

John 10:19-42

Introduction

After the “shepherds” of Israel had “put out” the man who was born blind, Jesus the good shepherd found him and brought him to Himself – into the fold of His sheep. The man who was born blind was already one of Jesus’ sheep, so when Jesus called him, he knew Jesus’ voice and he followed Him.

Jesus uses this contrast between the “shepherds” who are no better than thieves and robbers and the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep to make *Himself* known to us. He is the good shepherd who sees the wolf coming and does battle with the wolf to save the sheep. And this is the mystery: He gains the victory and gathers the sheep not just by putting His life *on the line*, but by “laying it down” and dying in order that He might take it up again; in order that He might be the good shepherd of His sheep forever; in order that the sheep might go in and out and find pasture and have life and have it abundantly.

I. John 10:19–21 — A division occurred again among the Jews because of these words. Many of them were saying, “He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?” Others were saying, “These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?”

The first group of Jews, who say Jesus has a demon and is insane are in some ways being more “honest” with themselves than the “others.” They were used to thinking of the Messiah in self-centered terms – in terms of what the Messiah would do for them. But they had no use for a Messiah who would lay down His life for them. What glory was there in that? And even as Jesus spoke of laying down His life for the sheep, He also seemed to be expecting absolute allegiance from the sheep. He is the door (the only door). He is the good shepherd (there is no other). He has authority to lay His life down and to take it up again. These Jews hear in Jesus’ words not just what He does *for* the sheep, but what’s expected and required *of* the sheep. These aren’t the words of the “merely human” Messiah that they were looking for. Given these assumptions, what could be a more natural response than to say, “He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?”

But others disagreed. They had the same set of assumptions as the first group, and yet they couldn’t bring themselves to dismiss Jesus as an insane man who had a demon. So they weren’t really being “honest” with themselves. They said, “These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?” They say—very *rationally*—who they *don’t* believe Jesus is. At the same time, they’re still *irrationally* holding out hope that He might *be* who they want Him to be.

II. John 10:22–24 — At that time the Feast of the Dedication¹ took place at Jerusalem; it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. The Jews then gathered

¹ The Feast of the Dedication celebrated the restoration of the temple worship under Judas Maccabaeus in 165 B.C. It was celebrated in the month of Chisleu (our November/December) and so came two months after the feast of

around Him, and were saying to Him, “How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ [the messianic son of David], tell us plainly.”

The Jews asking this question can’t be those who say Jesus has a demon. Any man who “has a demon and is insane” obviously isn’t the Christ. The Jews asking this question must represent the second group who, in spite of their “popular” assumptions about the Messiah are still holding out hope that *Jesus* might be that Messiah. That’s why they ask: “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” But if they really knew the Scriptures and if they really believed in the Messiah that those Scriptures promised, what could possibly be more “plain” (though still full of mystery) than the things Jesus has already said? The Jews don’t want “long, drawn out” explanations. They don’t want any “deep theology.” Just tell us “plainly” if you’re the Christ, they say, and then *we* can fill in the rest.

III. John 10:25 — Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father’s name, these testify of Me.”

The Jews want Jesus to tell them if He’s the Christ; and if He does—and if He is—they’ll believe. But Jesus says that He’s already told them and they’re already unbelieving. *How* has Jesus already told them? By the works that He does in His Father’s name. Not by a bare, propositional, self-promoting claim such as the Jews are wanting, but rather by the sum-total of His whole life and ministry as a constant doing of the works the Father has given Him to do (cf. 5:36; 6:28-36; 9:3-4; 14:10). In the face of unbelief, there’s no possible way for Jesus to be more plain. There’s no possible way to speak more clearly.

So the irony, of course, is that Jesus has essentially just answered their question: “*Yes, I am the Christ*”; but He does so without *saying*, “Yes, I am the Christ.” Instead, He points to *Himself* as the defining, ultimate revelation of *who* the Christ *is*. In other words, “*I am* the answer to your question.” “The works that I do in My Father’s name [the sum total of my life and ministry], these testify of Me.” Didn’t the Jews just confess, “These are not the *sayings* of one demon-possessed. A demon cannot *open the eyes of the blind*, can he?” They could see in Jesus’ words and in His deeds who He was *not*, but they didn’t want to see *in these same things* who Jesus *was*. The Messiah they were confronted with in this way was more than they wanted.

Maybe sometimes we read the Gospels and we wonder why the Jews wouldn’t want the Messiah that Jesus said He was. Who doesn’t want a good shepherd? As many would put it today, who doesn’t want a gentle, and tender, and loving, and kind shepherd? Who doesn’t want to go in and out and find pasture and have life and have it abundantly? But hand in hand with these things and even necessary for these things is a messianic sovereignty and lordship over our lives that’s absolute. The greatness of the Messiah’s salvation can only be measured by the absoluteness of the Messiah’s lordship. How far-reaching His salvation is depends entirely on how far-reaching His lordship is. There are many today who miss this connection and think they can have the salvation without the lordship. On the other hand, there are others today (like the Jews here in John) who miss this connection and therefore see in the absoluteness of Christ’s lordship only something restrictive – only fetters and chains. They can’t see the goodness of Christ’s salvation

Tabernacles in the month of Tishri (our September/October; John 7) and four months before the feast of Passover (in this case Jesus’ final Passover) in the month of Nissan (our March/April).

because they've already rejected—*a priori*— His lordship. So Jesus goes on to say in verses 26-30:

IV. John 10:26–28 — “But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.”

The sheep don't see the absoluteness of their shepherd's rule as something restrictive; they see it as the source of perfect rest and security and peace. The lordship that “demands” that the sheep follow their shepherd in all things and at all times is the *same* lordship that guards the sheep and keeps the sheep and goes after the sheep when they stray and that guarantees the sheep will never, ever be lost.

“You do not believe,” Jesus says, “*because* you are not of My sheep.” Jesus' point isn't to get us tied up in knots over a mystery we can't penetrate. Jesus' point is that if they *were* of His sheep, they would most certainly believe. Why? *Because Jesus is the good shepherd!* Jesus will never fail to bring and keep and preserve safe from all harm all of His sheep. In saying this to the group of those who were rejecting Him, Jesus is still inviting each individual to prove that he is among His sheep by believing in Him – by seeing and experiencing in the absoluteness of His lordship the irresistibly effectual working of His saving power and love. This is why after saying, “you do not believe because you are not of My sheep,” He goes on to say: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.” Oh, what comfort and joy! What perfect peace and happiness!—That I hear His voice in the Gospel, and that He knows me, and that I follow Him, and that He gives me eternal life, and that I will never perish, and that no one will snatch me out of His hand. What cause for endless praise and thanksgiving! What power for faithful service and obedience! I am His and He is mine.

And now let's be reminded of how it is that *Jesus* can say these things. How can a *man* claim God's sheep as His own, who hear and know His voice? How can a *man* have authority to give eternal life? How does *Jesus* have a lordship such that all the powers of hell can never snatch the sheep from His hand? Jesus answers:

V. John 10:29–30 — “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.”

What is this “oneness” of which Jesus speaks? It's not “sameness” as if Jesus and the Father were somehow “the same” – as if Jesus *is* the Father or the Father *is* Jesus. Otherwise the language of Jesus would cease to have meaning: “*My Father, who has given them to Me... I and the Father are one.*” On the other hand, this “oneness” isn't just a matter of perfect agreement or oneness of purpose, as if Jesus was only saying that He and the Father are always completely “on the same page.” The absoluteness of the language communicates more than this. More importantly, mere agreement (no matter how perfect it is) can never satisfactorily answer the question we started out asking: How does Jesus have a lordship such that all the powers of hell can never snatch the sheep from *His* hand?

What is this “oneness” of which Jesus speaks? Remember what Jesus said in verses 14-15:

- John 10:14–15 — “I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, *even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father.*”

The “oneness” of which Jesus speaks is His eternal and all-comprehending *knowing* of the Father and the Father’s eternal and all-comprehending *knowing* of the Son. But who could ever *know* the Father in this way except one who Himself “participates” fully in the single, undivided Godhead? And of whom could it be said that the Father knows Him *even as* the Father is known by Him except one who Himself “participates” fully in the single, undivided Godhead? In verse 38 Jesus will say, “The Father is in Me, and I [am] in the Father.” That the sheep know Jesus and recognize His voice is due to the fact that they recognize in the voice of *Jesus* the voice of *the Father*. That Jesus knows the sheep is due to the fact that they’re already “*His own*” sheep whom *the Father* gave to *Him* before the ages began (cf. Jn. 6:39; 10:29; 17:9, 11, 12, 24; 18:9; 2 Tim. 1:9). We are eternally secure in *Jesus*’ hands because, Jesus says: “My Father, who has given [the sheep] 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.*” Our eternal security is grounded in the eternal relationship of knowing and love between the Father and the Son – a knowing and love that reaches outward to encompass and draw in even us. Could there be any more certain ground of our peace or any more unshakable guarantee of our hope?

VI. John 10:31–33 — The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, “I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?” The Jews answered Him, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.”

Remember, these are the Jews who just a moment ago were saying to Jesus: “How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.” They can’t see in Jesus’ claim to possess the Lordship of God Himself the true nature and the true greatness of the Messiah’s salvation. So after just asking Him to tell them plainly if He was the Christ (the messianic son of David), now they pick up stones to stone Him – because He, being a man, made Himself out to be God.”

VII. John 10:34 — Jesus answered them, “Has it not been written in your Law, ‘I SAID, YOU ARE GODS’?”

The Hebrew word for God, *elohim*, is a fixed plural form (it’s never singular in form). So how do we know when the meaning of the plural noun is actually singular, referring to the one true creator God? The context is always clear. In particular, when the plural noun *elohim* appears with a singular verb or a singular pronoun, then we translate *elohim* as “*God*” rather than “*gods*.” “In the beginning, God [plural] created [‘*He* created’; *singular*] the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). God [plural] shall bless [‘*He* shall bless’; *singular*] us; let all the ends of the earth fear *Him* [*singular*]! (Ps. 67:7) When *elohim* should be translated “gods” it’s usually referring in context to the false gods and idols of pagan nations – but not always.

In Psalm chapter 8 the *angels* are called “gods” (*elohim*; Ps. 8:4-5; cf. Heb. 2:7, 9). How can this title that belongs supremely to the one true God be assigned to the angels? Because the angels, in their exalted position, have been assigned the task of acting *for* God – of executing His judgments and decrees (cf. Gen. 28:12; Ps. 103:20; Dan. 11:1; 12:1). God has delegated a “divine” lordship, as it were, to the angels. It’s for this same reason that even men *can* be called “gods” (*elohim*).

In Luke’s genealogy of Jesus, Adam is called “the son of God” (Lk. 3:38). Adam was the “son of God” in the sense that he was the image and the likeness of God, and *as such* He was appointed to rule for God over all creation (Gen. 1:26). It’s this God-like role of Adam, and even of all mankind in Adam, that allows him to be called the “son of God” in Luke 3 and that allows the psalmist to say: “You have made him a little lower than the gods [*elohim*; cf. Heb. 2:7, 9] and crowned him with glory and honor” (Ps. 8:4-5). God had delegated to Adam a “divine” lordship over His creation. After the fall, this delegated lordship came to be focused in those who held the office of judges or rulers, and especially kings. Any man who sits on a throne is exercising *divine* functions and prerogatives.² It’s because of this “God-likeness” that kings *can* be called “gods” (*elohim*; cf. Exod. 4:16; 7:1; 22:28). The passage Jesus quotes from is Psalm 82:

- Psalm 82:1–7 — God has taken his place in the divine assembly; in the midst of the **gods** he holds judgment: “How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.” They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. I said, “You are **gods**, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, like men [like the men that you are] you shall die, and fall like any *prince*.”

“Jesus answered them, ‘Has it not been written in your Law, “I SAID, YOU ARE GODS?”’” And then He continues:

VIII. John 10:35–36 — “If he called them gods, *to whom the word of God came* (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God?’”

What was the word of God that came to the gods? “How long will you *judge unjustly* and *show partiality to the wicked*? ... You are **gods**, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince.”³ Jesus’ point isn’t just that *men* are called “gods,” but that even pagan and wicked men are called “gods” (*elohim*) because God has delegated to them as kings a divine lordship and the exercise of divine functions and prerogatives. Now if even those to whom the word of God came—if even those who “judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked”—are called “gods,” then why are the Jews so quick to accuse the one whom the Father *sanctified and sent into the world* of blasphemy when He says “I am the Son of God”?

² This isn’t the same thing as “divine right.” To the contrary, the point here is divine privilege accompanied by divine stewardship and accountability (cf. Ps. 82:1-7).

³ This word has come even to the pagan kings by virtue of their descent from Adam to whom God gave the stewardship of ruling for Him over His creation.

But isn't Jesus saying a whole lot more than what this Psalm is saying? In Psalm 82, God is the one who calls the human rulers "gods" as a way of emphasizing their high calling and their stewardship of divine prerogatives and then emphasizing in turn how far they will fall. But here isn't it Jesus who's calling *Himself* the Son of God, and isn't He claiming not only a stewardship of divine prerogatives, but even that He and the Father are one and that He is therefore equal with God (cf. v. 33)? How can Psalm 82 justify the claims that Jesus is making?

Listen, again, not just to the logic of Jesus' words, but to their compelling power and beauty. If even pagan Gentiles who "judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked" are called "gods," then what should we say of one whose scepter "is a scepter of uprightness"; who "love[s] righteousness and [who] hate[s] wickedness"? I wonder if Jesus has in mind Psalm chapter 45 which speaks of the *ideal* Davidic king:

- Psalm 45:4–7 — In your majesty ride out victoriously for the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness; let your right hand teach you awesome deeds! Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; the peoples fall under you. Your throne, **O God**, is forever and ever. **The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness; you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness.** Therefore **God, your God**, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.

If the Davidic king could be addressed—not by virtue of his own person but by virtue of the throne upon which he sat and by virtue of the *ideal* that was represented in that throne (cf. 2 Sam. 8:15)—if the Davidic king could be addressed on these grounds *ideally* as "God," then what should we say of "the Christ" (cf. v. 24)—the good shepherd—who **FULFILLS** this ideal *perfectly* (cf. Heb. 1:8-9)? How could the one whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world—who truly fulfills the ideal of David's throne—not be in some mysterious and wonderful way—equal with God? How could a man who stewards perfectly the functions and the prerogatives of Deity not be in some mysterious and wonderful way truly "*one*" with the Father? So Jesus concludes with words that are not only a sovereign ultimatum, but also a gracious invitation:

IX. John 10:37–38 — "If *I do not do* the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if *I do* them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, *so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.*"

The greatness of the Messiah's salvation can only be measured by the absoluteness of the Messiah's lordship. How far-reaching His salvation is, depends entirely on how far-reaching His lordship is. There are many today who miss this connection and think they can have the salvation without the lordship. This explains why many are so content with a minimalist salvation. If we fail to see how far-reaching is the lordship of Christ, then how can we really ever want anything more than to "go to heaven and not to hell"? To the extent that we understand and grasp how far-reaching is the lordship of Christ—that He is the eternal Son of God made in time the messianic Son of David, it is to that same extent that we can understand and grasp how far-reaching is His salvation. If there are many today who miss this connection and think they can have the Messiah's salvation without the Messiah's lordship, there are many others today (like the Jews in John 10) who miss this connection and therefore see in the absoluteness of Christ's lordship only

something restrictive – only fetters and chains. They can't see the goodness and the greatness of Christ's salvation precisely because they've already rejected—*a priori*— His Lordship. So we read in verse 39:

X. John 10:39 — Therefore they were seeking again to seize Him, and He eluded their grasp.

But then we read in verses 40-42:

XI. John 10:40-42 — And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was first baptizing, and He was staying there. Many came to Him and were saying, “While John performed no sign, yet everything John said about this man was true.” Many believed in Him *there*.

“*There*,” far away from Jerusalem and Judea, on the other side of the Jordan, many who had first listened to the preaching of John the Baptist came to Jesus and *believed* in Him – because they were of His sheep; because Jesus is the Good Shepherd. And so we're called and invited to do the same – to see in the **absoluteness** of the Messiah's **Lordship** the *greatness* of His **salvation**, and our own eternal security.