

My sheep

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[0 : 00] Now for our text, let us turn to verses 27 and 28 of John 10. Verses 27 and 28. John's Gospel, chapter 10, where Jesus says, let us read from verse 25.

Jesus told them, answered them, I told you, and ye believe not. The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

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the Lord Jesus was yet again confronted with the unbelief of his own countrymen the Jews they were Jews who were divided among themselves as to Christ's identity and as to Christ's authority some of them thought that he was demon possessed and was raving mad verse 20 but others of them couldn't agree with that and they had their own views but they had one thing in common although they were divergent as to who Jesus was and about his authority and had divergent views about him they had one thing in common and that was that they could not be neutral about the Lord Jesus they were both opposed to him with implacable and ingrained opposition and bitterness but one thing they couldn't do and that was to ignore him and they could not be neutral and neutrality is still an absolute impossibility for anyone

[2 : 09] Jesus says quite categorically he who is not with me who is not for me is against me with regard to the Lord Jesus there is no no man's land where we can hide ourselves there is no grey area there is no neutral territory we are either for him or we are against him and the Jews here as much as they were against him and as much as they would have nothing to do with him at the same time were not neutral now a detail is inserted here about the time of this confrontation in verse 22 we are told that this took place at the feast of the dedication the dedication of what?

well this feast of dedication was held every December it was also known as the feast of lights among the Jews and it commemorated the dedication or rather perhaps more accurately the re-dedication of the temple in Jerusalem after it had been destroyed by a man called Antiochus Epiphanus 167 years before Christ and after this temple after the temple was desecrated and mutilated and destroyed by this man it was rebuilt and it was re-dedicated and this dedication was observed by the Jews every December and so it was December time when this happened it was at the feast of the dedication in December AD in December AD 29 in all probability and at this particular feast the Jews pursued the questioning of the Lord Jesus and they said to him how long are you going to keep us in the dark?

how long are you going to keep us in suspense? will you not tell us plainly who you are? how long are you going to make us to doubt?

and in response to these questions there came the very sad reply from Jesus Jesus said I have told you and you didn't believe me I told you and you didn't believe me so that their unbelief and their rejection of Christ's words as well as of Christ's person made it patently plain that they were not of his flock and they were not his sheep and Jesus makes that plain too he says you believe not because you are not of my sheep as I said unto you and then for their information and for ours and for the information of succeeding generations to the end of time Jesus tells us the kind of people his sheep should be and the kind of people his sheep are if they are obedient and Bible loving and Bible believing people and we have this in these two verses of our text in these two verses we have a twofold description one a description of the character of Christ's people and another description of the privileges of the people with that character so we have here then the character and the privileges of the people of God first of all the character that marks them and will mark them to the end of the day now four distinctives are given here of true discipleship four marks of what it means to be a genuine follower of the Lord Jesus Christ and the first distinctive is this that those who are Christ are sheep he talks about my sheep sheep now of course all mankind cannot be called sheep by the good shepherd for most of mankind multitudes of mankind are more like wolves and foxes than like sheep only Christ's true followers have this distinctive they are called by Jesus himself sheep now that tells us immediately something that we need to be reminded of constantly and it is this that no member of the body of Christ no follower of Jesus Christ however genuine the genuine the following may be no follower is perfect or flawless or impeccably wise or obedient because sheep are silly and foolish and perverse and exasperating they are so prone to wonder which prompted no doubt prompted F.W. Faber to write souls of men why will ye scatter like a flock of frightened sheep foolish hearts why will you wander from a love so true and deep what foolishness resides in the sheep in the people of God however long they have been on the way however close they live to the Lord there is still foolishness there is still perversity there is still within us the wanderlust so that the apostle has to say to us or other writers

Jude for example has to say to us keep yourselves in the love of God don't wander about there is this wanderlust within us and the psalmist had to make this startling and in one sense horrendous confession he says I am as a beast before you but there is another side to this metaphor of sheep and I think that is the one that the Lord would have us look at here and take from these words for one thing sheep are harmless they are harmless they don't attack they are not animals of prey neither was our Lord the Lord Jesus was harmless and undefiled and holy and separated from sinners and because the Lord Jesus was harmless his sheep are to be harmless

[8 : 53] Jesus said I am meek and lowly in heart and you shall find rest for your souls and he expects that from his sheep he says blessed are the meek and remember that meekness is not weakness of character meekness is meekness humbleness of heart lowliness harmlessness ye are the blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth the apostle says let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus the mind of great humility and humbleness of heart and we remember that the Lord Jesus was and we are to be followers of him in this sense he was blameless and harmless in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation and generation that's one thing then as sheep we are to be harmless another thing about sheep is that they are so useful they are so useful sheep farmers derive their entire livelihood from sheep their flesh is useful their wool is useful they are assets sheep are assets to their owners they are the bread and butter of their owners and their owners livelihood is invested in sheep and does that not remind us and point out to us something about ourselves that we are to be assets to the Lord have we ever thought of ourselves like that as assets we are to be able to carry rather than to have to be carried constantly and you know the feeblest of us the feeblest of us can carry many a thing to the Lord and many a person to the Lord in prayer and what's more useful than that no one likes not to be useful no one likes to feel that he or she has been shunted into a siding and has been forgotten and there's no need for any of Christ's flock to be like that we are told that in love we are to serve one another and we are to serve and follow him who on one occasion took a towel and girded himself and washed his disciples feet well that's the first thing sheep that's the first characteristic that's mentioned here sheep and the second is my sheep my sheep and here there is expressed a relationship between the sheep and the shepherd a relationship that turns wolves into sheep

Jesus doesn't speak of my wolves but he does speak of my sheep and where there are sheep there is a shepherd and our shepherd is the good shepherd who gave his life for the sheep he is not a harling who abandons the sheep at the first sign of trouble he is the good shepherd who gave his life for the sheep and to whom the sheep belong now to this relationship Jesus refers four times in this chapter in verse 3 and verse 4 he says in each he talks in each verse of his own sheep in verse 14 and verse 27 he talks of my sheep four times he refers to this relationship which indicates the significance and importance of it a relationship between the sheep and the shepherd well now how do ravening wolves and foxes or whatever you like to call those outside the fold how do they become sheep how do sinners become followers of Christ how do the enemies of the cross of Christ become reconciled to the

Lord himself well of course the immediate answer and the straightforward and simple answer is by faith in the Lord Jesus himself that's absolutely true and in one sense we need not go any further wolves are turned into sheep by faith in the Lord Jesus however this can be developed and put in other ways for example wolves are brought into the fold and become the sheep of Christ's pasture because of election God's choice of them God loved them before they ever knew him God chose them before they ever were in a past eternity we are told that he predestinated them unto the adoption of children by Christ Jesus now far from being a severe and hard doctrine this is a doctrine of tremendous comfort it's probably the most comforting doctrine in the whole range of

Christian doctrine God's choice of his sheep and one great reason why it is so comforting is this it means that if we belong to the flock of Christ if we are saved people it means that our salvation is rooted in eternity not in time when we came to believe in Jesus but further back from that before time was before the foundation of the world because election is eternal election and our salvation is rooted in eternity and in the eternal ages and in the eternal plan and decree of God and if that does not give comfort to a believer then words mean nothing so we are his sheep my sheep because of election my sheep too of course because of redemption and redemption means deliverance from sins guilt and power and pollution but not deliverance full stop but deliverance because of a price

I have found a ransom let him not go down to the pit and then we are brought into this relationship to by adoption my sheep by adoption brought into the family having a right to all the privileges of the sons of God and here is one of the privileges we are we have this relationship Jesus says you are my sheep the Holy Spirit enables us to call the father of Jesus Abba father my sheep that's the second characteristic about those who truly follow they are sheep but more than that they have this close relationship they are my sheep the third thing is this that they are attentive sheep the true people of God are attentive sheep we are told here very distinctly Jesus says my sheep not just sheep but my sheep my sheep hear my voice they hear my voice they are attentive sheep and so important a mark so important a mark is this that

[16 : 20] Jesus refers to it four times in this chapter my sheep hear my voice this is a sure mark of grace that they hear my voice not merely that they are able to hear God's voice but that they are anxious to hear God's voice and are restless until they do hear it they are eager to listen concerned to hear and where that is the case then they are in the flock of God we have to hear of course initially in order to be saved hear and your soul shall live but we also have to hear continually as we go on in life hearing God's voice in the scriptures we have to hear more intelligently as we go on and understandingly and deeply and attentively there's a progression and this progression indicates the genuine mark of of of one's calling and election that we are not only able to hear but that we are anxious to hear my sheep hear my voice

I think that is the kind of meaning we are to take out of these words they hear my voice they are concerned to hear to hear my voice and of course God indeed speaks and the believer can say I'll hear what God the Lord will speak to his folk he speaks peace and to his saints but let them not return to foolishness God speaks to us in different ways he speaks to us in providence through sickness through bereavement through disappointment in various ways in providence he speaks to us he speaks to us through conscience and we all have a conscience until we are saved it's dead but when we are saved it's cleansed and it becomes lively and as old John Trapp the Puritan commentator puts it conscience is God's domestic chaplain within us and God speaks to us through the chaplain he has put within us and he has installed that chaplain in our hearts from birth and that chaplain that our conscience becomes a lively conscience when we are brought from darkness into his marvelous light and then of course we hear and God speaks to us not only through providence and through conscience but through the scriptures and I want to say this that sheep who are not eager to hear the voice of the shepherd in his word are either not real are either real sheep who in fact are straying or they are masquerading sheep they're not genuine if there is no real desire to hear his voice in his word then we've got to examine ourselves indeed because my sheep one of the marks says

Jesus of my sheep is that they hear my voice that's the second thing that's the third characteristic they are sheep they are my sheep they are attentive sheep and the fourth one is that they are obedient sheep and they follow me and they follow me so obedience is laid down here as a clear evidence of discipleship now I believe that of all the evidences of discipleship I believe that obedience is not perhaps the one at the very top but it's the most comprehensive it embraces everything else where there's a failure in obedience then we're in difficulty and we're in trouble if we don't take up the cross and follow Christ then we cannot be his disciples to obey is better than sacrifice now we are to obey by following him they hear my voice and they follow me they do what

I command they follow me now may I say this that following the Lord is observable by others it's something that is observable it's done in the sight of others it's an outward proof of inward attentiveness it's the way in which the sheep of his pasture live their lives and confirm their calling and election by their obedient following so the mark of a true Christian is not secrecy there is such a thing as a secret disciple but that's not the mark that's not the mark the mark of a true Christian is not secrecy but openness in obedience and of course at such a time as this every communion this point is made the question of openness the question of professing in obedience to Christ's command is there someone here tonight and you have been a believer and perhaps for quite a while and it's a secret one you are you haven't professed in this particular way that we are given the opportunity to do so tomorrow at this table well you have time to think again about the question of obedient following you have examined yourself so eat of that bread and drink of that cup and as we follow the

Lord openly not only at the Lord's table but day by day and obediently then let us remember this as one writer puts it let us not stop to pick the gaudy but odourless flowers by the way but press on and follow on to know the Lord and to know more intimately that's the first thing then the characteristics that mark the people of God now we come to the second thing and it is the privileges that sustain the people of God the privileges that sustain them and what we are thinking of now is not what we are to him in character but what he is to us in blessing he blesses us and we are to count our blessings and name them one by one let us look at our blessings let us look at them as they are brought before us here in our text look at the privileges of those of whom

[23 : 25] Jesus says you are my sheep you hear my voice and you're following me what is the first privilege Jesus says I know them my sheep hear my voice and I know them that's a great privilege it's not merely that he knows about existence the Lord Jesus knows of the existence of every single person who ever existed there is not one person in heaven not one person on earth and there is not one person in hell who is unknown to the Lord he knows all the wolves as surely as he knows all the sheep but he knows his sheep in a special way and with a greater and a deeper knowledge deeper than any father has of his child or any shepherd has of his sheep he knows his sheep because they are part of it what are sheep they are part takers of the divine nature they are part takers of the divine nature they are part of God himself as it will they are those to whom he has given life they are those whom he has known not only from the time they first believed but from all eternity their salvation is rooted in the eternal realm he knows them and that means for us that he knows our secret thoughts our personal sorrows our urgent prayers and he knows our silences when we should be praying he knows our silences and our confessions and our praises and our consecration and our service and our very names there is nothing he doesn't know he knows the way we take as Psalm 139 puts it he knows our sitting down and rising up and he knows us to such an extent and at such a level that sooner will a mother forget and forsake and abandon the child at our breast than the good shepherd would cease to care for and to know intimately the sheep of his pasture and he knows us not merely as something in his own mind but he knows us for our good for our advancement for our growth and grace he knows us more deeply than anything we can imagine and more lovingly than anything we deserve

I know them I hope we're able to count that as a tremendous asset and a privilege that we should be known at a deep level by the Lord not only that we exist but known as those for whom Jesus died and then he says I give to them eternal life there's the next privilege I give to them eternal life and eternal life as we know is something that we have here it begins here and now this is life eternal that you believe in him whom he has sent and we believe here we don't start believing in heaven we believe here and the life the eternal life that he gives us here is a life that is sustained here for as long as we live here and sustained by the giver himself and after all how can anyone be of the flock of

Christ without having life eternal until we receive life eternal death reigns what a thought everyone out of Christ we say of that person we believe about that person that death reigns it's not just dead but death reigns and it's only because grace reigns through righteousness that we become sheep and follow him what a privilege and another privilege is this that this life that he has given to us will never be withdrawn it will never evaporate and disappear how could it because it's called eternal life life that shall never end has got this quality about it it begins here and continues throughout eternal ages well then what a possession to have eternal life and we have it for one reason only because it's given

I give to them eternal life I give to them it's the bestower of our great and our good shepherd and it's given to us and bestowed upon us not as something commensurate with our standing but as something for the first time in our lives to give us a standing before God for eternal life is but the life of God in the soul and that constitutes our standing in righteousness before him it's a given eternal life and it's given to those who seek and those who seek shall find let us never treat then this gift casually or nonchalantly it's a precious privilege to have I know my sheep and I know them as those to whom I have given eternal life and the third thing is this they shall never perish now this is really a corroboration or a confirmation of the fact that we have received eternal life this is an extension of the gift if you like of eternal life it's because life is eternal that we will never perish to have eternal life is never to perish that's what eternal life is for us it means never to perish and eternal life therefore confounds and baffles and disarms the second death because the second death has no power over those who have eternal life they shall never perish now to be sure

Christ's sheep may and do slip and slide and slither they do indeed falter and fall but they will never ever fall away and be lost and no believer will ever be lost not not only because he will not be allowed to be lost but even more than that because it's impossible for him to be lost I would put it as strongly as that it's impossible for a believer to be lost how come because to be lost for a believer to be lost Christ would have to perish first and the life of God in our soul would have to become extinct first and the good work he began in us would have to be undone first and if that took place then grace would be no more grace salvation would be no more salvation the shepherd would be no more the shepherd and the sheep would be no more his sheep but they shall never perish and notice the word they shall never never perish now never tells us about speaks to us of a long long time never is a long long long time but it's not longer than grace will last never is never longer than grace will last or life will continue because the life he gives us this quality it's eternal life what a privilege what a privilege for those who have the character of sheep and the last one is this no one shall pluck them out of my hand no one shall pluck them out of my hand and of course this is another reason why we will never perish you see not only will we not perish because of the quality of the life we are given but also because of the strength of the hand we are in my hand no one shall pluck them out of my hand the next verse talks about the father's hand this verse talks about the son's hand we are in two hands if you like my hand the shepherd's hand the mighty hand his right hand shall hold us and we are in the hollow of that hand and no one shall pluck us out that's what he says no one shall pluck them out of my hand

[32 : 57] I think it's Spurgeon who says that many may snatch at us but none will snatch us out of his hand or remove us from our divine base our divine base while we live here in this crumbling world our divine base is the hollow of his hand and not all the powers of darkness can prize open his hand so as to expose one of his sheep to lostness no one will open his hand they are safe in my hand so here then is divine ownership and divine possession and divine protection and perseverance here we have four privileges over against the four characteristics that belong to those who are trusting

Jesus for salvation what a privilege it is and when we think of this when we think of the character that we have and when we think of the privileges we are given then both converge and point to one source the Lord himself he has given us the character we have of sheep he has given us the privileges we enjoy and he has done it basically and fundamentally because of the death he died and that's the death we're going to remember tomorrow what a strong reason we have for remembering the Lord's death and for remembering it with gratitude and thankfulness in a eucharistic way he has given us our character a new nature a new creation and he has given us unspeakable privileges he knows us now and he'll know us throughout eternity we shall never perish neither shall anyone pluck them out of our hand well we may have doubts about ourselves we may have doubts about our faith but let's have no doubt about the shepherd and his qualities and his attributes and the love and the mercy that he bestows upon us seek ye the

Lord while he may be found call ye upon him while he is near and may we find him to be near to us as we go to the church tomorrow and as we sit at the table tomorrow may we find that he is near and that everything we have for time for death and for eternity rests upon him whose death we are to remember until he comes again let us pray our gracious God and our heavenly father thou hast not withheld thy son but thou hast delivered him up for us all we thank thee for the delivering up of the Lord Jesus so that he is portrayed in scripture as the good shepherd who gave his life for the sheep the chief shepherd who will come again at the end of the day oh Lord may we be ready for his coming having given us so many privileges may we not treat them lightly may we not look upon them casually but may we marvel constantly at the richness of the shepherd's provision as we trudge through the wilderness and above all when we arrive in

Canaan may we have this good hope through grace that Canaan is before us and if our trust is in the Lord we have no reason to doubt him for he is faithful who has promised bless us we pray then with all spiritual blessing we ask it for Christ's sake Amen