fold and you'll be safe forever and more.

So thank you very much for your attention and for listening. Now we're going to read that passage that I was speaking about there in John in John chapter 10.

So John chapter 10, we're just going to read a small section from verse 1 down to verse 18 and then we'll look at some of these verses.

So John 10 and from the beginning, let's again hear the word of the Lord. 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.

[5 : 46] 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 and strangers 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.

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 was 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.

[6 : 56] 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.

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.

Amen. We pray for the Lord's blessing once more on that reading of his holy word. As I was saying there to the younger ones a few moments ago, crofting and looking after sheep, that's something that I think we are fairly familiar with.

[8 : 04] Even if you don't have sheep in the family, you're familiar with it because you see it all around you. You're surrounded by it, you see the crofters in the community, no doubt looking after the sheep just out there as I was coming in.

I was seeing some sheep as I was coming in. There is a lot of differences to how we look after sheep and how we tend to sheep.

There's a lot of differences from that to how sheep are looked after in the days of Christ and in the Bible days. I've mentioned some of the children already. I'll touch on some of these things as we go. Even though there's differences, culture was different and there's many other differences, I think our general familiarity with sheep and seeing sheep around us actually helps us when it comes to passages like this and to understanding passages like this.

The idea of our Lord being our shepherd, that's a pretty well established image really right throughout the Bible. Lord is our shepherd. Straight away you think of Psalm 23, that picture of the Lord being our shepherd.

[9:07] But you have other pictures of that as well. Even earlier on in the likes of the book of Exodus, the whole Exodus journey is kind of given to us in the context of a shepherd.

When you see the children of Israel coming out of Egypt, they're like a flock and you have the pillar of cloud and fire leading them. As I was mentioning to the children, the shepherd leading.

The shepherd is that that pillar of fire and cloud and he's going before his people, leading his people. Even that whole Exodus narrative, actually it's very much couched in that kind of language of a shepherd and sheep.

You have that kind of imagery cropping up all over scripture as well. What Jesus is doing in this passage here in John chapter 10 is he's turning to this image and he's delivering a series, quite a number actually, of wonderful scriptural truths, of wonderful lessons from this image here.

He's really drawing from that image of shepherds and sheep all the way down to verse 18. There's loads in it and I don't want to look at all of that because there's so much in that.

[10:14] It can actually be a wee bit confusing as well when you look at it all because what happens is that Jesus actually changes the meaning of the different parts of the image as he goes through the illustration.

You might have noticed that. For example, one minute he's talking about himself as the shepherd and in another stage he's talking about himself as the gate or the door. He's changing the imagery as he goes through it.

You have to keep up with it a wee bit. The same with the enemies as well. Sometimes the enemies are described as thieves and the robbers and other times it's the wolves. It's a very fluid picture.

It's a detailed illustration and a very fluid illustration that he gives in the sense that he's using different parts of it to teach about himself and also to teach about the enemies as well.

There are perhaps certain highlights within the passage. When I read it there was probably certain things that really jumped out to you. Probably one of these main lessons would be this idea of the shepherd laying down his life later on in the passage.

[11:17] The idea of the shepherd laying down his life for the sheep, giving himself in a sacrificial way and it would be very profitable if we just looked at that one thing. But again I don't want to look at that either.

What I want to do is I want to look at the first section of this illustration that we have here. You have it there really in the first ten verses. That first section there in verse ten that I want to look at today and I want to just bring three things out of it.

Firstly the shepherd calling the sheep by name. So the shepherd himself calling the sheep by name. Secondly the shepherd leading the sheep.

And thirdly and importantly the sheep following the shepherd. Now those last two are different. So first of all the shepherd calling the sheep by name, the shepherd leading the sheep and then the sheep following the shepherd.

So let's look firstly at the shepherd calling the sheep by name. Now before we get into the point of service, it's probably worth just very briefly explaining how sheep were looked after in this particular culture and this context here.

[12:26] I mentioned earlier on that it was a wee bit different. What you had here is people had in the villages, people had their own little flocks. Sometimes we imagine it like massive flocks.

That's not really what it was like. It was lots of the families had their own little flocks and they'd have these flocks and then at the end of the day what they would do is they would gather the sheep, all the sheep in the village, into one sheepfold, into one enclosure.

And this was usually a walled enclosure with some kind of entrance, some kind of door or a gate of some kind. So all the sheep that belonged to the people of that one particular village, they would all be brought in and kept overnight in the enclosure.

To keep them safe, to keep them safe from predators and to keep them safe from others perhaps trying to steal the sheep as well. And what they would do is they would assign one person, they would give one person or pay one person to be the gatekeeper.

And the gatekeeper had a very simple job. The gatekeeper was to stand at the door for the gate and stay there all night and only to allow the rightful shepherds in.

[13:31] Nobody else was allowed in. So that meant thieves and robbers couldn't sneak in the door because there was a gatekeeper there. So if the thieves and the robbers wanted to get in they would have to climb over the wall which is what we have in the illustration here.

And then the next morning what would happen is that the rightful shepherds, they would get up, they would come to the gate and the rightful shepherds would be allowed in. The gatekeeper would allow them in and then they would call their sheep.

Bear in mind there's lots of sheep in here. They would call their own sheep and their own sheep would recognise their voice. They wouldn't recognise the voice of a stranger, wouldn't recognise the voice of someone else.

They would recognise the voice of their own shepherd and the sheep would come to them. And actually there's evidence that the shepherds actually had names for their sheep.

You'll notice in the passage here there's reference to calling by name. There is evidence that that actually happened which is I suppose understandable when you think of the fact that they're smaller flocks. You can imagine them giving names.

[14:30] And actually I was reading a few weeks ago now when I was looking at this and I was seeing that even now, even today, eastern shepherds, some of them named their sheep based on distinctive features like white nose or something like that.

They actually have names for their sheep. And that was likely the case here as well. The shepherd would go in, perhaps call them literally by name, the sheep would respond, come to the shepherd and then the shepherd would go out, lead them to the flock, lead them to pasture land and lead them to different places where they could be kept safe and looked after.

And that is very different to the robbers and the thieves. Very different indeed. The robbers and the thieves here, we read there, they climb, they climb the walls together.

These robbers, they don't care about the sheep. The shepherd cares about the sheep. The robbers here, they don't care. They just care about themselves. And in verse five we read there of the sheep that as strangers they will not hear but will flee from him for they do not know the voice of stranger. Now, who are these thieves and robbers that Jesus is talking about here? Well, it's absolutely no coincidence that this illustration here comes to a straight off the back of chapter nine.

[15:51] And what happens in chapter nine? Well, in chapter nine you have the Pharisees. And what the Pharisees are doing is they're throwing up a previously blind beggar out of the synagogue. And then they actually get to the point of nearly throwing his parents out of the synagogue.

They're chucking him out. And why are they chucking him out? They're chucking him out because he's been healed and he's attributing this healing that he's experienced to Jesus. The Pharisees here, they don't care.

They're just like the wolves here. They don't care about the man. They throw him out as soon as he mentions Jesus. They don't care about the people. They just care about themselves.

And in that sense, these Pharisees, they weren't real shepherds of the flock. They weren't true shepherds of the flock. They were like those shepherds we read up early on in Ezekiel chapter 34. That's what they were like. Wicked shepherds. Wicked shepherds who didn't care. They just fed themselves. They fleeced the sheep to look after themselves. They're like these thieves and robbers in this illustration, only caring about their own interests.

[16:55] And they say, there's people like that still out today, people who even call themselves shepherds. But actually, they just care about themselves. They don't care about the flock that they are under shepherds of.

They are merely fleecing the flock who are before them. And when you're reading that passage back in Ezekiel 34, when you're reading that, you're reading about the wicked shepherds and you're thinking about the Pharisees and how terribly they treated the people.

You're sort of crying out for a real shepherd. Funny, we had a true shepherd. One who will genuinely care for the flock. One who will genuinely care for the flock.

And that's exactly what Jesus is saying here. He's saying, that's me. Pharisees and these others just care about themselves. They'll put all sorts of burdens on your back. But I am the true shepherd.

I am the real shepherd. I am the one who cares for my sheep. And as the true shepherd, I know my sheep and I call my sheep by name. I know them. Intimately, I know them personally.

[17 : 55] He knows exactly who I am. And you know, when you think back to the image of the Eastern shepherds coming into their sheepfold and all these different sheep there, it's quite amazing that they knew exactly which ones were there.

You know that, I don't know if they marked them or what, I'm not sure exactly what they did, but they saw them and they knew exactly which sheep belong to them. And that's what it's like with our Lord.

He knows exactly. He knows exactly who it is that are who. And when you look at the world today, the world is big, its population is huge.

Over, well over 7 billion people now. It's not far off 8 billion people now. Massive amount of people in the world. And yet the Lord, he knows exactly every one of his sheep.

He knows where they are. Right now at this moment, all the millions of his sheep scattered throughout the world. He knows where they are and he knows exactly what it is that you're going through.

[18 : 52] And when he calls you to himself, you know, as a lost sheep, when he's calling you to himself, he calls you by name. He calls his sheep by name. But what I mean by that is it's a personal intimate thing.

It's not that he gives just some mere general blanket call to all sheep everywhere and those that are who's come to him. That's not how it works. It's not a blanket call he gives out at all.

He calls you in a very personal way indeed. He calls you as it were by name. An intimate calling of the lost sheep towards the shepherd.

And for those of you who are the Lords here today, you'll be able to testify to that. You'll be able to remember that. You'll be able to think back to a time perhaps when you were outside the fold and then you sat under the preaching of the word or you read it maybe, maybe in your own house or somewhere or you came under the public worship of God and the word being read in the worship of God.

And then all of a sudden you began to become aware of the Lord speaking to you in a very real way, drawing you to himself. And when that happens, it's remarkable.

[20 : 00] It's almost like there's no one else in the room, even if it's a packed church. It's like the Lord is speaking to you. You know, it's not the minister speaking to you. You know, it's the Lord.

The Lord is speaking directly to me, himself. And when you recognize the voice of the Lord like that calling you, you're drawn.

You're drawn in. And you feel that. You feel that that drawing in towards them because you know, it's not the voice of a stranger. You know, this is the voice of someone who will protect you.

You know, this is the voice of someone who will ultimately save you from danger. You know, it's the voice of someone who will relieve you from this burden of sin and suffering that you've been carrying.

And you go to it. You recognize it and you go to it and you receive salvation. He calls you to himself and you're drawn in. And that idea of the Lord calling you by name and then you recognizing his voice, that's not only true in terms of salvation.

[21 : 04] That's not only true in terms of that moment when you first came to faith in him. No, it is through then, but it's not only through then. That's through actually right throughout your Christian life, right throughout your journey.

The Lord in different ways. He's calling you by name. He's speaking to you in different ways. So for example, imagine a shepherd going out with his flock, without the wilderness, and the shepherd sees one of his flock stray.

I mentioned this in prayer earlier on, I think. One of them stray, one of them going off by themselves, away from the safety of the flock. The shepherd sees that and the shepherd calls that sheep back, draws that sheep back.

And how often that happens with ourselves in relation to our relationship with the Lord. We seek to walk as the Lord's people in the paths of righteousness, but we know that from time to time we are

led astray for different reasons.

I do think over this last year, that has been more common, where people are taken away and people come away, away from the safety of the flock of the Lord.

[22 : 14] But then what happens in due course, in God's time, you will hear his voice. You hear his voice calling you. You hear his voice lovingly warn you. You hear his voice lovingly rebuke you.

And you hear his voice lovingly calling you, calling you back to himself. And when you recognise that, as the Lord's child, as a sheep of the fold, when you recognise that it stops you on your tracks. It might take you a while to recognise it, but when you do, when you hear the voice of the Lord speaking to that, it stops you on your tracks and you come back into the fold. And whether that be him speaking to you through your conscience, or whether that be him speaking to you through your providence, or through the word, or the preaching of the word, whatever it is, you recognise it and you come back in the fold.

So this idea of the Lord calling on you, it's not just in salvation, it happens throughout our Christian life. Similarly, in times when you're in need of encouragement, and in times when you're in need of comforting, again, if he calls you, he speaks to you in a very intimate way, a personal way.

It's like it's just you and him. Like the Lord speaking directly to yourself and he's giving you exactly what it is that you need at that particular time. And the call is always the same in the sense that the call is to come towards him.

[23 : 30] Because no matter what the sheep needs, the answer is always to come towards the shepherd. You know, if the sheep is lost, if the sheep is hungry, if the sheep is sick, the answer is always that the sheep needs to hear the voice of the shepherd and to come towards the shepherd.

That's always, no matter what situation you're all in today and you're all in different situations, the answer is the same, isn't it? We all have to recognise the voice of the shepherd and we all have to come towards him.

And I hope I'm praying that that's something you know yourself today. Whether you're outside of the fold and you're only recognising his voice really for the first time, or whether you're already in the fold and you've been in the fold for a long time, my prayer is that you would recognise his voice speaking to you and calling you, that you draw towards himself.

So our shepherd, he calls us by name. Secondly and much more briefly on this point, our shepherd, he leads us.

He goes before us. So we've eaten our shvore there that when he brings out his own sheep, we've eaten, he goes before them. He goes before them.

[24 : 38] Now, when you see, as I mentioned to the kids earlier on, when you see the sheep being moved in our community, it is very much like the crofters and the dogs are driving them forward.

And so, when you see the children in the Bible, it's different. In the Bible, the shepherds would lead the flock. And that's very much the image that you have here.

Our Lord, our shepherd, he leads us. He goes before us. He paves the way for us. And when you think about our Lord like that, when you think about him leading and paving the way, you can't think about that without thinking about his death on the cross, you know, going before us, leading the way because they are in the cross.

And as our Lord and our Savior, as he suffers and dies on the cross in a very real way, that's him paving the way, going before us as our Savior and going through that suffering in order to open up a way, paving out a way of salvation for us.

And then all we have to do is put our faith in him, put our trust in him. But he's the one who comes and he's the one who opens up the way. He's the one who sheds his blood.

[25 : 48] And, you know, sometimes you get the metaphorical scripture that kind of starts to mix up and you get a weaver of that here because he is the lamb who sheds his blood, but at the same time he's the shepherd.

He's the lamb being sacrificed and he's the shepherd laying down his life for his sheep. So he goes before us in that way. He leads us in that way, opening up salvation by everything he did for us at the cross.

But now that we are on the path of salvation, now that we are the Lord's people, he continues to lead us.

It's not just that he led us into salvation, he continues to lead us. And he continues to lead us today to ensure that we walk in the paths of righteousness.

That's what he wants us to do, as those who are the Lord's, he is leading us down the path of righteousness, the highway of holiness. And what he does is he leads us and he goes before us to show us how to live, to show us how we are to enjoy life as the Lord's people, to show us how we are to enjoy, as we have it there in verse 10, to enjoy the fruit of this abundant life.

[27 : 05] You know, he speaks of this abundant life. He leads us to show us how we can have that, even within the fold. We need to follow in order that we might have these things.

And the way he does that, the way he leads us in that way is in two ways. He leads us by instruction and he leads us by example. So he leads us by instruction because, well, he tells us how to live. You read the Gospel and he explains to you there how to live according to the law of the Lord. He opens up the Ten Commandments, he opens up the whole of the Old Testament and he practically shows you how to apply it to your life.

Serving them out, great example of that. He shows you by his instruction, by his teaching, he's leading you. But also he's leading you by example. He's not just a teacher who teaches but doesn't show.

He teaches and he shows. And you read his life in the Gospels and you read how he interacts with others. You read how he speaks, what he does, the kind of people he speaks to, where he goes.

[28 : 06] You see all of that and you see a living example of what it is to live and to walk the paths of righteousness. So he's leading us in the sense of teaching us how to but he's leading us as well in the sense of showing us.

He is our example and as he goes before us, as he leads us, we look to him as our example. And he leads us in many other ways as well.

He leads us to pasture. He leads us to the spiritual food that I was talking about to the children. He leads you here. He leads you to shelter and safety when you need it. He is leading us all the time. So as our shepherd, he leads us. So first of all, we saw our shepherd calling us by name. Secondly, we see our shepherd leading, leading us, going before us.

But lastly, and I think this is probably the most important in many ways in terms of our response, we must follow him. We must follow him.

[29 : 05] So you hear him calling, you see him leading, but you must respond. That's imperative. You must respond. You must actually follow.

And again, I say that to all of us, to those who are the Lord's people and those who are still outside of Christ, we all must respond to that. He's calling on us all in different ways to follow him, to come to him and we must respond and we must follow.

So for those who are on the outside, for those who aren't the Lord's, well, look at verse 7 here. Jesus is changing the imagery a wee bit here.

Now he's referring to himself as not the shepherd, but he's referring to himself now as the door. And he says, so Jesus again said to them, 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.

[30 : 18] The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. See outside, outside the sheepfold, it's a dangerous place and that's what he's trying to convey here.

Outside is a very dangerous place. There is danger out there that is cause for fear, that is cause for anxiety, that is cause for concern, concern for the eternal well-being of your soul.

And Jesus is saying to you here, with all that danger out there, it is imperative that you are outside. You must come. You must come in. You must enter through this door that is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

He's saying, follow me in. Follow me into the safety and refuge of this fold. And notice, there is only one way in. There's only one way in here.

You won't get in based on your own merit. You won't get in based on your good works. You won't get in based on just being a good person or your charitable deeds and all these things.

[31 : 24] You won't get in based on that. Not that these things are bad, but that's never a way that will bring us into the fold of Christ. You won't get in through being a religious person in the sense of merely attending church and being part of the church in that sense.

Again, that alone, good, very good, but that alone is not going to bring you into this fold at all. That's like you trying to climb the wall and climb in the sheepfold in some other way.

The only way in is through faith in Christ. It's the only way. See, any other way would be difficult. In fact, impossible. There's one way in and it's in one sense, it's an easy way in and in the other sense, it's an impossible way in because it's only the Holy Spirit that can enable us to respond to that and enable us to walk through and enable us to put our faith in Christ. But that's the way in for you. That's the door. Faith in Christ. It's a simple door. You enter in, even as a sinner, even as a fallen sinner, you come in with your faith in Christ. Take him as your Lord. You follow him and you're safe in there. You're safe in the refuge of his fold. And when you come in, when you follow him in, and I know many of you here have done that, if you follow the Lord into this fold, when you come in, you'll find that you don't just receive eternal life as a kind of future reward.

[32 : 41] That's not the case. We do, we do receive that, but we don't just receive that. We also receive what we have described for us here in this passage as an abundance of life now.

So we receive this right now, here and now, this abundant life. And that's an important point, a very important point. And I think this is one of the reasons why some people have this mentality of putting salvation off until my death bed or leaving it until later on in life or something like that.

The gospel offer is much more than just a ticket of entry which you cash in upon death. That's how a lot of people think about the gospel, but it's much, much more than that.

The gospel gives you abundant life right now. It does something for you now in the here and now. The Lord promises to bless you with all sorts of spiritual blessings, all sorts of spiritual privileges. He offers you a peace that passes all understanding. And I'll tell you, most of the world today is looking for that. All the fear that's going on. A peace that passes all understanding.

[33 : 48] That's an offer to you within this fold and in this abundant life. He offers you an inexpressible joy, an inexpressible joy. Don't even think about that. Something I can't even be fully expressed.

That's an offer to you. A living hope, a real hope, a certain hope, not the kind of wishful hope that the world offers. Something sure. That's what the Lord offers us.

He offers us the relief of having our guilt, of our sin removed, the weight of our sin removed. He offers us the sure knowledge that we are never alone, that the Lord is always with us.

That every time we call upon His name, His ear is bowed down. That He's listening to His people. And the list could go on. You could list so many other blessings that are ours right now, not just eternal life to come, although that is great.

We have something now. We have these blessings now, enter into this sheepfold and you'll receive that abundant life for yourself. But you must follow Him.

[34 : 47] You must follow Him. And for those of us who are already inside, for those of us who have put out faith in Christ, as I said, it is imperative that you also continue to follow the Lord.

Because taking Him as your Lord is to serve Him. And that means that you must follow where He commands you to go. You must do that.

You must follow wherever it is that He leads you. To take Him as your Lord is to do just that. He is your shepherd. And I think sometimes, I think sometimes we fall into this trap of thinking as the Lord's people that our time for responding to the Lord is merely isolated to that moment where we made that decision to come to faith in the Lord.

In other words, when we made that decision to come in through that door, that that's the only time that we have to respond to the Lord. And when we're on the inside, we're safe anyway. We can just relax and everything's fine.

That's a dangerous way to think. Of course it's true that once we come to Christ for salvation, our soul is eternally secure at that point. But it's imperative, absolutely imperative that we continue to follow the Lord every step of this wilderness journey that we're on.

[36 : 08] Because the minute you stop, the minute you lose sight of the Lord and you stop following the Lord, things will get difficult. Things will get very hard indeed. And that abundant life which you maybe remember and enjoyed and savoured so much early on in your Christian life, it's amazing how quickly you can forget that when you stop, when you stop following the Lord, we must continue to follow Him at all times.

Israel followed the Lord in the wilderness of Sinai. The Lord took them to water. The Lord took them to food. The Lord protected them. If they had just stayed, they would have died.

If they became inactive, they would have died there. But they continued to follow. And that's important for the Lord's people that we keep following. Over this past year, apathy has definitely settled in, as I was mentioning earlier on.

You see it. You see it even in the desire for gathering and worship. It's not the same as it was. It's not the same as it was. Right throughout our islands. That desire is not there.

We have taken our eyes off of our Lord and our shepherd through all this. And we have to take great care about that and seek to do everything we can to protect the flock and look out for our brothers and sisters in the Lord and do what we can to encourage the Lord's people, especially those who are straight, to come back into this fold.

[37 : 30] So let's make sure we keep listening to the voice of our Lord as He calls us. Let's keep our eye out for Him as He leads us. And let's make sure that we respond to Him and that we respond by following Him.

Amen. And we pray for God's blessing on those few words. Just bow your heads in that short word of prayer before we sing. A heavenly Father, we give thanks for your hand upon us.

We give thanks for the way in which you are our shepherd. And we confess as sheep we do stray and as sheep we do wander and as sheep we do get into all sorts of dangers and difficulties.

But we give thanks that you're a gracious shepherd, a loving shepherd, one who continues to forgive and one who continues to speak to us. Help us to keep following. Help us to keep looking to you.

We pray. Trenza som sin, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Well, we're going to sing now and we're going to sing in that shepherd, Sam, Sam 23, the Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.

[38 : 38] Go am Sultan Relenting theleri of righteousness,

Lo, he who is filled with eternal joy Is God who has sought to save His marketed lips.

The table that was furnished in presence of my Lord, my fellow God, with all my life, and my God only for those good things and mercy of my life shall surely follow Him, and in your sails forevermore, thy death in praise shall be.

Stand for the vindiction. And I may the grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Lord of God, the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, continue with you all now and forevermore. Amen.