

The Gospel for All Peoples: John 10:1-30

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We're in the midst of a short sermon series on "Gospel Growth," and then we'll be back to where we left off in Romans 12. The reason for these 4 sermons is the new direction and passion that God has put in the hearts of the leaders here that we need to be thinking seriously about church planting. We want to see Gospel growth. We want to see personal revival in our lives, among all those who are here. And we want to ignite a joyful passion for the Gospel among all the peoples of Pittsburgh, and even to have a Gospel influence in other parts of the world as we are involved with overseas missions. One clear implication of this, which God has been impressing upon the leadership, is that we should be making plans to multiply ourselves in this region. Rather than gathering in just one location, let's seek a broader Gospel influence by continuing our ministries here and also planting ourselves in another place—in another area of Pittsburgh where some folks from the church already live and where we could make the ministries of this church accessible to many more people. It's an exciting dream to think of multiplying ourselves over the decades so that someday, Lord willing, there would be several churches throughout Western PA that share the same passion for the Gospel, being God-centered in our understanding of salvation, and focused on clear exposition of Scripture. I want to invest my life in seeing that happen, by God's grace. And I hope that through these few sermons I can help you to catch that vision, too.

We started, two weeks ago, by talking about prayer, and by talking about personal revival. The vision God has given to the elders is not mainly about buildings and locations and programs. It's about wanting to see God and His power. We want to see the Good News continue to transform our own lives, and we want to see that Gospel passion go forth to transform our city, our neighbors, our friends, our unbelieving family members, our co-workers. And since we do not have the power in ourselves to bring these things about, we must begin with prayer. In that sermon we examined the prayers of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 1 and 3. And I encouraged you, in the coming week, to further meditate on those prayers on your own, and to write out a prayer of your own to God, asking Him to revive your own heart.

Last week we took an in-depth look at the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is Gospel growth that we are seeking. So it was good to spend some time in one of the most Gospel-saturated paragraphs in

Scripture—Romans 3:21-26. We have to do some work there to make sure we understand Paul’s terminology—justify, propitiation, redemption. The short of it is summarized in that illustration of the DVD. All of your sins, shortcomings, all the ways that you have disobeyed God, dishonored Him, ignored Him, . . . all of that is recorded on that DVD. And God sees all of that. And as a just judge, He must punish those sins. The sins are so serious (we deceive ourselves by thinking they’re not that serious) that the only just punishment is an infinite punishment, an unending punishment. Well, the happy solution to this problem is that Jesus Christ came to earth and lived without sin and then went to the cross to die for the sins of His people—those who repent of their sins and trust in Him. God’s punishment fell on Jesus. God’s wrath was directed at Jesus. And because Jesus is an infinite Being, very God of very God, He was able to pay that infinite debt in a finite amount of time. The resurrection proves that. Jesus succeeded in His mission to save His people from their sins. And since He paid it all, there’s nothing else for us to pay. We receive this gift by faith, not by trying to add to Christ’s work with our own work. We turn our lives toward Jesus, which involves turning our lives away from sin. And this Good News changes us from the inside out so that we want to live for Jesus.

That’s the Gospel, friends. I hope you believe this Good News. I hope your life reflects your belief in this Good News. And I hope you want to see others embrace our great Savior. I encouraged you to think about the Gospel message, to think about your own story of how God saved you, and to write out a simple outline of how you would share that with someone else, and then to do that—to share that with your spouse or your kids or a friend.

The sermon for this morning is, “The Gospel for All Peoples.” And next week will be, “Called to Gospel Multiplication.” And what I have in mind for these 2 sermons is to look at God’s promises that He will cause this Good News to spread to the ends of the earth, and also that He is calling us to be part of this mission. Today, as we focus on “the Gospel for all peoples,” I want us to be convinced of God’s plans and promises to save His people. God is on the move. He is a missionary God. Before all is said and done, there will be Christ-followers from every people group around the world.

As we think about this in terms of our own local context, we should be greatly encouraged by this. God is at work here! He is drawing people to Himself here!

I have two simple points. I first want to look at the truth of God's sovereignty in salvation. Then, I want us to see how God's sovereignty in salvation is our hope for Gospel growth.

The truth of God's Sovereignty in Salvation

We can see this truth in John 10 in many ways. First, in verse 3 we read that the good shepherd "calls his own sheep by name." This demonstrates the truth of election. God chooses, he elects certain individuals to be saved. He doesn't have to do this. Some may ask at this point: why doesn't He just choose to save everyone. But based on what the Bible teaches about the seriousness of our sin, the more appropriate question is: Why does He save *anyone*? He would be perfectly just to condemn all of us to eternal punishment, because that's what we deserve as sinful human beings. But He graciously chose to save many from the punishment of sin, and God the Father gives these elect ones to the Son. And the Son calls them. And He calls them effectually. They hear His voice and follow Him.

This is the biblical truth of predestination, or unconditional election. We studied this recently in Romans 9. It's unconditional, meaning God didn't choose the elect based on a list of conditions that had to be met. He didn't choose those who were good enough, because none of us are good enough. It's unconditional election. His choice was based only on His own sovereign will.

Moving to verse 11, we see another component of God's sovereignty in salvation, namely, that Jesus died specifically for the sheep. He didn't just make salvation *possible* for anyone who might believe. He purchased, in a definite and effective way, the salvation of His sheep. He laid down His life for the elect.

Are you beginning to see the nature of God's work in salvation? His will is ultimate, not the human will. He is moving with purpose and power to save those whom He chose from before the foundation of the world. This is a God-centered view of salvation. God is the determining factor in who becomes a Christian and who does not. In contrast, in a man-centered theology, the idea is that our own free will is the determining factor in who becomes a Christian and who does not. And I'm certainly not denying that we all exercise our will in either embracing Christ or rejecting Him. But what is so clear from the Gospel of John (and the whole Bible) is that God's choice is ultimate.

If you turn back a couple chapters, you'll see in John 6:44, Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." And then in verse 65 he says, "This is why I told you

that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” Salvation belongs to the Lord. It all originates in Him.

Charles Spurgeon, who preached in London in the 1800s, came to this realization early in his Christian life. He said, “When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all myself, and though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea the Lord was seeking me.” So at first he thought, I’m the one doing this. I’m pursuing God. I’m the one making the determining choice. But then, awhile later, he says, “The thought struck me, *How did you come to be a Christian?* I sought the Lord. *But how did you come to seek the Lord?* The truth flashed across my mind in a moment—I should not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to make me seek Him. I prayed, thought I, but then I asked myself, *How came I to pray?* I was induced to pray by reading the Scriptures. *How came I to read the Scriptures?* I did read them, but what led me to do so? Then, in a moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, and that He was the Author of my faith, and so the whole doctrine of grace opened up to me, and from that doctrine I have not departed to this day, and I desire to make this my constant confession, ‘I ascribe my change wholly to God.’”

So yes, we exercise our will and choose to read the Bible, pray, seek the Lord, and repent of sin and trust in Christ. But we couldn’t do any of those things if God wasn’t first pursuing us, if He hadn’t first chosen us. We saw this in the verses from John 6. We can also see it in chapter 10 verse 26, where Jesus says, “but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock.” Think about this for a moment. If the human will was the determining factor in who is a sheep and who isn’t, this verse would have to read differently, wouldn’t it? If my choice is ultimate, then the verse would say, “you are not part of my flock because you do not believe.” If Jesus said that, He would be making a different point. And it would then be possible to assume a man-centered theology that puts the emphasis on human free will. If Jesus said, “you are not part of my flock because you do not believe,” (and if that’s all He said) it would be easy to assume that anyone could simply exercise their will to believe, and then become part of the flock. But that’s not what the verse says. Jesus says it the other way around, “you do not believe because you are not part of my flock.” God’s will, God’s choice is ultimate. He elects individuals for salvation, and gives them to the Son. The Son dies for the sheep, and effectually calls them.

And in contrast to those who do not believe because they are not sheep, Jesus says in verse 27, “My sheep hear my voice,

and I know them, and they follow me.” So how do you know if you’re a sheep? Do you hear His voice? Do you hear Him calling you and leading you, and pointing you to precious treasures that are so much greater than the dull routine of worldly enjoyment? Do you hear His voice? The next question is possibly easier to discern: Are you following Him? Are you striving to obey Jesus’ commands? Are you fighting sin and pursuing righteousness? Not in your own strength, or course, but in the power of the Spirit. But are you striving for the happiness of holiness?

Many may consider themselves to be sheep, but if they’re wandering around following strange doctrines and worldly pleasures, they shouldn’t have any confidence that they are truly sheep. Because the sheep follow the good shepherd. Not perfectly. But He’s our shepherd, and we listen to His voice and follow Him.

Finally, in verses 28-30 we see that God’s sovereignty in salvation endures to the very end. “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.” From start to finish, salvation belongs to the Lord. Jesus calls his sheep, the sheep hear his voice, and they persevere to the end. God will preserve them to the end. God’s sovereignty in saving sinful humanity is seen from the very beginning to the very end. It is all his work, it’s all by His sovereign grace. Left to ourselves, our hardened sinful nature would rebel against God for eternity. But God’s powerful and effective grace breaks into our hearts and transforms us and keeps us believing!

Before moving on to the second point about how this doctrine is a motivation for us in the task of evangelism and missions, I just want to illustrate it from two places in Acts. First of all, Acts 13:48, where Paul and Barnabas are preaching in Antioch of Pisidia, and they announce that they are turning to the Gentiles because the Jews were hardened in unbelief. Verse 48 says, “And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.” Do you see in that statement the primacy of God’s choice? God’s appointing is primary, and then those who were appointed believed.

Similarly in Acts 16:14, in the conversion of Lydia. It says, “The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.” Again we see the need for God’s work in effectually calling the elect to Himself. We are unable to make our own hearts open

up to the Gospel. We are totally depraved, and are hard-wired to turn away from God. But the effectual call of God can break through that hardness and regenerate our hearts so that we have new desires and a new perspective on all of life.

In summary, salvation is the work of God from start to finish. He chooses those whom He desires to save, for His own glory. He gives them to His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus lays down His life for these sheep. He calls them by name. And the sheep hear His voice and follow Him.

God's Sovereignty in Salvation is our Hope for Gospel Growth

Now let's look at how God's sovereignty in salvation is our hope for Gospel growth. This is the hope and the excitement we have in evangelism and missions. How can the doctrine of unconditional election (the truth that God predestined those who will be saved), how can this be an encouragement to us in evangelism and missions?

Look at verse 16 in John chapter 10. This is a great missionary verse! Jesus says, "And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice." In the opening verses of the chapter, the sheepfold is the Jewish people. And Jesus, the good shepherd, enters by the door and calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. For instance, His disciples were individuals He called out of Judaism. And Mary and Martha and Lazarus and many others. As Paul writes in Romans 9:6-7, "not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring." Jesus was separating out the true sheep from the fold of Israel. The sheep hear his voice and follow Him. The sheep who are left behind are unbelieving Israel.

But now we come to verse 16 and Jesus speaks of sheep that are not of this fold, meaning Gentiles. Sheep who are not of the fold of Israel, but are of other folds. Here is the task of missions. The sheep from other folds must be drawn into the one fold of the good shepherd. This idea is seen again in the next chapter, 11:50-52, where Caiaphas the high priest unknowingly utters a profound prophecy concerning Jesus. He says, "it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." And then John writes, "He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad." The sheep are scattered abroad. And they're from other folds. This is the Gentile mission that the Gospel must go to all the nations. And it must go to all the nations, because there are sheep

in every one of those nations. There are elect ones, for whom the good shepherd laid down His life.

Now think about the boldness and courage and hope this gives us in evangelism and missions (whether far or near). As we share the Gospel with family members and co-workers and neighbors and individuals we meet on the bus or the plane or walking down the street, our hope is in the fact that the sheep will hear the voice of the shepherd. And they will follow Him. For those who are unwilling to listen to the Gospel and unwilling to follow Christ, that may mean they're not sheep. Or it may simply mean that this is not the precise time God has ordained to save them. Maybe the seeds are being planted, and conversion will happen next week or next year or ten years from now. And we must pray that God will yet save them.

Knowing that God is in control gives us peace and power and excitement in pursuing Gospel growth! He has chosen His sheep from other folds, and Jesus speaks boldly, "I *must* bring them also, and they *will* listen to my voice." Do you think Jesus' plans will be thwarted? Do you think He's going to come up short? NO! This is the Jesus who has been given "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt 28:18). Nothing will stop Him from accomplishing His purposes.

His sovereignty in salvation is our only enduring hope as we wage war against the unbelief that holds so many in absolute bondage. It would be foolish to think that WE have the power in ourselves to bring about change in a person's heart and in a person's will. That assumption rests on a naïve view of sin and an inflated view of our own evangelistic abilities. It assumes that people really can decide, of their own free will, to trust in Christ. And it assumes that you and I are savvy enough to persuade them to do so. Think about it: If God doesn't act sovereignly through His people to save His elect, but rather the determining factor is whether or not a person chooses, of his own free will, to trust in Christ, then the ultimate burden rests on us. And that may provide some motivation, but it will be a kind of twist your arm, guilt-trip kind of motivation. And more than that, it will become very depressing when evangelism isn't producing tangible results. We would start to think: maybe we need different Gospel tracts, or maybe we need to change the message a little so people will listen to it. Do you see how the man-centered approach shifts the emphasis away from God's power, and causes people to attempt ministry and missions in their own strength? That kind of thinking will not produce long-lasting, doctrinally-sound Gospel laborers.

Instead, brothers and sisters, we need to stake our hope in God's sovereignty, and the fact that He has chosen His sheep, and He knows who they are, and we get to be a part of drawing them to the Good Shepherd. They are out there. And we get to be the messengers to take this great news to them!

John Piper recounts the story of being at Urbana '67. Urbana is a large missions conference. And a man named John Alexander spoke, who had been a long-time missionary. And he said, "At the beginning of my missionary career I said that if predestination were true I could not be a missionary. Now after 20-some years of struggling with the hardness of the human heart, I say I could never be a missionary *unless* I believed in the doctrine of predestination" (*Let the Nations be Glad*, 55). God's sovereignty is our only lasting hope. Our own zeal and our own passion may last for a time, but if we're going to make it for decades in ministry and missions, we must have our feet firmly planted on the rock of God's sovereignty.

This truth was a great encouragement to the Apostle Paul in Acts 18, when he was in Corinth and the Jews were opposing him. "And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people. And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.'" (vv. 9-11). Paul's life was about Gospel growth. He wanted to see the message go forth from city to city. And even in the face of fierce persecution, he took comfort in the promises of God.

And I believe that in this city, too, God has many people—many whom He plans to save, but they have not yet believed. We have the privilege of being God's heralds, to be His messengers, to deliver this news and watch as God changes hearts.

We must go to this city, to this region where God has placed us. We have a desire to ignite a joyful passion for the Gospel of Jesus Christ among all the peoples of Pittsburgh and the world. And we can pursue that vision with the confidence that the sheep will hear His voice and follow. Jesus has other sheep. He has other people in this city. And we get to be part of God's plan to bring those sheep to the Good Shepherd.

I told you that I would have a simple homework assignment for you in each of these sermons. The first was to write out a prayer for personal revival. The second was to think through a simple outline of how you can share the Good News, and your own personal testimony, with others. Today, in light of this theme of

the Gospel going to all peoples (far and near), I want to ask you to identify 5 people in your life who are unbelievers, and to commit to praying for those individuals daily for the coming month.

Family members, neighbors, friends, co-workers . . . Think of individuals you know and who you're in contact with regularly, and just begin to pray for the things you know are going on their lives, and especially praying for their salvation. Let's pray to the God who saves. And let's pray on behalf of those who need to be saved.