

Safe in His Hand

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[0 : 00] If you have your Bible with you, please open it up to John chapter 10. John chapter 10, we are coming down to verse 22 here, a new section.

John chapter 22, John chapter 10 verse 22. Let me read the first couple of verses for us this morning.

Then came the festival of dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts, walking in Solomon's colonnade.

So John now gives us a sense of the timeline here in his account of the story of Jesus. And the last clear indication that we had of that was back in chapter 7 verse 1, where he told us it was the Feast of Tabernacles.

And it seems that most of what's happened in between then and now happened closer to the Feast of Tabernacles. But now John kind of fast forwards a few months.

[1 : 02] The Feast of Tabernacles happened in the fall. And this is now another festival, the Festival of Dedication happening in Jerusalem, which happens in kind of our calendar in December.

And there's another major event that comes in the story of Jesus here. So I'm going to just share with you a little bit of what the Festival of Dedication is about.

It's not a festival that was commanded in the Old Testament. In fact, it only started being celebrated 200 years or so before Jesus. It's known today as Hanukkah.

And it marked the date that the Jews revolted against an oppressive ruler, the Syrian Antiochus Epiphanes. They regained independence.

They recaptured the temple and they reconsecrated it and rededicated it to God. And then every year after that, they began to celebrate this. It was also called the Feast of Lights.

[2 : 02] There's lots more that could be said about it, but that's the gist. And John tells us that this is the occasion of the next part of the story of Jesus. This festival is on and the people, again, as they usually do, all kind of converge on Jerusalem to celebrate and mark the festival.

It's now winter. And Jesus, John tells us, was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's colonnade. That was kind of a covered part of the temple, like a portico with large pillars.

So Jesus is walking there. And John tells us in verse 24, The Jews who were there gathered around Jesus, saying, How long will you keep us in suspense?

If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly. This is somewhat amusing to read in the original language. A little more literally, they say, How long will you take away our lives?

Tell us plainly if you are the Christ, the Messiah. In other words, stop wasting our time and just tell us. Are you the Messiah or aren't you?

[3 : 15] Verse 25, Jesus answered, I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep.

My sheep listen to my voice. I know them, and they follow me. So the Jews gathered around him.

They're asking Jesus to tell them plainly whether he is the Messiah. And Jesus says, I already told you, and you do not believe. Notice that it's the present tense, like you do not believe in me.

Even now, in this moment, you still do not believe. And we might be tempted to think, well, that's a pretty reasonable question that they're asking.

Like, Jesus, we've been waiting patiently for a long time now. We've been following your story. How long are you going to leave us wondering? But judging by what Jesus says to them in response, this is not the kind of question that they're asking.

[4 : 23] Jesus makes it crystal clear. They have already heard the things that he's been saying. I did tell you. They have already seen the works that he's been doing, the miracles, the signs, the things I do in my Father's name.

They bear witness about me. And yet they are still refusing to believe Jesus. More likely, this question that they're asking is an attempt to subtly pressure Jesus into making the claim outright, publicly, to be the Messiah.

And they're hoping to use that against him. to accuse him, to go after him. Jesus says to them, I did tell you. Now, it's not as though Jesus has publicly said, I am the Messiah.

He did say that, pretty much word for word, in private, to various individuals. the woman at the well, in John chapter 4. He said, not quite in word for word, but basically said, I am the Messiah to his disciples, in Matthew 16.

He said, what equates to, I am the Messiah, to the man who had been born blind, when he tells him that he's the Son of Man, just a couple chapters ago. But Jesus has never publicly, and openly declared word for word, I am the Messiah.

[5 : 43] In the more public settings, he often uses metaphors, and analogies. But to anybody who's been listening, it's pretty obvious, that in all these metaphors, and analogies, Jesus is basically saying, I am the Messiah.

He's told them that he's been sent from heaven. He's told them that he speaks for his father, God. He's told them that he's the Son of Man, and all the messianic meaning, that goes with that, we've talked about.

He's told them that he's the bread of life, the bread of heaven, the light of the world. Back in John chapter 5, he's told them that he's the one, who will judge at the end, with the authority given to him by God.

And now here in John chapter 10, he's told them that he is the true shepherd, of God's flock. The one who will shepherd, and lead God's sheep. Just like King David, was God's chosen shepherd, and king long ago.

So, I did tell you, says Jesus. Not only did I tell you, but the works that I am doing, in my father's name, testify about me.

[6 : 58] You want some evidence? Some proof that I am the Messiah? Look at the things that I've been doing. The miracles, the healings, the signs. They're things only God can do. You've heard all I've done, and you've seen all I've done, all I've done, and yet you do not believe me.

And then Jesus goes a step further, in verse 26, and tells them why they don't believe. You do not believe, because you are not my sheep.

Or as some translations say, because you are not of, you are not among my sheep. We're going to leave that one alone for today. It's not the first time we've heard something like that, that Jesus said, and it requires careful consideration.

We might come back to it in the weeks ahead. But for today, it's enough simply to say, the reason they refuse to believe in Jesus, even though they've seen his works, and heard his words, is that they are not his sheep.

Jesus then goes on to tell us, what is true about his sheep, again, here in verse 27. Three things.

[8 : 14] He says, my sheep listen to my voice. I know them, and they follow me. They listen to my voice.

And here, listening implies more than just listening. It implies faith. It implies obedience. It's not just that they hear what Jesus is saying, like these Jews that he's talking to right now.

It's that they listen. They really listen to him. They accept his words. They obey them. They follow me, says Jesus. They do what I ask them to do.

They recognize me as their leader, their shepherd, their Messiah. Verse 28. Jesus goes on.

He says, I give them, that's my sheep, I give my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish.

[9 : 12] No one will snatch them out of my hand. Here it is again. Jesus declares plainly that he will give eternal life to his people.

Life that lasts forever. He says that for his sheep, they will never perish. And this translation in English is a little bit flat.

Literally, it's, they will not ever perish unto the ages. It's a very emphatic way of saying it. They will live forever and ever and never.

Not die, but perish. He's not saying they will never die, but rather that he will give to them everlasting life. Life that goes on forever.

And we know from other places in this gospel that that everlasting part of this life will begin after they die. When Jesus, as he said earlier, raises them back to life from the dead at the last day.

[10 : 15] And we'll hear more about the resurrection in the chapter ahead. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.

I love this statement that Jesus makes. This is Jesus' way of saying, you see these sheep of mine, these followers of mine, you can't touch them.

Let's think about these words. These words about snatching the sheep take us back to what Jesus said a few months earlier, earlier in chapter 10.

He was telling us there, really likening the Pharisees to thieves and robbers. Talking about how the true shepherd uses the gate, but those who aren't the true shepherd, they go in another way.

Like they climb over the wall to try and snatch the sheep. He talked about how thieves and robbers only really come around for one purpose.

[11 : 21] To steal. To kill. To destroy. They come to snatch the sheep for themselves. To steal them away from their true shepherd.

He also likened the religious leaders, the Pharisees, to the wolf. He talked about how the wolf comes around and when he does, the hired hand runs away and then the wolf attacks the sheep.

That's actually the same word for snatch. It literally means to make off with someone's property by attacking, by seizing, by stealing, carrying off, dragging away.

And here Jesus says, no one will snatch them. my sheep from my hand. And to really appreciate this, I think we need to put ourselves as best we can in the shoes of Jesus' disciples right now.

Imagine that you're one of them. You're standing there right now in Solomon's portico watching this unfold between Jesus and these Jews, probably many of them Pharisees or religious leaders.

[12 : 35] here in this moment, the sparks are flying between Jesus and the religious leaders. They want Jesus dead.

They hate him. They've been plotting and scheming for some time now about how to take this guy out. How do you think the disciples of Jesus are feeling right now in the midst of this?

Do you think they feel safe? Do you think they feel safe? their master, who they know is the Messiah, is a wanted man.

And he's a little bit outnumbered, it seems. Even though he's managed to avoid arrest so far, even though he's been able to outmaneuver the Pharisees in all of these public encounters up to this point, things are continuing to heat up.

the tension is rising between Jesus and the religious leaders. In fact, in just the next chapter after Lazarus dies, Jesus will say to his disciples, let's go back to Judea, to Bethany, the village of Lazarus, which is like right next door to Jerusalem.

[13 : 49] And what does the disciples say when Jesus says this to them? They say, but Rabbi, a short while ago, the Jews there tried to stone you. Like, we can't go back there.

It's not safe. Thomas, one of Jesus' disciples, actually said, great, let's go and we'll all die with him. So what's unfolding right now that we're hearing is the reason why the disciples are afraid.

They don't feel safe. this situation between Jesus and the Jews, the Pharisees, the religious leaders, it feels dangerous. And yet, what does Jesus say in the midst of all this?

He says, no one will snatch my sheep out of my hand. This is a word both for his disciples and for his opponents.

to his disciples, it means, don't worry about them. Don't fret about them. They will not get you.

[15 : 02] Your life is in my hand and it's safe in my hand. This is a word for his disciples. But it's also a word to these Jews who aren't his sheep, Jesus' opponents.

to them, it means, you can try your hardest to go after my sheep, my people. You can try to draw them away.

You can try to poison them against me. You can try to hurt them. But no matter how hard you try, you will fail. No one can snatch them from my hand.

No one can steal them away from me. They are my sheep. I am their shepherd and they are secure in my hand. And then Jesus takes it a step beyond that.

In case there's any doubt, verse 29, Jesus says, my father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my father's hand.

[16 : 08] I love this. It reminds me of all those silly little arguments I had with other kids at the playground. background. This is probably more a thing for boys, but maybe you remember those little things.

Like, you better stop trying to hurt my friend. I'm going to punch you in the face. Well, if you do that, I'm going to get my dad and he's going to come and he's going to punch you in the head. Well, then I'll get my dad and my dad knows karate and he'll block your dad's punch and punch him right out.

All the things that we said to each other when we were kids, at least us boys. this is a little bit like that, but this is the holy and righteous version of that.

You can try to snatch them out of my hand, but let me tell you a little secret. My father, God, is holding them too in his hand.

And he's the greatest that there is. He's the strongest, he's the most powerful. Nobody can snatch them out of his hand. I hold my sheep safe and secure and at the same time, so does he.

[17 : 17] And then Jesus says it in verse 30. I and the father are one. I love it.

The ultimate statement of unity between father and son said by anyone else, absolute blasphemy, but by the divine son of God, the word who became flesh.

This is the truth about who Jesus is. It's as though Jesus is saying, not only do we work together, my father and I, but we are together one.

One and the same God. Again, his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him.

But Jesus said to them, I have shown you many good works from the father. For which of these do you stone me? We are not stoning you for any good work, they replied, but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.

[18 : 31] God, the Jews who were there that day understood perfectly well what Jesus was claiming when he said, I and the father are one. It was a claim to share in the same divine nature as God, to be united, to be one with God, the father.

I asked a little earlier if you thought the disciples of Jesus felt safe. how about now? Jesus' opponents now have stones in their hand and they're ready to let fly.

I can only imagine the disciples' hearts probably pounding, racing, and their thoughts, what do we do? Do we run? Where are we going to meet up later with Jesus if we get away?

What do we do? Well, for the moment, Jesus manages to hold the stones at bay simply by speaking. He asks them a question.

He calls them to consider again the good works that he has been doing. Could he be doing such things, the things of God, while at the same time blaspheming God and trying to steal his glory?

[19 : 51] But sadly, Jesus' opponents don't seem to care too much about the countless signs and miracles that he's been doing. It's just like earlier, the Pharisees, they didn't give a rip about the man who had been born blind that was now healed.

They're focused on one thing, taking Jesus out. Verse 33, we are not stoning you for any good work, but for blasphemy because you, a mere man, claim to be God.

This is at the heart of the issue. In the eyes of these Jews, Jesus is just a man, a mere man, and therefore they accuse him of blasphemy, despite the fact that he is doing the things that only God can do.

So the stones are ready to fly at Jesus. And let's imagine for a moment again that you are one of his disciples. Let me ask you again, do you feel safe in this moment?

And yet, even though they might not feel safe, they are safe. even though they might feel threatened and in danger, are they in danger?

[21 : 17] No. What did Jesus just say? I give my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish.

No one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. what's the worst they can do?

Pelt us with stones? Destroy our reputations? Make life miserable for us and our families? Arrest us?

Kill us? I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.

snatch. No one can snatch them out of my hand. Even though in this moment the disciples do not feel safe and secure, the truth is they are, because Jesus holds their lives in his hand, and he is very capable.

[22 : 26] He is the good shepherd. He will lay down his life for his sheep, and after rising from the dead, Jesus, just as he promised, will raise all of us who believe back to life from the dead, never to die again.

And so even if they kill us, through Jesus, our shepherd, we win. We have life forever.

he will raise us up. And so these words of Jesus should put a boldness and a confidence in our hearts.

They should give us peace. Our ultimate hope in Jesus, through Jesus, we are untouchable.

Nobody can take it away from us, this life. no one can snatch us from our Savior's hand. And there are a couple other places where this comes out so wonderfully.

[23 : 34] I have to highlight a couple of them. Luke chapter 21 verse 16, Jesus is talking to his disciples there about how things are going to be at the very end of the world.

And he says this to them, he says, you will be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death.

Everyone will hate you because of me, but not a hair of your head will perish. Stand firm and you will win life.

I love that. In the same breath, Jesus says, they will put some of you to death, but not a hair of your head will perish.

Nothing, no one can snatch my sheep from my hand. Or take the words of the apostle Paul in the beloved passage, Romans chapter 8 verse 35.

[24 : 42] Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship? How about persecution? Or what about famine?

Nakedness? Danger? What about the sword? As it is written, for your sake, we face death all day long.

We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. no, in all these things, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

For I'm convinced, said Paul, that neither death, do you hear that? Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Nothing, not even death, can separate us from the love of our Lord Jesus. If you belong to Jesus, no one and nothing can snatch you from his hand.

[26 : 04] So how do these words speak to us today? Well, this good promise of Jesus is only for his sheep. So let me ask you, are you one of them?

Do you have Jesus as your shepherd? And if not, I urge you to come to Jesus to repent of your sins and to believe in his name.

him? And if you do, his promise is that you will be saved and you will have him as your good shepherd. Most of you here, I think, have already done that.

And so for you, this morning I have a different question. As you look around at what's happening in our world today, do you feel safe? Do you feel safe?

Are you worried? Are you fretting? Are you panicked? Like Jesus' disciples are in this moment.

[27 : 21] Do you feel safe? If Jesus is your shepherd, you are. Let your heart hear these words one more time.

I give my sheep eternal life. They shall never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.

my hope and my prayer is that these words will sink deep into our hearts. And that as a result we will have peace. We will have a calm in our hearts.

Even as we look out at what's going on in our world today, we are going to be just fine. We are in the care of our Lord Jesus.

We are in the care of God, the Father. Father, we don't need to hide in our homes. We don't need to worry about what will happen if we can have confidence, we can have boldness, because this is the end of our story.

[28 : 37] And my hope and prayer is that that will enable us to continue to reach out to the people in this community, to love them, to invite them into our homes, to go over to their homes, knock on the door, share with them the love of Jesus and the truth of Jesus.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, thank you so much for these words. You are the ultimate. Father, you are the ultimate, the one true God.

Put our hearts at rest, we ask. you know the things that we've been thinking about this week, you know the news articles that we've read, you know the media posts that we've seen.

Put our hearts at rest, Lord, with these words. Thank you for an unshakable hope and confidence that will come true when you return.

Lord. We pray this in your name. Amen.