

Dr. Don Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds,

Session 9, John 10, Law

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Hey everybody, welcome back. We are taking a deep dive today into something I think we all think we know pretty well: John 10, Jesus is the Good Shepherd. But we're going to find out that we might not know it as well as we thought we did.

We're working from a lecture by Dr. Donald Fowler. Right. And boy, he's got some really interesting stuff to say about this passage.

Yeah, it's amazing what we can miss, even in stories we think we're really familiar with, you know? For sure. And Dr. Fowler argues there's a whole other layer to John 10, a layer that's all about kingship. And it just, it really makes you rethink what Jesus is saying here.

Okay. So what you're telling me is that Jesus as the Good Shepherd is about more than just, you know, caring for his sheep. Yeah.

There's something more to it. The common interpretation, you know, it really focuses on his tenderness and protection. Right.

But Dr. Fowler points out that in the Old Testament, that title, shepherd, you know, it wasn't just about pastoral care. It was often used for God himself. And even more intriguingly, for the messianic king.

Wait, so you're saying when Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd, he's actually making a statement about his kingship. He is. Now that's a pretty bold claim.

It is a bold claim. I mean, you don't just throw that out there. No, you don't.

You better have some evidence to back that up. That's right. And Dr. Fowler, he does have some really interesting insights from the text itself.

Okay. For example, he talks about how Palestinian wolves, unlike the wolves that we picture. Okay.

He had pit ferocious. Yeah. Huge, you know.

Those gray wolves. Exactly. They were actually really small.

Really? Not a major threat to sheep at all. Huh. I never thought about that.

Yeah. It kind of throws a wrench in the whole image of, you know, the courageous shepherd fighting off this ferocious wolf, you know. Yeah.

It doesn't really work. It doesn't. When you think about the Palestinian context.

So the shepherd imagery in John 10 might be a little more symbolic than we realize. Right. It's pointing to something else.

And Dr. Fowler, he even points out a rather grim detail. Canines, like wolves, you know, they tend to kill multiple times, even when they're not hungry. Yeah.

So if a shepherd really did flee from a wolf, like in the traditional interpretation, it wouldn't have ended well for the sheep. Let's just say that. No, it wouldn't have.

So that adds another layer of, you know, kind of questioning that traditional reading. Okay. That's a little disturbing, but it makes you think.

So if the pastoral imagery isn't the whole story, what is the real point Dr. Fowler is making? Well, he argues that Jesus is intentionally drawing a parallel between himself and the future Davidic king described in Ezekiel 34. Okay. I'm familiar with that passage.

Yeah. This king is specifically tasked with being a shepherd to God's people. Right.

Which reinforces the idea that, you know, Jesus is claiming a royal title here, not just a pastoral one. So Jesus is using the shepherd metaphor to connect himself back to this Old Testament prophecy about a king who will shepherd God's people. Exactly.

Okay. That's starting to make a little bit more sense. Yeah.

And the connection gets even stronger when you consider how John's gospel kind of unfolds. You know, remember where Jesus says, I and the father are one. Yeah.

Dr. Fowler links this directly back to Ezekiel 34, suggesting that Jesus is declaring himself to be both the promised Messiah and God incarnate, fulfilling this prophecy of the shepherd king who is one with God. Wow. I'm starting to see how deep this rabbit hole, this deep dive, goes.

Yeah. But wait a minute. Dr. Fowler makes a really hard left turn.

He does. And he starts talking about ancient law codes. Yeah.

What's the deal with that? Yeah. It does seem like an abrupt shift. Yeah.

But there is a method to his madness. Okay. I'm trusting you.

I'm willing to follow along. That's very good because it's worth it. Dr. Fowler is making the point that in the ancient world, the concept of kingship and law were like totally connected.

Okay. You can't really understand one without the other. All right.

That makes sense. Yeah. So he's trying to show how understanding ancient law codes can shed light on the idea of kingship and ultimately on Jesus's claim to be this good shepherd king.

Precisely. To illustrate this, he dives into the Code of Hammurabi, a Babylonian code that actually predates the Mosaic law. Wow.

Okay. Now, he's not saying that Moses copied Hammurabi, but he's highlighting the similarities and, even more importantly, the stark differences to show how God's law fits within but also goes beyond the legal systems of the ancient world. And some of those differences are pretty intense.

Oh, yeah. He talks about how harsh Hammurabi's Code is. It's brutal.

Yeah. I mean, we think our, you know, justice system sometimes is harsh. Right.

Hammurabi's code makes ours look like child's play. Yeah. You know, capital punishment for all sorts of offenses.

Right. It makes the Mosaic law with its emphasis on justice and mercy seem almost progressive in comparison. Right.

Almost like super progressive, like way ahead of its time. Way ahead of its time. Yeah.

And it's not just about the severity of the punishments. Yeah. Dr. Fowler explains that there's like a fundamental difference in the way the two codes are structured.

You know, Hammurabi's code, it's what's called case law, meaning it's a collection of rulings on specific situations. Okay. But the Mosaic law, on the other hand, it mostly lays out general principles and commandments.

Yeah. Kind of like setting overarching guidelines. So instead of just reacting to specific cases, the Mosaic law is more about establishing a broad ethical framework.

That's it. Okay. I can see how that would make a big difference.

Yeah. How you approach justice and all that. Huge difference.

And Dr. Fowler uses the law of jealousy found in both codes. Okay. It's like a powerful example of this difference.

Okay. How so? In Hammurabi's code, a woman accused of adultery basically has to prove her innocence through this really dangerous trial. Oh.

But in the Mosaic law, there's this ritual involving an oath and a symbolic drink where the woman is presumed innocent unless God reveals her guilt. Wow. It's a huge difference.

Yeah. That's a huge difference. It's a much more humane and just approach.

Right. You know, it makes you realize how much our understanding of justice and all that has involved over time. It does.

It really does. It highlights this crucial point that Dr. Fowler is making: biblical law isn't simply about maintaining order or punishing wrongdoing. Right.

It's about the relationship between God, the king, and his people. Yeah. A relationship based on covenant faithfulness and love, not just fear of punishment.

Okay. Now, that's a really powerful way to think about it. So, how does all this tie back to John 10 and Jesus as the good shepherd king? Well, stay tuned because in the next part... Oh, cliffhanger.

Yeah. Got to wait for part two. That's right.

We'll be exploring how Dr. Fowler connects this understanding of law to a fascinating passage in Deuteronomy. Okay. One that lays out the rules for kingship in Israel.

Right. It might just change the way you think about leadership, both in the Bible and in our world today. I am definitely intrigued.

I cannot wait to hear what he has to say about that. Yeah. We'll be back in just a moment.

Okay. So, we're diving deeper now into this idea that law and kingship are all tied together. That's right.

And you mentioned Deuteronomy. I did. What's the connection there? Well, Dr. Fowler takes us to Deuteronomy chapter 17.

Okay. He calls it a crucial part of Israel's ancient constitution. Okay.

This passage basically outlines the rules for Israelite kingship. And it challenges some common assumptions about what the Bible says about kings. Okay.

Like what? Well, you know how in 1 Samuel 8, the Israelites are asking for a king. Right. Is often seen as this rejection of God.

Right. It's a bad thing. A bad thing.

Right. Yeah. Dr. Fowler argues that's not the whole story.

Really? Yeah. He points out that God always intended for Israel to have a king, but one who would rule according to God's law. Yeah.

Not like the kings of other nations who are all about power and personal gain. So, it wasn't the idea of having a king that was the problem. It was the kind of king they ended up with.

You got it. That makes sense. Yeah.

And Deuteronomy 17 gets really specific about what a righteous king in Israel should look like. Okay. So, tell me, what are the big no-nos here? What are the things that a king who wants to follow God's law is absolutely forbidden from doing? Okay.

So, first, he can't be a foreigner. Gotta be a native Israelite. Okay.

That makes sense. Second, no multiplying horses, which back then was all about building up military might. Oh, okay.

So, God's putting some limits on military power. Okay. Third, no multiplying wives.

Oh, boy. That one always comes up. Yeah.

Right. Because that often led to messy international alliances and straying from God. Right.

Right. And lastly, no multiplying silver and gold. So, basically, don't be greedy.

Don't be materialistic. Yeah. It's a big warning against materialism and prioritizing wealth over everything else.

Wow. That's a pretty strict set of guidelines. It's almost like God is saying, if you want to be my king, you need to be different from all the other rulers out there.

Yeah. It definitely goes against the grain of how most ancient kings operated. Yeah.

It does, for sure. And it makes you think about leadership even today, doesn't it? Oh, absolutely. How many leaders, whether in government or business or even in our communities, get caught up in those same traps? Right.

Power, military strength, shady alliances, the pursuit of wealth. I mean, it's a timeless struggle. It is a timeless struggle.

But there's more, right? There is. Dr. Fowler highlights a specific verse in Deuteronomy 17 that's super important. He does.

Deuteronomy 17 emphasizes that the Israelite king has this very important duty to personally copy and study the Mosaic Law. Oh, wow. So he can't just delegate that to somebody else.

No. This isn't about just having a copy on a shelf somewhere. He's got to really know it.

He's got to internalize it. It's about making the law the foundation of his leadership and demonstrating this deep commitment to following God's will. So being a good king isn't about ruling with an iron fist or amassing wealth and power.

It's about aligning your leadership with God's law and serving the people that are entrusted to your care. That's a great way to put it. It really kind of flips the script on what we usually think of as powerful leadership.

It's a radical concept even today. Yeah, it is. And Dr. Fowler suggests that this idea of the king as a shepherd serving under God's law has implications for how we understand leadership in all its forms.

Okay. So we're not just talking about ancient Israel anymore. Not just ancient Israel.

This has implications for us today. That's right. Okay.

I'm really curious. Where is he going with this? Well, you'll have to stay tuned for the next part to find out. Oh, another cliffhanger.

Another cliffhanger. I know. I'm sorry.

You're killing me. But when we come back, we'll be exploring how Dr. Fowler connects this ancient idea of the shepherd king to the role of spiritual leaders today. Okay.

It might surprise you. All right. We'll be back in just a moment.

Okay. So we've been on quite a journey here with John 10. We have.

We started with Jesus, the good shepherd. We talked about ancient law codes. Now you're telling me we're going to talk about modern-day leaders.

That's right. All right. I'm hooked.

Let's hear it. Well, Dr. Fowler argues that this whole idea of the king as a shepherd serving under God's law. Right.

Has some pretty profound implications for leadership in general. Not just back in ancient Israel. Okay.

So where do modern leaders fit into all of this? Well, he specifically asks this question. Okay. He says.

Oh, quote coming. If Jesus is the good shepherd. Okay.

And we as pastors are the under shepherds. Whoa. Hold on a minute.

Pastors are under shepherds. Yeah. That seems like a pretty direct connection to what we were just talking about with kings and the law.

It is. And I think it's brilliant how he kind of brings it all together. Yeah.

He's basically saying that the kind of leadership God calls for, whether it's a king in ancient Israel or a pastor today, is rooted in service and humility. Just like Jesus, the ultimate good shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep. So he's drawing a parallel between the shepherd-king ideal from the Old Testament and the role of spiritual leaders today.

Yes. But isn't it a bit of a stretch? I mean, to compare a king with all that power and authority to a pastor. I can see why you would say that.

Yeah. But remember the kind of kingship we're talking about here isn't about lording it over others or amassing wealth and power. It's about leading with self-sacrifice.

Okay. Prioritizing the needs of the people you're called to serve. Right.

And always remembering that you're ultimately accountable to a higher authority, me as God himself. Okay. I'm starting to see the connection a little bit better now.

So pastors, as under-shepherds, are called to embody that same kind of servant leadership. Exactly. Putting the needs of their congregation first.

Yeah. And always looking to Jesus as the ultimate example. That's right.

It's really making me think about all the different kinds of shepherds that we encounter in our lives. Yeah. Not just pastors, but teachers, parents, mentors, community leaders.

Anyone who has influence over others could be seen as an under shepherd in a sense. That's such a great point. And I think Dr. Fowler's challenge applies to all of them.

Whether you're leading a congregation, a classroom, a family, a team at work, the call is the same. To lead with integrity, humility, and a deep commitment to the well-being of those entrusted to your care. Man, this has been an amazing deep dive.

I mean, we started with a familiar Bible story and ended up with this really profound reflection on the true nature of leadership. It's amazing how he weaves together so many different threads. You know, John 10, ancient law codes, kingship, modern-day leadership, to reveal this deeper message about what it means to truly serve and lead like Jesus.

Yeah. I'm feeling pretty inspired to think about how I can be a better shepherd in my own life. Me too.

It's a challenge, but it's definitely one worth taking on. Absolutely. And I think that's the perfect note to end on.

As Dr. Fowler reminds us, true leadership isn't about power or prestige. It's about love, service, and a deep commitment to the well-being of others. Well said.

As we wrap up this deep dive, let's consider how we can embody that shepherd heart in our own lives. No matter where we find ourselves leading or serving. Thanks for joining us on this incredible journey.