

Hymn: Crown Him With Many Crowns

Crown him with many crowns,
the Lamb upon his throne.
Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns
all music but its own.
Awake, my soul, and sing
of him who died for thee,
and hail him as thy matchless king
through all eternity.

Crown him the Lord of life,
who triumphed o'er the grave,
and rose victorious in the strife
for those he came to save;
his glories now we sing
who died and rose on high,
who died eternal life to bring,
and lives that death may die.

Crown him the Lord of love;
behold his hands and side,
rich wounds, yet visible above,
in beauty glorified;
no angels in the sky
can fully bear that sight,
but downward bends their burning eye
at mysteries so bright.

Crown him the Lord of years,
the potentate of time,
creator of the rolling spheres,
ineffably sublime.
All hail, Redeemer, hail!
for thou hast died for me;
thy praise shall never, never fail
throughout eternity.

[John 10:11-18](#)

As many of you know, my plans for university at the normal age of eighteen were interrupted by the sudden onset of serious neck pain. One evening, sitting in a prayer meeting, I gravitated towards the armchair most likely to give me some support and relief – one that elderly people usually sat in.

A lovely member of that group called Peggy saw my pain and quoted the words with which today's reading began: 'I am the Good Shepherd,' and led a prayer for me. So I know first-hand the comfort this passage brings to people.

Yet what I've discovered over the years is that these comforting words are also challenging words. So today we're going to meditate on both the comforting and challenging messages of these verses.

The **first** thing to observe is how Jesus teaches here about his **divinity**. Right from the opening words, 'I am', we have a claim to divinity. Those two words may be unremarkable in English, but you may recall that God revealed himself to Moses as 'I am'. There are then seven 'I am' sayings in John's Gospel, and what we don't see in English is one particular feature of the Greek. If you wanted to say 'I am' in the ordinary sense in Greek, you just needed to say 'Am.' But adding in 'I', the personal pronoun, gives it added emphasis that echo the Old Testament notion of God as 'I am.' In the 'I am' sayings, the Greek uses that emphatic 'I am' rather than simply 'Am.'

This claim to divinity is bolstered by the title 'Shepherd'. Of itself it isn't necessarily a divine title, because the rulers of Israel were commanded by God to shepherd the people¹. However, the rulers were given the title 'Shepherd' as derivative from the Lord, under whom they served. The ultimate 'Shepherd of Israel' was God himself². This was also deeply personal, most famously in Psalm 23, 'The Lord's my Shepherd.'

Therefore when Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd, he is taking on for himself a title that ultimately belongs to God himself. Combined with emphatically saying 'I am,' Jesus is making it abundantly clear that he claims divine status for himself.

All very interesting, you may think, but what does it mean for us and what did it mean for the first hearers? Quite simply, if Jesus is divine, then we owe him our allegiance. It's hinted at later in the passage when Jesus is talking about

‘other sheep that are not of this sheepfold’ (verse 16). He says, ‘They too shall listen to my voice and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.’

So the other sheep are listening, but not them only: Jesus said, ‘They *too* will listen to my voice.’ His assumption is that not only will the other sheep listen, they will listen, because the original sheep are listening intently in the first place.

And for all who act as under-shepherds in the church among God’s people today, we are therefore not only to listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd for ourselves but also obey that voice and furthermore encourage or urge those in our care to obey his will.

The **second** observation in Jesus’ teaching here is his **love**:

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (Verse 11b)

¹⁷The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.’

Note all those references to Jesus laying down his life. Risking one’s life is honourable and to be applauded, but to lay down one’s life demands more. When we risk our lives, we put ourselves in harm’s way and we may be killed or maimed, or we may survive unscathed. But in laying down one’s life, death is certain. He will die, and he will do so voluntarily. He is not a political protestor who happens to get caught and executed, but one who willingly presents himself. He could have prevented it, but he doesn’t.

The word ‘love’ is not explicitly used for these actions, but when the good shepherd is contrasted with the hired hand who will run off with his wages rather than protect the flock from danger it’s clear that Jesus is in this for love, not money.

For reasons that Jesus doesn’t explain here (we must go elsewhere in the New Testament for answers) the protection of the flock from harm can only be achieved by the sacrificial love of the Shepherd.

So the Lord himself is willing to put himself in harm’s way for the sake of those who will be saved.

What sort of response does that call for from us? For one, surely it leads us to a sense of wonder and worship that God in Christ has done this for us. How can we not 'sing the wondrous story'?

For another, remembering that the life of Jesus is a model for us, we know from this that he calls us to love in sacrificial ways, too. Many of our Christian sisters and brothers around the world still lay down their lives for their faith. While that seems far less likely for us and I pray such trials never come our way, should not each one of us ask what we have sacrificed out of love for Jesus and love for his people?

None of us can give up our lives for the salvation of the world, but we are called to love because Jesus has shown love. Christian disciples respond to God's love in Christ by showing that we are in this for what we can give, not what we can get. That's what distinguishes shepherds from hired hands.

What am I giving up out of love for Jesus and his people? Can I answer that question?

My **third** observation is that Jesus teaches us here about his *mission*:

¹⁶I have other sheep that are not of this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

Here Jesus looks beyond the sheep in the immediate courtyard. These are not secret believers in other religions, as if all religions are valid ways of coming to God, because the second part about 'one flock and one shepherd' rules that out. This is about the mission to the Gentiles that will take place after the Ascension and Pentecost.³

The sacrificial love of the divine Shepherd is such that he wants to draw all into his flock. His death is the effective way to bring all who will respond to follow him. Not only does he know those who are already part of his flock, he knows all people, and so he calls them, inviting them to recognise his voice and follow what he says.

And the relevance for us is this. While sometimes Jesus reaches out to people in unusual, direct ways – for instance, I've heard accounts of him appearing in dreams to people and calling them to follow him – mostly he works through human intermediaries, who are empowered by his Spirit. And you know who that means. Us.

Therefore, when we accept the call to join the flock of Christ and tune into his voice as the way to know how to live, part of that includes the fact that he speaks to us about sharing the news of his self-giving love with the world.

That doesn't mean we all go knocking on doors. It doesn't mean that quiet people have to become loud. Nor does it mean that we all have to know all the answers to all the objections to our faith (although a bit more studying of our faith by many of us would surely do no harm).

But it does mean that we all have a privilege and an obligation to be bearers of Christ's good news to the world in our words and our deeds. It is a wonderful story we have to tell of a God who was so concerned about the alienation between him and his creation that he took the pain of reconciliation entirely upon himself.

Some of us will find it easier to talk about Jesus than others. But if we are not so fluent with our words and start to get nervous at the thought of talking about our faith, we might want to reflect on Who it is we are talking about and what it is he did for us. Does the cost of our nerves stack up against the price Jesus paid on the Cross?

Hymn: The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in You alone,
And I will trust in You alone,
For Your endless mercy follows me,
Your goodness will lead me home.*

He guides my ways in righteousness,
And He anoints my head with oil,
And my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on His pure delights.

And though I walk the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one,
For You are with me, and Your rod and staff
Are the comfort I need to know.

Reflection: The Lord Is My Shepherd

The LORD is my shepherd,

My guide, my satnav, my personal trainer, my president, my prime minister, my mentor. The one I look to...

I have everything I need.

I want plenty of things, long for so much, desire a world of things. But what Lord, do I need?

He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams.

Lord, we burn ourselves out at times, take on too much. Please help us to pause, to find moments of refreshment amidst the busy-ness...

He renews my strength.

We are so tired at times, so wrung out from the day. Renew our strength Lord, please, give us patience and endurance...

He guides me along right paths, bringing honour to his name.

It's easy to get lost, to become distracted and lose our way. Please guide us in our decision making this week Lord...

Even when I walk through the dark valley of evil, I will not be afraid,

The news can be bad, it can frighten and overwhelm us. Help us to see it through your eyes, give us comfort, compassion and courage...

For you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.

Popular opinion informs us that there is nothing out there, but you promise to always be with us, to never leave us. Help us to remember that Lord in all that happens this week...

You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies.

Enemies appear in many guises - peer pressure, cynicism, rebuffs and negative criticism. Your word offers us a feast of encouragement. Thank you Lord.

You welcome me as a guest, anointing my head with oil.

Help us to keep in mind that we are your prodigal children, welcomed home, forgiven, invited in...

My cup overflows with blessings. Surely your goodness and love will pursue

me forever. I will live in the presence of the LORD all my days.

Thank you for all the good things in our lives, and the promise of fullness of life with you.

Amen.

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Hymn: I Will Sing The Wondrous Story

I will sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me.
How He left His home in glory
For the cross of Calvary.

I was lost, but Jesus found me,
Found the sheep that went astray,
Threw His loving arms around me,
Drew me back into His way.

I was bruised, but Jesus healed me;
Faint was I from many a fall;
Sight was gone, and fears possessed me,
But He freed me from them all.
Days of darkness still come o'er me,
Sorrow's paths I often tread,
But the Saviour still is with me;
By His hand I'm safely led.

He will keep me till the river
Rolls its waters at my feet;
Then He'll bear me safely over,
Where the loved ones I shall meet.

Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me,
Sing it with the saints in glory,
Gathered by the crystal sea.

Francis H Rowley (1854-1952)

Blessing

May he brought again from the dead
that great Shepherd of the sheep,

our Lord Jesus Christ,
fill your hearts with his joy, and love, and peace;
and may the blessing of God,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with you now and forever. **Amen.**

¹ See, for example, 2 Samuel 7:7, 1 Chronicles 17:6

² See, for example, Genesis 49:24, Psalm 80:1, Jeremiah 31:10, Ezekiel 34:1.

³ <https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/jesus-the-good-shepherd-leads-his-sheep-in-john-10/>