

From the Pulpit of Keith Miller
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December 6, 2020

Unto Us: A Shepherd is Given

John 10:1-18

Introduction

I read a statistic this week that 1/3 of all Americans have a great to a good deal of trust in the political competence of their fellow citizens. That means that nearly 70% of Americans have little to no confidence in the political competence of their neighbors, coworkers, friends, and family. In 1997 those percentages were flipflopped with a staggering 64% of Americans believing that their neighbors were politically competent when it came to voting for our country's future. Right now we have a President Elect who seems to be the winner while our sitting president believes the election was rigged. Politically, we are divided nation.

Politics are not the only thing that divides us, we are divided with ourselves as a society. We literally believe, as a society, that the physical genetics of our body and DNA are lying about our true gender and the real determining factor about our gender has more to do with the way we feel. Just this past week Ellen Page, who is an academy award-winning actress, stated on her Instagram page:

"Hi friends, I want to share with you that I am trans, my pronouns are he/they and my name is Elliot. I feel lucky to be writing this. To be here. To have arrived at this place in my life. I feel overwhelming gratitude for the incredible people who have supported me along this journey. I can't begin to express how remarkable it feels to finally love who I am enough to pursue my authentic self."

Indiewire reported on Page's Instagram post and titled their online article: "Elliot Page Coming Out Is a Historic Moment for Trans Masculine Visibility." In the comments section, scores of people praised Page; here are a few of those comments:

Mark commented: "*I honor the courage of the transgender community coming out. I fall in that category myself being trans but I'm stuck in this male body the way things are going for me.*"

Jennifer commented: "*If they are really trans this is great, but if it's just another Sam Smith where they claim to be but don't do anything to transition then this will be unfortunate. I'm a transwoman. I changed my name after I was feminine enough for people to see me as a woman. This new idea that you just have to say you are transgender to be so is so dangerous. It completely erases people like me that truly are and need help. It's not fun being trans. It hard. It's costly. People need to understand it's more than just a name change.*"

In a survey conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of the American Osteopathic Association, 53% of American adults would support their teenage child's request to transition to another gender. The point I am trying to make is that we are a deeply conflicted culture on more levels than our

politics. In his book, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, Carl Trueman attempts to answer the question how a particular statement has come to be regarded as coherent and meaningful in less than 30 years. You are no doubt familiar with the statement: “I am a woman trapped in a man’s body.”

The response by some Christians concerning the LGBTQ movement is not all that dissimilar to their response to other moral and social issues of the past with a lament to go back to some past golden age when things were different or “better.” Some in the Church are already responding this way with the current political climate and pandemic crisis we find ourselves in. Trueman offers the following challenge to his readers early in his book: “Every age has had its darkness and its dangers. The task of the Christian is not to whine about the moment in which he or she lives but to understand its problems and respond appropriately to them.”¹

Think again about the message of Isaiah 9:6-7 to an oppressed, exiled, and dejected Hebrew people:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. (Isaiah 9:6–7)

Attributed to the Son are four names. As the “Wonderful Counselor,” Jesus’ wisdom supersedes the wisdom of the age or of all earthly sages combined. As the “Mighty God” his reign as King will have no limits and will be eternal. As the “Everlasting Father” the title is used in reference of a benevolent king who genuinely cares for his people and wants what is best for them. As the “Prince of Peace” Jesus will rule and reign as the King perfectly. This is everything we all want in a King or a president, but have never had.

When God gave his Son on the first Christmas, he not only gave the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world, but he also gave us the Good Shepherd. Jesus specifically claims in John 10:11 that he is not just any old shepherd, he claims to be the “**good shepherd.**” The shepherd Jesus is identifying as is the one in Psalm 23 which begins with these words: “**The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake**” (Psalm 23:1–3).

Jesus is the Good Shepherd Who Cares for His Sheep

The reason Jesus felt compelled to identify himself as the “good shepherd” was because of what happened in the previous chapter to a man who was born blind that Jesus healed. It didn’t take long for people to notice that the man was miraculously able to see, so they asked him how he was healed. The man answered: “**The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed and received my sight.**” (John 9:11). The man was then brought before the Pharisees, and after they realized that the man was healed on the Sabbath (which they believed no one was allowed to do any type of work on that

¹ Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway; 2020), p. 30.

day, which including healing the sick), they concluded that Jesus couldn't possibly be from God since he healed a blind man on the day set apart for the worship of God. Instead of celebrating the fact that the man was healed from his blindness, the Pharisees kicked him out of the synagogue. When Jesus heard about what happened to the man, he found him and told him: **"For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind"** (John 9:39).

Unlike the pharisees who barred the healed man from worship, Jesus said he was the true shepherd of the sheep and that it was only through him that people are forgiven of their sins and saved from the wrath of God. Jesus said: **"I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture"** (John 10:9). Anybody else who claims anything else, Jesus says is a thief who, **"comes only to steal and kill and destroy."** Jesus, however, came that his sheep may, **"have life and have it abundantly"** (v. 10).

So why was Jesus born? So that his sheep will, **"have life and have it abundantly."** How did Jesus make it possible for his sheep to have that kind of life? He answers that question in the next verse: **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep"** (v. 11). In other words, the Son who was given, was given to die for the sheep so that they would have the kind of life that no other person or system could give them.

After Jesus was handed over to Pilate by the religious leaders out of a desire to have him killed, he asked Jesus about the charges made by the religious leaders that he was the King of the Jews. Jesus answered Pilate and said something that we American Christ-followers seemed to have forgotten; here is what he said: **"My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from this world."** Jesus then said: **"For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice"** (John 18:37).

We are told that Pilate tried to avoid sentencing Jesus to death, but even after he had him flogged, the religious leaders and the crowds continued to demand that he die by crucifixion. In desperation, Pilate finally asked: **"Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you."** To which Jesus responded with a sobering reminder that God does not have a plan B because he is always working out of his plan A: **"You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above"** (John 19:10-11). What Jesus means is that he does not share his throne with anyone and that Pilate was only a pawn in the hands of the One who put him in power in the first place. This is what Jesus meant when he said in John 10:17-18, **"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"** (John 10:17-18).

Just about every Empire and superpower, and the Emperors and kings who served under them, have fought and worked to sustain something that was only temporary; they are all now filler for the history books. Where is Babylon? Where is Greece? What came of Alexander the Great? How about Rome, where is Rome today? All of them God raised up and all of them God

deposed (Dan. 2:21), this is why Isaiah reminded an exiled Hebrew people under the heel of the Babylonian Empire: **“Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust.... All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness”** (Isa. 40:15, 17). Pilate was no different and neither is any king, president, nation, or superpower today. As much as I respect Ronald Regan, he was wrong when he said that “America was a shining city upon a hill.” Jesus said of those who hear his voice and follow him are not only his sheep, but the **“...light of the world”** (Matt. 5:14-16).

The message of Christmas and the cries from the manger on that first Christmas promise that there is only one King whose kingdom will last forever.

Jesus' Sheep Follow Him Because They Know His Voice

How we feel has become the way we measure truth as a society; we have become the judge of the creator and have taken on the role ourselves. This way of gauging the truth has also found its way into the Church; we have placed our feelings on the throne of Christ.

When the shepherds were told that Jesus was born, the angel of the Lord appeared to them and said: **“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord”** (Luke 2:10–11). Christ means Messiah; Lord means sovereign one. Do you know what that means? It means that there is only one savior who can fix your sin problem and only one King who will not share his throne with another. Notice what Jesus says of the sheep who belong to him:

- **“The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”** (v. 3)
- **“When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.”** (v. 4)
- **“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me...”** (v. 14)
- **“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.”** (v. 16)

Do you hear a common theme in Jesus' description of his sheep? When he speaks, four things happen: 1) Jesus leads his sheep; 2) his sheep follow his voice; 3) his sheep know him; 4) his sheep listen to his voice.

If Jesus is the good shepherd and you are his sheep, then there is no other shepherd that you should want. Why? Because he leads me to the place of life and thriving is. Only Jesus makes me lie down in green pastures. Only Jesus leads me beside still waters. Only Jesus restores my soul. Only Jesus leads me in paths of righteousness for his name sake. No president or politician can do that for you! Your sexual preference, appetites, anatomy, what the culture tells you is brave or will make you happy cannot do what only Jesus can do! The idea and philosophy that I am my own maker who has the ability, power, and authority to make my own self in whatever

image I think best is a lie that comes from a thief whose only hope and intention for you is to, **“steal and kill and destroy”** (v. 10).

When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, it is Jesus’ rod and staff that comfort me, therefore I have no need to fear anything that threatens me because the good shepherd came so that I might thrive, and the only place of thriving is found in him. Jesus is the good shepherd of Psalm 23! Listen to what Jesus does for his sheep:

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” (Psalm 23:4–6)

Listen, the only voice that ought to have any shaping influence and impact upon your life, is the voice of the Good Shepherd. Jesus is the standard by which every decision you make ought to be measured, not your feelings. Feelings have their place, but they are fleeting, fickle, and sometimes false. The kingdom of the Son who was given: **“Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this”** (Isaiah 9:7).

Conclusion

In an age full of division over politics, gender, what it means to be a human being, and the COVID-19 pandemic, we were made for this time and this place. What the world needs is the one institution and movement that has weathered the storm of tyrants, empires, extreme hatred, pandemics, and time... not because of what the Church is, but because of the One whose voice we follow. There is wisdom in Trueman’s advice: “Every age has had its darkness and its dangers. The task of the Christian is not to whine about the moment in which he or she lives but to understand its problems and respond appropriately to them.”²

Whatever it is that you feel or wherever you think you need to be, I leave you with this one question: “Whose voice are you following?” What Cheyenne needs are not Christians moving from one church to another because of what they feel or want, but sheep who listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd and follow him. What people need is the kind of life they were created for, and the only place they will find it is in the Good Shepherd who said: **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life”** (John 14:6).

My dear brothers and sisters, it is time to stop whining about politics, it is time to stop whining about the ways the pandemic has interrupted your life, and it time to stop whining about the darkness and dangers of our age. We were not made to hide in the shadows but to stand on a hill to shine for the Son who was given as the lamb of God and the shepherd of our souls. We were not called by the Shepherd to hide in the shadows or run from danger, but to thrive as his people for such a time as this. We were made for the day we find ourselves in!

² Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway; 2020), p. 30.