

Mk 10:32-34

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The good shepherd who gives up his life for the sheep.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who gives up his life for the sheep.

That's one of the most famous verses in John's gospel.

Today I'm going to show you

that Mark and John were singing from the same song sheet.

We'll see that Mark presents Jesus as the Good Shepherd who gives up his life for the sheep.

But first, do you know what Christians were called before we were called Christians?

It says it a few times in the book of Acts.

The original name for Christians was 'followers of the way'.

In the gospels, lots of the teaching material happens while Jesus and his disciples were on the way up to Jerusalem.

It's Jesus' last journey before the events of the last week of his life.

Mark and Luke both structure their gospels around this journey up to Jerusalem.

And in today's passage, we are on the journey.

10:32 "They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way,"

And believe it or not, this is the picture of a shepherd.

I'm not sure what your picture of a shepherd is.

Mine has been formed by the Aussie drover.

And the drover goes behind the cattle

with dogs keeping the cattle in line and moving in the right direction.

But the first century shepherd walked in front.

His sheep knew his voice

and they would follow along after them.

It's much more the pied piper of Hamelin than a drover.

So here is Jesus leading the way like a shepherd

with his disciples and other followers

trailing along behind like the flock of sheep.

It's a picture of what it means to be a Christian.  
Jesus leads us.  
And we go along behind him.  
And it seems that he might not always lead us  
in the places we expect to go.  
It kind of makes sense if you think about it.  
We wouldn't need someone to lead us  
if we would choose the right paths on our own.  
We need a shepherd precisely because  
the right paths are surprising to us.  
10:32 "They were on their way up to Jerusalem,  
with Jesus leading the way,  
and the disciples were astonished,  
while those who followed were afraid."  
Why were the disciples astonished?  
I think because they had a pretty good inkling  
of what awaited Jesus in Jerusalem.  
This prediction of Jesus' death  
is the third time he has told them about it in Mark.  
So if the disciples were listening to Jesus,  
then they absolutely knew what awaited him in Jerusalem.  
The signs are that the disciples didn't really get it.  
But at the very least,  
they have heard the rumblings that the Jewish leaders want Jesus killed.  
The first time in Mark that it is mentioned  
that the Pharisees want to kill Jesus is right back in chapter 3.  
Jesus' death is not something  
that appears as a shocking plot twist at the end of the story.  
On the contrary,  
the story has been steadily moving in that direction from the start.  
So when Jesus starts intentionally heading in the direction of Jerusalem,  
the thought on the disciples minds is,  
"Why would you go looking for trouble?  
You know the people in Jerusalem want to put you to death.  
Jerusalem is where their headquarters is.

Why not keep in the towns and villages where you are off the radar?"  
The disciples were astonished.  
The disciples were not the only followers.  
Jesus had the twelve who he taught most closely.  
But there was a larger group tagging along.  
And they were afraid.  
Why were they afraid?  
Presumably because they might come under the spotlight  
because of their association with Jesus.  
If they went to Jerusalem  
and their presence their came to the attention of the authorities,  
then they might end up in jail or worse.  
But Jesus led the way and they followed.

Which is a good time to pause  
and think about what it means for Jesus to be our shepherd.  
I guess that Jesus' behaviour here  
is not what we would normally consider shepherding.  
But it is what shepherding was in the first century.  
You led from the front.  
The sheep followed behind.  
And if there were dangers along the path,  
the shepherd met the dangers first.  
I think we conceive of shepherding as a very gentle kind of leadership.  
The shepherd may well have had  
a gentle and personal love for his sheep.  
But there wasn't anything sentimental about it.  
The sheep were not pets, they were his job.  
And if you are going to be dealing with wild animals,  
which first century shepherds did on a regular basis,  
then shepherds needed to be tough guys.

How does Jesus do his leadership here?  
He's out the front.  
When his disciples are astonished,

he does give them another explanation  
about why he's going to Jerusalem,  
but he doesn't take a backwards step.  
The typical Anglican style of leadership  
is that nothing happens until everyone is on board.  
And so you can have endless meetings.  
And sometimes important decisions are just not taken  
because of resistance by a small number of people.  
Now of course leadership in the church  
is not the same as leadership by Jesus.  
Jesus had a mission from the Father.  
And he was resolutely focused on completing the mission set for him.  
He wasn't going to let astonished disciples  
or afraid followers derail him from what he was doing.  
Many of the decisions we make,  
we have no direct word from God about.  
And so it's appropriate for us  
to tread more gently in such circumstances.  
However when there is a subject  
about which we do have a direct word from God,  
say in some clear matter of doctrine or a moral issue,  
then it's appropriate for us to be just as resolute as Jesus.  
And even when we don't have a direct word from God,  
say for example, we made a decision on Tuesday at PC  
to put solar panels on the church roof.  
There's no word from God about that.  
But the appropriate thing is for the people  
who are charged with a certain responsibility to make a decision.  
The appropriate thing is for shepherds to lead from the front.  
It would want to be a very sensitive decision  
before you would go surveying the church community  
before you settled on a way forward.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd.  
He knows what is best for the flock.

They need him to go to Jerusalem and give up his life.  
They might not realise it yet.  
But that is what is best for them.  
And Jesus will do what is best for the flock.

He does however  
give them a detailed explanation of what is coming up.  
10:33-34 "We are going up to Jerusalem,  
and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests  
and the teachers of the law.

They will condemn him to death  
and will hand him over to the Gentiles,  
who will mock him and spit on him,  
flog him and kill him.

Three days later he will rise."

This is Jesus telling his disciples he's going to die  
well before he gets there.

This is in fact the third time in Mark  
that Jesus has told his disciples he's going to die.

And this time has the most detail in the prediction.

Let's go through it and compare with what actually happened.

"The Son of Man will be delivered over"

The word translated delivered over means betrayal.

Jesus tells us in advance that he will be betrayed.

In fact Jesus knew from the start that it would be Judas.

"The Son of Man will be delivered over  
to the chief priests and teachers of the law."

I guess it's not a surprise.

These were the people who had constantly expressed their disapproval  
and let's not sugar coat it, hatred of Jesus.

But that was what happened.

Jesus was put on trial before the Sanhedrin at his first trial.

That's the chief priests and teachers of the law.

"They will condemn him to death."

Well yes that's exactly what they did.

They decided that he must be put to death.  
The only problem was  
that they didn't have the authority to condemn anyone to death.  
The Romans kept that authority for themselves.  
The only way for the Sanhedrin to get the death penalty  
was with the cooperation of the Roman governor.  
"They will hand him over to the Gentiles."  
That's exactly what they did.  
The Romans treated Jesus as an object of fun.  
They dressed him in a scarlet robe  
and said "hail King of the Jews".  
Doubtless they were mocking the whole Jewish race  
not just Jesus.  
They made a crown of thorns for his head.  
They struck him on the head with a staff and spat on him.  
It was just another way of mocking the idea that he was a king.  
They whipped him.  
That was part of Pilate's plan to get Jesus set free.  
Give him a whipping and the crowd's thirst for blood will be assuaged.  
When has they worked, ever?  
"The Gentiles will mock him, spit on him, flog him and kill him."  
And as we know as Christian people,  
it didn't end there.  
Early on Sunday morning, Jesus rose.  
"Three days later he will rise".  
Every single detail of what Jesus said was fulfilled.

What does that tell us?

It tells us that Jesus knew exactly what he was getting himself in for.  
He went to Jerusalem not with some vague idea  
that bad stuff was going to happen to him there,  
not even with just the general understanding that he was going to die.  
He went there knowing every painful and humiliating detail.  
And Jesus led the way.  
Like a shepherd with his flock he marched forward to Jerusalem.

What does that tell us about Jesus?

It magnifies his sacrifice.

I'm sure most of us have had the experience where we do something because it's the right thing to do.

But if we had known

exactly how painful or difficult it was going to be in advance, we might have struggled to go ahead with it.

Sometimes Christian ministry can be like that.

People go into ministry because they want to serve their loving saviour.

And they know it's going to be difficult.

But they don't know exactly the details.

And if they had known,

some would have never chosen that vocation.

But Jesus knew all the details.

And he led his flock to Jerusalem.

Here's another thing it tells us about Jesus.

He thought it was important for his disciples

to know what was going to happen to him before it happened.

Why did they need to know in advance?

Well we can say for certain

that he didn't tell them so they could use the information well.

Jesus kept the disciples fully informed.

And they just didn't get it.

In the very next story,

James and John are arguing about getting the best places in Jesus' glory.

Do you think that's appropriate?

No, of course not.

Do you think it's made even more inappropriate

by what Jesus has just told them?

Yes absolutely!

Jesus has just told them the details of his public humiliation and death which are just around the corner for him.

Hey guys, a bit of empathy is in order here!

Arguing about who gets the best seats in glory

is not exactly the best way of showing empathy to Jesus.  
But the disciples just don't get it.  
And that's consistent throughout the gospels.  
Until Pentecost, the disciples behave like totally clueless half wits.  
So why tell them stuff in advance?  
They aren't going to be able to use the information well.

The point is not what they will be able to do with the information  
when they are told.

It's about them knowing later.

When they reflect on things after Jesus' resurrection  
after the coming of the Holy Spirit,  
then God helps them to understand.

And it's very important for them to understand.

It's very important for us to understand.

That Jesus was totally purposeful in going to the cross.

Jesus was not blindsided by any of it.

He willingly accepted the Father's plans  
for your sin and my sin to be paid for.

He accepted those plans knowing the painful and humiliating details.  
We need to know that.

Have you ever wondered if you are really loved?

Jesus knew what was coming and he did it willingly for you.

There are going to be times  
when you wonder about whether God has everything under control.  
Y'know life throws some curve balls at you.

Bad things happen.

It's part of living in a world groaning under sin.

But God always has everything under control.

He had everything under control when Jesus was being mocked  
and spat on and flogged.

And he has things under control in your life too.

And it's good to be able to look at this passage  
and know that God had everything under control for Jesus.



And he has everything under control for you too.

But there's more.

Jesus' prediction didn't stop at his humiliation and death.

"Three days later he will rise."

I'm not sure why the heading in my NIV Bible calls this section,

"Jesus predicts his death a third time."

This is your periodic reminder

that the headings in the Bible are not the word of God.

They should not be read out if you are doing a Bible reading in church.

Just read us God's Word.

"Jesus predicts his death a third time."

Ok, it's an impressive prediction complete with details.

But surely it's more impressive,

surely it's more important that he predicted his resurrection.

His resurrection is what marks Jesus death out from all the other deaths.

Lots of people have died.

In fact just about everyone who has been alive on the earth

and is not still alive on the earth has died.

There are a couple of exceptions.

Elijah and Enoch.

But they are the exceptions that prove the rule.

We all die.

So far only Jesus has been resurrected.

It's the prediction of his resurrection

that makes what Jesus says here indisputably a word from God.

Some people have some pretty good insight about the future.

You can argue the toss

about whether Jesus could have predicted the details of his death.

Unless you have a promise from God,

no one can predict their own resurrection.

What's this telling us?

God's promises are absolutely reliable.

God does every seemingly impossible thing he says he's going to do.

It doesn't matter how outrageous God's promises are.  
He will fulfil them.  
And chief among the promises is the promise to raise you to life.  
God has raised Jesus.  
Jesus is the firstfruits.  
He will raise you, Christian.

Now I'm not looking forward to dying.  
It is often a painful and undignified process.  
But the knowledge that I will be raised,  
raised in a new body that is fit for the new creation,  
that is something that reduces the fear of death.  
It makes it a mere trifle.  
Friends, we will rise again.  
That has to be the thing we grasp on to  
when everything else seems uncertain and unstable.  
We will rise.

So what have we seen in this reading.  
We've seen Jesus the Good Shepherd,  
going out ahead of his flock,  
leading them.  
He knows what is best for us  
and he will lead us there.  
We've seen Jesus the Good Shepherd who gives his life for the sheep.  
It was purposeful and deliberate.  
He knew all the details.  
All the painful and humiliating details.  
And he chose to go there because he loves us.  
We've also seen the certainty of the promises of God.  
Every word from God comes true exactly.  
Jesus died as he said he would.  
To the last detail.  
Jesus was raised to life as he said he would be.  
That's a promise that we can hold on to.

He said everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.  
He proved it by predicting that he would be raised  
and then rising to life on the third day.