

THE IDENTITY AND SECURITY OF JESUS' SHEEP

John 10:22-42

Key Verses: 27-28, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand."

In the previous passage Jesus declared two more "I am" statements. We have heard four of the seven thus far in John's gospel. Do you remember them? (1) The bread of life (6:35). Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (2) The light of the world (8:12). Jesus spoke to the people, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." And in chapter 10, there were two statements. (3) The gate (10:9). Jesus said, "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved." And, (4) The good shepherd (10:11), where Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

In addition we have covered 6 of the 7 miraculous signs in John's gospel which were performed by Jesus while he was alive: (1) changing water to wine at a wedding in Cana, (2) the long distance healing of a royal official's dying son, (3) the healing of the 38-year invalid man at the pool of Bethesda, (4) feeding over 5000 people with just 5 loaves and 2 fish, (5) walking out on the Sea of Galilee to his disciples, and (6) healing the man born blind with mud and saliva after sending him to the Pool of Siloam.

These "I am" claims and miraculous signs of Jesus all testify to who Jesus is: he is the Messiah, the Son of God, who came to give us life in his name.

In today's passage Jesus continues to testify to his divine origin, appealing to his works. But the result is more animosity and hatred toward him from his critics. So Jesus withdraws from them. The NIV Bible calls this section in chapter 10 verses 22-42: "Further Conflict Over Jesus' Claims." The ESV titles it: "I and the Father Are One." Today let's listen to Jesus and learn who Jesus' sheep are and what Jesus promises them.

I. The Identity of Jesus' Sheep: Who are they? (22-27)

We know the time and place of this discourse. The time was winter at the Festival of Dedication, also known as Hanukkah. This is a festival which Jews still celebrate today around the same time as Christmas. The place was Solomon's Colonnade at the temple courts in Jerusalem.

The Jews there grilled Jesus saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." We, the reader, know that Jesus already told the Samaritan woman that he is the Messiah. Jesus also told the blind man whom he healed that he is

the Son of Man, which is another reference to the Messiah. However, Jesus didn't go around public declaring, "I'm the Messiah, listen to me!" At the same time, Jesus made bold claims that only God could make, including his "I am" claims. Jesus even said, "Before Abraham was born, I am!", which caused Jesus' critics to pick up stones to kill him. Jesus knew that his claim to be the Son of God would ultimately be the cause of his death. But if they listened at all to Jesus' claims and considered his works they would understand that he is indeed the Messiah, the Son of God.

So Jesus answered their question and demand, saying (25), "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me..." Recall that Jesus has already introduced many witnesses to who he is: John the Baptist, God the Father, the Scriptures, himself, and his works. Here, Jesus again emphasizes his works. By considering Jesus' life-giving works, they should know that Jesus came from God. The prophet Isaiah had foretold over 700 years before Christ that one day the lame would walk and the blind would see (Isa 35:5-6). Jesus worked such miraculous healings. Even the formerly blind man testified of Jesus, "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing" (9:33).

Jesus' critics had a problem: they closed their hearts. They loved the world. The truth could set them free. But they were not willing to lose anything to accept the truth. Jesus knew their problem: "but you do not believe because you are not my sheep" (26). Here we are back to the metaphor of the shepherd and the sheep. No one really likes to be called a sheep, or to think that they are someone's sheep. But the Bible says that we are all like sheep. Isaiah 53:6 says, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Prideful people think, "I am my own person. I don't follow anyone! I live my life the way I want to." Actually, this is the same attitude of the devil. British author C.S. Lewis wrote in his book *The Great Divorce*: "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.'" The Bible repeats in several places: "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." So either, we are Jesus' sheep, or we are not. We are either slaves to sin or free in Jesus.

Then who are Jesus' sheep? Jesus describes them in verse 27: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." Here we learn three things about Jesus' sheep.

First, Jesus' sheep listen to his voice. What does it mean to listen to Jesus' voice? We all know what it means to hear people but not really listen to them. We have done this both as the speaker and as the listener. For example, someone talks to us, but we have something else racing in our minds. We really don't want to listen because maybe we think we're too busy, or it sounds too boring or demanding or uninteresting. We must not be that way with Jesus. To really listen to Jesus means to delight in his word and

put it into practice. If we don't, Jesus says we are foolish builders and what we are doing will be destroyed when the storms hit. So, are you listening to Jesus, really listening?

Second, Jesus knows his sheep. Knowing someone, really knowing them, is a two-way relationship. Of course, Jesus knows everything about everyone, including their deepest, darkest secrets and greatest joys and victories. But so many people don't enjoy a personal relationship with Jesus because they don't want to share their minds and hearts, joys and sorrows, victories and defeats, with Jesus. Are there parts of your life that you are keeping from Jesus? Are you ashamed of some sin like lust, immorality, gossip, envy or procrastination that you struggle with and give in to? Tell it to Jesus. Perhaps even tell a close friend who will keep you accountable and pray for you. Jesus knows his sheep and his sheep know him.

Third, Jesus' sheep follow him. To follow Jesus is similar to listening to Jesus. If we really listen to Jesus, we will follow him. To follow Jesus is not to study the Bible in order to get what we want in order to make our lives more comfortable and easy. To really follow Jesus is to go where he wants us to go, to say what he wants us to say, and to do what he wants us to do. This is not easy or natural or automatic for anyone. It involves surrender.

In the true story recent movie, "Breakthrough," a mother's son drowned. They pronounced him dead. Then the mother prayed for him and his heart started beating again. But his full recovery was still an uphill battle. During this struggle, the mother realized that she always had to be in control of things in her life. Finally, she repented her pride with tears in prayer saying, "I surrender." It meant, "your will be done." She shifted from the controller to the follower of the Lord.

Levi the tax collector had a posh job working for the Roman empire. But one day Jesus visited his tax booth. Jesus must've seen it in his eyes and knew it in his heart: Levi was looking for a radical life change. Jesus simply said, "Follow me," and Levi got up, left everything, and followed Jesus. His friends must've said to him, "Levi, are you crazy? How could you leave your secure job to follow a poor preacher who can't guarantee you any income, even your next meal or a place to stay?" But Levi could reply, "I have decided to follow Jesus the Messiah. No turning back." History bears out his wise decision. He became one of Jesus' 12 apostles and the writer of Matthew's gospel. Now, many people have named their sons Matthew, even in our church.

II. The Security of Jesus' Sheep: What does Jesus promise them? (28-42)

So what's the big deal about being Jesus' sheep? I mean, what's in it for us? Now we've come to our key verse, 28: "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one

will snatch them out of my hand.” Here, “them” is Jesus’ sheep. This is an incredible promise. Jesus promises his sheep three things here.

First, Jesus says, “I give my sheep eternal life...” Eternal life is not an eternal extension of this earthly life, with all its sorrows and pains and heartaches. In that case, most people would not want eternal life. Rather, eternal life is more like taking your best day ever that you can remember extending that and magnifying it a thousand times forever. We have all experienced at least a glimpse of heaven and hell on earth. We’ve known the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat. To lack the peace, security and joy of eternal life is to live in meaninglessness, emptiness, anger and regret. It is a life without Jesus. A life full of the fruit of the Holy Spirit describes eternal life: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control (Gal 5:22).

Second, Jesus says that his sheep “shall never perish.” To have eternal life and to never perish are closely related. Whoever believes in Jesus shall not perish, but have eternal life. We all must die some day, sooner or later. There is no escaping it, no running or hiding from it. People have sought ways to extend their lives through diet, exercise, surgery, etc. Two of my favorite lines in the movie Braveheart deal with our mortality: “Everybody dies. It’s just a matter of when and how,” and, “Everybody dies. But not everyone really lives.” It has been said that we should live each day as if it is our last. Of course, in some sense, we shouldn’t do that if we have to plan for tomorrow. But in spirit, we should live our lives to the fullest. That’s what Jesus has promised: to give life, and to give it more abundantly. Jesus gives life to the full. Jesus gives eternal life to his sheep. And they shall never perish.

Third, Jesus says of his sheep, “No one will snatch them out of my hand.” Who would want to snatch Jesus’ sheep out of his hand? Of course, that would be his foe and enemy, the devil, or anyone on the devil’s side. That would include those whose primary aim in life is to acquire not eternal life with Jesus but things on earth such as money, possessions, fame, human recognition, pleasure, comfort, etc. There are many false teachers and false religions that try to snatch Jesus’ sheep away. But if we are Jesus’ sheep, no one will snatch us out of his hand. And no one can snatch his sheep out of his Father’s hand.

Jesus goes on to say, “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.” Jesus is one with the Father in spirit and purpose, not in person. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons in one God. They are three united in a Trinity: united in power, in creation, in purpose, in wisdom, in redemption, in love. Jesus’ sheep cannot be snatched away because they are God’s sheep. Jesus and the Father are one in action and purpose.

At this point, Jesus' opponents in the crowd again picked up stones to stone Jesus. Someone commented in our Bible study, "Maybe they started carrying rocks in their pockets." Jesus was not afraid. Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" Again, Jesus implored them to honestly consider his deeds and actions. After all, what was he doing that was so evil?

"We are not stoning you for any good work," they replied, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God." It was not what Jesus was doing necessarily (except healing on the Sabbath), but what he was saying that really bothered them.

Jesus then used an argument from Scripture: Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are "gods"'? If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be set aside—what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'?"

Here Jesus quoted Psalm 82:6. In that psalm, rulers of the people or judges were called "gods," because they were in places of authority to speak and judge for God. The Hebrew word in fact is the word Elohim, which is the word in Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God (Elohim) created the heavens and the earth." As another example, God called Moses to speak to Pharaoh. But Moses said to God, "Send someone else." He actually objected to God and didn't want to do it. Then the Lord was angry with Moses and said, "What about Aaron, your brother? He will speak to the people, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him" (Ex 4:13-16). In this story, Moses was like God to Aaron since Moses received the message of God to pass on to Aaron. But Jesus is greater than Moses. In addition, when prophets spoke they often said, "Thus says the Lord..." How much more appropriate is it to honor Jesus, the Son of God, who was sent from God in heaven as the living Word?

Again, Jesus appealed to his works and his union with the Father, saying, "Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father."

Jesus kept emphasizing his works. But they weren't listening. They weren't having any of it and they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp. So Jesus went back across the Jordan to where John had been baptizing earlier. Many people came and believed in Jesus based on Jesus' words and John's testimony about Jesus. These were the kind of believers Jesus was looking for: believing, not because of miracles that would benefit them, but because of his words of truth that would set them free from the power of sin and death.

So, are you following Jesus?

When I was 10 years old, I had two dreams: to be a Catholic priest and a professional athlete, at the same time. So I wanted to serve God and I wanted to become famous through sports, with people chanting, "Albright, Albright," after I hit a home run. My desire to serve God disappeared in high school. I wanted to be a medical doctor, and then an engineering. My desires got more and more practical. Then my dad died of a heart attack at age 47. I was 18. I visited a priest and asked him about studying engineering in seminary. He said, "No, you would need to study in the humanities." So I decided to attend Northwestern University to study mechanical engineering. Yesterday a neighbor called me "Father," thinking I'm a Catholic priest. I told him I'm not a Catholic priest but I am a pastor and I am a father, with children. Last weekend I visited relatives in Nebraska, in a small town called Humphrey, with a population of 560. My grandmother lived there as the eldest of 13 children. She herself had 14 children, including my mother. I saw aunts, uncles and cousins whom I hadn't seen for over 20 years. I spoke with three of my cousins about my faith and hope in Christ. One of my cousins is a born again Christian, whose son is also a pastor in Omaha. So I attended his church with seven of my relatives, six of whom had never attended an evangelical church before. This was such an answer to prayer! I called my brother this morning encouraging him to go to that church again, even today. I also left a voicemail for my cousin asking him to call and encourage my brother to come again. I praise God for his grace to a sinner like me, calling me to serve Jesus Christ, my good shepherd (my wife can testify that I thank God most often for "Jesus, my Good Shepherd" in my prayers).

In conclusion, we have learned in this passage the identity and security of Jesus' sheep. Who are they? They are those who listen to Jesus' voice. Jesus knows them. They follow Jesus. What does Jesus promise them? Jesus promises them eternal life. They shall never perish. No one can snatch them out of his hand.

Do you have assurance that you are Jesus' sheep? Do you love Jesus and follow him? Do you know that he loves you, not because of anything good you've done, but because he created you to know him, his love and his glorious purpose? He has given us great and precious promises.

Do you care about others? Do you care whether they have the promise of eternal life in Jesus or not? Jesus' sheep cannot be indifferent toward others. Jesus was not indifferent. Jesus gave his life to proclaim the message of salvation and eternal life in him.

Sometimes we are ashamed of ourselves. But he loves us still. Sometimes we are angry or immature. But he loves us still. He calls us to really know him, to love him, to follow him. Jesus gives his sheep eternal life and they shall never perish. No one will snatch them out of his hand.