

Jesus' Sheep

JOHN 10:27-29

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****COVID-19 SPLIT SERVICE****

It is a great blessing to be able to be with you this morning. Hopefully everybody has the elements for the Lord's Supper (either from home or from the table in the entryway). We plan on partaking of the Lord's Supper immediately after our study this morning, we then plan on singing one song before we head outside to get a good dose of fellowship. We will be singing, "Footprints of Jesus," so, if you have a songbook at home, this would be a good time to be finding "Footprints of Jesus" in your book. And if you do not have a songbook at home, let me know, and we would be glad to get you one so that you can follow along.

This morning, I am thankful for those of you who have done so well with the face coverings, and the distancing, and the signing up for worship, and the singing from the wall, and all of it. We are in new territory with all of this, aren't we! We want to be safe, we want to respect the authorities, but above all, we are here to honor God. And so, we have come together this morning, split into two groups, doing the best we can. And we are thankful for your patience, and your support, and for your encouraging words over these past few months.

As you can see, we are starting (once again) with a summary of our role in God's plan for our salvation. The good news is that Jesus died, was buried, and was raised up on the third day. We obey the good news by believing it, by turning away from sin, by confessing Jesus as the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be briefly buried in water for the forgiveness of sins. And once again, this morning we have several examples, starting with Angelo, who was baptized just a few days ago at the Southwest congregation in Phoenix, Arizona. We are thankful for Angelo's good example this week.

The next example comes to us from the Myrtle Avenue congregation out in Long Beach, California. They didn't give the man's name, but we certainly rejoice with our new brother in California.

And then we also have two this week from Mutare, Zimbabwe! These were both posted by someone with the name of Trymore Tizola. What an awesome name! Trymore! And the two women being baptized here are Marvelous and Emma. So, we rejoice with our new Christian sisters over in Zimbabwe. And again, we have these pictures this morning by way of encouragement. What they have done this week, you can do this morning. If

you have any questions or concerns, if you would like to study further, please get in touch. Send me a message, give a call, or pull me aside when we are outside in a little bit, and I would be glad to open the word with you.

This morning, I would invite you to be turning with me to just a few verses in John 10, and we'll be looking at a verse that is often taken out of context. We'll get there together in just a moment, but I'm referring to John 10:28, where Jesus refers to his sheep, and in passing (as a part of a much larger conversation), he says that he ***"give[s] eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand."*** Obviously, many have taken this verse and have tried to use it to suggest that once we are saved, there is no way for us to ever be lost.

However, as we try to disprove this idea by pointing out all of the other passages suggesting that we CAN fall away, it's very easy to go to the other extreme, where we end up constantly living in fear that we might lose our salvation without even realizing it, and we might actually miss the comfort in this passage. The solution, it seems, is to go back and to look at this passage in context. Many times through the years, I've said that when somebody uses a scripture to try to teach something that's not right, we can usually fix that by simply reading the surrounding verses. So, if somebody quotes a passage that seems to prove some bizarre theory, we need to start by reading a few verses before and after it, and that will usually resolve the issue. And as we are about to discover, that is certainly the case with this one.

In John 10, Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd, and his people are his sheep. So, in John 10:28, when Jesus refers to giving eternal life to ***"them,"*** we need to look around to see who the ***"them"*** are. The ***"them"*** are Jesus' sheep! This morning, then, as we think about the promise that Jesus' sheep will never perish and will never be snatched from his hand, I want us to think for a few moments about the relationship between the sheep and the shepherd and the conditions that make this promise the kind of promise we can believe. I want this to be a comfort, not a passage that gives us any kind of false hope. So, the question is: How do we know that we are Jesus' sheep?

Most of us, of course, do not look like sheep! We usually don't eat grass. We don't usually make sheep noises (unless, of course, you're eating gyros in our family, which is probably why my wife doesn't like gyros). We don't have four legs. Some of us do have hair that's white like wool, but generally speaking, we don't look like sheep. So, what are these qualities that sheep have that make them qualify for the Lord's promise here?

Let's look at the passage itself, and then let's look at what it means to be the Lord's sheep. The passage is John 10:27-29, where Jesus says this,

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.

So again, let's look at what it means to be referred to as Jesus' ***"sheep,"*** especially in light of the promise that the Lord's sheep will never perish. We need more Jesus; so, according to Jesus, what does it mean to be a sheep?

I. **First of all, in the passage itself, Jesus says that his sheep HEAR HIS VOICE.**

So, the sheep Jesus is talking about here are the sheep who LISTEN. And in this case, it's in the present tense, indicating that it's an ongoing kind of listening – not just listening here and there, but this is an ongoing habit of hearing the Lord's voice – constant attention. In fact, earlier in this chapter, Jesus talks about the sheep knowing his voice, and recognizing his voice, and listening to him exclusively.

We know that we are often able to recognize people by their voice, by the way they speak. Years ago, as part of a communication minor, I took an entire class on "Voice and Articulation." For an entire semester, we studied the human voice and what makes us unique. Our voices are affected by the size and shape of our bodies, our throats are different, our teeth are different, our nasal cavities are all different, our lungs are different, our diaphragms are different, our vocal cords are all different. And then we all pronounce things in different ways, we have varying rates of speech, and varying tones, and different styles and accents. And often, we get a call from somebody, and within the first word or two we know who it is on the other end. And what is true for us is also true of sheep. A shepherd in the ancient world could call out to his sheep in a communal sheep pen, and his sheep would recognize his unique voice. And so, there is a sorting that would take place very quickly, based on hearing the voice of their shepherd. And what is true of sheep is also true of us. The voice of Jesus is unique. His words stand out as being different. We hear his voice in scripture, and we know: This is the Good Shepherd!

So what? What does this mean for us? It means that if we are his sheep, we listen! If we are truly his sheep, we pay attention. We stop, we turn our heads, and we hear what the Lord says to us in his word, ***"he who has ears to hear, let him hear."*** We read, we study, we learn. So, does the guarantee in John 10:28 apply to us? Will we live forever? Will we never perish? Well, it depends! And the question really is: Are we listening? Are we hearing the voice of the shepherd? This doesn't mean that we understand everything, but it means that we are interested, that we pay attention, that we hear his voice. So, first of all, then, Jesus' sheep will listen.

II. **The second big idea here is that Jesus KNOWS HIS SHEEP.**

And this knowledge is more than just knowing they exist; but instead, this refers to an intimate, close relationship. We might compare it to knowing a member of the family. I might recognize somebody if I meet them out in public somewhere, but I know my wife and children in a much deeper way. And that seems to be what Jesus is saying here. He's making this promise of eternal life, not just to any sheep, but to the sheep that he knows.

Back then, a shepherd might be with his sheep 24/7 for weeks or months at a time – moving from place to place, looking for water, finding new sources of food – and along the way, the shepherd would obviously need to sleep near his sheep, he might need to bandage wounds or treat them for various conditions, he might need to go searching if one of them wandered off, and so on. It was a close relationship. For us, then, the question is: Does the Lord know us personally? What is our relationship status? Do we interact on a regular basis? Are we in the Word? Do we go to the Lord in prayer? And like hearing the Lord, this one also depends on us a bit, doesn't it? Relationships don't usually work if they are totally one-sided. For him to know us, we have to be a part of that. I'm thinking of what Jesus said back in Matthew 7:23 as he anticipated the disobedient showing up at the judgment and expecting to be saved, but he will declare to them, ***"I never KNEW you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."*** His knowledge of us, then, depends at least partially on OUR behavior. It's not that he's incapable of knowing us, but there are many who refuse to be KNOWN by the Lord.

But let's also take some comfort from this passage. If we listen to his voice, he knows us! What a blessing that is! He knows our strengths and weaknesses. He knows our fears. He sees when we are heading down a dangerous path. He knows when life is hard. He knows when we are sad. He knows when we are tempted. And in spite of everything, he loves us anyway! What a comfort it is to be known. We like finding a doctor who knows us and cares about us. For years now, I've been seeing a nurse practitioner through GHC. I would have a hard time even explaining what it means to be an Advanced Practice Nurse Practitioner, but in my mind, she has the knowledge of a doctor but the heart of a nurse. She's like a doctor who actually cares! I don't get the feeling I'm annoying her by being in her office. There is a sense in which she "**knows**" me. And that's maybe somewhat similar to what's happening here in John 10. Jesus "**knows**" his sheep. Of course, I could stop going to the clinic on a regular basis, and the relationship would suffer, wouldn't it? And in the same way, Jesus knowing us as his sheep is an awesome blessing, but it is also somewhat conditional. So, Jesus makes this promise to those sheep that are KNOWN.

III. As we return to the text itself, the last characteristic here is that these sheep actually FOLLOW Jesus.

So, they LISTEN, they are KNOWN by Him, and they FOLLOW. To "**follow**" is to "be on the same road as" somebody, to be going in the same direction. And just like listening, this isn't a one-time decision, but this is continual. We see movement down a path. We think about what Jesus over in Luke 9:23, "***If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and FOLLOW Me.***" The same word is used. The sheep that are promised eternal life are those who are continually following the Lord. So, there is listening involved (we need to understand what to do), but we must also actually DO what we are told to do. We think of what John wrote in 1 John 2:3-6,

³ By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. ⁴ The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; ⁵ but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: ⁶ the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

So, are we sheep? Are we promised eternal life? It depends: Are we keeping his commandments? Are we keeping his word? Are we walking in the same manner as he walked? Are we following? This isn't necessarily perfection, but are following? Are we on the same path? Are we heading in the same direction? Are we obedient?

Conclusion:

Here at the end, we get back to where we started: The promise that as his sheep, Jesus gives us eternal life, that we will never perish, and that no one will snatch us out of his hand. Is that true? Can we rely on that promise? Absolutely! But we need to remember: This promise is made to sheep who listen, it's made to those who are known by him, and it's made to those who follow. This doesn't mean that we are sinlessly perfect, but as long as we are with him, nobody can take us out of his hand. It's the difference between a kidnapping and a run-away. As God's children, we will never be snatched, but we are not prisoners. We do have the freedom to leave on our own. And so, the encouragement this morning is to hear and follow the Good Shepherd, so that we are, in fact, KNOWN by Him.

As we close our study, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

Thank you for caring for us and for watching over us. Thank you for calming our hearts when we are stressed and when we are facing illness. Thank you for leading us in paths of righteousness. Our cup truly overflows. Thank you for sending Jesus to this earth as the Good Shepherd, and thank you for the wonderful promise of a life after this one. You have been so good to us. When we doubt, we pray that we would turn to your word for strength, that we would listen and follow.

You are the great and awesome God, and we come to you today in the name of your Son, Jesus.
AMEN.

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