

Gospel of John Study

Session 22

In the last session, the first half of chapter 10, Jesus revealed Himself as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies as the good shepherd. Those who are Jesus' sheep know His voice and listen to Him and follow Him because He loves them. Jesus compared the Jewish religious leaders to robbers and thieves, wanting to take the sheep by violence or cunning but either way, take them for themselves away from God. Jesus also taught He was the gate to the sheep pen and no one could come into the pen without going through Jesus. He alone was the way to gain eternal life, which He compared to good pasture. We also saw the Jesus claimed to have the authority from His Father to both lay down His life for the sheep but also take it up again. At this, there arose a division among the Jews in that some thought He must be demon-possessed to make such a statement while others remembered that He healed a man born blind and that must point to Him being from God.

Now in this session, we are going to see the Jews confront Jesus concerning a seemingly simple question concerning His identity. Throughout His discussion with the Jews He is going to reveal to them the depths of their unbelief and mercifully give them opportunities to see the truth about who He is. We will see the power of willful unbelief and its consequences through this life as Jesus tries to show that He is both the Messiah and the Son of God.

Before diving into the Scripture, we need to understand the Feast of Dedication, which we now call Hanukkah. It was a festival that took place annually in late December. Unlike the other feasts we've studied in John, this one has no Biblical basis. It was/is not celebrated because of divine mandate. In fact, it didn't date back to antiquity or the times of Moses, like the other festivals, but rather this one sprang up in 165 B.C.

An extremely evil king arose over the Seleucid empire in Antioch in 175 B.C. His name was Antiochus IV Epiphanes. He was truly an antichrist figure in Jewish history, like none before him. He had risen to the throne by treachery. When his father died, Antiochus' older brother was in line to be the next king but was being held in Rome. Instead of working for the release of his brother, he let him rot in Rome and swayed enough of his empire to crown him as the king. While outwardly generous he was greedy and evil. The Seleucid practice was similar to the Roman practice which was not to interfere in local religious matters unless they were openly hostile to the regime. When it came to Judaism, he took a bribe from a Jewish man and installed him as the high priest. Of course, this meddling didn't sit well with the Jews and they overthrew Antiochus' puppet and restored their own man to the high priesthood. Antiochus was busy conquering Egypt at the time but when he returned and discovered that his man had been removed from office, Antiochus went ballistic - over-the-top rage - against the Jews. He decided the best way to deal with them was by merging them with the pagan religions in the Greek world. He sacked Jerusalem, pillaged the Temple and then began sacrificing pigs on the altar in the Temple to Zeus - completely desecrating the Temple area and attempting to realign the priesthood with that of pagan religions.

In 168 B.C. Antiochus's actions led to a full-on revolt by the Jews, led by a man named Judas Maccabeus. Judas led a revolt which took three years to wage but in the end the Jews defeated the Seleucid (Syrian) forces and expelled them from Israel, thus liberating the Jews. After this victory, they rededicated the Temple so that they could use it once again in worshiping the Lord.

It was a festival of light as light represented the ability to worship God after their hopes of doing so had been dashed during the Syrian occupation. They would light a candle each night to show the growing hope that God was giving them. It was a joyous time. Unlike the other feasts, this one was celebrated in the home, not by gathering everyone to Jerusalem. It was set up similar to our 4th of July to commemorate the victory and liberation of their people during this conflict. This is important to note in that John brings out that this dialogue between Jesus and the Jews takes place during the Feast of Dedication. Jesus is going to show that He is the fulfillment of this Feast as well, as He is both the Light of the world and the one who brings true victory to those who believe in Him.

1. Jesus exposes the reason for unbelief

[John 10:22-26]

The portico or porch of Solomon was on the east side of the Temple and it was covered so it made a great place to teach the people during the winter months as it was sheltered from cold rain and most of the wind. Being in December, we are only three months from the eventual crucifixion of Jesus.

Q: What was the burning question the Jews asked Jesus that started this discussion? (v.24 - *If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.*)

This seems like a straight forward, innocent request. They want to know whether or not Jesus is the Messiah or not. Notice this question was asked during the Feast of Dedication which celebrated national independence from tyranny. So this is what was on people's minds at this time - national independence.

Q: Why did Jesus avoid identifying Himself as the Messiah in the borders of Israel? (*Because He did not want to associate Himself with all the baggage the term came with in His day and time. Among the Jews, and especially their leaders, they expected the Messiah to overthrow Rome by God's power and establish national Israel as the leading nation in the world. Jesus knew the Jews were mistaken in this belief but realized that it would be impossible to counter this belief at this time. In truth, this expectation of the Jews of the Messiah being a warrior-king was correct if you take into account something they didn't see or understand and that is that the Messiah was going to come to earth twice - once as a suffering servant and the second time as the warrior king.*)

The Jews here refers to all the Jews present at this time, religious leaders and the populace present. Not only was national independence on their minds at this time but on one hand Jesus' miracles exceeded the powers of any man and His teachings did carry a great deal of authority. On the other hand, He had not presented Himself as the Messiah and showed no political ambitions at all during His ministry. The crowd wanted a declaration from Jesus to either dispel the notion of Him being the Messiah so they could look elsewhere or for Him to confirm Himself as the Messiah so they could swear to Him their allegiance and start the revolt against Rome.

At first glance this question seems legitimate enough yet by the wording we know it isn't. The word "gathered around" Him (v.24) This word means to encircle or surround. This word is only used four times in Scripture and two of them deal with being surrounded by enemy armies. The real reason the Jews want Him to reveal His identity is so that they have further grounds to condemn Him. This is one of the traps of the leaders but it differs from the other traps in that it involves rallying an entire crowd of people get Jesus to trap Himself in public.

Q: What was Jesus' response to this demanding question? (v.25 - *"I told you the truth but you don't believe..."*)

Q: What does this response do in the dynamic of this conversation? (*It puts the burden of proof back upon those questioning Him.*)

Q: What does Jesus charge against this group of people? (v.25-6 - *He charged them with unbelief. If they believed in Him, they would know who He truly was. His sheep manifested their nature by following Jesus. He was drawing from the sheep/shepherd analogy He used in His last discussion with them. Thus, their unbelief means they are not truly Jesus' sheep.*)

Here's one of the major problems with unbelief. It cuts the unbelieving person off from any further revelation of from God. When we stop believing or following Jesus, we cease receiving any further revelations or illumination from Him. It causes us to stagnate.

As this conversation progresses, Jesus further exposes their unbelief in Him. Now before we move on from this demand or question from the Jews, we need to do a quick review of what the Jews are overlooking.

Q: In essence, who are the Jews blaming for not knowing whether or not Jesus is the Messiah? (*They are blaming Him. "You haven't made it clear enough for us. We don't know what to think?"*)

Now let's review Jesus' actions. We are only going to examine those signs and actions (His works) that He did in Israel, those the Jews would have all known by this time. As we'll see, it is the Jews who have no excuse for their unbelief.

In Chapter 2 Jesus turned the water into wine at the wedding. After this, He traveled to Jerusalem and threw out the merchants from the Temple fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah's zeal for the Temple.

In Chapter 3 John the Baptist testified that Jesus was the Messiah and pointed people away from himself and to Jesus.

In Chapter 4 Jesus healed the son of a royal official without ever visiting the child who was laying sick in another town.

In Chapter 5 Jesus healed a man who had been lame for 38 years. Then He called Himself the Son of God and the Son of Man. The Son of God identified Jesus as God while the Son of Man was a Messianic title from Daniel.

In Chapter 6 Jesus miraculously fed 5,000 men (plus the 10,000-15,000 women and

children who were with them). Then He miraculously crossed the sea. At the end of the chapter He calls Himself the “bread of life” and the Son of Man.

In Chapter 7 Jesus stood up at the Feast of Tabernacles and claimed to be the fulfillment of the Messianic passage in Isaiah 55. He begged the watching crowds to come to Him to receive the Holy Spirit - a gift only God could give.

In Chapter 8 Jesus continued to preach at the Feast of Tabernacles and applied a Messianic passage from Isaiah 4 to Himself, promising to give the light of life to all who were walking in darkness. He called God His Father. He referred to Himself as the Son of Man and the “I AM”, another name for deity.

In Chapter 9 Jesus healed a man born blind and through the persecution this man faced, Jesus led this man to saving faith in Himself.

In Chapter 10 Jesus applied the Messianic promises about the good shepherd to Himself, making it clear that He fulfilled those prophecies.

If these were not clear enough for the Jews, Jesus repeatedly claimed that He had been sent by the Father and was not doing His own work but His Heavenly Father’s work. The miracles should have proven to them that He was from God. Their problem wasn’t intellectual ignorance but spiritual ignorance. They rejected His claims because as Jesus put it in John 9, they were blind and in lost in darkness. The reason they did not believe Jesus was because they were unwilling to embrace the truth about who Jesus was.

In v.26 Jesus says that these people are not His sheep because they didn’t believe in Jesus. Despite the works of Jesus on their behalf - both in teaching and with miracles - they refused to believe what God was showing them. In the face of this overwhelming and constant barrage of evidence, these people still refused to believe in Jesus.

Q: From last week, how does a person become one of Jesus’ sheep? *(10:9 - He enters through the gate to the pen. In He sees Jesus as the only way to get to God and then follows God’s guidance that leads him to repentance and confession of Jesus as one’s Lord.)*

[Romans 10:8-11]

[John 3:16]

Q: This is a review question. In John, what does the word “believe” mean? *(It is a total, whole-hearted trust in what God says being true and then adjusting your life to His revealed truth. Belief in Jesus changes who we are, thus how we think, behave and speak.)*

Here’s one of the many truths we need to pull out of this passage. If a person is looking for an excuse to ignore Jesus, they will find it. There is a responsibility on each person to seek after God and believe the truths He reveals to us along the way to salvation. Think back to the journey the man born blind had on his way to salvation. He believed Jesus was a man, then a prophet, then the Son of Man, then his Lord. By believing the truth of Jesus revealed to him, one step at a time, he came to fully believe in Jesus.

This is how it is with the people we come into contact with as well. Unless we’ve known them for some time, we don’t know just how much of God’s revelation of Jesus He has given to them but we can watch and see if that knowledge of the truth is growing or not. If not, in time, it

will turn to unbelief and it will show as they become hostile to any further revelation of Jesus. As believers, it's our role to know that there is some level of unbelief that is occurring in the hearts of those lost around us and be praying for them to remain open to further revelation of God to them.

2. The consequences of unbelief

[John 10:25-31]

The problem with not following Jesus is that it does not excuse them from God's will but rather indicts them as living against the will of God.

Q: What does Jesus give to those who follow Him? (*v.28 - eternal life*)

Q: What are the metaphors that Jesus has used to describe eternal life thus far in John? (*water (of life), bread (of life), light (of the world) and good pasture.*)

Jesus has used an array of common and well-known things to get people to see that He's offering them the eternal life with God they are seeking.

Q: Who will snatch a soul from Jesus hand? (*v.28 - no one*)

Q: Why is it that no one will snatch a person from Jesus' hand? (*v.29 - Because no one is greater than Jesus' Father and the Father is the One who has given these souls to Jesus thus no one has the power to snatch anyone from Jesus' hand.*)

As some have erroneously stated, "OK, no one can't snatch a person from Jesus' hand but I can do it myself or my sins can do it so that I effectively jump out of Jesus' hands.." This is nonsense as it would deny the truth Jesus just stated in v.29. No one is greater than the Heavenly Father. Since God is greater than us and greater than our sin, nothing can remove us from Jesus' hands once placed there by the Father.

Q: What does the knowledge of eternal security mean to you?

Q: What does being in Jesus' hands signify? (*It signifies being secure in Him. Your life is sealed up by Him for all eternity. This is the believer's security before God.*)

Q: Whose hand are Jesus' sheep in at the end of v.29? (*The Father's hands*)

This shows yet again that Jesus never acts independently of the Father. It is the Father's power to preserve the sheep. All Jesus does is in the will of God and thus done in the power of God.

[Colossians 3:1-4]

Our old sinful lives died and our new lives are hidden with Christ in God. The word “hidden” means to conceal. The fulness of who we truly are in Christ is concealed from us and the world at this time but when Christ returns, we will be seen as in Him and that new life will be revealed fully to all. We are secure in God’s hands.

Q: Why do you think Jesus switched the “hands”? Are believers in Jesus’ hands or the Father’s hands? *(They are in both. v.30 explains this. Jesus and His Father are one.)*

Q: In what sense are Jesus and the Heavenly Father one? *(They are one in nature and equality. Notice that Jesus maintains their individuality of Him and His Father in the Godhead. The Jews understood that Jesus meant more than just being one with the Father in thought or purpose. They saw He was claiming to share the same nature with God Himself, thus calling Himself God. It is important to know that Jesus and the Father are not one “person” but rather they are one in nature and action. The word for “one” in v.30 is neuter which gets translated “one”. If it were masculine (as you might expect) it would be translated “He” which would be “I and the Father are He” which would indicate they were the same person using two different names.)*

This is the earth-shattering statement of Jesus in this discourse. It is similar in nature to the statement in John 8:58 that before Abraham was, I AM. It was a direct statement that Jesus considered Himself God. The problem arose that since the Jews were fiercely monotheistic, they were confused. Was Jesus presenting Himself as another deity, a rival, to the God of Israel or was He presenting Himself as the God of Israel? The idea of the Trinity eluded them. Despite His words and teachings about being one with God, thus the same nature as the God they claimed to worship, they missed this connection and repeatedly charged Him with blasphemy.

While this discourse from Jesus would certainly give hope and strength to those who were Jesus’ sheep, it should cause great concern and fear among those who were not believing in Jesus. Instead of eternal life and comfort, their fate would be eternal death and torment.

Q: Instead of seeking to come to Jesus after this statement by Jesus, what do the Jews do? *(v.31 - they seek to stone Him - to execute Him on the spot.)*

This is actually an interesting incident in that the word translated “picked up” means to “carry”. Remember, they are in the Temple on the porch of Solomon. There would be no loose stones lying around with which to take up and stone Jesus. However, not far away, there would have been a large quantity of stones in the nearby area that were used in making the Temple. The people actually had to leave the Temple area to go get the stones and carry them over to the Temple in order to stone Him.

Now technically, stoning was illegal under the Roman law as only the Roman governor could impose and carry out the death penalty. However, in the heat of the moment, the Jews were known to carry out lynch-mob justice on people whose crimes caused a violent flaring of emotions in a crowd. It was rare that the Romans would prosecute a single or isolated instance of street justice, as long as it didn’t become routine and something the governor could not overlook.

This revelation in v.30 also shifts the focus from Jesus’s claims of being the Messiah to

His claims of being the Son of God. The crowd wanted to know if Jesus was the Messiah or not and He gives them not only that answer but also a lot more. He's not only the Messiah but also the Son of God.

The consequence of not believing all the works of Jesus that show that He was the Messiah also proved He was the Son of God. Thus by failing to believe one truth about Jesus, it leads to a domino effect where a person disbelieves many things about Jesus. This leads to an inability to put one's faith in the true Jesus - they put their trust in a Jesus who has been artificially constructed by their imagination to suit their purposes. They miss salvation.

3. Jesus exposes the folly of unbelief

[John 10: 32-42]

Q: What was Jesus question after the Jews showed they wanted to stone Him? (*v.32 - For which of the good works I showed you are you stoning Me?*)

The word "good" here is morally good or beautiful or noble.

Q: Who did Jesus say actually originated the good works He performed? (*v.32 - The Father*)

This makes the matter almost silly. He is in essence asking which of the Father's beautiful works are you stoning Me for? It is interesting that the Jews seemed incapable of thinking through the implications of Jesus' mighty works. They always seemed to be able to explain them away in one way or another. We need to remember this as we witness to the lost. The lost are blind and will often use anything to rationalize not believing in the evidence given by Jesus. We've got to be praying for the Spirit's activity in the life of the lost to prevent this rationalization.

Q: How do the Jews respond to Jesus' question? (*v.32 - They don't stone Him for His good works but rather for claiming to be God - blasphemy.*)

Here's the scoop. The Jews see Jesus as a mere mortal lining Himself up on the other side of the unbridgeable chasm that separates the transcendent, infinite Creator from His fallen and finite creatures. For John's readers, however, the irony is clear. Jesus has not made Himself out to be God. He Himself is the eternal Word of God who was God. He is and has always been the unique Son of God, utterly dependent upon the Father, humble and obedient yet completely one with Him.

[John 1:1, 14]

Before we get into the weeds of vv.34-36, it is important to take a look from high above at what Jesus is doing in this conversation. He loves these people despite their unbelief and desire, at the moment, to kill Him. He desires for them to come to faith in Him - to be His sheep. They seem rather reluctant to remember and thus give any validity to the signs and wonders He

performed. However, from time to time, they would give some respect for the Scriptures. So, Jesus is going to go away from His works and focus on the Scriptures as they also make the point that Jesus is God's Son. They substantiate the claims that God has a Son and it shouldn't be strange to believe this. The word "Law" here means the entire Jewish Old Testament. Notice Jesus calls this "your law" (v.34). He's calling on their sense of holding the Scriptures in authority over their lives, at least in principle.

[Psalm 82:6-7]

Jesus makes clear His argument. Jesus says that the Scripture proves that the word "god" is legitimately used to refer to others besides God Himself. If there are others who God, the Author of Scripture can address as 'god' and 'sons of the Most High' (or sons of God), on what Biblical basis should anyone object when Jesus says "I am God's Son"? This argument is even made stronger by remembering that Jesus is the One whom the Father set apart as His very own Son and sent into the world.

Psalm 82 is believed to be a psalm that was addressing Israel at the time of God giving the Law. The curse that fell on the Israelites was then in consequence to them fashioning the golden calf. Consider this, the Word of God came directly and clearly to Israel at Sinai but this rebellion of the golden calf (and other actions along the same line) led that generation to fail to gain entrance into the Promised Land. Instead of listening to the God who gave them the law, they in essence, became little gods by fashioning a golden calf to worship. Israel is called God's firstborn (Exodus 4:21-22) and this is a title that Jesus has picked up and claimed that He has fulfilled - the firstborn of God.

Keep in mind this entire section is an appeal by Jesus to consider what the Scripture say. Since God calls other "gods" in His Word, why should they get bent out of shape if He calls Himself the Son of God? He wants them to stop and consider the testimony He's already given them.

Q: What does Jesus say about the nature of Scripture? (v.35 - *It cannot be broken.*)

There are three things we need to keep in mind to get an accurate and clear translation of this passage. These three things help us understand why Jesus spoke this passage at this time. When Jesus said Scripture cannot be broken, He meant that it cannot be annulled or set aside or proved false. Jesus is showing the Jews that they know that Scripture has authority over their lives but at the moment they are attempting to put that authority aside. Just because the Scripture is inconvenient at the moment, does not nullify its force or validity.

Secondly, the phrase, "*whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world*" points to Jesus' entire mission as the Father's ambassador to earth. It would culminate in Jesus' death, burial, resurrection and glorification. Again, one of the themes of the Feast of Dedication was the rededication of the Temple and He is saying that the Father has set Him apart or dedicated or sanctified Him to do these works and give these teachings. This is the way that Jesus fulfills the Feast in that He is the One the Father sanctified for this purpose of bringing the light to mankind.

Lastly, Jesus is in a very heated moment with the Jews here. They are boiling with rage at this point and on the verge of killing Him. He doesn't have a lot of time to develop a long theological rebuttal to their indictment of blasphemy. Instead, this is a short shot at them that

gets them to consider a reason why they should not take offense at His statement that He is the Son of God. The word of God uses this term and so they should consider this rationally instead of rashly.

So Jesus thought goes like this: You claim to hold Scripture as your authority, yet you are not doing so. You have not considered the Scripture I quoted to you, which cannot be set aside just because it is inconvenient for your purposes at this moment. Thus, how can they seek to kill Him whom the Father has set apart or sanctified to be sent into the world on His behalf for saying He is the Son of God? It is a quick rebuttal to their charges of His blasphemy while they are in a state of great agitation. It turns out that this quick defense based on Scripture buys Him enough time to appeal, once more, to the testimony of His good works and teachings.

Q: What does Jesus tell the Jews to do if they cannot believe the works of the Father He did? (v.37 - *Don't believe Him.*)

Jesus is attempting to get them to consider the evidence that He is both the Messiah and the unique Son of God. He doesn't want people to accept Him based merely upon His words but upon the works that the Father gave Him to do. Anyone can blather on and on about who they want you to believe they are but only the Messiah and Son of God could fulfill the Feasts and prophecies and do the signs Jesus did.

Q: Why do you think Jesus wants the Jews to consider his works (works being more than just miracles - it also includes teachings)? (*They might come to learn and understand who He truly is -which is the point of this discussion that the Jews initiated in the first place.*)

The works of Jesus also gave testimony of Jesus' nature being one with God. They revealed His mission and His love.

Q: At the end of this discourse, what did the Jews attempt to do? (v.39 - *to seize Him - to arrest Him*)

Q: Based on the previous times Jesus escaped the clutches of the angry mob, why do you think Jesus was able to escape again? (*His hour had not yet come - though this was not stated in this instance*)

From the mob in Jerusalem, Jesus fled to a place beyond the Jordan, probably Batanea where John the Baptist spent a lot of time preaching and baptizing people.

Q: What did the crowd at that place come to think about John the Baptist? (v.41 - *while John did no miracles, everything he said about Jesus was true*)

Q: What was the result of believing John's testimony about Jesus? (v.42 - *They came to believe in Jesus.*)

It appears these people were more open-minded than those in Jerusalem. This also lets us know that the ministry of John the Baptist bore fruit. Many who believed in John came to

believe in Jesus.

The folly of not believing in Jesus leads one to put Him to death (figuratively). Think on that for a moment: seeking to put to death the only One who can save you. But for those who receive the good news about Jesus and put their faith in Him, they are saved and become one of Jesus' sheep, secure for eternity.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?