

John 10:22-42 “The God Who Won’t Let Go”

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[0 : 01] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us. We're back in John's Gospel this morning.

We've been encountering Jesus there time and time again, learning who he is, seeing most recently Jesus as the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep and then takes it up again in resurrected glory to give life forever to us.

We're going to read the rest of John chapter 10 this morning. But before we do, I want us to notice something that Jesus mentions in this passage almost as an aside.

It is a fundamental premise that he states in his argument to make a different point, but it's really important for us to consider briefly because it shows us Jesus' view of the Bible.

What develops in this passage that we're about to read is that Jesus is about to be stoned. And just like in that difficult trial of his temptation by Satan, when the going gets tough, Jesus quotes Scripture.

[1 : 24] In fact, in an effort to hold off his potential murderers, Jesus quotes that famous line of the rarely mentioned Psalm by the really unknown guy, Asaph, Psalm 82.

Is that what's on the tip of your tongue? You were thinking, that's where I would go in that moment, Psalm 82. No, I don't know if that would be my go-to. And then what Jesus states is the foundational premise of his whole argument.

He says, and Scripture cannot be broken. Every jot and tittle of every word on every line of God's word is completely certain.

It is utterly infallible. It is absolutely true, Jesus says. It is his view of the Bible. It's the way he uses the Bible in every situation, counting on it.

Do you approach God's word that way? Followers of Jesus? Do you follow him only in his loving example, his wise teaching, his gracious forgiveness?

[2 : 41] Or do you follow his view of the Bible, too? It cannot be broken. Not one word, even Old Testament words, not one will misguide you.

You can stake your life on it. He does. You must order your life by it. He does. He came, he says, to fulfill the law and the prophets, not to abolish any of it.

So yes, we may need to study its appropriate application. But not in order to avoid submitting ourselves to its authority. In order to trust the authority of our own wisdom or our own culture.

No. Does God's word guide our lives the way it did Jesus' life? Is it on our lips the way it was on his every time he was squeezed?

That's what came out. Does it examine us rather than the other way around? If we say we follow Jesus, it must.

[3 : 45] And that is part of why we read it together every week. Read it personally every day. God, thank you for your word.

God, thank you for your word. It is truth. It is truth. If we come to you this morning and ask that you would teach us your truth.

That you would transform us then by your truth. Your word is truth, Father. And we ask you to do that in Jesus' name. Amen.

John 10 at verse 22. The word of God. The word of God which cannot be broken. At that time the feast of dedication took place at Jerusalem.

It was winter and Jesus was walking in the temple in the colonnade of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.

[4 : 54] Jesus answered them, I told you and you do not believe. The works that I do in my father's name bear witness about me. But you do not believe because you are not part of my flock.

My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish. And no one will snatch them out of my hand.

My father who has given them to me is greater than all. And no one is able to snatch them out of the father's hand. I and the father are one. The Jews picked up stones again to stone him.

And Jesus answered them, I have shown you many good works from the father. For which of them are you going to stone me? The Jews answered him, 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. Jesus answered them, is it not written in your law? I said you are gods.

[5 : 59] If he called them gods to whom the word of God came. And scripture cannot be broken. Do you say of him whom the father consecrated and sent into the world you are blaspheming?

Because I said I am the son of God? 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 me. Believe the works that you may know and understand.

That the father is in me. And I am in the father. Again they sought to arrest him. But he escaped from their hands.

He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first. And there he remained. 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. Thus far God's holy word.

[7 : 01] It is yet another encounter with Jesus. Where John wants us to consider who he is. And whether we believe him.

The story centers around the identity of Jesus. Doesn't it? It is what they ask him about. At the beginning of the conversation.

It is what they start to stone him for. In the middle of it. It is what many believe in him. About by the end of it.

Jesus identity. Particularly as divine. Is crucial. But Jesus doesn't enter into merely theoretical discussions about nuanced theology.

He also shows here why his identity matters. He teaches doctrine that makes a difference. Let me give us a picture of this that we'll come back to some this morning.

[8 : 03] Imagine that you are hiking up on a mountain near some steep and dangerous looking cliffs. You can't even see how far the fall is below. Maybe you are up on the local land trust trails.

Maybe you have taken a visit to Chattanooga. And you are there at Rock City. And you are coming to enjoy the beautiful views. But you look up and you see near the edge of the cliff a toddler and an adult.

Okay. The toddler looks excited and energetic. And he is running around at the edge of the cliff. And you look and you see them. And they are hand in hand. Okay. Now let me ask you something.

You start to wonder. Who is holding whom? In this toddler and adult situation. And by the way does it matter?

Does it make any difference who is holding whom? Let me ask you that. Does it make any difference if the adult is merely standing there with hand available? It's there in case you need it.

[9 : 04] But it's just hanging limply while the adult distractedly looks all around. And presently the toddler is holding on to that hand. But at any moment the toddler could decide to let go, run off, frolic and go anywhere to his own danger.

Or would it make a difference if in fact the toddler who seems to know nothing of the dangers around him is actually being held, this is likely, in a vice grip by an adult who says, I am holding you and you are going nowhere whether you want to or not.

I'd suggest it makes all the difference in the world. Who is holding whom? Even if the toddler stumbles then, even if the toddler falls, even if the toddler tries to run off, he will be safe.

The distinction in who is holding whom makes all the difference in the world. Jesus doesn't want us to miss the glorious doctrine or the great difference that it makes in this passage.

The overarching doctrine will start there. Another issue here in Jesus' teaching is his unity with his father. We've seen Jesus' divine nature come up repeatedly in John's gospel.

[10 : 23] It's on almost every page, but perhaps never so directly to this point as verse 30 of chapter 10. I and the father are one.

Clearly here, God the father and the son are two distinct persons. They interact with one another in relationship here, fulfilling different roles.

They're even referred to in the plural. I and the father are one. But the two are mysteriously united.

Are said to be one. In what ways, we might ask? What does Jesus mean here? Well, first, they are united in grace.

They're specifically united in the giving of the gift of salvation. Life eternal with God, giving that gift to undeserving people.

[11 : 27] Referred to here as sheep in Jesus' analogy. Jesus' sheep hear his voice and follow him. And verse 28, I give them eternal life.

Jesus is giving a gift. Now keep looking. Who else is giving gifts? Verse 29, my father, who has, same verb, given them to me.

What great gifts are being given here by the father and the son. Just ponder it for a second. This is eternal life.

Relationship with God as a free gift. Salvation by grace alone. These are called the doctrines of grace because they flow to undeserving sinners.

From the unending supply of love in the heart of the triune God himself. We've read it in chapter 1. To those who received him.

[12 : 32] Who received the gift. Not earned it. Who merely believed in his name. John says, Jesus gave the right to become children of God.

Listen, I don't want you to miss this. There's only a few words in the passage. But brothers and sisters, let your heart soar to this for just a minute, okay?

We are brothers and sisters because God the father and God the son together in eternity past decided for their grace and love to overflow to us.

That they decided they were going to rescue us and adopt us into their family. The father said something like, son, my love is so overflowing and so full that I've got a gift to give to you.

A people. A bride. Lost sheep to bring into our fold. And Jesus the son responded and said, oh father, my love too is so overflowing that I will be the good shepherd.

[13 : 51] And I will go lay down my life for those sheep so that I may bring them into our family. That's how they're going to be saved. They'll become my brothers and sisters.

They'll become sons and daughters of God. Wow. Father and son in covenant together for our sakes.

Who deserve nothing. Grace flows and flows and flows. It's gifts. Gifts all over the place.

Gifts to our unending blessing. Right? I say unending blessing because father and son grasp onto us and won't let go.

Verse 28. No one will snatch them out of my hand. No one is able to snatch them out of the father's hand.

[14 : 52] Both of those. Now we have, as it were, the toddler teetering on the cliff grasped tightly by two adults. That's the way you would do it, isn't it? Two adults grasping on two mighty hands that will never let go.

The father and the son united in their grip on us. Who is holding on to whom? Wonderfully.

Reassuringly. Graciously. His is the love that will not let me go.

Amen? Listen, some of you talk theology. You talk about the perseverance of the saints. That's us making it to heaven.

It is not something that should be credited to our account. We persevere because of the preservation of the saints by our mighty God and Savior.

[15 : 57] It was never my strength to grab hold of him in the first place, was it? It was grace, grace, grace. And so it's not up to me to hang on or else.

No, no one is able to snatch us out of his hand. And that is wonderful. But we can't stop there in understanding the unity of the father and the son.

It's not only in grace, but also in glory. It's not only in action and purpose that they decide to come rescue us, but it's also in being and divinity.

See, some of you, like me, have had conversations with people who've come and knocked on your door. And you've talked with a Mormon or a Jehovah's Witness who would like to take you to John 10, 30 and explain to you at great length how this is a unity merely of action.

Jesus does things that God does. He gives. He saves. He holds us. But Jesus is not claiming to be divine, they say.

[17 : 12] He's not fully God. He's just God-like or godly. Please, please, please don't stop there and miss the full glory of the Savior, okay?

There is so much more than unity in action and purpose. Now, I will admit to you, the grammar of the sentence itself doesn't demand our understanding it that way.

It certainly allows for the understanding that I and the Father are one means in our very essence as we believe Jesus, the Son, very God of very God.

But the context does demand this very straightforward reading of Jesus' words, I and the Father are one. Just a couple of points here to help you.

First, when someone tells you it's merely a unity of action, just consider what those actions are that Jesus and God the Father are united in.

[18 : 18] The clearest one is giving life, which throughout the Bible is the prerogative of Yahweh alone and no one else. And then it is preserving life eternally.

That's another God job in case you're unclear on that. You can't claim to do those things without claiming to be divine. It's not as though Jesus is saying that God, by the word of his power, speaks the Son into existence.

And over here we have a child who picks up a yellow crayon and some paper and draws a round picture with rays coming out from it. And now we say, oh, look, you both made the Son.

You're one. It's not the same thing. The actions themselves here are uniquely divine. Next, when Jesus comes back to this teaching, this point he's making, he comes back to it in verse 38.

He says that the things he does, the works, the actions, are to demonstrate the reality of his union with the Father. There's something else they're pointing to that clearly predates and undergirds his powerful actions.

[19 : 32] The Father in me and I in the Father, two in one. By the way, we will see the Spirit in this relationship later in John. I know it's three in one.

But listen, one difficult, glorious concept at a time, okay? Just one for this morning. Last, in case you're still wondering how to take Jesus' words here, both times he says this about being one with God, what do the people listening to him do?

Pick up stones to kill this blasphemer? Right? Let's arrest him. They don't miss it.

You, being a man, make yourself God. Yep, he doesn't correct them on that. Except, just notice this for a second, they miss the glorious, the wonderful reality that actually, what's really happening here, Jesus, being God, made himself man.

Plenty of men claimed to be doing things that would further God's purposes. They were claiming to be godly. That was no problem.

[20 : 50] Jews loved that. This one, Jesus, was claiming to be one with God. That we can't have.

We won't tolerate it. Indeed, as John keeps showing us in so many ways, the word was with God, and the word was God.

One in grace, one in glory. Fully, fully God. Glorious truths, right? Glorious truths.

And, let's not miss what Jesus would have us hear. The difference that these wonderful doctrines make in our lives. first, they should lead us to unusual humility.

What I mean by that is that the picture here of Jesus giving eternal life to his sheep is not of sheep competing to win the prize, of best sheep.

[21 : 56] It's not what happens, is it? We're not receiving a reward. We are recipients of grace. Palms up, right? Empty-handed, grateful recipients, more interested in the greatness and glory of the giver than in anything about us.

That grateful humility will always be warm and welcoming to others because you don't think you're any better than they are. These doctrines of grace ought to make a difference in that normally achievement-oriented, task-rewarding, success-honoring people like you and me, isn't that how you spend most of your weeks?

We now delight in, we now seek out, we are now exceedingly patient with those who don't achieve, those who fail to perform, those who get overlooked by everyone else because all of a sudden we're not so high and mighty, down here, humble, dependent, needy, receiving grace.

Nobody looks lower than us. There's nobody beneath me. I so need what you need. Isn't that the way God loved and welcomed you into his family, isn't it?

I dare say it's the way he is showing us that the love of the Father and the Son flows to us and then through us to many, many others.

[23 : 30] As many have said, gratitude is the current of the river of grace. When you marvel at God's amazing grace to you, sing it, shout it, show it in a life of humility.

But when I say humility, please don't hear wimpy, fearful, woe is me. It's not at all what Jesus is talking about.

Jesus is telling us that the glorious truth of his unity with the Father is to inspire unusual security in his sheep.

It's not just enough to know that he is divine, that he's part of the eternal Godhead, the second person of the Trinity, that his is the mighty hand that flung out the stars, that it's his outstretched arm that parted the Red Sea and delivered his people from Egypt.

No, that's not enough. Jesus wants you to know something more. Jesus wants you to know that that almighty hand is holding you and it won't let go.

[24 : 52] Hear it again. I give them eternal life and they will 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.

That is the difference that the glory and grace of Jesus make for us. We're now the toddlers, aren't we? We're on the cliff's edge.

We're playing around. We're having fun. We're completely oblivious to anything that might could happen, the danger that could come to us. No fear in the world about what could come next and the uncertainties that lie ahead because we are grasped tightly by God the Father, by God the Son, by a strong Savior who will not let us go.

See, the picture of security is not people cowering down, curled up in a ball, deep underground in a cement bunker surrounded by the most amazing system of vaults in the world just trying to survive to get through one more dangerous day.

No, no, no, no, no. Jesus wants those who believe in him to hear his voice, to follow him confidently into the world with nothing to lose, with eternal life secure forever with him and a whole creation in front of you to enjoy him in and to share him with.

[26 : 29] That's the life Jesus is offering us. The underground zip lines of the Louisville Mega Cavern have been there recently.

They're about a hundred feet above a rock floor. Several hundred feet of zip lines stretched across this dark cave, darkness everywhere.

It's a bit scary. One of our guides through the dark cave was a young woman who was joyfully zipping around from line to line. She was joking around as she invited others into the fun that she was having.

She was screaming with delight as she flew several hundred feet across the zip line and her voice was echoing off the rock walls all around us.

after watching her for a while another man in our party chuckled and said to her you always wanted to do this job didn't you? She said this she said actually no actually I've been really afraid of heights my entire life.

[27 : 41] In fact I really wasn't sure my first time in here I'd ever come back but I've learned to trust what's holding me. I've learned to trust what's holding me.

Are you learning to trust what's holding you? Who is holding you?

Maybe you're not so much afraid of heights or the edge of a cliff but you're afraid of your sin your weakness your death your world falling apart with a war your family falling apart with arguments you're afraid of your failing your not being enough your missing out your grip slipping friend listen listen to Jesus it's not about the strength of your grip it's about his and nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ

Jesus your Lord nothing can snatch you out of his hands yes it is we sing it prone to wander Lord I feel it prone to leave the God I love I understand you're being afraid you're going to run off from him but I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day we sing that too oh love that will not let me go I rest my weary soul in thee it is well it is well with my soul sing those two resting in his strong grip trusting what holds me

I can zip around joyfully I can savor the view it's glorious for me or Jesus I can point others to the path of life and I can quit chasing security everywhere else Thursday I thought I was going to write this sermon about having security in God's strong grip on us that was the plan for the day on Thursday I wrote zero words zero didn't feel good instead God took me by the hand and one event after another in my life and in others lives that I love all day he just kept showing me the things that

[31 : 25] I grasp it for security and how they vanish as quickly as I reach for them picture a vapor a bubble that you grab it and as soon as your hands around it it's gone or if you're with me in the cliff imagery if you're still dangling on the ledge these are the little weeds and twigs that as we start falling we're grasping for everything that we can to hold us and it just leaves us empty handed and we crushed I can't share most of the details this morning but God showed me how I look for security in health in money in job security in fitting in in being right in being able to fix in my commitment and my resources to make it all right one after another after another what are you grasping at to hold you friend

I challenge you if you haven't experienced this if you haven't lived this already try it see how quickly anything you want to grasp at will disappear and that's not what I want you to experience I don't want it to stop there experience that there you are and you're frantically flying off the cliff and you're grasping an empty hand and I've got nothing and all of the sudden a strong hand grasps you it reaches out to you it holds on to you and it will not let go my only comfort is that I belong body and soul in life and in death to my faithful savior Jesus Christ he's holding you he is fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood and set me free from the tyranny of the devil in fact he also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head apart from the will of my father in heaven in fact all things must work together for my salvation

I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand no one is able to snatch them out of my father's hand I and the father are one let me ask you something as we prepare to come to this table if all that is true regardless of me and how tightly I cling to Jesus then why bother with this table Jesus why would Jesus want us celebrating this sacrament if he's going to hold on to us forever no matter what whether we hang on to him or not I think at least one of the reasons at least part of his view of this table is that he wants all of us always to remember his grace and his grasp both of those things his grace to give us life and his grasp to keep us in that life forever it's why as the crowd gathers around

Jesus in this passage with stones in their hands to kill him that he actually keeps pleading with them to understand that they would know that he indeed is God and that they can find life in him that they would come and believe in him Jesus keeps pleading with them that's what he would say to you this morning if you are here and you don't yet trust in Jesus that could be for any number of reasons if you're here and you don't believe in him yet maybe it's because this is the first time you've ever heard the good news of Jesus maybe you're here and you've been in church your whole life you've heard this many times but you're just not quite convinced yet maybe you're a young person and you've grown up in church but you have never yet yourself trusted in Jesus confessed your sins to him received his forgiveness then to all of you who fit those categories let me invite you not to come to take bread and wine this morning but come receive

Jesus he is the one who will hold you and never let you go he invites you today to come and trust him we would love to talk with you more about him if you do trust him if that is your great comfort your only comfort then I want you to come this morning empty handed because you are coming to receive all that you need so you can let go of all those other things that you've been grasping at all over the place you can let them go in fact you have to it's the only way to come you come empty handed because you're here to receive his grace again his grace and his grasp he won't let you go let's pray Jesus thank you for that thank you for that promise thank you for the fact that you let go of your life that you would grab onto us use these common elements for a sacred purpose that we would trust you more we ask in your name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org