Secure Sheep

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Preacher: Hugh Ferrier

[0:00] Well, friends, would you turn with me, please, to the words we read in John chapter 10, John chapter 10, and reading verses 27 and 28 again. John 10 from verse 27, where Jesus says, 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.

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. After conducting a funeral service, I sometimes find myself reading the inscriptions on the different gravestones as I make my way back to the car. It might sound strange, but I also find it interesting seeing how a person perhaps wanted to be remembered, or how their family, how their friends wanted them to be remembered. A few years ago, a friend in our congregation told me about one particular person whom they knew, and this person wanted only one word to be written on their gravestone, and that word was the word kept. Kept. This person's only confidence, their only comfort in life, their only confidence, their only comfort in death, and their only confidence, their only comfort in what lay beyond death was the safe keeping of Jesus.
And so this evening, I want us to reflect on the security of Jesus' sheep as we prepare to come to his table tomorrow. And we're going to look at these verses under two headings. We're going to look at the great distinction, and then the great declaration. The great distinction, then the great declaration. First, the great distinction, verses 22 to 27, where John focuses on the distinction that Jesus makes, the distinction that Jesus makes. In verses 22 to 26, Jesus speaks about those who aren't his sheep. We can start by noting the context. Verse 22 and 23, John tells us that it was the feast of dedication. This was a festival that commemorated or celebrated the rededication of the temple over a hundred years. In 167 BC, King Attaikos Epiphanes of Syria attacked Jerusalem and polluted the temple by sacrificing unclean pigs on its altar to his pagan gods. A number of Jews, led by a man named Judas
Maccabeus, Judas the Hammer, revolted and they overthrew the Syrian army. In 165 BC, two years later, they rededicated the temple to God. And every year since then, they had an eight-day festival. The feast of dedication, as they commemorated this event, celebrated this event. And John also tells us that it was winter. The feast of dedication took place during the month of Kisleth. This was the Jewish equivalent of our month of December. But John might be doing more than simply highlighting the time of year. Some scholars suggest that John is making a cryptic statement to highlight that relations between Jesus and his opponents were at an all-time low. There was an increasing frostiness.
[3:41] There was a wintry atmosphere between them. And John tells us that Jesus was walking in the temple in the colonnade of Solomon. This was a sheltered area in the temple complex. It was an ideal location to shield oneself from the harsh wintery conditions. And so we read about rabbis meeting with their students in Solomon's colonnade. If you go to the book of Acts, you read about the early church, the early Christians meeting in Solomon's colonnade. Well, we move from the context to the confrontation in verse 24.

John tells us that the Jews gathered around Jesus. In mentioning the Jews, John is referring to the religious leadership, but he could also be referring to a wider group. And they gather around Jesus. They encircle him. They confront him in an aggressive, hostile manner. And John tells us that the Jews ask Jesus a question. They ask him how long he's going to keep them in suspense. Perhaps more literally, how long he's going to provoke them. How long he's going to annoy them. And they demand that if he's the Christ, did he tell them plainly? This word Christ refers to the anointed king, the king promised in the Old Testament who would be sent by God to rescue his people. And not just rescue his people, but rule over his people. The king who would deliver his people and then have dominion over his people. The Christ was the one who would make everything sad come

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untrue. And the Jews are demanding that Jesus tell them clearly, whether or not he is the Christ or should they expect another. We move from the confrontation to the comment, verses 25 and 26. Jesus responds by making an announcement. He tells the Jews that he had already told them, but they hadn't believed. He then tells them that the works that he has been doing in his father's name bore witness about him. Now, it's important to remember that nowhere in John's gospel has Jesus explicitly said that he is the Christ. But throughout John's gospel, we find Jesus demonstrating himself to be the Christ as he says that he is the one sent from God, sent by God. We find him demonstrating himself to be the
Christ as he declares himself just in the previous verses to be the good shepherd, that long-promised king, who would deliver his people and have dominion over his people, the one descended from King David.
And we find him demonstrating himself to be the Christ as he heals the sick, as he feeds the multitudes. And having made this announcement, Jesus makes an accusation. He accuses this group who have demanded that he tell them plainly whether or not he's the Christ of unbelief. And he says that they're unbelieving because they're not part of his flock. Note what Jesus says. He doesn't say, you don't believe and therefore you are not part of my flock. He says, you don't believe because you're not part of my flock. Then in verse 27, Jesus speaks about those who are his sheep.
Jesus speaks about his sheep. He's just spoken about those who aren't his sheep, those whose lives are characterized by unbelief. And he now speaks about those whom he calls my sheep, the sheep who belong to him. And Jesus says three things about these sheep. He says that his sheep hear his voice.
[7:33] And he says that his sheep are known by him. And that doesn't just mean that he has a vague, general knowledge and awareness of them, but rather a deep and intimate relationship with them.

And he says that his sheep who hear his voice and who are known by him also follow after him. Well, friends, as we consider these verses, we can see the mark of those who don't belong to Christ's flock. The mark of those who don't belong to Christ's flock. That's what we see here in John 10.
Jesus speaks here about those who don't belong to him. And he says that they don't belong to him. And therefore, they don't believe in him. They aren't part of his flock. As far as Jesus is concerned, unbelief is the defining, distinguishing, distinctive mark of those who aren't his sheep.
And friends, that's worth our attention this evening. Unbelief is a failure to recognize Jesus, a failure to receive Jesus, a failure to rest on Jesus as the Christ. The King sent by God to deliver his people, rescue his people, save his people. And as such, unbelief is the defining mark of someone who isn't part of Christ's flock. And on the final judgment day, when Jesus will divide all those who ever lived into two groups, the sheep who belong to him on his right and the goats who don't belong to him on his left, he will look at every unbelieving person, every unbelieving person who ever lived, and he will solemnly and emphatically say to them, depart from me.
[9:35] I never knew you. Never knew you. It won't matter what family they came from. It won't matter what church they attended or didn't attend. It won't matter what good deeds they did or were recognized for within their community. It won't matter what version of the Bible they read.

It won't matter whether they sung psalms or hymns, accompanied or unaccompanied. If their lives were marked by a refusal to receive Jesus and rest on Jesus and recognize Jesus as the Christ, they will find themselves being rejected by Jesus when they need him most. So this evening, I want to highlight, friends, the seriousness of unbelief and emphasize that this is the defining, distinguishing, distinctive mark of someone who isn't part of Christ's flock. But as we consider these verses, we also see the marks of those who do belong to Jesus. That's what we see here in John 10.
Jesus speaks about his sheep, those who are known by him, those who belong to him, and he says that his sheep hear his voice and they follow him. As far as Jesus is concerned, hearing and following him are the defining, distinguishing, distinctive marks of those who are his sheep, those who belong to him. And again, that's worth our attention this evening.
When I was still living at my parents, I bought some new pillows. They were good pillows that I hoped would really improve my sleep. I'm a terrible sleeper, so no offense to Colin and Kathmar and the family. I will not sleep this evening. I am a terrible sleeper, but I had a great hope that these

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new pillows would help my sleep. But I had a great fear, and maybe some of you could resonate with it, and my fear was that my younger brother would steal my pillows and sweat and slobber all over them.
And so I took a black permanent marker pen and wrote in bold letters on each of the labels, HF, to show David and indeed the rest of the family who these pillows belong to.
[12:03] I had to tell the High Free congregation a few weeks ago, don't worry, there's no pillows in the High Free manse with HF on some and NF on others. But I wanted to mark these pillows 20 years ago as belonging to me.

And in the same way, Jesus' people, Jesus' flock, have certain markers that indicate who it is that they belong to. We might say that they have the ear of faith where they hear the words of Jesus, and they have the foot of faith where they follow the leading of Jesus. We see this in the lives of Matthew, the lives of Zacchaeus and Peter and Lazarus, who all heard the voice of Jesus and then simply hear the voice of Jesus. They hear the voice of Jesus, but each followed after Jesus. And that is true of every single Christian. Every Christian in this building tonight, every Christian watching or listening online, they hear and they follow Jesus, wherever that might lead them, whatever that might cost them. And so this evening, I want us to look at ourselves and ask the question whether or not these defining, distinguishing, distinctive marks are evident in our lives. You know, if someone were to look at you this evening, if they were to look at your public life, but not just your public life, but also your private life. Who you are, if they were to look at you, they're definitely one of Jesus' sheep.
And if Jesus was to look at you this evening, your public life, but not just your public life, but your private life, who you are when no one else is looking, would he be able to say of you, would he be able to easily identify you as one of his sheep? The great distinction. But then second, we have the great declaration. The great declaration, verses 28 to 30, where John now focuses on the declaration that Jesus makes. The declaration that Jesus makes. Verses 28 and 29, we hear the firm promises.
Jesus begins by promising that he gives his sheep eternal life. Look at the beginning of verse 28. Jesus speaks about eternal life. Now, that refers to quantity of life, a life that continues through countless, endless ages, a life that has no end. But it also refers not just to quantity of life, but to quality of life, a life of communion with God, fellowship with God, relationship with God. You remember what Jesus said? This is eternal life. That they know God. And Jesus says here that he gives eternal life to his sheep. It's not something that they somehow merit or somehow earn. It's something that Jesus graciously, generously, lovingly lavishes on them. He gives them eternal life.
Jesus continues by promising that his sheep will never perish. Look again at verse 28. He literally says they will never, no by no means ever perish. It is an unequivocal, uncompromising assertion that none of Jesus' sheep will be lost. None of Jesus' sheep will forfeit that eternal life. And Jesus goes further and promises that no one will snatch the sheep out of his hand. Look again at verse 28. Jesus sees himself as being the shepherd who has every single sheep in his hand. And he says that there is nothing that will snatch them from his hand.
And he says that there is no one that will snatch them from his hand. This is how safe, this is how secure Jesus' people are. But he goes further still. And he promises that his father has given his sheep to him.
[16:29] Look at verse 29. Now friends, here's what really takes our breath away. Jesus has already said that his sheep hear his voice and they follow him. But he now says that those same sheep have been given to him by his father. It's not that the sheep simply decided that they would follow after Jesus. Rather, the father determined that these sheep would be Jesus' sheep. And he pledged them, promised them to his son from all eternity. It's as if the father said to the son before the creation of the world, my son, I am going to create Hugh Ferrier. And here's everything you need to know about Hugh Ferrier. Here's all the good things that he's going to do. But here's all the rubbish that he's going to involve himself in. Here's all the ways that he's going to let you down, my son. Here's all the ways that he's going to defame my honor, my name, my glory, my reputation. But my son, I am giving him to you. Giving him to you, my son.

But Jesus goes even further and he promises that no one is able to snatch the sheep out of the father's hand. Look at the end of verse 29. Jesus says now that the father is greater than all.
The Old Testament is replete with statements that highlight the sovereign strength of God. In 2 Chronicles 20, we read, O Lord, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven? You rule over all

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the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might so that none is able to withstand you. In Proverbs 21, we read, no wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the Lord. Then in Jeremiah 32, we read, O Lord God, it is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power, by your outstretched arm, nothing is too hard for you. This is the point now that Jesus is making when he says that the father is greater than all. He's saying that there is no person stronger than the father. No power stronger than the father. No figure, no force stronger than the father.
And then Jesus says, isn't it wonderful? And no one can snatch them out of the father's hand. He's just said that the sheep are secure in his hand and will never be snatched from it.
[19:20] Now he says that the sheep are secure in the father's hand, not just his hand, but the father's hand and will never be snatched from it. We move though from these firm promises to the final pronouncement in verse 30. Jesus has been speaking about the father and about himself.

And he said that he gives the sheep eternal life, that none will snatch them from his hand. And he's then said that the father gives the sheep to him, that none will snatch them from the father's hand. Now Jesus brings things to a climactic close, a great crescendo by proclaiming that he and the father are one. It's a bold statement where Jesus is claiming to be equal in deity and glory with the father.
And it's a bold statement where Jesus isn't simply declaring himself to be equal in deity and glory with the father, but also united in will and purpose with the father. The will of Jesus is that the sheep be safe and never lost. And the will of the father is that the sheep be safe and never be lost.
Well, friends, as we consider these verses, we can see the security of Christ's flock. The security of Christ's flock. That's what we have here in John 10. Jesus says that his sheep have been given to him by his father. He says that he then gives those sheep eternal life. And he says that those sheep will never perish. And he says that none of those sheep will ever be snatched from his hand.
[21:12] As far as Jesus is concerned, each of his sheep is safe. Each of his sheep is secure. Since they're being kept by a shepherd who will not allow anything or anyone to snatch them from his hand.

And that's worth our attention this evening, friends. Leon Morris, Bible commentator, tells a story about a World War II bomber. The story goes as follows. This bomber was hit by flak during a mission. The pilot had trouble steering and asked the rear gunner how bad it was. The gunner replied, there's a three by five hole in the left horizontal stabilizer, an elevator. Will we be able to make it home? He asked.
No sweat, the pilot replied, but they barely made it, skewing and skidding as they landed. When they got out and the pilot examined the damage, he screamed, when you said three by five, I thought you meant inches, not feet. They really hadn't been safe, but were in mortal danger all along.
And then Leon Morris writes this, Friends, Great Assurance. This is the ultimate security of every single Christian. They're safe, they're secure, in the firm, faithful grip of the good shepherd who will never, never, never let them go.
And this means, friends, that a Christian cannot, a Christian will not lose their salvation. There is nothing and no one strong enough, nothing and no one smart enough, nothing and no one subtle enough to somehow prize open the fingers of the good shepherd and pluck even the smallest, least noteworthy lamb from his hand.
[23:44] You know, let's imagine a conversation between Jesus and his disciples following this great declaration. Peter gets up.

And Jesus looks in the eye. And then James and John get up and they say, Lord, we're part of your inner circle.
Our mothers are sisters. But Lord, you know how hot-headed we can be, how bad-tempered we can be, how angry and aggressive we can get.
Lord, you've even nicknamed us the sons of thunder. Now, Lord, what if we really lose it with someone, really get mad with someone and say or do something that we'll regret down the line? Will that cause us to lose our salvation? And Jesus looks them in the eye and says, no one will snatch you out of my hand. And then Thomas gets up.
[25:10] And he says, Lord, I love you. In fact, Lord, I'm not boasting, but I think I love you more than any of these other disciples because I am willing even to die with you if needs must.

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But Lord, you know my temperament. You know that I'm prone to melancholy. You know that I'm prone to doubts. You know that I'm prone to a disbelieving mind at times.
Lord, what about my doubts? What if I doubt something about you for a season? Will that cause me to lose my salvation? And Jesus looks them in the eye.
And he says, no one will snatch you out of my hand. And then Matthew gets up. And he says, Lord, I'm fully on board with you, fully on board with your mission.
But Lord, I've got a past. I've got baggage. I've got a background. In fact, I've got such a background that sermons are going to be preached about my past 2,000 years from now.
[26:14] Where people are going to speak about Matthew, that dishonest tax collector. Lord, will my past cause me to lose my salvation? And Jesus looks them in the eye and says, no one will snatch you out of my hand.

And then Philip gets up and he says, Lord, Lord, you know that I'm always trying to be involved in your work. Always there in the background trying to help people along in their faith.
But Lord, what if I get ill? What if I get sick? What if I'm no longer able to do all that I once did for you? What if I'm no longer able to be as active as I once was? Will that cause me to lose my salvation?
Jesus looks them in the eye and says, no one will snatch you out of my hand. And finally, Andrew gets up and he says, Lord, my whole life has been one of pointing people to you.
I pointed my brother to you. I pointed that little boy with his loaves and fishes to you. I pointed some Greeks to you. Lord, I've always been pointing to you.
[27:21] But what if I end up with dementia? And I'm no longer able to point to you. And I'm no longer able to remember you.

And I'm no longer able to pray to you. And I'm no longer even able to say your name. Will that cause me to lose my salvation?
And Jesus looks him in the eye. Says, no one will snatch you out of my hand. You weren't placed into my hand by the Father before eternity began.
Only for a little bit of dementia or some other issue to now snatch you from it. Friends, this is the great assurance.
This is the ultimate security of every single Christian. It's not about how tightly we are holding on to Jesus. If it were about the tightness of our grip, I'm sure we'd all be left to spare him.
[28:22] Instead, it's about how tightly Jesus is holding on to each and every one of those whom the Father has given to him. That is where eternal security finally, fundamentally lies.

Reminds me of a scene in the film Titanic. I am no Titanic fan. I have a wife who likes Titanic. I'm certainly not a Titanic fan. But you can get sermon illustrations even from Titanic.
And in the film, Rose has slipped over the edge of the ship. And she's on the brink of falling into these icy waters and falling into a harrowing death.
She's quite legitimately frantic with fear. She's screaming out for help. But Jack, played by Leonardo DiCaprio, has grabbed hold of her hand. And he says to her, listen to me.
I've got you. I won't let you go. And he manages to haul and pull her aboard away from that potential death.
[29:32] And in the same way, friends, Jesus will not let go of any one of his people. He will not allow any of them to perish. And so this evening, I want to say to every single Christian in this building.

If you are part of Jesus' flock, you can be completely confident, completely assured, without any arrogance, that you cannot lose your salvation.
Because you are safe. You are secure in the strong hand of the good shepherd.
Now, friends, isn't that good news to hear at the end of another week? And isn't that a comfort? And isn't that an encouragement? As we prepare to come to his table, professing that we belong to him and that he belongs to us tomorrow.
That it's not about our grip on him, but his grasp on us. Thank you.

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