

Sermon- The True Seeker and the Spinner of Truth

Scripture: John 10: 19-30

Sunday, January 13, 2019

In John chapter 10 we were presented with two I Am sayings. I am the door. And I am the Good Shepherd. Last Sunday in the Good Shepherd section, we looked at this task of being shepherd that Jesus Christ was called into. I mentioned that Christ's calling was so powerful that He was willing to lay every aspect of his life down to complete the task. When the call on your life is that strong then there is no price too high to pay. That is what Jesus was telling the people in last weeks sermon. Guys, people, my people! I love you, I am your Good Shepherd. There is no price too big for me to pay for your souls. Now in those days while the job of shepherd was not a glamorous job, in the metaphorical sense, the term shepherd was always associated with rulers and kings. Like the word "servant" today right. In the secular world nobody walks around handing over business cards with the title of servant proudly printed under their name, right? Yet government officials are often referred to as public servants. Here Jesus is taking his role of shepherd and putting an official stamp on it. He declared to the Jews and to the world world actually that "I am your Good shepherd". Just a very beautiful, empathetic, non-judgmental and comforting message to anyone who could hear him speak.

So how do the people hearing him react to his beautiful message? What we clearly see in our passage is that they react in two very distinct ways. One set of people think that Jesus is demon possessed and the other camp which said that Jesus could not be demon when you consider his actions especially his healing of the man born blind. Two distinct responses to Jesus' claim of being the Good Shepherd. So there were two camps. Those who were feeling it in their gut and those for whom Jesus' words are like water on a duck's back. You pour and pour the water and that water will roll away and the feathers

will not even be wet. Two camps. Those who sense the truth of Jesus' words in their gut and those who have the dry feathers. That is what verse 19 to 21 are talking about.

Now I have told you this before but I am going to repeat this again. When people are in one of these two camps in this intermediate time, the one doubt that always persists is, is the message of Jesus clear enough for the doubters? After all people come from different backgrounds and life experiences. People have different levels of self awareness and different capacities to make sense of the world around them. So if someone is not hearing Jesus fully, if they are not hearing Jesus right, maybe Jesus' message was not clear to them right? Well, could be. And so the solution to that problem is for Jesus to amplify his message. And that is what Jesus is doing here and that is what the next section of our passage is doing here. Let me explain.

When we come to verse 22 we get two very interesting pieces of information. The verse opens with these words. It is now winter. Then it goes on to say, it was the time of Hanukah, the festival of Dedication. Was this opening phrase "it is now winter" just a little bit of weather trivia thrown in by the Gospel writer to get the story started? Not really. We know that every piece of information found in John is put there with a purpose. And we also know that in the Gospel of John when details like time of day, "it was morning" or "it was night", are included, these bits of information served to convey a certain mood to the story. You see Shakespeare do the same thing in the poem Richard the III in which Gloucester the villain says these lines, *Now is the winter of our discontent*

Made glorious summer by this sun of York;

The weather words in our case are telling us something about the spiritual state of Jerusalem at the time. The apostle John was letting us know that there was a wintry coldness towards God. To get at this coldness in more detail we have to look at the next detail there. It was also the time of the festival of Hanukah, the Festival of Dedication.

Now here is the story of Hanukah. 164 years before Christ the Syrian empire was ruling over Jerusalem. But a new guy Antiochus Epiphanes was a particularly obnoxious to the Jews had taken over. He had the temple, desecrated with pigs blood and then erected a statue of Zeus there. Of course the Jewish people rebelled against this abomination and one particular rebel leader Judas Maccabees defeated the Syrians and then cleaned and rededicated the temple. It is this event is the Festival of Dedication also known as Hanukah. Now Hanukah is not just celebrating Judas Maccabee's accomplishment, it was also looked toward to the coming of the Messiah who would bring the Jewish people permanent peace and victory as an independent people. This is important to understand because while the Hanukah celebration brought the Messianic expectation into focus it also projected the wrong image of the Messiah as a military leader who would come to give them military victory. And the priests and spiritual leaders did not do anything to correct this expectation. In fact the spiritual leaders only exploited the people for their own good. This was the kind of shepherds that Jerusalem had at that point. Shepherds that had made Jerusalem a spiritually cold place. It was against this back drop that Jesus was presenting himself as the Good Shepherd.

You see Jesus had two tasks. He had to correct the Messianic image and fulfill the Messianic expectation. If Jesus said he was the Messiah they would have thought of him as a military leader. If He focused on correcting the image of the Messiah most people would think he was trying to change the Messianic expectation so that it would conveniently fit himself. So the task of simultaneously changing the Messianic image and making the people see that He was the Messiah was not an easy task. That is why Jesus had to be extremely careful when the people surrounded him and asked him this question. "How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly".

And to that question, Jesus instead of making a simple declaration that He was the Messiah which because of the above dilemma would have backfired, decided to tackle

the question indirectly. So instead of saying that he was the Messiah, he told them that he was the Good Shepherd. Now puts the onus on figuring out the truth on his listeners.

And he tells his listeners to examine both his words and his actions before coming to a conclusion. So the people do that and come to two very different conclusions. One set say he is demon possessed. The other say, Jesus is who he says he is.

Let's take a closer look at each category of people. First the people who think he is demon possessed. I am calling these people the Truth Spinners. Now if you look at the truth spinners, when they first encounter Jesus there is not much to distinguish them from the truth seekers. They have many questions about Jesus and rightly so. Then they are exposed to Jesus' words and miracles. Jesus has at that point of time done so many miracles. And he has spoken with so much passion, love and clarity to the people. And yet after hearing everything that Jesus had to say, nothing changed in their mind. It is almost like in the end it did not matter to them what miracle Jesus performed or what he revealed about God, as far as the truth spinners were concerned they were not moved by Jesus. They would have the most devious explanations of Jesus' power. Explanations like Jesus' power came from the fact that he was demon possessed. Why, were they not able to see the truth? They were not able to see the truth because they were never interested in the truth. Because if they admit the truth, it would cost them too much. As Pharisees or people who were enjoying the power and wealth that their present position, they did not want to overturn their life because of Jesus Christ and the message of the kingdom that He was proclaiming.

I want to contrast their reaction with those of the truth seekers. Now the truth seekers also had many questions about who Jesus was, what he came to do and where he got his authority to do and say what he did. But as they examined the evidence, their worldview started to change. They realized that Jesus Christ was who he said he was even if believing it would mean that everything in their life would have to change

starting from the inner most reality that they had to admit their own sinfulness and whatever pride they had in themselves was a house of cards that needed to be blown down anyway.

So what is the different between the truth seeker and the truth spinner? Well, one big difference is their agenda, right? One group wanted to find the truth, the other was not interested in the truth. But when you look at our passage, you find that Jesus gives us another explanation of the existence of the two categories of people. Reading from verse 25 to 28 ²⁵ *Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. ²⁶ But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, ^[e]as I said to you. ²⁷ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.*

This friends is I think really fascinating. From the beginning of salvation history people have wondered about this question. What distinguishes Noah from his neighbors or Esau from Jacob or Abraham from his brothers or David from Saul. You can go down the line all the way to our present time. Was it that one was inherently more righteous than the other? Was one group more intelligent or more hardworking. Did one group somehow deserve Christ more than the other. While all these explanations are tempting what Jesus is saying is this. What distinguishes the group who does not want to see the obvious truth never belonged to him. They were never his flock in the first place. While the sheep that recognize his voice and follow him somehow sense a familiarity in Jesus' voice.

And if the sheep do belong to him and come to him then he promises this sheep two amazing things. He promises his sheep eternal life and he promises his sheep a bond that cannot be broken.

So what does it mean for you and me. Two things.

The first is when you are working with a seeker, know this. Even when the seeker asks you questions about Christ, what you declare about Christ is not important. Just be a transparent conduct of Christ's words and actions. If Christ is cryptic then pass on those cryptic words and let them wrestle with it. If you are direct when Christ is cryptic, it is not going to make a difference. The seeker has to wrestle with the evidence and come to their own conclusions. Your conclusions are your conclusions. Pass on what Christ means to you and did for you, that is called witnessing. But do not try and spoonfeed the seeker. It is will no purpose. If their belong to Christ, they will recognize Christ's words and come in.

The second thing I want to bring to your attention is regarding this bond that cannot be broken. If you do belong, you are in Christ's hand and there is no power in the universe that can snatch you from Christ's hand. There are two ways you can take this. You can take it as license to live your life any way you want because you think you can get away with it. But if you do, know this, you are certainly acting like you actually do not belong, because someone who belongs to Christ has a deep desire to please and honor Christ. But the intent of promising those who belong an unbreakable bond if so that you never have to live your life in doubt or keep looking over your shoulder to see if Christ is still there. No, the purpose of the unbreakable bond is to give you a freedom to go full steam ahead into what Christ has called you knowing that your life is not a struggle for salvation. No your life is lived in the freedom that comes from being in the eternal embrace of God himself. That is the kind of life that the Father and the Son and His Holy Spirit want for each of us. A live of belonging and life or freedom, a life where we are never far from the voice of our Good Shepherd. I pray that each of us will be right there next to our Good shepherd, in belonging, in power and in purpose. Let us pray.