

I AND THE FATHER ARE ONE

John 10:22–30 (No. 57)
Treasuring Christ Church – Pastor Boyd Johnson
February 4, 2018

INTRODUCTION

Text

John 10:22–30: "At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." 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. 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.""

The Feast of Dedication

Since chapter 7, we've been studying Jesus' ministry during the Feast of Booths, an annual celebration that was the highlight of the year for the Jews that took place in September or October. He arrived to Jerusalem from Galilee during the festival, declared himself to be the Light of the world, the Shepherd over the flock of God, and the Door to the sheepfold, as the only way to salvation, and healed a man of blindness. Meanwhile, the Jews ridiculed him, called him names, slandered him, sought to arrest him, and even tried to stone him.

As we pick back up in 10:22, we notice right away that Jesus is in Jerusalem for another feast: "At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem." The Feast of Dedication was in December. So between verse 21 and verse 22 a couple of months have elapsed. And now we're about three months out from Jesus' crucifixion. What he did in those months between verse 21 and 22, none of the gospels indicate. Perhaps he stuck around Jerusalem or the surrounding areas and lay low with his disciples. Perhaps his public ministry continued. Or perhaps he traveled elsewhere. Whatever he did during that time, the Holy Spirit, didn't think it was necessary for us to know.

But the time was now the Feast of Dedication and Jesus was in Jerusalem. "It was winter"—sometime around mid-December and the last of the feasts during the year, as far as our calendar is concerned. If you look to the Old Testament to learn about the Feast of Dedication, you won't find it. This was a feast that became a tradition during the 400 year gap between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament, which we call the intertestamental period.

This was another dark period in Israel's history. It was a time of silence from heaven with no new revelation and no prophets of God. For the most part, it was also a time of mass apostacy among the Jews. It was also a period of struggle and persecution for the Jews. At one point, in the year 167 B.C., a Syrian king named Antiochus Epiphanes came and overtook the land of

Israel. He was a particularly cruel ruler who thought highly of himself. His name meant Antiochus the Supreme One and he thought he was the personal manifestation of Zeus and Baal. The Jews had a nickname for him. They changed one letter in his name and called him Antiochus Epimanes, which means moonstruck—in other words, Antiochus the Madman.

It was a fitting description. He wanted to unify his empire so he imposed Greek culture on all the lands under his rule. This was called Hellenization, which is a word that comes from the Greek word for Greek. He wanted to “Greek-ify” Israel.

What could unify a people more than a common religion? So he mandated the worship of Zeus and banned all other religions, including Judaism. He outlawed Jewish sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem, banned observance of the Sabbath, forbade circumcision, made it illegal to read or own a copy of the Old Testament. When his troops found copies of the Hebrew Scriptures, they destroyed them and condemned to death anyone who possessed them.

As bad as all of this was, he went further. He turned the temple into a temple of Zeus with an altar bearing his image. He also had pigs slaughtered in the Holy of Holies. This was an abomination to the Jews because pigs were unclean animals and pagans had overtaken the sacred temple. The Jews were required to make sacrifices to the Greek gods or die.

Soon, a group of Jews rose up under the leadership of the revolutionary, Judas Maccabaeus. He was a cunning military leader who used hit-and-run tactics and guerrilla warfare to attack the Syrian army with much success.

Judas Maccabaeus was most remembered for what he did in December of 164 B.C. He marched to Jerusalem and won it back for the Jews. When he came to the temple, it was a mess. Weeds and bushes reportedly grew in the courtyards. The temple needed repairs both inside and outside. The holy vessels and curtains were gone. And there was the question of what to do with the altars that had been used in pagan sacrifices.

So he cleansed the temple, rebuilt the altar, and saw to it that the temple was restored. He rededicated the temple to God on the 25th day of the Jewish month of Kislev (mid-December). As they celebrated the rededication of the temple, the story goes that they only found olive oil enough for one or two days to light the lamps. But, miraculously, the lamps stayed lit for eight days, so they celebrated for eight days.

In memory of the rededication of the temple, the Jews thereafter celebrated each year on the 25th day of the month Kislev for eight days by lighting lamps in their homes. This annual celebration became known as the Feast of Dedication or the Feast of Lights, which we know as Hanukkah.

So the Feast of Dedication wasn't a biblical celebration. It was more of a political holiday. It also wasn't a festival that you had to travel to Jerusalem to celebrate. The Jews celebrated in their homes with candles and family reunions.

But Jesus was in Jerusalem at the time. It was winter—it was the cold, rainy months—and (v. 23) “Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon.” The colonnade of Solomon was the covered walkway supported by columns on the east side of the temple courtyard. The colonnade opened toward the courtyard and was closed to the outside. It was roughly the size of

two football fields in length.

This was an area that the scribes normally held their schools. The colonnade of Solomon, also called Solomon's Portico, was so named because it was thought that the structure dated to the time of Solomon (though that probably wasn't the case). You might remember that this was one of the early meeting places of the first Christians (Acts 3:11; 5:12). In Acts, we find Christians gathered there and proclaiming Christ, and the apostles performed many signs and wonders there.

On this day, Jesus was walking freely in the temple. That's amazing because only a few months earlier they wanted to stone him at the temple. Maybe there had been a cooling off period.

Confronting the Christ

But before long, the Jews found him (v. 24): "So the Jews gathered around him. . ." The phrase "gathered around" means they surrounded him. They circled around him. They had a question for him, and they wanted an answer. They said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." The form of the verb "said" has the idea that they were persistent. They wanted an answer and they wanted it now. It wasn't a friendly question either. Literally, "How long will you lift up (suspend) our soul?" "How long will you take away our life?" You've left us hanging in the air as to who you are. The question has plagued us, troubled us, annoyed us. Our life has been taken away from us as we've been vexed by you. End the suspense, Jesus, and tell us plainly who you are.

They charged him with ambiguity. They imply that Jesus hasn't been forthright or clear in the past. This was a ploy. They had him surrounded and they wanted a confession. If they could get him to say unambiguously that he was the Christ, then they could charge him and destroy him once and for all. You can almost hear them sneer: Tell us plainly, don't be timid or sly, tell us if *you* (of all people) are the Christ. They had the right question. They had the wrong attitude because their hearts were hard.

Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe." Many are puzzled why Jesus at this point didn't come right out and simply say the words, "Yes, I am the Christ." Skeptics even use this fact to say that Jesus never claimed to be the Christ (*contra*, John 4:25-26; 10:36; 18:36-37; Matt. 16:15-17; 26:63-68; 27:11; Lk. 4:18-21).

To understand why he answered as he did, consider the dominant presumption at the time. The Jews were preoccupied with the idea that the Christ would be a political and military figure who would lead them to victory over their Roman oppressors, much like Judas Maccabaeus. To say, "Yes, I am the Christ," when they really didn't understand who the Christ would be would actually mislead them. How many of the Jews considered the Christ to be the suffering servant who would die on behalf of the people? How many of the Jews considered that the Christ's mission on earth would be brief before he returned to the Father? How many of the Jews considered the Christ to be coequal with God, very God himself? So when Jesus came, he had to teach people what the Christ came to do and what he would be like.

He said, "I told you." What does Jesus mean by, "I told you"? We only need look at the

context. It's no accident that John records what he does in the first half of chapter 10, skips over a couple of months, and then records these words of Jesus.

What did Jesus tell the Jews? I am the good shepherd. I'm the one who came to gather the flock of God from the fold of Israel and, indeed, the nations. I'm the one who cares for the flock and leads them to abundant life. I am the door. I'm the only way anyone can be delivered from dangers greater than the Romans—that is, the dangers of sin, death, and the wrath of God.

He was saying, "You can't understand it if I tell you I am the Christ, so I told you in another way—by means of a word picture—that you should have understood." And earlier, Jesus told them, "Before Abraham was, I am"—a clear claim to be God himself. And he said I am the light of the world—I'm the way out of spiritual darkness. And he said I am the bread of heaven—I give you the spiritual food you need for eternal life.

In his speeches to the Jews, he had deftly used the Old Testament to demonstrate that he fulfilled prophecy. He had repeatedly said that he was sent from the Father to do his will perfectly. He said that he was able to take up his life again. Jesus did tell them. He told them in many different ways that should have reshaped their understanding of the identity of the Christ.

He hadn't been silent as to who he was. The Jews were disingenuous to say otherwise. The problem wasn't lack of clarity or evidence or argument. The problem was sin. Because of their sin, they did not believe. Because of their sin, they didn't understand. Because of their sin, they didn't hear what he had told them plainly. The problem is always sin. That's why people don't believe. Sin blinds. Nobody was ever reasoned into heaven. The Jews repeatedly rejected the evidence Jesus gave them.

He not only told them he was the Christ, he showed them. "The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me." Both his words and his works proved he was the Christ—the Anointed One, the one sent from God. He healed the blind man. He walked on the water. He made bread and fish out of thin air. He healed the lame man. He healed an official's son from afar. He turned water into wine. Is that plain?

No one but the Christ could heal the blind. The Christ was to come as the anointed one of God in the power of the Spirit and the blind would receive their sight, the lame would walk, the lepers would be cleansed, the deaf would hear, the dead would be raised, and the poor would have good news preached to them (Matt. 11:4-5; Lk. 4:18-19). Jesus did all that.

All his words and all his works pointed in one direction. In that sense, he had told them and his works bore witness about who he was. The conclusion that he was the Christ was inescapable.

Yet They Didn't Believe

So why didn't they believe? Jesus told them (v. 26), "You do not believe because you are not among my sheep." They weren't counted among Jesus' sheep, so they didn't believe.

A few weeks ago, I called your attention to this verse to notice the order of the clauses. It doesn't say, "You are not among my sheep because you do not believe." Rather, he says,

“You do not believe because you are not among my sheep.” That is, we don’t become Jesus’ sheep by believing. Rather, we come to believe in Jesus because we are his sheep.

If they were of his sheep, they would believe. But since they are not of his sheep, they don’t believe. Had they been his sheep, they would have recognized him as the shepherd and the Christ and believed. As for Jesus’ sheep: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” That’s the nature of true sheep.

In contrast, these Jews didn’t hear his voice, Jesus didn’t know them savingly, and they didn’t follow him. So they wouldn’t believe what Jesus had plainly said and done.

Not Just Christ, But Co-Equal with God

Jesus didn’t stop there. He would tell them more than they asked. He said of his sheep, “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” Who can grant eternal life other than the one who is himself eternal?

John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”

Jesus has the power to give his sheep eternal life because he is the eternal God. As God, no one can snatch the sheep out of his hand. Snatch is a violent word. No one is strong enough to rip the sheep away from his grip. This is a tremendously comforting verse about the eternal security of all true believers. Our eternal security rests not on our feeble grip on Christ, but his strong grip on us.

If Satan could rip us from Christ’s grip, he would. If you in your sin could wrestle yourself from Christ’s grip, you would. But none of Christ’s sheep are lost because he holds them.

Isaiah 40:11: “He tends his flock like a shepherd; he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart.”

Furthermore, Jesus says (v. 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 the sheep are in the grip of both the Father and the Son. Two hands are holding you at all times, Christian.

Eternal security, perseverance of the saints, once-saved-always-saved, these are doctrines which are based on the character of God. You stay saved because God has a hold of you. Jesus and the Father are united in this work of keeping you eternally safe (v. 30): “I and the Father are one.”

What a comfort! They have a united purpose in rescuing us and keeping us. In just six words, we find an ocean of meaning. The word “one” is neuter not masculine. That is, they are one thing, not one person. They don’t have the same identity, but they have the same essence. The Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father. But they are one in nature and purpose, even as they are distinguishable in personhood.

The word “one” keeps us from the ancient heresy of Arianism, which denies the unity of their essence and believes Jesus as no more than a man. On the other hand, the phrase, “I and the

Father” keeps us from the heresy of modalism, which denies the diversity of the persons in the Godhead.

The Athanasian Creed sums up the biblical teaching on Trinity very well: “There is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost: but the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal.” That’s simply an expansion of what Jesus said here in six words. Jesus is co-equal with the Father because Jesus himself is God just as the Father is God. The Jews understood what he was saying even if liberal critics today do not. They heard Jesus claiming to be God and picked up stones to stone him for blasphemy in verse 31 and then justifying their actions saying in verse 33, “You, being a man, make yourself God.”

He wasn’t making himself God. He is God.

CONCLUSION

Here, during the time of the Feast of Dedication, when the Jews were lighting candles to celebrate the dawn of hope from a past deliverance, they rejected the true light of the world who could deliver them from their present darkness. Don’t make the same mistake. That is a mistake that will lead to eternal damnation.

He is the Christ. He is God. For all of us who are his sheep and have believed, take comfort—though you are feeble and weak, God and Christ are mighty and strong. They will keep you, even as you are unable to keep yourself.