

No one can take you out of the Fathers hands

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[0 : 00] So, if you'd like to turn with me to John chapter 10, and we'll pick it up at verse 22.

So, John 10 and verse 22. So, John 10, beginning at verse...

I'm in the wrong gospel. Sorry, hang on. John 10, beginning at verse 22.

Now hear the word of the Lord. 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.

[1 : 19] 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. Well, let me pray for you and pray for me this evening. Well, as I said, over the next few weeks, I'd like to address the issue of perseverance.

By perseverance, in relating that to the Christian, I mean the issue of the Christian continuing in their faith is much down to the grace of God, as it is God holding us in his hand, and no one snatching us from it.

[2 : 34] What I'd like to address this evening is just these few words here that Jesus speaks, and the question that is asked him and where he is, out of John 10.

Now, most of what he says is fairly easy to understand. It's fairly simple to understand. We hear Jesus being asked a question. Well, we understand that.

And then we can see that Jesus gives them an answer, and the answer says things like this, that God has spoken. Well, that's simple to understand.

God speaks. God gives eternal life. Again, we understand what that means. Those who belong to God will never perish.

Hopefully, you know what that means, and you rejoice in the fact that you sit here this evening with whatever ailment you might have, knowing that you're never going to perish. And we also know that those who belong to God can never be snatched from the hand of God.

[3 : 37] These are simple truths. They're true truths. We've got them. But they have their depths. Imagine it like this for a moment.

If you can swim, okay, you can swim. It doesn't matter if you're in a swimming pool or you're in the middle of the channel.

If you can swim, you can swim. But some of us will feel a lot more comfortable swimming in a swimming pool where we can touch the bottom than we ever were perhaps a half a mile out to sea.

And yet there's no other reason for this than the fact that we can touch the bottom in one situation, but in the other situation, the depth scares us.

And what you have here is that kind of both simplicity and complexity. Simplicity is that if you can swim in a swimming pool, you can swim in the sea, but you're far more likely to get scared in the sea because of its depth than you are in a swimming pool by which you can touch the bottom.

[4 : 49] And when you actually come to wrestle with some of the issues that Jesus speaks of here in John 10, some of them are fairly easy. They're in the shallow end.

We understand them. Some of the others are far deeper. And even though we can read the Bible, we can read simple things and we can read difficult things, we're far more comfortable to read the things that are simple that we can touch the bottom on than we are to perhaps read into those things that we think are out of our depth.

And what I want to suggest this evening is that if you can read, you can read and let God take care of the rest. Okay, let God take care of the depth to which he takes you.

Remember, you can't be snatched out of his hand. He's going to be able to keep you. But at the same time, I don't want to take you down a road that you can't get yourself back from. There are some people who are really quite clever theologically, but sometimes their cleverness does them no good.

And they take themselves down roads that they've got no possibility of getting back from, but by the grace of God, they get back to where they ought to be. And so let's begin with the absolute basics.

[6 : 05] Jesus, at wintertime, is walking in the temple in the colonnade of Solomon, which basically means he's not in the temple, but he's sort of on the outside of the temple, but underneath a shelter.

And he's probably underneath the shelter because it's wintertime, and it's going to be cold, and that's where he is. As he's walking, the Jews, okay, who are still interested, or at least curious about Jesus, ask him a very simple question or actually put it to him.

So the Jews gathered around him, verse 24, and said to him, how long will you keep us in suspense? Assuming that Jesus is actually doing that, I don't think that he is, but they are.

And their question is this, if you are the Christ, tell us plainly. If you are the Christ, tell us plainly. And what they are suggesting to Jesus is that up to this point, he hasn't been plain.

That up to this point, he hasn't actually been clear. That up to this point, he has done nothing more but keep them in suspense. Now, Jesus doesn't agree with their proposal.

[7 : 22] But their question is, don't keep us in suspense, but speak to us plainly. But then notice Jesus' answer, verse 25. Jesus answered them, I told you, and you do not believe.

I told you, and you do not believe. And so the point that Jesus is making is this, that it really doesn't matter how plain Jesus speaks.

It really doesn't matter how clear Jesus is. It really doesn't matter how simple Jesus says that he is the Christ.

Simplicity, plain speech, clarity, cannot penetrate unbelief. Okay? Okay? I told you.

So it doesn't matter how plain you make the gospel message. It doesn't matter how clear you say that Jesus is the Christ, even if Jesus says it himself, or how simply he says it.

[8 : 30] The plainness, the simplicity, the clarity, cannot ever, never, penetrate unbelief. unbelief. It just cannot get through.

The Pharisees are accusing Jesus with the question that basically, Jesus, you're just not making it plain enough. This is why we can't understand. Or this is why we don't believe.

You're just not plain enough, Jesus. And Jesus is saying in verse 25, the problem is not that I'm not plain enough. The problem is your own unbelief.

That's the problem. The problem is not that I'm not simple enough. The problem is you don't believe. The problem is not that I'm not clear in what I'm saying. The problem is your unbelief.

And so if you can swim, you can swim in the shallow end as well as the deep end. If you can swim, you can swim in the deep end or the shallow end.

[9 : 36] If you can read, you can read simple stuff and you can read difficult stuff. But if you can't read, you can't read. And if you can't swim, you can't swim.

And what Jesus is saying here is that you can't understand because you don't believe. In other words, it's a bit like saying go and swim when someone hasn't had a swimming lesson.

In other words, they need belief before they can understand the plain word of Jesus. It's not as if Jesus has to make it plainer or simpler or be more clear.

No, the issue is they first need to be separated from their unbelief. The issue is not clarity.

The issue is unbelief. The problem is their unbelief. So this raises a really very important question for us to consider. Why is it that you know that Jesus is the Christ?

[10 : 40] Why do you know that Jesus is the Christ? Are you really any smarter than these Pharisees? I'm not. I don't think you're that smarter, much smarter than them.

You may be looking at you. But why do you know that Jesus is the Christ when they didn't? Well, Jesus answers that, doesn't he?

By effectively saying that God causes us to believe in Jesus and causes us to understand Jesus. So let's read verse 26.

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 my Father's hands.

[11 : 48] So let's just stop and understand the picture here. Jesus is basically saying that only sheep can hear his voice, that only sheep can know that Christ is the Christ.

And the only way they can actually get to know it is if they are given to Jesus by the Father, verse 29. So the reason why you know that Jesus is the Christ, it is because God has first given you to Jesus, given you as sheep to him.

And as he has given you to Christ, you then come to believe. Okay? It is not the other way around that you first believe and are then given to Jesus.

No, no, no. Look at verse 29. My Father who has given them to me, given who? The sheep who hear the voice of Jesus.

First you belong, then you believe. First you belong, and then you believe. This is why I think the prodigal son, or shall we say the prodigal son, the younger one, the ones who have been brought up in a covenantal home, who have understood the things of God, but then who runs away from home, comes back.

[13 : 15] And why does he come back? It may look, while he's in the far country, as though he's not a sheep. But what does Jesus precede the parable of the prodigal son with?

A sheep that is lost. Right? A sheep that is lost. And the sheep is brought back into the fold.

So let's not draw any conclusions here of people who, at the moment, who once listened to Jesus, who are no longer listening to Jesus, are somehow not part of his fold, because the whole point of the parable is that sheep get lost.

But sons are still sons. Is that clear? That should be incredibly encouraging. Okay?

Sheep get lost. Jesus told a parable about it. And so, first you belong, and then you believe. But that doesn't mean that you cannot wonder.

[14 : 24] We'll deal with the perseverance of Christians as we move through next week and the week after, of the importance of making sure you're nibbling the grass inside of the fold rather than looking at the grass on the outside, thinking that it's somehow greener.

Sheep do get lost. Okay? But they're still sheep of the fold. That's why the shepherd goes out and looks for them.

Sons leave the home. But they're still a son. But we'll deal with that in a moment later. The point here is to understand that you become that way because of God's perseverance with you.

God brings you to Jesus. God gives you to Jesus. That's where it starts. The only reason why I continue in my faith when so often I wanted to just, oh, I don't know if I want to live like Jesus today.

And the only reason I do is because, not because I'm persevering, but because God is persevering with me. And the reason why you continue with your faith, even though it can be really difficult at times, is because God is persevering with you.

[15 : 42] And sometimes God brings us back into listening to the voice of Jesus through difficulties because that may be the only way we come back. Or it could be through something else, whatever it may be.

So how do we see the perseverance of God here? How does God persevere with people? Well, firstly, when a person who doesn't believe in Jesus, and when I say doesn't believe in Jesus, I mean someone who doesn't trust Jesus with the whole of their life, for the whole of life.

Okay, that's the definition of an unbeliever. It's not that they choose to believe something else. It's rather that they're not trusting in Jesus with their whole being, their whole life, for the whole of life. And the reason they're not doing that is because they're not part of his fold.

Okay, but as I said, I'll put the little disclaimer in there. Okay, sons can be prodigals and sheep can get lost. Okay, so there's room for other considerations, but we're not looking at that right now.

But sheep do hear the voice of Jesus because they are his sheep. And people who don't hear the voice of Jesus, like the Jews here who say, make it simpler.

[16 : 59] Just be plain with us. Stop keeping us in suspense. They are in their unbelief because they're unwilling, as you get to see later on in the Gospel of John, they're unwilling to believe anyway.

And so they just do not believe. And so the reason we have come to believe in Jesus, the reason why we have come to trust in Jesus, is because, verse 29, God has persevered with us.

God has taken us and has given us to Jesus. First we belong and then we believe. God has taken us from wherever we were and has given us to Jesus because first we must belong before we can believe.

In other words, both belonging and belief is a gift of God. Now, God doesn't do the believing for us and God certainly doesn't do the repenting for us, but God perseveres with us to such an extent that he is constantly bringing us to Jesus.

And as he brings us to Jesus, this is far more exciting than believing the misguided assumption that the world has somehow got seekers in it. No one seeks for God.

[18 : 10] No, not one. Romans 3. The true seeker, the true seeker of this world is God. God gave his son to seek and to save the lost.

And I have much more confidence in God seeking the lost than I do the lost seeking him. And so should you. And this is how God perseveres.

He's constantly bringing people to Jesus because he is the seeker. He's the true seeker. And so both belonging and belief originates with God.

It is a gift from God. It is God persevering. It is God doing something, not you doing something. It is God at work, not you at work. We can rejoice.

The next thing we notice is that the perseverance of God is seen in the fact that he leads his sheep. That God doesn't just bring us into the fold, but now he takes us where he wants us to go.

[19 : 14] He takes us where he wants us to belong. He leads us in the path of righteousness. Now, the perseverance on our part is that we should listen.

We should persevere to listen. But the perseverance on his part is that he speaks. And if God didn't speak, then there would be nothing to listen to and nothing to be led by.

But the perseverance of God here is seen in the fact that Christ is the word of God given to us to speak and to lead so that we may follow.

So any following we do is preceded by the perseverance of God. Any perseverance we do is preceded by the fact that God first perseveres with us. We've all seen, in fact, I saw something, it's amazing that, you know, I've got a few bad habits when I'm out in shops.

One of them is if I go in a bookshop and if we go shopping and we go into that bookshop quite regularly, I've been known to finish a book by visiting it frequent times and then feel guilty for not buying it.

[20 : 20] I mean, you know, it's a real sin, you know, but I don't know what to do about it because, you know, I have actually bought the book on several occasions because I felt so bad reading it and not buying it that I've actually gone back and bought it and left it on my shelf unread for the second, you know, anyway.

But I can remember once sitting there and on this bench and I saw, I saw this mother with a very young child and she's walking ahead of her child into the shop and she said, come on, whatever the child's name was, I don't know, come on, come on.

Who's persevering? Well, the parent is saying, come on, and the child's, you know, like this, and they get in. Without a word of a lie, five minutes later, I saw a woman with her mum and it was the daughter now saying to the mum who was about 80, come on, come on, are we ever going to get into this shop?

We've got so much to do. And I thought, how things reverse. But who's persevering with who? Well, they're both persevering. But one is, one is doing the pushing, one is doing the leading, one is saying, come on, let's get there, let's go.

And God perseveres with us constantly, just gently, come on, let's get a move on. God also perseveres in the fact, verse 28, that it is God, God the Son, and God the Father is the triune God of Scripture who gives us eternal life.

[21 : 52] And eternal life doesn't just mean that we will live forever, but eternal life speaks of a quality of life that you don't currently have. You're immortal.

The day that you were born, you became immortal. It means that you would never die, that you would continue to exist. Your body would disappear at some point, but you would forever be.

But eternal life isn't speaking of immortality as much as it is speaking of the quality of life that God is giving you. And there is a quality still yet to be enjoyed.

That's why we've not yet inherited the eternal life. We have it in essence, but we don't have it completely. So God is the giver of eternal life.

In Philippians 1, it says this, that it is God who began the good work in you, and it is God who will finish the good work in you. I mean, how encouraging is that? It does say in Philippians 2, however, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, but we'll get to that side next time.

[23 : 02] But for now, understand that God who began the good work in you is going to bring it to its completion. That God doesn't stop working. He doesn't get halfway through and think, I've tried 496 times and it's just not working.

He keeps going because God is able to bring you to completion. In Jeremiah 31.3, it tells us that God is a God who loves us with an everlasting love.

Then that God will never stop doing good to us. Never stop it. Jeremiah 32 as well.

It is God who gives us an undivided heart in Ezekiel 11. And it is God, as we see here in John, who gives us eternal life.

And then over in Romans, it says something really quite spectacular and wonderful, that the gifts of God, everything that God gives us are irrevocable. In other words, that once God has given them to us, he can never take them away again.

[24 : 06] What does that mean in real terms? It means that a Christian can experience wonderful and great gifts of God, become a prodigal, and not have those gifts taken away from him or her.

Because the gifts of God are irrevocable. Okay? God doesn't say you've blown it. Look at all that I've given you and look what you've done and you've gone.

Look at the story of the prodigal who comes home and enjoys as much as he did before he even left, if not more. Okay? The gifts of God are irrevocable gifts.

And so, since that it is God who gives eternal life and since that that eternal life is an irrevocable gift, then it follows from that, quite obviously, that you will never perish.

Okay? Do you see how it all links together? That if God gives eternal life, then it follows from that, if God's gifts are irrevocable, which they are, Romans 11, verse 29, that eternal life means that you will never perish.

[25 : 16] Never perish. Peter Jackson, the blind pianist, used to tell a story about perishing. And the definition that he gave was of a hot water bottle and the cap.

And this family very kindly put a hot water bottle in his bed, did it up, but unfortunately, the cap had perished. And he got into bed that night and he said it felt like getting into semolina or warm rice pudding.

He said he didn't get up and say anything because it was already late. And so he laid there in a wet bed. We probably stripped some of it off, but it was the same lady, I think, who says, would you like me to close the curtains for you?

What for? Do you think I'm going to be woken by the light? You know. And yet, he had a sense of humor beyond many in that regard. But his definition of perishing was this, that when something perishes and people are perishing all the time, is that they can no longer fulfill the purpose for which they were created.

And so God has given you eternal life, not just life forever, but a quality of life. And that quality of life means you will never perish. You will never not fulfill the purpose for which God has created you.

[26 : 42] Okay? We don't fulfill it even completely now, but we will never perish. It means that God will get us to a state and to a condition by which we will always fulfill the very thing that God created us for.

We will never, ever perish. Now, not perishing doesn't mean that you're not going to have a difficult life now. Not perishing doesn't mean that you're not going to have problems now.

I've been in the church long enough to see people with Alzheimer's, with dementia, in a bed-bound state. I've been in the church long enough to see people care for people with Alzheimer's, dementia, and in a bed-bound state.

And I've also seen these people, when they die, whether it be from cancer or anything else, to have no physical resemblance or mental resemblance of their former self.

I've seen it and it's hurtful to see. But they will never perish. They will never perish. They may lose their mind.

[27 : 52] They may lose their physical capabilities. They may lose the luster of their life, but they will never perish. Even Christians, unfortunately, can die in quite horrible ways, but they will never perish.

It would be good for us then to remind ourselves what Romans 8 says, that who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

As it is written, for your sake we are being killed all day long and we are regarded as sheep to the slaughter. No. In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

For I am sure. And I can remember getting to that point in my studies and saying, well, how are you sure? How do you know? How do you know, Paul, that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord?

How do you know that? John 10, verse 29. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all.

[29 : 29] Is greater than all. That's how he knows. Because he knows God. That's how he can make that statement. So you will not perish because God will not allow it.

and even though we will have loved ones that will seem to perish in their earthly body and in their mental state, if they belong to Christ, they will not perish but they will become the person that God has called them to be on that side in glory.

A dying woman in Haddington once said to her pastor as he ministered her, she was dying, he knew that she was dying and so he ministered into death, asked her the question, and what if you don't obtain the eternal life that you've been promised?

She said to the parish, said to the pastor, if I were to perish, if I were to perish, then God would lose far more than me.

because all that I would lose would be my eternal life, but God would lose being God. God would lose his honor.

[30 : 51] God would effectively stop being God. We will not perish because God will not allow it and what God doesn't allow doesn't happen.

And so the next statement follows so well in fitting as we draw this to a close. Verse 28 and again verse 29, no one will snatch them out of my hand.

No one will snatch them out of the Father's hand. No one can take them from the hand of Jesus who is God. No one can take them from God the Father who is God. No one can take us from the triune God of Scripture.

So not only does the believer have eternal life, but the believer has eternal security. Okay? Eternal life comes with eternal security.

That only, that means that not only do you have a good life, a better life awaiting you, but you have a life that is entirely secured because of the perseverance of God.

[31 : 58] God keeps on keeping you and no one can snatch you from his hand. And so there is a distinction here to be made that I think you need to know and that is the distinction between safe travel and safe arrival.

How was your journey? It's a terrible one, but you got here safely enough. Ah yes, I got here safely enough. See, we understand on a purely human level if we've been on a journey that there is a big difference between safe travel and safe arrival and a bumpy journey, but yet we still get there in one piece.

And so the Christian life is not without its bumpy journey, but you will get a safe arrival. Why? Because eternal life means eternal security.

So you can have your trouble, you can have the pain, you can have the difficulties, you can have a bumpy travel, but you will always have a safe arrival.

because eternal life and eternal security are in the hands of God. The reason, again, why eternal security exists is because there is no one greater than the Father.

[33 : 13] No, not one. No one's greater than God the Father. So as we conclude, the issues of worrying about perishing or even perishing physically need not really be a worry at all.

The worries about security, there are earthly worries, but God can take care of them. If he can take care of the more serious one of eternal security, I think he can take care of any earthly one.

the issues of life eternal, of belonging to Jesus are all dependent on the perseverance of God. It all depends on God doing what he continues to do.

That God begins the work and God will complete the work. And so this leads to two outcomes in your life right here, right now. The first is this, you can rest.

You can rest assured. But the second is this, you can risk everything. You can rest in Christ.

[34 : 19] You are eternally secure. But you can also risk everything because you can't lose any of it. You can't lose any of it.

And by risk, I don't mean go and sin against God because you can't lose it. By risk, I mean you can go out into the world and take big risks for God because you can never be taken from him.

You can never be snatched, never perish, never be lost because you're heading towards a world that is better, where you will be better, and with God forever because of the perseverance of God.

So if you're ever feeling as though you can't continue, remember the verse that says that he remains faithful even when we are faithless.

This is the perseverance of God. Amen. Thank you. Thank you.