

The Secure Sheep

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[0 : 0 0] could turn your Bibles to John chapter 10. We'll be taking up to John chapter 10 verse 22. I was reading this week that apparently this generation is the entitlement generation.

We've had the baby boomers, the me generation and the me, me, me generation. We just keep adding them on and capitalizing them just to try and emphasize it. But apparently, if you actually go back and you're a little bit more objective about it, what you discover is that every, every, every generation is the me, me, me generation. The fact is, we ask the question and it seems to be one of the things to discuss at the moment is, is this generation more narcissistic than the one before? Well, probably not. But it is true that younger people are more narcissistic and you actually become less narcissistic as you get older. So some of you, perhaps those with grey hair and sitting in this sort of area here, thumbs up to you guys. You pass through that phase and you probably are seeing it very clearly in the rest of us who are younger than you. You know, we're probably not more narcissistic, but I'll tell you one thing that we are and that is we're getting more and more creative in how we actually express our sense of self. We're finding all kinds of new ways to express it. You know, you can get a degree in under two weeks online from America. I could have actually become a, I actually became a celebrant through the Australian system, but I could have become a celebrant without doing anything if I'd, if I'd just given my credit card details to an American agency. There's all kinds of different ways that we can actually gain qualifications and a sense of importance. We take on titles. What were the titles in that last song? Our God is the Lion of Judah? The Lion and the Lamb. They're not two titles we like to put together, but we like titles and we do stack them on top of each other. Apparently, if you go to Italy, any university graduates, as anyone who's got a three-year degree can call themselves doctor.

Primary school teachers can call themselves maestro as a title. High school teachers, professor. But a university rector, and I'm looking for this job, can call himself magnifico.

Magnifico. That's good. Kim Jong Il, he calls himself, amongst his other 1,000 titles, the guardian of the planet. There are actual job titles. This particular guy who was researching the article that he wrote in the Atlantic a few years ago, researched some different job titles and came up with these ones. Idea Ambassador, Knowledge Sorceress, Chief Reality Officer. I have no idea what they do, but they sound interesting, don't they?

More and more, we're trying to find ways to bolster up our sense of self, our sense of importance, our sense of significance in this world. And yet, as Jesus addresses the people who come to him in this passage, he cuts through it all and reduces it to one irreducible factor. Do you believe in me or not? That's Jesus, not me.

[3 : 50] The setting for this confrontation is actually at the time of the Feast of Dedication, or it's called Hanukkah in Hebrew. It's actually similar to our Christmas feast that happens at the 25th of December. But the history of the feast is actually significant, because about 200 years previous to when Jesus is celebrating this feast, the nation of Israel were cruelly impressed by this man called Antiochus Epiphanes. And he had said in his heart to actually Hellenize, or make Israel more Greek. And so he did all kinds of...Antiochus Epiphanes actually means manifest God, if we're talking about titles. And so the way he said about that was he desecrated the temple. He forced the priests to eat pork. He set up a pagan altar in place of the altar to the God in that temple and turned it into a place of pagan worship. And he made it a capital offence to own any or be in possession of any piece of Hebrew scripture. Now, eventually the Jews got strong enough to overthrow their oppressor. They rose up and overthrew him. Judas Maccabees, if you've heard of him, was the guy who led that. And Hanukkah is actually the celebration of the cleansing and the rededication of that temple after all of the atrocities that happened. It's not a feast that you'll find in the Bible. It's not a feast that God required.

But Jesus is still its fulfillment. Hanukkah, the festival of light. Jesus is being presented by John as the fulfillment of this festival. It's about two months, chronologically, about two months after the Feast of the Tabernacles. So the first half of chapter 10. And it's winter. So that's why Jesus is teaching in the colonnade of Solomon. There's more shelter from the cold winds in that sort of area of the temple. But interestingly, it's also the first place that the Christian church gathered. So if you look up Acts 3.11 and 5.12, you'll see that that is where the Christian church in its very early infancy was gathering. It was their first address. Perhaps John is here reminding the early Christian readers of his gospel, of a familiar point in their history, looking back. Have a chat with some of the folk who've been coming to this church for more than 10 to 15 years, and you'll find that there have been a few different changes of address. And perhaps they can share with you not just the change of address, but the memories that come along with that. That nostalgic trip of remembering where they were in the Lord at that point, and how far God has brought them in arriving at this point that we're at now. So at the colonnade of Solomon, the Jews approached Jesus. And essentially they asked the question, who are you? In verse 24, the Jews gather around him and said to him, how long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly. To put it bluntly, who are you? Now it could be an innocent question.

But the gathered around could also be translated from the Greek into surrounded or besieged. And in light of how trigger happy they are with the rocks later on, it's likely that this is actually a hostile crowd. It's not a friendly crowd gathering around Jesus.

And it's interesting because Jesus gets a very straight question and he responds in an unexpected way. He doesn't answer their question by telling them who he is. He answers them by telling them who they are. Jesus answered them in verse 25, 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.

I told you, he says. The problem isn't with whether Jesus has made himself known. He has emphatically declared himself by first what he has said and second what he has done. And enough's enough.

[7 : 50] So Jesus' answer, he uses it to show up their ignorance. I told you and you do not believe.

The problem is not with Jesus. The problem is with who they are. They don't believe him. Not what he says, although no one can argue with him, nor what he does. Although everyone is talking, every man and his dog is talking about what he can do. The problem is not that they haven't heard. It's that they don't believe.

And they don't believe because they are not one of his sheep. Jesus is crystal clear here about God's sovereignty over who he's saved.

And we're faced with similar opposition and questioning about who he is in chapter 6, verse 44. This is a pivotal moment in God's plan for his people.

The Jews believed that they were God's people. They were descended from Abraham. It was their birthright. Their entitlement. Abraham was the starting point for them.

[9 : 16] But what they neglected to realize was that Jesus was always the destination. Now, John wrote his gospel in a time when the church was growing, but it was becoming increasingly obvious that there was a separation between the Jews and the Christian church.

And the majority of the Jews were actually rejecting Christ. They were aware that the Jewish leaders had him executed. They were aware of this difficulty.

What claim could they possibly have to God if their saviour wasn't recognised? But by revisiting the evidence, John showed them that Jesus was real.

If the father had given them to Jesus, then they will believe. And these people who are struggling with the controversy going on around them are being anchored in God's people through their saviour Christ.

Now, I'm going to suggest that our problem is probably a little bit different to the initial readers. I don't think we have an issue with what John is saying here on the basis of whether or not we're descendants of Abraham, whether or not Jesus is genuine bona fide.

[10 : 32] I think we've kind of moved beyond that controversy. I think we have a problem with the fact that God has any involvement in our salvation beyond providing the saviour.

Some suggest that this predestining work of Jesus is described in this passage. Well, that suggests that it's a general thing. What I mean by that is he predestines a people for himself, but any of us have the freedom to opt in or out.

But Jesus is not talking about his flock in general terms here. He is saying that the flock is made up of individuals. The father gives him, even draws to him so that they can believe.

A flock that he calls to himself by name. And those the father doesn't draw to him won't believe. But it doesn't end there.

You see, the building of this flock is an expression of God's sovereign election for sure. And it's also an expression of our willing response of faith or belief.

[11 : 44] Same word group in the Greek. Jesus places both of these truths side by side in John. It's clear that they both apply to our salvation.

But it raises some uncomfortable questions for us. I mean, how can I still have real and meaningful choice if God chooses me?

How does that work? Well, there's some pat responses I can give you like, well, how can someone dead in their sins choose life? But I don't think that actually, I think that's a response, but I don't think that's actually an explanation of how we keep these two things together, God's sovereignty and our choice.

It's a response, but it's not a solution to the dilemma that's in our minds, is it? I mean, so with this dilemma, there's some different ways we can go.

We can actually resolve the uncomfortableness of it by revising God's sovereignty on the one hand. Playing it down or playing it up.

[12 : 52] Or we can revise our own free will or will on the other hand. Playing that down or playing that up. But if we do that, that would actually be editing scripture. What Jesus does is he places these things alongside each other and he doesn't give us all the answers in terms of how it works.

Perhaps the best I can say is as I look at these passages and struggle, wrestle with them myself, is it appears to be above my pay grade. But there are other questions that we ask too and things like this.

How does God choose some over others? And this is a real sticking point. If you have members of your family who aren't yet Christians, you'll know the deep desire you have in your heart for them to actually come to faith.

Some of you may actually have already experienced the loss of family members or close friends who never actually came to a saving faith in Jesus. So we ask the question, how does God choose some over others?

And some of our thoughts in this area border on thinking of God in terms of being a monster, that he should deny one person and not another. And I've got to say again, we don't get a full answer in scripture to how God makes the decisions for who he makes the decisions for.

[14 : 24] Paul comes pretty close in 1 Corinthians, but I don't think you're actually going to find this answer satisfying either. See, 1 Corinthians 1, verses 26 to 31, he's addressing a church that's full of pride, so proud and arrogant that they're actually abusing each other within the context of the church.

And so John starts off, they're fighting, they're doing all kinds of stuff. So John starts off, sorry, John, Paul starts off by actually saying these words to them. He challenges them on where their salvation comes from.

In verse 26 of chapter 1, he says this, For consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you are wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.

God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

And because of him, you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that as it is written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.

[15 : 47] Paul wrote to a bunch of struggling, fighting Christians in a church in Corinth, you're a bunch of losers. He chose you because you are losers.

But not just because you are losers, but to use you, you losers, to actually show his goodness and his glory. Now, I can't necessarily apply that as a blanket statement and say, okay, therefore, Grace Evangelical Church is a church full of losers.

And if you're visiting today, you've just found out the secret that they would have actually preferred I buried for a little bit longer, like after you've come a few times at least. But I'm not sure that I can actually apply it directly like that, but I can tell you this, time and time again, throughout the story of Scripture, God seems to do this.

He seems to pick people who really are rogues, ruffians, depraved, flawed in so many different ways. So if we're wondering, why does God pick me?

Frankly, based on the evidence that I see in Scripture, I don't want to scratch too deep. I already have a sense of the flawedness of my own character. I think all I'll find out is more, and all I'll see as a result of that, if I follow Paul's reasoning, is God's glory in being able to save even me.

[17 : 11] The tension is in our own pride, our own sense of who we are in our realm of existence, where, you know, particularly in the Western world, we're egalitarian, individualistic, democratic, in the way that we think.

We want to be more than who we are. And in our minds, anything that diminishes our sovereignty is dehumanising. So our solution from the very beginning, from Adam and Eve, has been to diminish God's sovereignty.

That's the default way we tend to go. Now we've been creative, and we've found other ways as well, but that's our default way. The Bible teaches clearly here that God is sovereign, and we are responsible for our choices, which is why Jesus goes on to say these words in verse 27, my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

Alongside Jesus' expectation that certain sheep are given to him is the expectation that those sheep will hear his voice and recognise it and follow him.

His sovereignty does not diminish our response. In a sense, then, it doesn't diminish our need to tell people about Jesus so that they can respond too.

[18 : 36] After all, that's exactly what Jesus goes on to do next in this passage. He doesn't leave these guys alone. He keeps pushing them to see who they are and pushing them to see who he is and pushing them to respond.

So Jesus answers this question first by saying who they are. But then he goes on to actually answer their question, and he does get to that point, and he describes who he is.

He returns to the shepherd imagery to do that, actually, to the shepherd imagery of chapter 10, the first part of that, so you can actually sort of scoot up with your eyes and have a bit of a refresh on that as I'm speaking.

But let me just summarise by saying Jesus says in that passage, I am the good shepherd. And in verse 27, you can see how he applies that imagery by saying, 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 hands. He's saying, I am the shepherd who gives abundant life to his sheep.

[19 : 46] The shepherd who will give his sheep eternal life. The shepherd who will not let his sheep perish. The shepherd who holds on to his sheep. Holds fast to his sheep. Jesus is offering comfort to his people.

Even in speaking these words, he's being the good shepherd. And each promise here overlaps, and yet kind of fills out what his shepherding brings for us.

The shepherd who will give his sheep eternal life. Physical death is a reality for now. Don shared a really touching part of his history today with the kids in showing us the gravesite of his wife June.

Physical death is a reality for now. But with Jesus, it's just a waypoint. It's not the end.

And in fact, it's the point that Jesus leads us through. The shepherd who will give his sheep eternal life. The shepherd who will not let his sheep perish. Now, perish can have the literal meaning of die here as well, so it could be like he's saying the same thing.

[20 : 55] But it also has a figurative meaning of being morally or spiritually lost. And Jesus has this covered too. He is the one who is just said as the shepherd, the shepherd who will die for his sheep.

He will ransom us from the power of sin. And in him, nothing can condemn us. Do you have guilts? Things you feel guilty about?

Are you struggling with guilt? Are you struggling with regrets? Are you struggling with thinking of yourself as worthy in any way of God's attention or anybody else's? Jesus is a shepherd who will not let you perish, despite the fact that many of your concerns may well be true about you.

And he's the shepherd who holds on to his sheep. It's the final thing. Jesus holds on to us. Our belief or faith isn't where our assurance comes from.

The one we have faith in is where our assurance comes from. And he's got a hold on us. A hold that he will not let go.

[22 : 13] I don't know if you remember as kids, we had this thing called Tarzan grip when we were kids and we were playing on the climbing frames and the castles and things at school. And we just thought it was unbreakable. We were little tiny tots, you know. If you held each other like this, that grip could not be broken.

I've got stitches and scars and broken bone history on the medical records to prove that it can. But this grip cannot. Jesus says, there is no one who can prise us out of his hands.

But if that isn't enough, he says in verse 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 hands. If you have any doubts about Jesus' capacity, do not doubt the father's capacity who is greater than all.

There is no one who is stronger. Stronger. So how can anyone possibly take us out of his hands? So if he has a hold on you, who can possibly tear you away?

Jesus finishes by declaring who he is in slightly different terms in verse 30. He says, I and the father are one. He is perfectly in sync with the father.

[23 : 33] But it's more than a oneness of mind or will with God that's being expressed here. We know this because of the reaction. Jesus and the father are one and they are not.

You see, they're not even one mind with God. And their reaction proves how far they are away from God. In verse 31, the Jews picked up stones again to stone him.

It's kind of getting a regular feature of their response to him. So John has to kind of describe it like that. Here we go again. The Jews pick up stones again to stone him. Now in the past, Jesus has kind of slipped away from them.

This time he does something I think is crazy. I cannot believe what it must have been like to be standing there alongside him as he does this. They're standing there with stones in their hands about to throw them.

And Jesus says, just looks them in the eye and says, so tell me precisely, of all of the good things I've done in the father's name, which one am I going to be killed for right now?

[24 : 32] That's my paraphrase. In one question, he demonstrates his closeness to the father and their distance from him.

He is one with the father and they are clearly not. And yet they press on in verse 33. 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.

In their minds, Jesus is a man. He cannot be God. So he must be a liar. Even though his words and his actions speak otherwise.

But they can't see the truth. Essentially, because they can't see the truth about themselves. So Jesus explains their problem by quoting Psalm 82.

It seems like a bit of an obscure psalm to quote at this point and an obscure direction of argument to go in. Jesus answered them, is it not written in your law, I said you are God's?

[25 : 45] It looks like he is applying simple logic here. The Bible says we are all gods. So how can you complain if I say I am a god? In fact, if I am the Messiah, I have more right to this claim than you do.

But this is a barbed psalm. It is a psalm of judgment on Israel itself. Israel was such a privileged nation. They were God's people in possession of God's law and in that sense, they were gods among men.

But Israel's crime is taking their privileged position as God's people and choosing to withhold justice and to exploit the weak and to do everything else other than actually embody that law in their lives.

Jesus is saying here that their rejection of him is expected. The truth about them is that they are so far from God that they're blind even to this coming judgment of this psalm.

Stumbling around in the dark as the psalm says. Bumping into God at work and just unable to see or appreciate that it's actually their God that they're actually opposing. Jesus exposes the truth about them and he exposes the truth about himself too.

[27 : 04] So if you struggle to see Jesus as God, you're not alone. That's why Jesus spoke these words. It's why John recorded them. Jesus is speaking into the darkness.

Remember, this is the festival of light. He's speaking to those who struggle to see the man that they see before them as their God and Savior. And he's saying, if my humanity puts you off, consider my actions.

Verse 37, Jesus says, If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe in me, or believe me, believe the works that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and that I am in the Father.

If at all it possibly helps to take me out of the equation in thinking this through, then take me out of the equation and start to think about what I've been doing. and then come back to think about me.

The truth about Jesus is that every point he cares for his sheep. He ransoms us from slavery to sin. He rescues us from our biggest enemy, even death. And he does it by dying in our place.

[28 : 25] Spurgeon once said, You stand before God as if you were Christ, because Christ stood before God as if he were you. This is the will of the Father.

This is who Jesus is. The Lion of Judah who became the Lamb, who fought the one battle we could never survive. Jesus is one with the Father.

They are not. But are you? Two responses are described in the final verses of this section. The first is disbelief and the second is belief.

Again, they sought to arrest him, we read, as their response to the Jews. So the Jews were actually unchanged by Jesus' words. They resumed their initial intent to arrest Jesus to have him done away with. And if you really understand the claims of Jesus and choose to disbelieve in, then there really is only this one option, hostility.

Jesus' claims are too big on your life. You are a sinner, he is your only saviour, trust him or die, serve him or be treated as a rebel. Statements like that provoke a response.

[29 : 46] If you're not with him, you can't help but have contempt for him. And maybe you're thinking, well, I'm not a believer but I don't have contempt, I just don't really care. I've been dragged along by a friend or I've been coming with my family members for months, weeks, years.

I just don't care. Try saying that you don't care to your parents. Try saying, I don't care what you have to say. I don't care about who you are.

I don't want you in my life. You try saying that to one of your parents or your brother or your sister or your close friends. See how they respond. It will crush them because it's the most contemptible thing we can do is just to treat God with indifference.

Unbelief is a hardness of heart. It's a hostility toward God. But there's also belief here. Many responded to the evidence and in verse 41 we see this and many came to him and they said John did no sign but everything that John said about this man was true and many believed in him there.

They saw what he did they listened to what he said and they came to him and they believed. This is the response that Jesus is calling for. It's not a response we can assume.

[31 : 14] There's no entitlement here. You can't just assume that you're in. It's also not a response we can inherit. Another way of assuming entitlement. You know my parents brought me up in the faith.

It's kind of my faith too. I put Christian on the census floor. Come to church every now and then. You might come to church regularly. You might even tithe. If everything that John says about this man is true then he is the good shepherd and following him is not loss and following him is what is being called for here.

And in following him it's not loss it's only gain. Only by following him do we actually achieve abundant life. I'm going to finish this point by saying this.

You may not feel that you're actually in the camp of belief but you may actually want to find out a little bit more about who this Jesus is before you actually saddle yourself for life with both the Lord and Saviour.

So I want to encourage you if you're thinking man I heard some of what you said Rob and I you know I'm not there yet but I'd love to talk more about it then come and have a chat with me because I'd love nothing more than to do that.

[32 : 33] In fact we're looking at running a Christianity Explored course sometime this term if possible where we just get a bunch of people together and we actually look at who Jesus is. You know one short 30 minute burst of me you know pounding the pulpit and telling you you're idiots if you don't believe that you know that's not enough.

In fact that's quite confronting and probably a bit off putting but if you want to sit down and actually discuss that I'd love to do that. I'd love nothing more than to do that. And friends if you are Christians if you call yourself Christians if you believe that this in this Jesus and he is your shepherd own him as your shepherd.

He's saved you at great cost to himself he's called you out of a world in slavery to sin. He's given all for you.

Let's give all for him. Let me pray. Father God we thank you for the for the fact that you introduce passages like this into your word that you know that really challenge us to think about who Jesus is that confront us with people who don't believe.

Well you know it's not just a bunch of trite sayings and helpful anecdotes for how to live but this is a gospel Lord that challenges us to really consider who Jesus is before we actually follow him.

[34 : 15] And so I ask Lord for all of us here whether we actually believe or not Lord that you would actually challenge us through these words. If we're struggling to believe or we're struggling to lay hold of our belief Lord I pray that these words would stick with us through the course of this week that they would push us to a new point of belief and understanding and to a deeper desire to putting our life in your hands.

We pray this in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.