

Forever Safe©

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Easter 4

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John 10:22-30 New Living Translation (NLT)

²² It was now winter and Jesus was in Jerusalem at the time of Hanukkah, the Festival of Dedication. ²³ He was in the Temple, walking through the section known as Solomon's Colonnade. ²⁴ The people surrounded him and asked, "How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

²⁵ Jesus replied, "I have already told you, and you don't believe me. The proof is the work I do in my Father's name. ²⁶ But you don't believe me because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, ²⁹ for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else.^[a] No one can snatch them from the Father's hand. ³⁰ The Father and I are one."

Footnotes:

- a. 10:29 Other manuscripts read *for what my Father has given me is more powerful than anything*; still others read *for regarding that which my Father has given me, he is greater than all*.

Gospel Question:

- 1) In this passage Jesus' talks about his sheep (his followers) recognizing his voice and following him. Have you ever felt like you've heard Jesus' voice? What was it like? If not, what might you imagine Jesus would call you to do?

²² *It was now winter and Jesus was in Jerusalem at the time of Hanukkah, the Festival of Dedication.*

Apparently, Jesus had stayed in Jerusalem since the fall. If we were to read back a little ways we would have heard that Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths, the Festival of the Harvest that lasted 8 days. But now, John tells us, it is winter and Jesus is still in Jerusalem for the Festival of Dedication, also known as Hanukkah.

It is the time when the Jews celebrate the rededication of the temple. Years before, a Syrian King had taken over the temple and defiled it by setting up an altar to his god – a pagan god. But in the 6th century BC, Judas Maccabeus and his brothers, reclaimed the temple, cleansed it and rededicated it to God. Every year, in December, the Jews continue to celebrate Hanukkah – the Festival of Dedication.

John says ²³ *He (Jesus) was in the Temple, walking through the section known as Solomon's Colonnade.*

Solomon's Colonnade, or portico, or porch, is the place where King Solomon would judge. This was the second temple, of course. The first one had been destroyed by the Babylonians. The second temple had been built by Herod the Great and this portico remained in Solomon's honor. It was the place where people would come to the king asking for justice or mercy and he would make his judgment.

Solomon's Portico faces the east, looking out over the Kidron Valley towards the Mount of Olives. The Kidron Valley is a sacred place in Israel. There is an ancient cemetery there and it is believed by many to be the place where the dead will be resurrected first when Jesus returns.

Solomon's Portico was 150 feet long, with double columns that supported a roof. Being on the eastern side of the temple it was the place most protected from winter.

The season is winter, but it reflects also the winter of Jesus' life – a place where he is already being judged, it would seem.

Throughout John, we hear the question raised by the religious rulers, "Who are you?" they want to know, trying to clarify Jesus' identity. Remember, John's Gospel is written to his own people who are Jews, trying to help them see and believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

²⁴ *The people (most translations say "The Jews, meaning the Jewish leaders – Pharisees, the Chief Priest, etc.) surrounded him and asked, "How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."*

But we can't help but wonder if they really want to know? Are they truly seeking to find out if Jesus is the long awaited Messiah? The Greek words, when translated into Modern Greek read, "How long will you annoy us? How long will you keep irritating us?"

It seems like that is really what is behind all their questions, doesn't it? Jesus, with all his works and authority in the Scriptures, proposes a threat to these leaders who have power over the people. It's rather annoying, we can imagine, for this miracle worker to

become more and more known and loved – and followed. His teaching was not always in line with their teaching either. Yes, they were definitely irritated!

Jesus answers their question by saying he has already shown them who he is. Actions are louder than words. He has demonstrated who he is and where he comes from by the miracles – the healing, the teaching, forgiving – all has come from the authority and power of God. And he and the Father are one.

He goes on to use the sheep and shepherd imagery that he had used before, in this same chapter. He had already told them he was the Good Shepherd and he reminded them that sheep only follow their own shepherd because the voice of their shepherd is the voice that is familiar to them.

Another shepherd, or a thief, could come in and call them but they won't follow, they will scatter. They know it is not the one they trust – not the shepherd whose flock they belong to.

Jesus tells the Temple Leaders, “You don't believe me, because you are not my sheep.”²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

Which brings us back to the question: How do you hear the Shepherds voice? How do you know Jesus is your Good Shepherd?

Do you believe he is your Good Shepherd? Which comes first – belief or following? You would think that one would have to believe in something or someone before they committed to following, wouldn't you?

But, the truth is, often times it is the other way around. David Lose, the commentator I quote often, says that he thought that way for a while until he studied psychology. Studies showed if someone puts a political sign in their yard, they became more committed to that political leader. If they recycled for a month, they became more passionate about recycling.

As a pastor, I have talked too many people who are at different levels of believe in Jesus as the Savior. People are searching for answers. They are asking the same questions these Jewish leaders were asking Jesus – “Who are you? If you are the Messiah, then tell us.”

But, the very fact that they are asking and that they are coming and “trying out church,” the fact that they are willing to be a part of the fellowship and take part in the mission of the church tells me that they are a part of the flock.

David Lose says, “we tend to justify our actions by shaping our convictions and even identity – often unconsciously – to explain and support those actions. Which means that

our popular exclamation – *I'll believe it when I see it* – should probably be modified slightly but significantly: *I'll believe it when I do it.*"

He goes on to say: "All of this helps me make sense of what Jesus is saying. Yes, those who believe in him are part of his flock and follow him. And, at the same time, those who are following him are more likely to believe in him and identify as part of his flock. We tend to separate out "believing" and "following," but according both to Jesus and modern psychologists the two actually go together." (www.goodpreacher.com)

You are a part of the flock of the Good Shepherd. Even if you aren't sure you know him, He knows you!

There was a story on Facebook that I shared on my page about an elderly man who went to the doctor to have stitches removed from his thumb. He told the doc he was in a hurry because he had a 9 a.m. appointment. He said his wife was in a nursing home with Alzheimer's and he had breakfast with her every morning.

The doc asked if his wife wouldn't understand if he was late this one time and the man answered that his wife did not even know who he is. She hadn't known him for years.

The doctor was stunned by this! He said that he was surprised the man made the commitment to keep going every day when his wife didn't even know him.

The man answered, "She doesn't know me, but I still know who she is."

Thing is – even if you aren't sure who Jesus is, he knows who you are. You are his because you are a child of God. He knows everything about you. He watches over you, protects you, and has saved you. Jesus, the Shepherd, keeps you safe because the power of God is in him.

The power of God allowed your salvation to be accomplished in his Son's death on a cross. And the power of God, which Jesus says is greater than anything else, raised him from death to life and promises to do the same for you.

Jesus says, ²⁸ "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish." It reminds us of what Jesus said to Nicodemus (who, by the way, was a Pharisee who did come to believe) – "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him will not perish but will have eternal life." (John 3:16)

No one can ever snatch you away from Jesus. David, the Psalmist, who had plenty of experience with shepherds and sheep wrote, with great trust: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul."

In this beloved 23rd Psalm, he writes, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me."

Little sheep, you are a part of the flock of the Good Shepherd. He has promised that nothing can snatch you away from him. Paul writes in Romans 8 that nothing can separate us from God's love. Jesus himself makes that promise.

The Lord is my (your) Shepherd and you shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. And that is a promise that you can cling to.

Do you have faith, even the size of a mustard seed? What can you do to grow that seed so that it sprouts and becomes a tree? What ways can you grow as a follower so that you can hear the Shepherds voice even stronger and be assured that you are forever safe?

Jesus said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you." Believe that and follow in ways that you will come to know him better. Reading, studying, participating in his works, acting as he acted, loving as he loved.

His voice will become louder and louder and you will become stronger.

But never forget that you are his and that nothing can snatch you away.

Amen.

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