

Sheep Listen
John 10:22-30

In a lot of Good Shepherd sermons we hear a number of uncomplimentary things about sheep. We don't have that in our Gospel reading today. The two main things about the sheep in our text is that they listen and they follow.

All sheep are the same in this way. They listen and the follow. The distinction Jesus makes hinges on who they listen to and follow.

The setting for His words is in Jerusalem in winter. It is the time of the Feast of Dedication. This was a twofold celebration. It reminded the people of God's presence in His Holy Temple, and how the Temple had been cleansed and made holy again after being defiled by the Romans.

Jesus, the Son of God, is present in His temple when He is approached by some with a question: *"How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."*

What do you think? Do these sheep want Jesus to answer this question so they can listen Him and follow Him? It would be good if that was the case, but it does not seem so from the answer Jesus gives. *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, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep."* No, they are already listening to and following another voice. They ask this question that they may justify their dark deeds.

And, in fact, the verses right after our reading record: *The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me? The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God."*

Jesus did not die at their hands that day. He is, indeed, God and is in control of all things. He would eventually die at their hands, but that would be according to His Father's plan, not at the whim of these wayward sheep.

Does that describe us? Are we wayward sheep? A case could be made. Our accuser does point his finger at our many sins in thought word and deed. He would remind us that we daily sin much against God and against those around us. He would remind us that we justly deserve God's wrath. He would lead us into despair.

But Jesus isn't about to let that happen. He has something to say. *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and 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. I and the Father are one."*

"I and the Father are one." That's the one thing those in our text wanted to hear. They didn't believe it, but it was the excuse they needed to pick up rocks and throw them at Jesus until He was dead. The rest of what Jesus said went

in one ear and out the other, because they were not among His sheep.

We are! And we listen to what Jesus says and believe it! “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them...*” That’s us! That’s you! Jesus calls you His sheep, and He knows you. He knows every spot, wrinkle, and blemish and loves you just the same. You didn’t have to get rid of all those things to become His sheep or to earn His love. God the Father chose you before you were even born to be Jesus’ sheep. “This precious lamb, this precious lamb, this precious lamb, these precious lambs, My Son, are yours. He will listen to you. She will follow you. They will listen and follow.

What does Jesus do for His beloved sheep? “*I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and 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.*”

Jesus’ earthly life came to an end, and so will yours. Jesus did die at the hands of sinful men. He did it to fulfill Scripture – to give His life as a ransom for many. He died for the sins of all. Many receive the forgiveness He earned because they listen and follow. They hear His voice speaking to them in the Scripture which tells of His perfect life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection.

Jesus lived and died, but He also rose from the grave. Alleluia! Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed, Alleluia!) Jesus’ body rose from the dead to everlasting life. We, His

sheep, have the promise that we, too, will rise from the grave to live with Him eternally.

The physical death that will come to us all, and cause our family and friends to grieve, is not the end. We will not perish. As Jesus’ sheep, He gives us eternal life with Him.

You are in the hand of your Savior, Jesus Christ, and in the hand of His Father. That sounds certain. And it is! You have the promise: “*no one will snatch them out of my hand... no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.*”

Some of you are in a rough place right now. You are grieving a loss. You, or someone you love, has health struggles. The cares of this life weigh you down. That may be where you are, but that is not who you are. You are Jesus’ beloved sheep. And what does He say about you? “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*” Amen.