

John 10:22-30

Today is known to us as **Good Shepherd** Sunday. So, I think it's fitting to begin today's sermon by talking a little bit about what it means to be a **good** shepherd. A truly **good** shepherd is one who **knows** his sheep. He knows their **weaknesses** and their **needs**. A **good** shepherd is also one who **loves** his sheep. For him, there is no greater reward than to see his sheep **contented**, well **fed**, and **safely flourishing** under his care. Because he knows and loves his sheep, a **good** shepherd will do **whatever it takes** to provide them with the finest **pasture** land; with clean, fresh **water**; and with an environment which is **protected** from predators. Jesus is **our** Good Shepherd, and He knows us **so** well, and loves us **so** much, that in any and every situation in life, we are completely **content** and at **ease** with Him. We can go to Him in **prayer**, and talk to Him at any **time**, about any **thing**, without any **hesitation** whatsoever.

But, have you noticed how **difficult** it is to speak your mind with someone whom you **don't** really **know** very well, or perhaps someone who doesn't know **you**? It seems that we **hesitate** to talk openly with them because we don't want to say something which would make us look **foolish**, or which might be **misunderstood** by them. However, when we know someone very **well** - like **Jesus** - we don't have those same **reservations**. We know that even if we would **misspeak**, our closest friends will always **understand**, and will take our words in the **kindest** possible way. Unfortunately, not **everyone** feels that comfortable with **Jesus**. Some people see Him more as a **stranger** in their life, rather than as a very **close** personal friend.

Nevertheless, even though some people may have **trouble** talking to **Jesus**, in no way does **Jesus** feel **uncomfortable** in talking to **us**. Jesus talks to us again and again, day after day, in His Holy **Word**, and He has **a lot** to **say** to the people of this world. But **When Jesus Speaks**, two different **reactions** may take place. On the **one** hand, there are many people **hear** Him, but they **don't listen**. And on the **other** hand, many people **do listen** to Him, and they **follow** His advice. In our text for today, Jesus gives us examples of **both** kinds of people.

Our text begins at the time of the Feast of **Dedication** - an 8-day festival to commemorate the **purification** and **rededication** of the temple after it had been defiled by a man named Antiochus Epiphanes in the year 168 BC. Sometimes this feast is also referred to as the Festival of Lights or Hanukkah. Although this was **not** one of the three great Jewish festivals which all adult Jewish males were **required** to attend, nevertheless year after year, it still drew many Jews to the city

of Jerusalem. Among those Jews were many who heard Jesus **speak**.

This time they came to Him with a **question**, "*How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the **Christ**, tell us **plainly**.*" At first glance this would appear to be a legitimate and reasonable request. Jesus had **not** referred to Himself in their midst by using the **exact words**, "I am the **Christ**, or the **Messiah**." The main reason for His **not** doing so, was that the Jews were only looking for one **kind** of a Messiah - a **political** one. In fact, they are **still** waiting for such a political Messiah today. If they had stayed with **God's Word**, and had not added their own **interpretation** of that Word, then Jesus could have **called** Himself the Christ without being **misunderstood** - as He did with the **Samaritan** woman at Jacob's well.

Besides, even though Jesus had not told them with **words** that He was the Messiah, He **had** told them with His **actions**. So, Jesus answered these Jews, "*I **did** tell you, but you do not **believe**. The **miracles** I do in My Father's name speak for Me, but you do not **believe** because you are not My **sheep**.*" The problem was not with **Jesus**, it was with **them**. They had **heard** Jesus' words - they had **seen** His actions - but they had not really **listened**. They were still **searching** for the Messiah, even though He was standing right in **front** of them!

Can God accuse **us** of being the same way? Can Jesus be working so **closely** with us, and still have it be possible for us **miss the point** of what He does and says? When God says, "*Don't misuse My name - Don't murder - Don't steal - and Don't bear false testimony,*" do we say, "Yeah, **those people** out there really ought to get their act together. **They** shouldn't be doing all those things"? If we **do**, then Jesus' words have gone right **past** us because we haven't listened **closely** enough to His words. Jesus doesn't mean for those commandments to apply only to those people **out there** - He means them for **us** too!

When people don't recognize the loving **voice** of Jesus **calling** out to them in the **commandments**, **guiding** them away from things which are **dangerous** to their body and soul, it's because they aren't His **sheep**. In order to be one of Jesus' sheep, we must **listen** to His voice, because Jesus said, "*My sheep **listen** to My voice; I **know** them, and they **follow** Me.*" Eyes which **see**, and ears which **hear**, **characterize** those who have **faith**. Many people **do** listen to Jesus, and they obediently **follow** Him. They follow Him no matter **where** He leads them. They follow Him at **home** and at **school**, at **work** and at **play**, in the **morning** and in the **evening**, when they are with a **crowd** of people and when they are all **alone**. They even follow Jesus when they don't know **where** He is leading them to. Abraham

was a really good **example** of that. God told him, “*Leave your country, your people, and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.*” **God** led the way - and Abraham **followed**. Following the Lord was **easy** for Abraham because he **trusted** God to lead him **wisely** and **safely** - as a **Good Shepherd**.

Following Jesus only becomes **difficult** when we presume to know more about **leading** than **Jesus** does. “Lord, I don’t **want** to go there, that looks too **dangerous**. Lord, I don’t **want** to help those people, they’re my **enemies**. Lord, are you **sure** You’ve thought this through? Isn’t **my** way really a **better** way?” That’s exactly the way the Prophet **Jonah** reasoned when God told him to go and preach a message of repentance to the people of **Nineveh**. The Assyrians were **cruel** people, they were **enemies** of the Israelites, and Jonah didn’t **want** them to repent of their sins. He wanted them to be **destroyed**! It’s too bad that Jonah couldn’t see things **God’s** way right from the start. He could have saved himself a lot of **grief** if he had.

When Jesus Speaks, we have a choice to make. We can choose to hear Him, **ignore** what He says, and suffer the **consequences**; or we can **listen** to what He says, **follow** Him, and reap the **benefits**. Concerning those who follow Him Jesus says, “*I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.*” **When Jesus Speaks**, those who choose to **follow** Him are **safe** - safe in **this** life, and also for the life to **come** - because Jesus offered His **own** life on the cross to **rescue** us from the guilt and punishment of our sins, and to provide us with **eternal** safety.

We all have the privilege of being **sheep** in the flock of Jesus. But what kind of sheep **are** we? Are we the sheep who **appreciate** what Jesus has done for us, and who willingly **follow after** Him, no matter where He wants to lead us? Or are we the sheep who love to **stray**, thinking that the grass is always greener on the **other** side of the fence? If we are **wise**, we will **follow** our Good Shepherd and remain **safe** in His protective care. We will **hear** His precious Word, and **study** it diligently. We will receive **forgiveness** for our sins in the Lord’s Supper **often**, and **daily** remember that God has made us His dear children through our **baptism**. But if we are **foolish**, we will **forget** about such things, and try to fend off the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh all by **ourselves**. The **wise** sheep will be **victorious**, and will live a safe and contented life because of their gracious Shepherd. The **foolish** sheep will be **torn to shreds**, because they were not **wise** enough or **strong** enough to take care of **themselves**.

When Jesus Speaks, what will **we** do? Let's always remember that the **wise** sheep will **listen** to His word, **follow** His commands, and be eternally **blessed** by the Good Shepherd who has provided for **all** our physical **and** spiritual needs.
Amen.