

Message #41

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John

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FOLLOWING THE GOOD SHEPHERD (Part 3)

JOHN 10:22-30

INTRO AND REVIEW

My wife Suzy spent her first year of college in Massachusetts at a school that was part of a denomination that was evangelical in its orientation. It took the Bible seriously and believed in salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. My wife soon discovered that many of her Christian friends at the college were fearful that they might lose their salvation for violating certain standards.

One of her closest friends was convinced that movies were inherently evil and that if she ever went into a movie theater, she would have her eternal life taken away from her. Suzy remembers another friend at the college who got drunk one night. The next day he expressed his heartfelt concern that he was no longer a Christian because of what he had done.

An official in this denomination said in a church magazine several years ago, **“God can save us only if we maintain relationship with Him. Trusting Christ for salvation involves a seeking heart and faithfulness to that relationship.”** (Frank Moore, Director for the Center for Faith and Culture Studies, Olivet Nazarene University, *Holiness Today*, July/August, 2005) If this is true, what is the extent of the relationship required? Are we required to have devotions so many days a week? What are the violations of this relationship that would take away our salvation? If there is always the possibility that we could screw up this relationship, can we never have assurance then in this life that we will go to heaven? Hopefully the passage before us today will help us to answer those questions.

In our ongoing study of John’s Gospel, we have been working on Chapters 7-10, which have as their setting the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. This was an eight day feast that reminded the Jews of God’s provision for their ancestors in their forty years of wandering in the wilderness after their escape from Egypt. At the height of this celebration, Jesus announced to the crowds that He was the light of the world. He followed that up by healing a man born blind. This got the religious leaders upset, especially the Pharisees. The Pharisees were the legalists who had all kinds of

detailed rules, including the restriction that there was to be no healing on the Sabbath. Jesus healed the blind guy on the Sabbath.

So tensions are increasing. In the first part of Chapter 10, Jesus told these religious leaders that He is the Good Shepherd. He went on to describe His relationship with genuine followers in terms of a shepherd to his sheep. In today's passage the setting changes, but Jesus takes up the metaphor of a shepherd with his sheep again.

I.

In vv. 22 & 23 of #10, which is found on p. 896 of the black Bibles under many of the chairs, we find that JESUS IS THE FULFILLMENT OF ANOTHER FEAST. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. JESUS IS THE FULFILLMENT...) The Apostle John writes, **"At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon."**

The feast involved here is fascinating on several levels. To begin with, it is never mentioned in the Old Testament. Its observance is never commanded or urged in the Bible. Yet Jesus is clearly participating in it. It appears that the feast is the reason that Jesus has come to Jerusalem.

The Hebrew word for dedicate is *hanak*. It begins with a hard "h" sound. So in English we know the feast as Hanukkah. Sometimes the beginning of the word is spelled with a "ch" instead of just an "h" to get that hard "h" sound.

The origin of the feast does have a connection with Old Testament history. Alexander the Great was conquering the eastern Mediterranean in the 320s and 330s BC. He died suddenly in 323 BC, when he was still a young man. The territory that he conquered was eventually divided up among four of his generals. A guy named Ptolemy got Egypt, and a guy named Seleucid got Syria. (SELEUCID-PTOLEMY MAP) For the next 150 years and more, these two generals and their descendants ruled their respective territories. Judah and Jerusalem were located between their territories. Control of them went back and forth between the two powers. Jews often suffered from the conflicts that were involved. This situation was prophesied in Daniel #11.

By 170 BC, a Seleucid descendant by the name of Antiochus Epiphanes IV was in control of Jerusalem and Judah. He was intent upon forcing Greek culture upon the region. So he tore down the wall of

Jerusalem. He forbade the practice of Jewish religion. He stopped worship in the temple. He took out furnishings from the temple. He prohibited circumcision. He destroyed copies of the Hebrew Bible. He killed many Jews.

Then in either 168 or 167 BC, the exact year is disputed by historians, Antiochus made an effort to take over Egypt. He had an encounter on the beach near Alexandria with the commander of a large Roman fleet, who told Antiochus to go back home. Antiochus recognized that he was not strong enough to take on the Romans. So in humiliation and anger he headed back toward Syria.

In Jerusalem he took out his anger on the Jews by bringing in an altar and an image of Zeus. There he sacrificed pigs on the holy site of the temple. This was recognized by the Jews as the Abomination of Desolation prophesied in #11 in the Book of Daniel. The abomination pushed a family of a father and five sons over the top. This family of the Maccabees began a revolt that involved what we would call guerilla warfare. In three years they were successful in pushing the Greeks out. According to Jewish tradition, it was exactly three years after the revolt began that the Jews reclaimed the temple in Jerusalem and rededicated it. In the Jewish calendar, it was the 25th of Chislev, which generally corresponds to the month of December in our calendar. (PROJECTOR OFF)

They had an eight day feast. Because they had not been able to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles three months earlier, they called their celebration the Feast of Tabernacles in Chislev. It was only years later that a story and a tradition developed that a bottle of oil was found in the temple to light the temple lamps at the time of the rededication. Supposedly there was only enough oil to last for one day. In order to prepare the oil according to the Biblical requirements, it would take eight days. Yet this one jar of oil lasted eight days, until the new batch was ready.

By the time of Jesus it appears that the tradition in Jerusalem, at least, was that Jews would place a light outside of their homes for each person who lived at that place. Some religious Jews would add one more light for each resident of the home for each of the days of the eight day feast. The modern practice is to light one more candle, or one additional light, in the window of a Jewish home for each night of the Feast.

Verse 23 in our text notes that it was winter when this incident happened. Because the Jews used a lunar calendar, the date of the annual celebration varies in our calendar. Jerusalem happens to be at the exact same altitude as Boulder City. It is also within three degrees of the same longitude as is Boulder City. Their winter average temperatures are very similar to what we have here.

The other additional detail provided by our text is that Jesus was walking in the portico of Solomon. (SOLOMON'S PORTICO 1) This was a part of the wall on the east side of the temple. Tradition said that part of the area was originally built during the time of Solomon. It is doubtful that this is the case. History and archaeology indicate that the whole area was destroyed in the Babylonian Captivity.

(SOLOMON'S PORTICO 2) The portico was built up against the outside wall of the temple compound. It had a roof. Then there were columns facing the interior of the temple compound. So it was open toward the inside. But in the winter it would afford some protection from the elements. The Apostle John may have mentioned this detail because the first Christians met in this area. That is described in Acts #3 and #5. (PROJECTOR OFF)

There are two things that we can get out of these two verses. The first is that Hanukkah was not a biblically established observance. There was no warrant in the Hebrew Scriptures for celebrating this holiday. It did not even require Jews to go to Jerusalem to observe it. The emphasis was for Jews to observe this celebration in their homes. But some Jews did go up to Jerusalem to observe it. Obviously Jesus did. He apparently saw this observance as an opportunity to promote His claims to be the Messiah.

In a similar way, there is no direct Biblical basis for observing Christmas or Easter. The New Testament nowhere commands such observance. I have encountered a few Christians over the years who have been negative about observing such holidays because there is no direct basis in the Scriptures for observing them. Some cults, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, preach against observing these holidays. The example of Jesus here teaches us that there is nothing wrong with observing such holidays, especially if there is an opportunity to promote the things of God.

The second thing to get out of these two verses is that Hanukkah was originally established to celebrate the national deliverance of the people of God from a threat to their existence. Evil forces threatened to do in the people of God. Jesus Christ was the true Messiah who provided His people with the opportunity for deliverance from the power of sin. At His second coming He would provide national deliverance from Gentile powers who would also try to destroy Israel. So Jesus was the fulfillment of what was pictured in this celebration of national deliverance. Yet He was being rejected by the religious leaders of the nation.

II.

We also have reemphasized in vv. 24-26 and v. 30 that JESUS IS A DIVINE SHEPHERD. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. JESUS IS A...) According to v. 24, **“So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, ‘How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.’”**

“The Jews” is a term used consistently in John’s Gospel to refer to the religious leaders of Judea who were mostly opposed to Jesus and His claims. The predominant group among those leaders was the Pharisees. Most of the rabbis were Pharisees. Pharisees were legalists and traditionalists. One of their traditional interpretations of the Sabbath law was that healing on that day was a violation of one of God’s commandments. Jesus did that. So he was bad. Thus it was that the Jewish leaders surrounded him in Solomon’s Portico.

Our ESV translation probably does not give the best sense of the original text. The text originally has the religious leaders asking, “How long will you take up our soul?” The sense of that most likely is that they are asking Jesus how long He will plague them without giving a direct answer to their question. Is Jesus claiming to be the Messiah?

Jesus had directly told the Samaritan woman in #4 that He was the Messiah. He had talked about this with His closest disciples. But in public situations where the religious leaders were around, He has not specifically and directly said that He was the Messiah. He did not do this for two reasons. One was that there were all kinds of misconceptions around about what the Messiah would be like. Claiming to be the Messiah would put different ideas in people’s minds about what that would mean.

Secondly, claiming to be the Messiah to these religious leaders was likely to provoke a quick and strong reaction from them. Such a direct claim was likely to lead to an arrest and prosecution. Jesus had a divine timetable that He was following which would not be rushed.

Verse 25 contains Jesus’ reply to their request: **“Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me...’”** Jesus did not tell them directly that He was the Messiah. But He had been talking about His unique relationship with God. He claimed that He was sent by God. He called God His Father. He also spoke of Himself as “the Son of Man.” That title could be understood in different ways. But in the Old Testament book of Daniel, it was used to describe the Messiah. Jesus had also claimed to be the light of the world in front of a large crowd of religious pilgrims in Jerusalem.

Then Jesus had also been doing amazing miracles. He had recently healed a man born blind. Never in Jewish history had that been done before. The Old Testament book of Isaiah prophesied that the future Messiah would heal the blind. Religious leaders who knew the Hebrew Scriptures should have been able to determine the identity of Jesus.

He continues in v. 26, **“...but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep.”** Thus Jesus returns to the figurative language used earlier in the chapter in which He compares Himself to a shepherd. There Jesus indicates that His sheep are not just those who are His followers, but they are also those who are certain to become His followers.

If you will look back at v. 16, you will see that Jesus said, **“I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.”** The fold that Jesus was describing was Judaism. Some of the Jews had become His followers. But there were some outside of that fold, some who were Gentiles, who would eventually become Jesus followers. These were ones who were chosen by God.

Back in #6 v. 44 (JOHN 6:44) Jesus had said, **“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.”** These verses emphasize the sovereignty of God in choosing and calling people to become His followers, in becoming part of the flock of Jesus.

It is fascinating that Jesus uses the language of election and predestination with this audience. For it is clear that these guys are skeptics and determined enemies, for the most part. We preachers tend to avoid such subjects with a largely unbelieving audience. (PROJECTOR OFF) Jesus does not. Why is this so?

Perhaps it is a kind of judgment on unbelief. Perhaps He does it to shake them up. Perhaps a few would respond to His teaching. We have already seen that Nicodemus was one of the Pharisees. At the crucifixion we will find out about Joseph of Arimathea. He is another member of the Sanhedrin. These two will eventually prove to be followers of Jesus.

Let's skip down, then, to v. 30. Jesus declares, **“I and the Father are one.”** This is another fascinating statement. It is subject to various interpretations. One strain of heresy in the early church was

Sabellianism, which was also known as Monarchianism. These adherents did not believe in the Trinity. The followers of this view pointed to this verse as proving that Jesus and the Father are the same person. God sometimes took the form of the Father. Sometimes He took the form of the Son. Sometimes He took the form of the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word for “one” here, however, is in the neuter gender. If Jesus was saying that He and the Father were the same person, Jesus should have used the masculine gender. He did not. So it is more likely that Jesus is saying that He and the Father are of one purpose or one will or one mind in regard to the disposition of the sheep. The statement is somewhat ambiguous. It is possible that Jesus was hinting at an essential unity, at a metaphysical unity. To have such unity of mind and purpose and will, and to refer to God as His personal Father, Jesus was perhaps claiming to be God. In the next verse the Jews seek to stone Jesus. In v. 33 they charge Him with blasphemy. So the religious leaders understood Jesus to be making some kind of claim to deity.

The initial question of the religious leaders in v. 24 was whether Jesus claimed to be the Messiah. Jesus in v. 30 seems to be making a bigger claim. He is claiming to be God. None of the contemporary views of what the Messiah would be like understood that He would actually be God in the flesh. Jesus is pointing toward that conclusion here. He is claiming to be more than what His listeners understood to be the Messiah. Jesus is a divine shepherd.

III.

In vv. 27-29 Jesus says that THE DIVINE SHEPHERD NEVER LOSES ANY OF HIS SHEEP. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. THE DIVINE SHEPHERD...) According to v. 27, **“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”** The stress here is on the role of the shepherd. He is sovereign over the sheep.

Two Sundays ago I told you about a friend who is a seminary professor who was sent to Jordan to spend time with Bedouin shepherds. One of his friends was a shepherd who had a flock of 2000 sheep. He said that he knew all of his sheep. At one point our friend in an interview asked this man, **“Have you ever lost any sheep?”** He replied, **“Yes, but I always looked for the ones that were lost until I found them--- alive or dead. There is only one sheep that I couldn’t find and it still bothers me every day.”**

Such is the care and concern of a good shepherd for his sheep. Jesus claims to be not just a good shepherd, but the Good Shepherd. He is the divine Shepherd. As such, He always knows where His sheep are. He is always able to find them. He is always able to rescue them.

Furthermore, according to v. 28, **“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”** In v. 10 Jesus said that He gives His sheep an abundant life. That has to do with quality. The promise here of eternal life has to do with quantity. It is a promise of life forever. This is the promise that Jesus explained to Nicodemus in #3: **“For God so loved the world that He gave His unique Son that whoever believes in Him, should not perish, but have eternal life.”**

Notice that this eternal life is a gift. There is no merit on the part of the sheep that deserves it. The Apostle Paul explained in Ephesians #2 vv. 8 & 9 (EPHESIANS 2:8-9). Speaking to Christians, he said, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”**

Once the gift is received, there is a promise that the receiver is in possession of eternal life. The assurance here in v. 28 of our text is that the recipient will never perish. (PROJECTOR OFF) Jesus uses a double negative here to stress the certainty of this promise. “I give them eternal life, and they will not never perish...” We have a great Protector. We have a divine Shepherd.

There was a story this week in the paper about a producer in Las Vegas whose father was a mob boss. He says that as a kid, his father would show up at his baseball games in a black Cadillac. **“The umpire would never call strike three on me. When I played football and he was in the stands, nobody would tackle me.”** (RJ, 10/3/2018) Michael Franzese had a “godfather.” We Christians have a divine Father. He allows us to experience challenges and difficulties. But He allows no one to take away His sheep.

In v. 29 Jesus says, **“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.”** This is the translation that most versions of the Bible have. If it is correct, it directly says that we have protection not only from the Son, but also from the Father.

There are a number of scholars, however, who argue that the original text (VERSE 29 ALTERNATE) more likely reads, **“That which the Father has given to me is greater than all.”** If that is the case, the point is that the flock of sheep, which is genuine Christians, is more important than anything else in the world. So the Triune Godhead is certain to watch over the sheep.

The Apostle Paul provides us Christians with a similar assurance in Romans #8. (ROMANS 8:35) Beginning in v. 35, he writes, **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness or danger, or sword? (ROMANS 8:36) As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered--- notice the reference to shepherding.’ (ROMANS 8:37) No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (ROMANS 8:38) For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, (ROMANS 8:39) nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

Christians often refer to these promises as essential elements of the doctrine of eternal security. There is a range of viewpoints about this doctrine. (PROJECTOR OFF) The denominational group to which I referred in the introduction believes that major sins on the part of Christians result in a loss of salvation. Eternal life is taken away from us.

A major objection to that view is that Jesus promises His sheep eternal life, not temporary life, not provisional life, but eternal life. If this eternal life can somehow be taken away from us, then it was never eternal in the first place. At best, it was temporary or provisional.

The objection is then raised about Christians who seem to turn away from the faith. One possibility is that they were not truly saved to begin with. They did not have genuine faith. The other possibility is that they are simply messed up Christians. In Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, he speaks of fleshly Christians. He talks about a church which has a lot of problems. It is marred by division and wrong attitudes and sexual sins. Yet he does not seem to doubt the genuineness of the salvation of these people in the church. He recognizes that God will discipline His children.

This role of our Heavenly Father is stressed in Hebrews #12. (PROJECTOR ON--- HEBREWS 12:6) In the first part of the chapter the author talks about how God the Father is a disciplinarian. He says, **“For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”**

The New Testament recognizes that behavior, character, and good works are evidences of the presence of saving faith. But they are never the basis for it. (PROJECTOR OFF) We should also be reminded that Jesus promises His sheep that life with Him is abundant. Furthermore, He promises us eternal rewards for our faithfulness. But we can be confident that the divine Shepherd never loses any of His sheep.

That assurance should affect the way that we live our lives. In the early years of the Christian era, several major plagues tore through the Roman Empire. The way that Christians behaved stood in stark contrast to the behavior of their pagan neighbors. Sociologist and historian Rodney Stark says, **“The Romans threw people out into the street at the first symptoms of disease, because they knew it was contagious and they were afraid of dying. But the Christians stayed and nursed the sick. You could only do that if you thought, ‘So what if I die? I have life eternal.’”** (*Newsweek*, 3/29/1999)

An early church leader by the name of Dionysius wrote, **“Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy... The best of our brothers lost their lives in this manner...”** (Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, p.82) Such is the difference that assurance of eternal life made in their lives. Such is the difference that it should make in our lives, in the face of the challenges of this world.