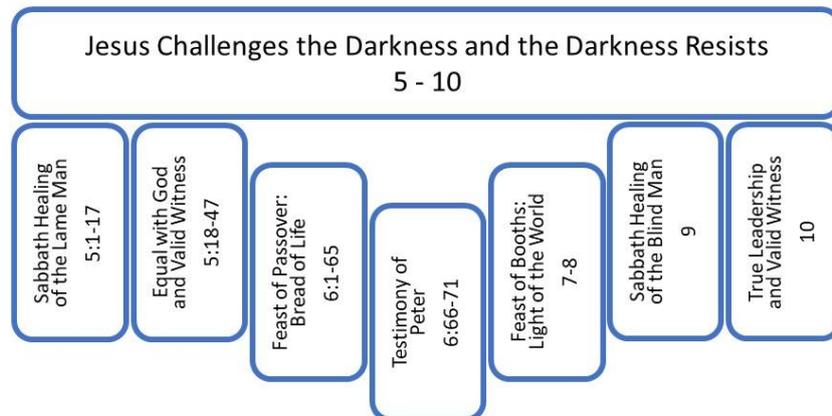


Lesson 18: John 10 True Leadership and Valid Witnesses

Introduction



Who is your leader? Who defines for you the purpose of your life? Who do you go to for direction? Whose authority do you recognize in ordering your life? From whom do you ask permission before executing any major decision? If the answer is no one, then you are your own shepherd.

Who do you follow? Who is your leader? True and good leadership is the topic of John 10.

John 10 presents the very well-known metaphors surrounding two famous I am statements from Jesus, "I am the Door of the Sheep" and "I am the Good Shepherd." This teaching is delivered in the context of a larger section, as the completion of that section.

So, stepping back to take a broad look, we see that we have come to the end of the second major section of John, chapters 5-10, in which Jesus challenges the darkness and the darkness resists. There was misunderstanding of Jesus in chapters 1-4, but not much opposition and no talk of killing him. Resistance has steadily increased, intensified in chapters 1-5.

At the center of the section, we heard the testimony of Peter, "You have the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy one of God." If that testimony is the literary center of the section, then flanked on either side are two feasts, the Passover in chapter 6 and the Feast of Booths in chapters 7 and 8. The first contained the declaration, "I am the Bread of Life." The second contained the declaration, "I am the Light of the World." The Passover feast ended with a group of disciples who believed without believing and were pushed back by Jesus with the faith test, "eat my flesh, drink my blood." And then similarly, the Feast of Booths ended with another group that believed without believing and were pushed back as Jesus drilled down into their self-identity. The group of false disciples at the Passover deserted Jesus. The group of false believers at the Feast of Booths picked up stones to kill him. So, we have two dialogues ending with rejection of Jesus flanking the testimony of Peter who holds on to Jesus.

Then if we move further out in the section on either side, we have two Sabbath healings that bring about the anger of Jewish leaders and provide opportunity for significant teaching from Jesus about himself. Now, at the beginning this content is in chapter 5. And at then, at the end it is in chapters 9-10. There are three parallel divisions in each of those two sections. In chapter 5, (1) first, Jesus heals the lame man on the Sabbath, bringing about the anger of Jewish leaders. (2) Then, Jesus teaches us about himself. (3) Then, Jesus calls witnesses to support his claims. That same pattern follows here in chapters 9-10. (1) First, Jesus heals a blind man on the Sabbath, bringing out the anger of Jewish leaders. (2) Then, Jesus teaches us about himself. (3) Then, Jesus calls witnesses to support his claims.

In chapter 5, Jesus taught us that he has power over life and has authority to judge. In chapter 10 he builds on that teaching. He again asserts his power over life and his authority. Though his authority takes on a more personal tone. He is the leader we know and trust. He is King on High, but he is also the shepherd with us on the ground. He calls his sheep, and they hear his voice, and they follow him.

Of the three divisions that parallel that chapter 5, healing, teaching and witnesses, we addressed the healing of the blind man already in our last lesson. That was chapter 9. So, now, we continue on with two parts of this lesson. First, Jesus teaching about himself as our true leader. That is verses 1-21. And then a call to witnesses in verses 22-42.

Jesus is our true leader. (10:1-21)

Jesus is our true leader. Let's read John 10:1-21.

¹ "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. ² But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers."

⁶ This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them.

⁷ So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. ⁹ I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

¹¹ I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. ¹² He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters *them*. ¹³ *He flees* because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep.

¹⁴ I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, ¹⁵ even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. ¹⁸ No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."

¹⁹ A division occurred again among the Jews because of these words. ²⁰ Many of them were saying, "He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?" ²¹ Others were saying, "These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?"

The Basic Shepherd Metaphor (1-6)

This text divides into four paragraphs. The first is verses 1-6. This is where Jesus delivers the basic metaphor. There are four players in the metaphor. There is a thief, a shepherd, a doorkeeper, and sheep. The thief and the shepherd each relate differently to the doorkeeper and differently to the sheep.

The thief must avoid the doorkeeper because he has no legitimate right to enter. He climbs over the barrier at some other point.

¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber.

And the sheep will not willingly follow this thief, because they have no relationship to him.

⁵ A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers."

On the other hand, the doorkeeper opens the gate for the shepherd who is recognized as having legitimate authority over the sheep. And when the sheep hear his voice, they respond, because they know him and trust him.

² But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.

My Croatian friend Vjenci says his grandfather gave each sheep a name. He remembers one called Jabuka which is Apple. When his grandfather called the sheep, they didn't even look up. He called each one by name, and he heads down, they just started walking after him at the call of his voice. Vjenci tried to call the sheep, when he was a boy, "Jabuko, Jabuko," but they completely ignored him and just kept on eating grass. He is not the shepherd. They do not know him.

Jesus has made clear that the primary issue of faith is the state of the human heart. Something has to be turned on inside of a person before they will follow after Jesus. But once it has been turned on, that person will indeed follow. Jesus declared in 6:65, "No one can come to Me, unless it has been granted from the Father." And then later in 8:47 "He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God." Seeing Jesus, hearing Jesus, these are senses a human being does not possess in his or her original state. Like the blind man at the beginning of chapter 9, we are born without sight. We cannot see the light unless the Light of the World opens the eyes of our hearts. We can also compare it to sound. We are born deaf, unable to hear the Word. But when he does unstop our ears, then we become his. We hear his voice, and we respond. We respond because we have begun to know him, and we trust him.

People in the gathered crowd are confused by Jesus metaphor. Verse 6 reports, "They did not understand what those things were which he had been saying to them." So, Jesus decides to expand on elements of the original metaphor. This is not so much an extension of the same metaphor, but more of an expansion of three key ideas, the door, the shepherd, and the sheep.

Expansion on the idea of the Door (7-10)

So, let's look at the expansion on the idea of the door. And this is verses 7-10.

⁷ So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. ⁹ I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

We find out that Jesus is too big for the metaphor. Not only is he the Shepherd who leads the sheep. He is also the door by which the sheep enter into the kingdom of God. The sheep are saved through him.

Now, I have heard the door here compared to a shepherd out in the country over night who uses an enclosure made of stone, just picked up out of the field, or an enclosure of thorn bushes and neither one has a set gate across the entryway. So, the shepherd lays himself down across the entrance. He becomes the door and prevents sheep from leaving at night or predators from entering.

The idea in Jesus' metaphor goes even further than that. Jesus is the entryway to salvation. Psalm 23 helps us imagine the goodness that our Shepherd desires to lead us into.

¹ The Lord is my shepherd,	I shall not want.
² He makes me lie down in green pastures;	He leads me beside quiet waters.
³ He restores my soul;	He guides me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.	

Jesus is the shepherd who restores the soul and guides us in righteousness, who gives us purpose. How do we enter into that goodness? Can Jesus simply call us and lead us into it? No. If he led, we could not follow him. We are not made for heaven. We have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We cannot enter into perfect righteousness. We have no place in the kingdom of God. We cannot follow him in. The angel of wrath blocks the way back into the garden.

But by dying for us, Jesus becomes the portal through which we can enter into the holy place of God. Because we enter into his righteousness when we place our faith in him. We stand in his grace. In this way, he is our entryway. And what we find when we enter is life that is more than life. Or more than biological life. Life cut off from relationship with God is not real life. Jesus says, "I have come that you might have life, abundant life."

But there is one who tries to bar the way to life. Jealous of Adam and Eve and bearing a bitter grudge against the One who made him, Satan entered the garden to destroy the life God gives. He is a deceiver. He is a murderer. He hates the idea of life under the loving sovereignty of God. He continues to work against mankind, to steal and to kill and to destroy, in opposition of the work of Jesus Christ. And anyone who opposes Jesus Christ participates knowingly, unknowingly, willingly, unwillingly in the work of Satan to kill, to steal, to destroy, to block life.

Jesus is not speaking abstractly about good shepherds and bad shepherds. His words are an indictment of false spiritual leaders, beginning with those present around him. Those present in the story in chapter 9. Chapter 9 is a concrete example of what Jesus is saying. The blind man is one of the sheep of Israel. But as a sheep of Israel, he had lived as an outcast beggar under the rule of false shepherds. The true shepherd came to him and opened his eyes. The true shepherd saw him and cared about him. But the false shepherds reject that true shepherd, and they speak lies about him. And when this poor sheep stood up for the true shepherd, he was reviled, and he, himself, was cast out. But the true shepherd sought out the lost sheep. He came to him and spoke to him. And that sheep heard his voice and followed him. Finally, the true shepherd denounced the blindness of the false shepherds, telling them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains (9:41)." The leaders of Israel, knowing or unknowingly, are doing the work of Satan. They destroy through deception. They care most about their own positions of authority. They are not concerned, not truly, for the spiritual health of the flock under their care. They are concerned with maintaining their religion. They are not concerned with spiritual truth.

Here Jesus expands the idea of the door, in the next paragraph, he expands the idea of the Shepherd.

Expansion on the idea of the Shepherd (11-18)

This is going to come in two parts. First in verses 11-13.

¹¹ I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. ¹² He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters *them*. ¹³ *He flees* because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep.

Jesus is not just the shepherd. Jesus is the good shepherd. In his goodness, he deeply loves his sheep. It is a revolutionary concept for leadership. If you are a leader, do you love your people. Sheep are not expendable for Jesus. Sheep are not stepping blocks for his own agenda. Sheep are not the lesser, unworthy masses that exist for the benefit or aggrandizement of elite leaders. The agenda of the Good Shepherd involves the protection and care of the sheep. He loves the sheep. He wants the sheep experience life. He is willing to die for the sheep. The hired hand is the contrast. He is not concerned about the sheep at all.

This is not the first appearance of this contrast between good and wicked shepherds in the Bible. Jesus' teaching alludes to the shepherd prophecies in Ezekiel and Zechariah. Both of which are Messianic. So, listen to this. This is Ezekiel 34:1-4 and 22,

¹ Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, ² "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? ³ You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat *sheep* without feeding the flock. ⁴ Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them..."

That is a wicked leader.

²² therefore, I will deliver My flock, and they will no longer be a prey; and I will judge between one sheep and another. ²³ Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd.”

Zechariah brings out even more Messianic prophesy around the metaphor of shepherd and ties into the Feast of Booths passage we have already noted as background to chapters 7 and 8 with its light and its water streaming out of Jerusalem. So, follow this. I am going to read five short passages, Messianic passages from Zechariah starting in 11:4-5,

⁴ Thus says the Lord my God, “Pasture the flock *doomed* to slaughter. ⁵ Those who buy them slay them and go unpunished, and *each of* those who sell them says, ‘Blessed be the Lord, for I have become rich!’ And their own shepherds have no pity on them.”

Next Zechariah 11:12–13,

¹² I said to them, “If it is good in your sight, give *me* my wages; but if not, never mind!” So they weighed out thirty *shekels* of silver as my wages. ¹³ Then the Lord said to me, “Throw it to the potter, *that* magnificent price at which I was valued by them.” So I took the thirty *shekels* of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the Lord.

Zechariah 12:10,

¹⁰ “I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.”

And Zechariah 13:7,

⁷ “Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, And against the man, My Associate,” Declares the Lord of hosts. “Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered; And I will turn My hand against the little ones.”

Then finally, Zechariah 14:7–9,

⁷ For it will be a unique day which is known to the Lord, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light. ⁸ And in that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea; it will be in summer as well as in winter. ⁹ And the Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be *the only* one, and His name *the only* one.

For those who have ears to hear in the audience, when Jesus says, “I am the Good Shepherd”, and then you go back into Ezekiel and back into Zechariah and you see the wicked shepherds are the leaders of Israel, but there is going to rise up a good shepherd, but he is going to suffer, he is going to be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, he is going to be pierced, and his little ones are going to be scattered, but in the end day he is going to be king who reigns in light and a river of life will flow from Jerusalem, if they could hear that, Jesus is saying, “I am the Messiah.”

Jesus continues his elaboration on the idea of shepherd in verses 14-18.

¹⁴ I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, ¹⁵ even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. ¹⁸ No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”

Jesus repeats here that those who hear his voice and respond, those are his. This is a spiritual reality. And it is not just true of Israelites. There are sheep outside of Israel, “I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them in also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with the shepherd.” That lesson is not really going to sink in for the disciples until after the resurrection and after Pentecost and after the church begins to grow. But it is not going to stop in Israel, it is going to go beyond. Because there are sheep out there who need to hear the voice of Jesus. There are still sheep all over the world who need somebody to proclaim the good news. And when they hear it, they are going to respond.

Describing the relationship between Shepherd and sheep, Jesus makes a comparison to his own relationship with the Father. It is not an absolute parallel. Jesus’ relationship with the Father is fundamentally different than our relationship with Jesus, because Jesus and the Father are equally God. Still, there are ways in which the relationship is similar. There is a personal, love relationship between Father and Son. There is also a personal love relationship between us and Christ. Even if there is as much difference between him and us as between sheep and a shepherd, there is still this personal knowledge, a knowing of names that involves a knowing one another. Jesus knows us, and we can come to know him.

The relationship is also similar in the sense of obedience. The Son obeys the Father, and we obey the Son. He is our Shepherd King. There is something of this in verse 17. And I do not believe that verse 17 means that God loves Jesus only as a result of his obedience – Jesus must obey first and then the Father loves him. It sounds like that, but that is not the idea. The Father loves who the Son is. And who is is the one who lays down his life. The Father loves this loving obedience that is part of the nature of the Son, this unconditional love for the Sheep that is part of his being. That is who he is. That’s what is meant by verse 17, “For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again.” The obedience of the Son to lovingly lay down his life is the glory of his nature. And the Father loves that nature.

Another truth stands out. This is kind of striking in this passage. I am not sure where else it is expressed. We tend to think about the resurrection of Jesus as the act of the Father. That is what the Father does. He raises Jesus from the dead. But John emphasizes the reality of equality in Father and Son. Regarding his life, Jesus declares, “No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.” No one kills Jesus without the authority of Jesus. Jesus has to willingly submit. And Jesus, himself, has authority to raise himself back up again. That strong language, that claim, leads to the response of the crowd. And it finds mixed reviews.

Response of the gathered crowd (19-21)

This is verses 19-21.

¹⁹ A division occurred again among the Jews because of these words. ²⁰ Many of them were saying, “He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?” ²¹ Others were saying, “These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?”

The charge “He has a demon and is insane,” reminds me of the Lord, Liar, Lunatic argument we borrowed from C. S. Lewis for the parallel lesson back in chapter 5. Who is this Jesus? What kind of person makes such claims? This crowd recognizes that Jesus does not leave them with the option of calling him a good moral teacher. Good people don’t say this sort of thing. He claims to be the door of salvation for all people. You can’t enter heaven unless you go through him. What good person says that? He claims to be the good shepherd not only over all Israel but beyond. He has this grandiose opinion of his authority. What kind of person says that? And now he claims that he has power over his own life and his own death.

What kind of man makes such claims? A demonic man who willingly deceives people, manipulates. Or an insane man who knows no better. He really thinks it is true. But it is not. Or the Lord of heaven

whose claims are true. These people understood the claims Jesus was making. And they recognized he has done great miracles. And so, now they are struggling to come to grips with it all.

Jesus has taught about himself. We had a sign of the healing of the blind man. Do you see the sign? Are you able to read it? Jesus helps us. He teaches us now about who he is. Who is the one who can heal the blind? He is the good shepherd. He is the door of the sheep. He is the one who has authority to lay down his life and to take it up again. They are not going to believe him. So, in the next section Jesus calls on witnesses to support his claims. So, let's read through that whole text. This is John 10:22-42.

Jesus calls witnesses. (10:22-42)

²² At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; ²³ it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. ²⁴ The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly."

²⁵ Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. ²⁶ But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

³¹ The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. ³² Jesus answered them, "I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?"

³³ The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out *to be* God."

³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Has it not been written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'? ³⁵ If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), ³⁶ do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? ³⁷ If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; ³⁸ but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father."

³⁹ Therefore they were seeking again to seize Him, and He eluded their grasp. ⁴⁰ And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was first baptizing, and He was staying there. ⁴¹ Many came to Him and were saying, "While John performed no sign, yet everything John said about this man was true." ⁴² Many believed in Him there.

Feast of Dedication (22-24)

We cover a few months' time between verse 21 and 22. John has moved us forward to another feast. He has taken teaching from that later feast to complete the parallel with chapter 5 to give us a call to witnesses here. And we know Jesus told other parables about shepherds and sheep not included in John's Gospel, so it is not surprising that Jesus taught again on this same theme at a later feast, and then John has just brought the two together.

The Feast of Dedication is not an Old Testament feast. In 167 BC the Syrian ruler Antiochus Epiphanes IV, a really bad guy, set up a pagan altar in the temple of God in Jerusalem. And he sacrificed a pig on it to Zeus. Judas Maccabees, also known as the Hammer, led forces to retake the temple three years later. And it was cleansed and rededicated after those three years of defilement. This feast celebrates that cleansing, the dedication of the temple. And you have probably heard of it by another name, by the name Hanukkah or the Feast of Lights. Because of the lighting of the lights and joyfulness of the occasion, it was also referred to as a Feast of Booths in the month Kislev (2 Maccabees 1:9). It fits within our whole Feast of Booths context. And with the content John just brings it all nicely together here.

The reference in verse 36 to Jesus as the one whom God “sanctified and sent into the world” may also be John’s way of indicating that this feast, too, finds fulfillment in Jesus. As the temple was sanctified anew, Jesus is the one who is sanctified. The temple was a shadow pointing to the reality of Jesus. If we study what the tabernacle and then later the temple were all about, it is constant symbolism about Jesus. And in that sense the sanctification of the temple also points to the sanctification of the Son, but the Son was set apart, sanctified, declared holy for his saving work, since the creation of the world. That was the plan. That he would come. And so, the Son fulfills this idea of the sanctification of the temple because he himself is the temple or he himself is the dwelling of God’s glory on earth. So, I don’t know. There may be a connection there. Or he is just telling us what time of year it is. It is the Feast of Dedication.

Expansion on the idea of the Sheep (25-30)

Now, before we get to the witnesses, we are going to expand – there is one more idea. We expanded on the metaphor with the idea of the door and then the idea of the shepherd. Jesus is going to give us a little more now about the idea of the sheep. So, listen to these truth claims. This is in verses 27-29.

- (1) “My sheep hear My voice” – That is a mark of true belief. They are the ones who hear Jesus.
- (2) “and I know them” – The sheep share personal relationship with Jesus.
- (3) “and they follow Me” – True hearing implies following. The sheep hear, they trust, and they start walking behind Jesus.
- (4) “and I give eternal life to them” – To know Jesus, to truly hear him and believe, is to experience eternal life as a gift from him.
- (5) “and they will never perish” – Eternal life is, in fact, eternal. If you have eternal life, you will never perish. And it does not mean the sheep will not die a physical death, but it means they will die no spiritual death. They will live forever in the new heaven and the new earth with God.
- (6) And finally, “no one will snatch them out of My hand. 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.” – We might understand from the previous promise “they will never perish” that the sheep have eternal security. But just so we are sure about this, Jesus makes this explicit promise.

And it ties in with promises he made back in chapter 6, “all that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out...and this is the will of him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day (6:37, 39-40).” Jesus adds here to those promises. It is building on the same idea. “No one will snatch them out of my hand.” Why not? Because, “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.” You can play that game that you might play with a little kid. And you hide a ball in your hand and close your fist and let them try to pry open your fingers. Nobody can do that to God, unless he let’s you. God’s hand is firm. And if he says nobody can snatch you out, nobody can snatch you out.

I recognize there is disagreement in the Christian world about whether or not a true believer can lose their salvation. I believe Jesus teaches here in John that they can’t. I believe this teaching is strongly affirmed in the theology of the Christian life taught by Paul.

And since Paul develops the idea of eternal security more thoroughly in Romans 5-8, and since I have addressed that teaching in my Romans podcast, I will just say a few words about something here, an argument I hear that bothers me. So, I will not develop the whole argument here. If you want my argument, you will have to go back and listen to Romans 5-8. But there is something I hear that people say, and it ultimately denies an essential aspect of the gospel. This is the problematic argument in a simplified form. People say, “Since we have free will to enter into relationship with God, we also have free will to leave.”

And I think, "Well, that sounds nice, but it is really false." There are times when we make a free will choice that we are free to then back out of the choice. But there are times when we are not free to back out of the choice. It is not that simple. And salvation is one of those times. It is wrong to understand salvation as merely the entering into a covenant with another person. The marriage relationship works to help us understand our salvation, that we say, "Yes to God." You say, "I do." You have to make that decision of the will, the volitional moment. But it is more than just a covenant, more than just a marriage. Something happens. So, that is part of the truth. It is just not the whole truth.

Along with bringing us into a covenant relationship with God based on grace, saving faith changes who we are as human beings. The new covenant believer has not just made a decision without any change, the new covenant believer experiences a spiritual regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Being born again is a true spiritual reality. It is not just a fiction of the mind. We are not just saying, "Oh, I am born again because I have made a decision." No when you made the decision, something happened to you. And you are born again.

And even if it is the human will that initiates the experience of being born again - which I do not think it is, I do not think that is what we learn in John, since no one can come unless the Father grants it, I think God has to do something in us - but even if we say that, if we say the human will is the decisive factor, we are often able to make decisions that cannot be undone. It is possible that we make a free will decision that you can't then change. Becoming pregnant, for example. That is a reality entered into by the human will. That creates an immortal life, a life that will live forever in death or will live forever in life. And once that new life has been conceived that reality cannot be undone by your will. You may have willfully entered into it, you cannot change it once it is done, once life exists. You can try to ignore it or erase it or unthink it, but you will not be able to. There is a new life. So, also with new birth. Once you place your faith in Jesus Christ, truly, you are born again of his Spirit. And it is not at all clear that you have any ability in your will to undo that new birth.

Now, you may disagree with me. That is fine. You may believe that it is possible for the spiritual regeneration of new birth to be undone. That is a longer conversation. But I do hope, and I encourage Christians to stop using the argument that just as we are free to enter into relationship with God, we are free also to leave relationship with God. Such an argument ignores the reality of the new birth by not addressing that fact that something transformative happens when a person truly believes. It is no longer simply a matter of the human will.

Okay. Back to our text, I believe Jesus is teaching here, that once you step into his grace, not only are all of your sins forgiven, so that there is now no condemnation, but you are also irretrievably taken into the care of God. Even if you try to walk away from Jesus, the Spirit in you will continue to cry out Abba Father. And Abba Father will never let you go. No one, not anything, is strong enough to snatch you out of his hand. Not even you.

To sum up the teaching here about the sheep. True belief brings about a spiritual response. The ears of the heart are open. If you truly believe that is a description of what has happened to you. You heard the voice of Jesus. You discovered that he knows you. And you followed after him. He has given you eternal life. You will not perish. You are held tight in the Father's hand.

Not only does the Father hold you, but so does Jesus, because they are one. In verse 30 he reminds us, "I and the Father are one."

That reminder is enough to incense the crowd. And they pick up stones to stone Jesus. And so, Jesus calls again on witnesses. We considered the witnesses more in-depth in chapter 5, so I am just going to point them out here to finish out the text.

The Call of Witnesses (31-42)

(1) First, Jesus calls on his works as witness. "I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?" The people retort, "It is not because of your works but because of your blasphemous identification with God."

Reflection questions

1. Read John 10:1-21. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
2. What different truths are communicated through the two different I am statements of Jesus in this passage: “I am the Door” and “I am the Good Shepherd”?
3. Based on this passage and the context of John up through this chapter, what is the abundant life Jesus offers and how is that life experienced?
4. Read John 10:22-42. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
5. Through the whole chapter, what truths stand out to you regarding the sheep? And how do you relate to that image yourself as a follower of Jesus?
6. Do you agree or disagree that Jesus is promising eternal security for those who believe? How would you support your opinion?
7. What do you think about Jesus’ quote of Psalm 82:6 in verse 34? Does it disturb you or confuse you? Read through Psalm 82 and think about it in connection with the broader context of John. How is the use of the Psalm a faith challenge for those who will consider the words of Jesus?
8. How do you feel at the end of the Psalm, reading verses 40-42? Does this feel like the end of a major section of the narrative? Why or why not?