

Assured and Secure

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Date: 28 June 2015

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[0 : 0 0] So about 170 years before this took place, the passages that were just read, the story of Jesus here at the Feast of Dedication, this area was ruled by a Syrian emperor called Antiochus Epiphanes.

And he was a radical Hellenizer, which meant that he wanted to spread the Greek religion across all of his territories. And so when he took over this area, when he got into Jerusalem, he desecrated the temple, he turned it into a brothel, he forced pork down the throats of the priests, he tore down the altar, and he put up a statue of Zeus.

So as you can imagine, the locals, that didn't go down very well. It was the worst thing that could happen. And so what are they going to do, though? The Syrians were an incredibly powerful force.

And there's records of how big a force they were. It was 50,000 foot soldiers, 10,000 horsemen, 300 armored elephants. I know, isn't that?

It's wild, right? It's like a real thing. So what did the Israelites do? Well, they learned the fine art of guerrilla warfare, is what they did. So they're led by a guy called Judas Maccabeus, also known as Judas the Hammer, was his nickname, and led by Judas.

[1 : 1 8] The local boys got together, and they actually managed to defeat the invaders and take back the temple. And the temple was rededicated. And each year, the Jews celebrated this feast called the Feast of Dedication.

Later on, it's called now as Hanukkah. So, John 10, 22. At the time of the Feast of Dedication, what we've just talked about, it says it was winter. Jesus was walking in the temple in the colonnade of Solomon.

Now, you know that John was a very careful writer. He doesn't throw out details willy-nilly. And there's a lot of details in this first line, isn't there? Why is that? Why is that?

The feast? The season, like the temperature, you know? The exact location? None of this is really necessary, is it?

What's he trying to say? Well, I think he's setting up the major themes of the passage here. The feast. It's this incredible story of deliverance, one in which Jesus wants to bring. He wants to bring this story of deliverance.

[2 : 1 8] He wants to bring the gospel of deliverance. It's winter. The message of Jesus is going to get a very cold response. We see that, right?

The religious leaders want to kill him first, stone him, and then arrest him later on. What about the location, the colonnade of Solomon? Why mention that at all? Well, it's a nod to Acts 3 and Acts 5 later on, if you can look there in your own time.

In those chapters, this exact place is mentioned. And in the first case, it's a place where the gospel is preached powerfully. In the second place, it's a place where the disciples do these incredible signs and wonders.

So I think the mention of that specifically is like saying, and despite the incredible opposition, the gospel is going to go forward. And that's how the chapter ends.

Jesus preaches. They want to kill him. And in the last little section, Jesus goes somewhere else, and many follow him. So let me say it like this. The major themes of the passage, the hostility of the religious leaders.

- [3 : 16] Two, the content of Jesus preaching. This incredible story of deliverance. And three, the gospel momentum. Now, we only have time to deal with two of those. So I'm just going to deal with the first two. So let's go at it.

Let's get right into the guts of the story and see how it plays out. We'll begin with hostility. And it appears right at the start, verse 24. Very interesting.

They say to Jesus, how long will he keep us in suspense? If you're the Christ, tell us plainly. I mean, it sounds like, it sounds like, oh, that's right.

They're finally asking the right questions. No, I don't think so. I think they're trying to provide an opportunity for Jesus to incriminate himself. I don't think this is a genuine question.

They are not searching for truth. This is not, Jesus, we're on the fence here. We could go either way. Tell us who you are. Whatever you say, we'll believe you.

- [4 : 14] What you say, anything. Just tell us, we'll believe you. The father and I are one. Right, we're going to kill you. No, it's the suspense word that they use here.

Why are you keeping us in suspense? That's, that's. The question is more. The question is more, how long are you going to annoy us for? That would be another translation. How long are you going to annoy us for?

How long do we have to put up with you? Given what happens later, they just want Jesus to clearly say something. So they have an excuse to kill him or arrest him.

Say the words, Jesus, and then we can stone you. Then we can get rid of you because you're a problem to us. And it's not just their words that are hostile. It's how they sort of box Jesus in. It says they, you know, sort of surround Jesus there.

They actually encircle him is what it means. In a very threatening way, that's what the passage is implying. They're looking for a reason to kill him. And what's the problem that they have? Well, ironically, it's them that's actually threatened.

- [5 : 14] They say it more clearly in John 11, 48. Let me read it to you. John 11, 48. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him. And the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.

So in their mind, Jesus is a threat to the whole fabric of their country, the whole religious fabric of their country. So the Pharisees are looking at him, saying he is an incredible threat to our status and our power because we've got a really good thing going here.

And they needed him gone. And the hostility was so acute that they were willing to break the law. They were willing to put him to death, which they couldn't do. Under Roman law, the Romans reserved the right capital punishment, but they were ignoring that.

So what does Jesus do? It's really interesting. We'll call it the Jesus maneuver. That's the part of the passage that you might not have really understood what was going on because it's not really, really obvious what's happening there.

Verses 31 to 39, the Jesus maneuver. So the Pharisees are on the brink of killing him for blasphemy. Jesus deflects their rage with this quite unusual maneuver.

- [6 : 22] He brings up quite a confusing or obscure passage from Psalm 82. So in the passage, the Psalm that he's quoting, he's quoting something that God is saying in the Psalm.

And God says in the Psalm, you are God's son of the most high, all of you. So in the passage, God uses the word gods, right? Lowercase g. To talk about the judges of Israel who he gave his word to, who received the word.

What's interesting is Jesus doesn't go to, you'd think if he's trying to protect himself here and build this really super airtight argument, he'd bring up stuff about Messiah being born in Bethlehem and talk about being born.

You know, there's like a million places he could have gone. And he goes to this. But his basic argument is he's saying this. He goes, basically, if God can use the term gods for something less than God, then surely he can use the term son of God for someone he sent into the world.

Now, again, it's not airtight, right? Like, it's not like, it's not what you expect. And it's not a game changer at all for the Pharisees. But what it does, it's a brilliant move, because what it does is he puts out this really obscure thing to people who are experts in the law and the scriptures, and it would have stopped them in the tracks.

[7 : 36] When we see it does, it stops them in the tracks as they're sort of, you know, processing what's going on. That's very clever. Now you know what to do if somebody tries to kill you.

Exegesis. And then the other thing he does is he, now it's not more of an emotional appeal, but he, well, maybe it is. He says to them, 31, they pick up stones to stone him again.

Jesus says, I've shown you many good works from the Father, for which of them are you going to stone me? So he does the obscure thing first, and they're kind of like, hang on, I always think about this.

And then he gives them a chance to think about what he just said there. And he goes, he demands that they think through his life. He says to them, of all the things that I've done, which you know about, the healings, the wonders, the miracles, you know, the feeding of the 5,000, the healing of the blind man, the healing of the long-term paralytic, of all of those things.

So of those things, which of those things are you killing me for now? The Greek is even sharper. The word good there, it actually means beautiful. It means beautiful.

[8 : 44] So the good there is not like morally good, it's like beautiful. Of all the beautiful things that I have done, for which one are you about to stone me?

So remember, the Pharisees are on the brink of stoning Jesus to death. He diffuses the situation. It's not his time to die. He diffuses the situation with first this obscure reference, which stops them.

He says, now think about my life, what are you going to kill me for now? And that buys him a bit of time. It buys him like 30 seconds, I don't know, 30 seconds, just before they try to arrest him again. And what does he do with that time?

He's stopped them, he's stalled them, he's got a window of opportunity. What does he do with that breathing space? Remarkably, he makes an appeal to them. Which I just think is astounding.

He doesn't at that point do a runner. He doesn't at that point call down a million angels and sort of wipe them off the face of the earth. He says this, verse 37, if I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me.

[9 : 46] But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father. Look, he says, you don't believe my words. At least consider what I've done.

At least consider how I've lived. Because perhaps in doing that, they'll grow into a more fuller knowledge and understanding. Jesus buys time so that he can say to the guys that want to kill him, come to me.

That strikes me as incredibly merciful. Isn't that remarkable? Where does his heart go? In the face of people who want to destroy him, where does his heart go?

It goes to mercy. I think this one truth from this passage can have a massive impact on us, can't it? I mean, these guys hated Jesus and he cleverly got them to listen to him for a few moments and he used that to give them an opportunity to understand who he is.

The guys that were trying to kill him. You think you've messed up? You think you've ignored Jesus a little bit too long? You think you've got problems.

[11 : 02] Jesus looks at you and he just wants to show you mercy, folks. He wants to forgive you. He wants to give you a second chance, a third chance, a fourth chance. And you think, but God does judge, doesn't he?

Absolutely he does. Of course God judges. But let me say it like this. In Isaiah 28, Isaiah 28 is an oracle all about judgment. So if you're looking for something to read about judgment, that's not a bad one.

An oracle of judgment against Israel. Let me read verse 21 to you here. The Lord will rise up as he did in Mount Parism. He will rouse himself as in the valley of Gibeon to do his work, his strange work, and perform his task, his alien task.

His strange work, his alien task. What is that? What is he talking about? He's talking about judgment. That's how the Bible describes judgment. The work of judgment is foreign to God's deepest desires.

God's proper work, what he does that best expresses his nature, is to give life, is to give grace, is to give mercy, is to give love.

[12 : 24] He does punish sin. He will judge. But it's his alien work. And we see that in this passage. These guys that want to kill him, he just wants to show them mercy, wants to show them mercy.

He buys time to give them another chance. I think, see, I think some people have the opposite idea, right? That God is intrinsically wrathful, but he makes an exception for some people, and you're not sure about that one thing you did that one time, and whether there's mercy for that, and you don't even like to think about it.

You don't like the fact that I'm bringing it up now, because then you have to think about it. Folks, if Jesus has mercy for this group of people who want to kill him, you're probably okay. You're probably doing all right.

His heart towards you is mercy and forgiveness, and is this ongoing offer of life. That's how God is thinking about you, this ongoing offer of life. Right.

Hostility. Hostility. Section two. Yeah. Let's move on to the heart of what Jesus says here. Let me read it to you. I'm just going to read 27 to 32 again.

[13 : 31] My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they'll 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. So in these three verses, Jesus paints this incredible picture of what it means to be a believer in the church. And do you see how it describes the role of the Christian here?

Two things it says about the Christian. There's a role of the Christian, there's a role of Jesus. Two things it says about the role of the Christian. One, to listen to Jesus. My sheep hear my voice. We are Christ listeners.

Second thing, the second thing, the way it describes the role of Christians, it says, what we do, we walk with Jesus. Verse 27 again, they follow me.

We don't just talk it up. We believe that what we believe makes a difference in how we live. If it doesn't, perhaps maybe we don't believe it. So that's what we do.

[14 : 30] That's our role. Now listen, we listen and we walk. We listen, we walk, we listen, we walk. Now Jesus' role, when describing what it means to be a believer, what does it say about what Jesus does for us? Two things.

He knows us, he keeps us. He knows us, he keeps us. Verse 27, I know them. And then all the snatch stuff after that, we'll get there.

Now let's look at the first one. He knows us. My sheep hear my voice, I know them. We are not a project to Jesus. It's not like, you know, ticking boxes on a wall, right?

Got him, got him, got her, got her. No, he knows us. The creator of the universe knows us. Christians are people, Jesus is getting to know, experientially. And the verb here in the Greek is present tense continual.

It's now and it's ongoing. You're talking to each other. You're experiencing each other, getting to know each other better. I hope you know this. I hope you realize that everything we do here, everything we do, we come to church, we sit down, we kneel, we stand, we say this, we talk to people, we do this, you know, all of it, all of it.

[15 : 38] It's all about getting to know Jesus. You know, there are some things that can, some habits or some attitudes or some, we say like some paradigms that can steal this idea away from us.

There's some things that can take that very central idea away from us. One of them is sort of making this whole thing, everything we do about rule keeping. I mean, you probably know this, legalism. But it's a very attractive legalism, of course, because it puts, it gives us a vague sense of security.

It puts salvation in our own hands. We kind of like that, you know. I don't have time to talk about that one, so we'll move on, right? The other two I want to talk about briefly, two attitudes, which they can suck the relational aspects out of Christianity, are one, naive optimism.

And two, cynicism. And they're actually related things. Now, I'm going to quote a couple of longish quotes from a great book called, *The Praying Life, Connecting with God in a Distracting World*.

If you're looking for a book to read, great book. *The Praying Life, Connecting with God in a Distracting World*. So, a couple of quotes which will explain how cynicism and naive optimism can ruin our connection with God. First, cynicism.

[16 : 58] Quote, cynicism begins with the wry assurance that everyone has an angle. Behind every silver lining is a cloud. The cynic is always observing, critiquing, but never engaging, loving, and hoping.

Cynicism leaves us doubting, unable to dream. That combination shuts down our hearts, and we just show up for life, going through the motions. That's easy to do. You know that, right? Just going through the motions.

To be cynical is to be distant. While offering a false sense of intimacy of being in the know, cynicism actually destroys intimacy. It leads to a creeping bitterness that can deaden and destroy the spirit.

And how does it affect us? One of the things it does, it ruins our prayer life. The quote continues. A praying life is the opposite of what we just described here.

Praying life is engaged with evil. It doesn't take no for an answer. The psalmist was in God's face, hoping, dreamy, asking. Prayer is feisty. Cynicism, on the other hand, merely critiques it.

[17 : 59] It's passive, cocooning itself from the passions of the great cosmic battle we're engaged in. It is without hope. That's how cynicism can affect you.

That's how cynicism can suck the relationship aspect of your Christianity away. Now the other one, naive optimism, which you might think is not too bad, but, and I quote here. At first glance, genuine faith and naive optimism appear identical since both foster confidence and hope.

But the similarity is only surface deep. Genuine faith comes from knowing my heavenly father loves and enjoys and cares for me. Naive optimism is groundless.

It's a childlike trust without the loving father. In cynicism, we can't pray because everything is out of control. Little is possible. That's what the cynic thinks. In naive optimism, we don't pray because everything's under control.

It's all right. There's tons more we could say about this here, but I want to move on. But both of these attitudes here, which you may be familiar with, can sack the life out of a relationship with Jesus.

[19 : 03] They're the big ones. And if you relate to those, goodness, what do I say? Come back to Jesus. Bring these attitudes to Jesus. Ask for his forgiveness.

Ask for his healing in your heart. If you don't know what to pray, you don't know how to pray, you know we have these folks over here that pray every week, right? They would love to come and pray with you. If you don't feel confident talking to your mates about this, your friends, go and see these guys over here.

They would love to pray with you. We must move on. Now remember, finishing up soon here. Remember where we are in the sermon. Okay. First section, hostility.

Second section was the core of Jesus' message, the story of deliverance. So we're talking about what it means to be a believer. There are two things we do. We listen to Christ.

We walk with Christ. And the things that Jesus does, he knows us. We've just talked about that. He wants to be in a relationship with us. The second part is he keeps us. So he knows us.

[19 : 58] He keeps us. All that stuff about we can't be snatched away. We can't be snatched away. A few times, we can't be snatched away. We cannot be taken from Jesus. What does that mean? Look at verse 29 to 30.

I'll give them eternal life. They'll never perish. 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 am the Father of one. So the good shepherd, good, beautiful, the beautiful shepherd, gives us eternal life, gives us his life.

We are brought into God's family and no one can take us from that family. So what does that mean for you? It means your salvation is not in question. Your salvation is not in question.

Because it's not in your hands. It's in Jesus' hands. And you see, to really make this point, Jesus takes us to the heights of theology.

[21 : 01] I am the Father of one. So you are safe in Jesus' hands because those hands are also the Father's hands. And who's stronger than the Father? You think you can lose your salvation?

Who can outwit God? Who can overpower God? Folks, your salvation is secure.

It's indefectible. Even you can't stuff it up. You should not have any anxiety about this.

This should be one of the things that you have incredible assurance about. Okay, we're finishing up here. We're coming to the table shortly.

And given this, I think when we come to the table, we should come with great thanksgiving and joy.

[22 : 07] Because it is an awesome thing that we're celebrating here. It is easy to go through the motions and sometimes that's just going to happen because you're distracted. But...

You know, there's one person I give to communion every time we do communion. And this one person, I put the bread in his hand and he goes like this and sort of bounces the bread a little bit. Like he's weighing it.

And I've never asked him about it. But I know, I'm pretty sure what he's doing is he wants to feel the weight of what he's doing. Because it's a really big deal what we're celebrating here.

And what this guarantees is your salvation. And what it says is that it's assured because it's in Jesus' hands and Jesus' hands are the Father's hands.

Christ wants to know us. He wants to know you so bad that he would rather go through death, he would rather die than be without your company.

[23 : 07] And nothing can separate that. And nothing can break up that relationship. And tonight we're going to celebrate it. Amen.