

One Tiny Passage, Ten Amazing Truths

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[0 : 00] Well, thank you all very, very much for such a warm welcome. It's such a joy for me and my family to be back with you today, and it's so good to see so many of you here. It's wonderful because many of you are very familiar faces.

We have so many dear friends in this congregation, but many of you are faces that I don't know. And that is also wonderful because it just shows the way the Lord is building his church over the past number of years.

For those of you who have not met before, I am the less good-looking, less intelligent version of Kori. So I was here as assistant pastor to Derrick from 2018 to 2021, three years that we loved so much, and we were so blessed to be here and to enjoy such a precious time with you.

Since 2021, I've been back serving on the Isle of Lewis in the congregation of Carlaway, and I bring the warmest greetings of the congregation there. And I do just want to take a moment to say that for us in Carlaway, and really for the whole free church across the Highlands and Islands, I want to say this, Sincis is a massive inspiration to us.

We live in communities where populations are going down, churches are getting older and smaller, and we're facing a huge challenge to get the people on our doorstep to see that the gospel is relevant.

[1 : 37] And the congregation here in Sincis is a massive inspiration for us. For many reasons, one, because it's a reminder for us that right in the heart of our capital city, we have a huge crowd gathering to meet in the name of Jesus and to praise his name.

And also because of the community and ministries that you have built up here over the years, has been such a positive model of what Jesus wants his church to look like. It was a massive privilege for us to be part of that for those three years, and we're so thankful to Corey, to the leadership here, to everybody who serves, and to you all for being part of such a wonderful congregation.

So thank you for all that you do, not just for yourselves, but for the wider church and for our whole nation. You probably don't know this, but you're a massive inspiration to us all. We're going to turn back together to the passage that Lewis read for us, and I want us just to focus in on verses 27 to 30.

I didn't tell them at the back, but it would be amazing if we could put 27 to 30 on the screens behind us as we go through these verses today. Let me read them again, John 10, 27, when Jesus said, My sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow me.

I give them eternal life, and they shall 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.

[3 : 06] I and the Father are one. These words are spoken by Jesus in the context of ongoing tension that's really been running through chapters 5 through to 10 in John's Gospel.

Throughout these chapters, Jesus is revealing who he is in both his words and his actions, but there's a section of the religious leaders of the Jewish community who are just resolutely opposed to accepting that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

And the tensions building as we go through these chapters, it comes to a bit of a head in this chapter in verse 24, when the leader said to Jesus, Tell us plainly, who are you? And Jesus says, I have.

And that's true. Jesus has told them who he is. His words and his miracles are repeatedly revealing and verifying his identity.

But the leaders don't and won't believe. And at this stage, a key part of the reason for that is because they are not part of his flock.

[4 : 15] They refuse to accept that Jesus is the good shepherd. And then in contrast to that, we have this description in the verses on the screen where Jesus describes those who do believe, and those who are part of his flock.

And that means that for us today, if you are a Christian or if you become one, these words are talking about you. And what I want us to see today is that what Jesus says in these few sentences is utterly amazing.

In fact, in one tiny passage, we find 10 amazing truths. And that's our title. And that means it's a 10-point sermon.

So the holidays have not started yet. Sleeves up. Let's go. Okay, first thing. Number one, Jesus says, my sheep hear my voice. This is pointing us to an extremely important theological point that's very, very easy to miss, but it's one that runs right through the whole of Scripture.

It's teaching us that the tool that the shepherd uses to lead his sheep is his voice. And as I say, that is a crucial theological point because right through the Bible, you discover that God accomplishes his purposes by using his voice.

[5 : 34] You see that in creation at the very beginning of the Bible. God spoke and the universe was created. You see it all through the Old Testament. God speaks, whether it's to Abraham, to Moses, to David, whether it's directly in terms of confronting people and speaking to them, or whether it's through the Prophets, to the Prophets, through the Prophets who functioned as God's spokesman.

God speaks and his purposes are accomplished. And you see all of that culminating, most of all, in Jesus. As John tells us at the very start of the Gospel, at this Gospel, Jesus is the Word.

And that's a very, very rich theological term. Part of what it's conveying is the fact that Jesus is the one who communicates and reveals God to us.

And as he comes, he comes to fulfill God's saving plan. He does it through his death and resurrection. And the end result of it all is what?

A message. Words that need to be proclaimed. A message of good news. It's the words of eternal life.

[6 : 47] And everyone who is saved by Jesus is saved because we hear his voice. Now, when I say hear his voice, I don't mean like weird mystical voices where, you know, you're walking down the road and you hear, Thomas, I don't mean that.

I don't mean that kind of thing. Maybe there are times when God will meet with people in that way in similar ways to what we see in Scripture, but that's not the emphasis at all that we have in the Christian Gospel.

What we have is an emphasis on the message that Jesus gave to his followers and that is now proclaimed throughout the world, that message that's contained here in the Bible.

And through the Bible, we hear Jesus' voice. We hear him calling us, teaching us, making promises to us. And if you are here today, and if you're going to become a Christian today, it's because you hear his voice calling you.

And that's the experience that everybody who has come to faith has had, has been, you've been drawn by this message that you've heard. And as we think about that, there's such an important point to think about for anybody here, especially who's maybe not sure about the claims of the Gospel.

[8 : 02] And as Lewis said at the start, we do come here today, and many of you may be here today with questions, uncertainties, hesitations, maybe doubts, maybe skepticism.

And maybe as I talk about that call, you're kind of resisting it, thinking, I am not sure that it's for me. Maybe you feel a bit reluctant about the Gospel.

Maybe, maybe you do want it, but you feel like something's missing. Maybe you feel like you're not ready for this. Maybe you feel like it's for later in life. Maybe you feel like you're not good enough, or you don't understand enough.

So maybe you're sitting here thinking, I can hear this message, I can hear the message of the Gospel, but I'm just not sure I want it. Now, if that's you, you've got to recognize something massive.

If you are hearing Jesus' call, even if you're reluctant or stumbling or hesitant, if you're hearing His call, what's it telling you?

[9 : 07] What is it telling you? Is it telling you that you're not ready? Is it telling you that you're not ready? Is it telling you that you're not good enough? Is it telling you that you're not suitable?

No. It's telling you that you can hear. And if you can hear Jesus calling you, what does that tell you?

My sheep hear my voice. He wants you in His flock. He is calling you. He is drawing you. And today is the opportunity to respond and to come and step into that family, into that flock.

Just go for it. Say, Lord, I hear you and I want to follow you. My sheep hear my voice. That's number one. Number two, and I know them.

These are three words that are just outstanding. I know them. They're spoken by Jesus about you.

[10 : 13] Spoken by Jesus about you. Jesus knows us. Jesus knows you. And that we phrase, that three-word phrase, tells you two massive things.

When Jesus says, I know them, it speaks about knowledge. And that's a crucial point about Jesus. Jesus knows each individual.

He knows every one of you here. And that knowledge that Jesus has of you is comprehensive. He knows every detail of your life, everything that you're going through, everything you need.

As Lewis prayed with the children, he knows the number of hairs on our head. But that knowledge of you is also careful. Knowledge of a person is a little bit like a nuclear reactor.

The deeper you go, the more dangerous it gets. And that's why people who know really private things about us and our lives, people like teachers and doctors and lawyers and accountants, they have to be really careful with the knowledge that they have of people.

[11 : 19] Jesus knows everything about you, and he's careful with that knowledge. He's never going to use that knowledge to be cruel.

And that's so crucial because so often in our society today, people will use knowledge about somebody to be cruel or to exploit the fact that they know that. Jesus is not like that. There's no media leaks from heaven.

Instead, Jesus is the one before whom you can be completely exposed and completely safe.

And that's because this knowledge of you is not just comprehensive and careful. It's also compassionate. Jesus knows you, but that knowledge of you is never separated from his abundant compassion.

In other words, what he sees in you doesn't repel him. It actually draws him towards you in love and mercy. The good shepherd doesn't say like, oh, sheep, go away.

[12 : 23] No. He moves towards his sheep, calling them full of compassion. So I know them, speaks of knowledge. But when you speak that language of I know them, knowledge in Scripture, it's always just more than knowledge.

It also speaks of relationship. And so that's the language that's what's been conveyed in the Bible's language of relationship. And we do the same. And in fact, I have a really interesting experience of it right now because half of you, I can say, I know you.

Because your friends that we've known during our time here, half of you, I don't know you yet. Because you're new to me. And so when we say, I know somebody, I know them, that doesn't just mean we have a knowledge of their name or address or whatever.

It actually means that they're our friend. And there's a relationship in our lives together. Jesus is saying that about you.

If you are a follower of Jesus, or if you become one, Jesus looks at you and says, I know them. And that speaks of the deepest relationship.

[13 : 33] And that's true of us as individual believers. And it's also true of us as a collective flock together. Together we are His. He knows us. We share in that relationship together.

Number three, and they follow me. Now, I want you to notice the order here. Jesus knows us and we follow Him. Jesus knows us and we follow Him.

And that order is really important to recognize because we can get it the wrong way around. It's not the case that the more we follow Jesus and the better we follow Jesus, the more He gets to know us.

The better we are at following Him, the better our relationship with Him becomes. And the better we do in our following, the more He likes us. And the stronger our relationship becomes.

It's so easy to think like that, to think that they're really committed Christians. They're the ones that have a real and a proper relationship with Him. They're the ones that really know Him and that He really knows.

[14 : 38] Not through. That's a theological mistake, a big theological mistake. It's not true. We follow Him because He knows us.

Not the other way around. And that means that when you took your very first step as a disciple of Jesus, or when you take that step, if you've not taken it already, at that moment Jesus knows you completely and loves you entirely.

In other words, you are utterly His from step one. And there's no promotion from there. You are just His beloved sheep.

And it's reminding us that in the Christian, the life of discipleship, the starting point is always His astonishing commitment towards us. And then from that starting point, we follow Him.

And that means listening to Him as He speaks to us in His Word, talking to Him day by day in prayer, striving to apply His Word to our lives. And that's just a very obvious and sensible thing to do.

[15 : 56] We hear someone and we respond. And to not respond is stupid, and yet we do it all the time. My wife has lost count of the amount of time. She says, oh, can you do this? Yes.

And then I don't do it. I forget. And as Christians, we can so easily do the same. That's why day by day, day by day, we want to recommit to listening to Jesus, seeking to follow Him and for His Word to shape every part of our lives.

That does not mean that we're perfect. We are always stumbling followers. But it's a reminder that a key part of our day-to-day lives as Christians is just that recommitting ourselves each morning to follow Jesus today.

I read a brilliant book by a friend of mine called Michael Broutigam. He lived in Edinburgh for a number of years. Some of you may know him. He now is a lecturer in Australia. In fact, he's coming to Edinburgh this summer, so if you see Michael tell him, I said, hi.

He wrote a book about discipleship. He said something I thought was brilliant in that book. He said, we spend so much time talking about leadership in the church, and that's a good thing to talk about.

[17 : 06] Leadership is a crucial part of the church. It's a crucial part of your lives as well and work. And at home, leadership is a crucial topic. But he said, really, our focus should be on followership.

I thought that was really perceptive, because before, whatever leaders were followers, followers of Jesus, and that's what we need to always give our attention to.

One more point to highlight here is that this also reminds us, that word follow also reminds us that being a Christian is never about standing still.

It's so easy to think like that, and I think so many people perceive Christianity like that. They think that by becoming a Christian, you're kind of locking yourself in a time warp and never changing.

That's not true. At the heart of discipleship are two key things, repentance and learning. Both of them are impossible if you stand still and never change. The truth is, following Jesus takes you on an amazing journey.

[18 : 10] A journey of growth where we learn and mature. That's why we come each week together to start a new week learning from God's word. A journey of serving where we do things for Him on our own and together.

And it's an amazing journey of discovery as we get to know our church family, as we get to know ourselves better, and as we get to know Jesus more and more deeply. And that's part of what makes being a Christian so brilliant.

Because you're on this amazing pathway of learning and growing and thriving, where God the Holy Spirit day by day makes us more and more into the people that we were created to be.

Number four, I give them eternal life. There's three amazing words in that statement. Key word, give. So it's not earned.

It's not about you getting up to God's standard. It's all grace. Key word, life.

[19 : 17] Life and not death. Through Jesus, death has been defeated. John's Gospel is building up towards the cross all the time. That's at the heart of his mission to bring life.

And the key word to describe it is the word eternal. That's what Jesus has come to give. Eternal life. Nothing below the maximum.

Nothing less than abundance. Nothing short of forever. That's what Jesus has come to give us.

Number five, and they'll never perish. That's the corresponding truth of the gift of eternal life. All those who trust in Jesus will never perish. Just think about the stuff that lies behind that word perish.

You can kind of just, we can expand on that in our minds. You think about fragility, the fact that we are vulnerable, exposed, weak.

[20 : 22] And all of us are aging. And we rightly put a lot of effort into prolonging death, preserving our lives and the lives of one another.

That's such an important thing to do. But although we can maybe prolong death, we can never escape it. We're all fragile. Behind the word perish is also pain.

Physical pain of aging, illness, suffering. And the emotional pain of hurt and loss and ultimately the separation that death brings and that causes so much agony in our lives.

And there's fear, fragility, pain, fear. Fear of dying, fear of losing what loved ones, fear of eternity in hell, fear of all the vulnerability that our sinful state has exposed us to.

And so you look at that word perish and all this stuff lies behind it. Fragility, pain, fear. If you are a Christian or if you become one, you can take all of those things and you can stamp the words, never perish over all of it.

[21 : 43] So yes, your fragility is real. Your pain is hard. Death is a horrible enemy, but you will never perish if you're trusting in Jesus. You will never be lost.

Illness and suffering and aging can be hard things to face, but all of them are just taking you closer and closer and closer to the day when the good shepherd takes you home.

And that's why in the Gospel, the day that the whole world fears, the day that we die for us becomes the doorway to paradise. And that's what the Gospel is about.

That is what the resurrection of Jesus has accomplished for everyone who trusts in Him. That great stamp of never perish is tattooed onto your life.

It cannot be taken away. You think, well, why is that possible? Because of point number six, no one will snatch them out of my hand. That is such a beautiful description of security.

[22 : 45] If you are a Christian or if you become a Christian, you are in His hands. And I want you just to take a moment to dwell on that truth. Sometimes, you know, you reach passages in Scripture, particularly in John's Gospel, and you read it, and you really have to stretch your mind to think what John is describing.

You go to John chapter one, and there's a lot that you have to really think a lot about. But sometimes John is so beautifully simple. You come to that verse, no one will snatch them out of my hands. You just need to look down at your own hands.

And think about how Jesus is holding you. And the amazing truth is the fact that He is holding you, and that is never changing.

No one will snatch you out of His hands. And that's because His hands are what nail holds in them. And I mean that figuratively, in that the cross has defeated death, united you to Jesus, and the hands that were nailed to that cross are the hands that now will never, ever let you go.

Number seven takes us into verse 29. My Father, who has given them to me. It just gets even more amazing as we get into this verse. Jesus starts talking about His Father, and He says something utterly astonishing.

[24 : 12] He says that you have been given by God the Father to God the Son. That word given is amazing. You are a gift from the Father to the Son.

Now, we often think of that word given in different terms. We think of the fact that the Son was given for us. So you think of John 3.16, that the Father gave His Son, so that we might be saved.

And that's a beautiful gospel truth. How often do you ever think about the fact that you have been given? How often do you think about the fact that you are a gift?

And I want you to think about it, because it's such a beautiful thing to consider. Often we can take huge comfort from the fact that we can say, Jesus is mine, He's my Saviour, but you can also take huge comfort from the fact that you can say, I am His.

You've been given to Him, you are His. And this is so, so, so important, because sometimes we can, in our Christian lives, we can look at ourselves and we feel like we are failing, that we are struggling, that we are rubbish, that we are a disappointment, that we are a failure, that we are so far from where we should be, and we can heal all of that by reminding us that we are His.

[25 : 55] You are given by the Father to the Son, and do you know what Jesus' response to that gift is?

He's absolutely delighted. Absolutely delighted that you are His.

Number eight, my Father is greater than all. Jesus says you just have to kind of jump across that bit in the commas. My Father is greater than all. God is greater than all.

Whose flock are you in? The greatest of all's flock. And I want you to think about that phrase, greater than all. That's such a good phrase for us to think about it. What's the greatest of all?

In other words, what's ultimate reality? And this is the question that every single person in Scotland has got to think about more. What is ultimate reality? What is the foundation of everything that exists?

[26 : 51] What's the destiny to which we're all moving? And what's the purpose and explanation for life as we go through day to day? What is your greatest of all? What's everyone out there's greatest of all?

And the culture around us today offers us a lot of depressing answers. Chance, fate, science, a force, something.

The gospel is so much better. The gospel tells us that ultimate reality is the God who is wise and pure and good and strong and loving.

He is the greatest of all. He is ultimate reality. He is the explanation of everything, and he's doing something.

He's holding you. Which is point number nine. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hands. I love how in these verses Jesus repeats himself, but he actually says something more the second time because this truth in verse 29 is the same as the truth in verse 28, two pieces of information are added.

[28 : 07] First, Jesus is now talking about the Father's hands. So in 28 Jesus talks about His hands. 29 He talks about the Father's hands. Whose hands is it? Whose hands are holding us? Is it Jesus' hands? Is it the Father's hands?

It's both. It's double hands. How cool is that? And the second truth that's added is no one is able.

That word able that just adds just a deeper dimension to the truth that's been conveyed here. I love that phrase. In terms of your security in the divine double hands that are holding you, no one is able to snatch you out.

No one has the ability to do that. No one is strong enough. No one is capable. It's not possible. No one can do it. Not even yourself.

And that's probably the most important thing to remember because we can so easily think that we can stuff it up. You actually can't. You actually can't.

[29 : 14] Because your salvation never depends on you. It depends entirely on Jesus. Your security never depends on you. It depends on the fact that the Son and the Father's hands are holding you.

And it's all reinforced by the tenth and final point. I and the Father are one. This is one of the deepest theological truths that lies at the heart of the Gospel.

You have the distinction between the Father and the Son, and yet the simple, beautiful unity, Father and Son are one.

And that's one of the great truths of the foundation of the Christian Gospel. The unity of God, one God. John's emphasized this already in chapter one, and it just runs as a foundation running through his whole Gospel.

That one God, that united Father and Son, has a unity of will. Father and Son want the same things. Unity of power, Father and Son, same power, Father and Son, same glory.

[30 : 23] And God the Father and God the Son, and as they send God the Holy Spirit to accomplish God's purposes, are all united together.

And John will go on in chapter 14, 16 to tell us more about the work of the Holy Spirit as Father, Son and Spirit works together to accomplish God's purposes.

Together they're doing something. What are they doing? Saving you, holding you, loving you.

And if you, I don't know if this is theologically appropriate, I'm going back to Lewis anyway shortly, so it'll be fine. I want you to think that you can go round the Trinity, come into the Father and to the Son and to the Spirit, and you come to the Father and he says, I love you, holding you.

You come to the Son, I love you too, and I'm holding you as well. And you come to the Holy Spirit and he says, I love you too, and I'm coming to dwell in you and never leaving.

[31 : 46] And you just go round the Trinity, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and you just see this beautiful, repeated, re-emphasized, unending commitment to save you and to save all the flock of Jesus across the ages of history, across the nations of the world.

One tiny statement gives us 10 amazing truths. Do you know what happened next?

The Jewish leaders picked up stones to kill him. They didn't want to, they did not want to accept what Jesus was saying.

They did not want to recognize him as the Messiah and the Son of God. In fact, they wanted to destroy him. Now, I'm pretty sure that there's nobody in here who wants to stone Jesus.

But maybe you're tempted not to bother with him. Maybe you're tempted to put these words and all the other words that the Bible reveals to one side.

[33 : 07] And maybe you're tempted to think, I just want to get on with the rest of my week. Please don't do that.

Instead, I hope everyone here is a sheep who hears his voice and follows him. Amen.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you for these magnificent words and for the glorious truths that they reveal.

We thank you that you are the good shepherd. We thank you for your incredible love and commitment towards us. And for all of us here, whatever stage we are at in our path of discipleship, we want to follow you, Father Lord Jesus.

We want to keep our eyes on you, Holy Spirit. We want to be led and directed by you. We want to go into this new week and into the rest of our lives following you.

[34 : 07] Amen.