

# Who Are You?

by Mark Jarvinen

*<sup>22</sup> It was now winter, and Jesus was in Jerusalem at the time of Hanukkah, the Festival of Dedication. <sup>23</sup> He was in the Temple, walking through the section known as Solomon's Colonnade. <sup>24</sup> The people surrounded him and asked, "How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."*

*<sup>25</sup> Jesus replied, "I have already told you, and you don't believe me. The proof is the work I do in my Father's name. <sup>26</sup> But you don't believe me because you are not my sheep. <sup>27</sup> My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, <sup>29</sup> for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> The Father and I are one" (John 10:22-30 – NLT).*

Today's text occurs as part of the "**Good Shepherd**" teaching in chapter 10 of John's Gospel. Throughout this chapter Jesus reveals Himself as the Good Shepherd of Israel, i.e. the Messiah, but many of the Jews listening to Jesus simply didn't get it. They remained in the dark over Jesus' true identity. The stage was set for an encounter between a group of inquiring Jews and Jesus, while he walked through a section of the Temple in Jerusalem known as Solomon's Colonnade. It was there that teachers found shelter from the cold winter winds typical during that time of year. Jerusalem was teeming with Jewish travelers during the **Festival of Dedication**, also known as **Hanukkah**. A group of Jews large enough to surround Jesus caught up with him and pressed him with a burning question: "**How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.**" One commentator suggests that the question could also be translated, "**How long will you annoy us?**" In other words, these

Jews wanted an unambiguous answer from Jesus. ***“No parables, no riddles, no vague allusions to Scripture, just tell us plainly, yes or no, are you the Messiah?”*** Are they seekers, or antagonists? Apparently from the tone of his response in vv. 25-26, Jesus discerns an antagonistic edge to their question:

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The crowd of Jews got up in Jesus’ grill and pressed for an answer to the question **“Who are you?”** By his response, Jesus in effect said, “I’d like to ask you the same question - **“Who are you? But I guess you’ve already answered that – I told you and you don’t believe me.... You don’t believe me because you are not my sheep.”**

As we encounter God’s Word this morning, Jesus poses the same question to us – **“Who are you? Are you one of My sheep?”** In our text, Jesus points to characteristics of those who are His sheep.

### **I. “My Sheep Listen To My Voice ...” (v. 27a).**

The first key characteristic of Jesus’ sheep is - **they are willing to listen to His Word.** The problem with the group of Jews who sought Jesus in the Temple was that they didn’t really come to listen to Jesus’ voice. The text says they were in suspense – not to find the truth – but to accuse him of blasphemy. They didn’t come to listen to His teachings, but to hear Jesus say something self-incriminating. **As**

**Jesus' sheep, we must be willing to listen to what He has to say to us, especially as it pertains to life and salvation.**

Awhile back, I became engaged in a wide-ranging conversation with my brother-in-law, Dan Rinden, which eventually led into his experience as an army infantryman during a 9-month tour of duty in Viet-nam. He told me about his first night patrol after his deployment. It was 1969 and Dan was just 22 years old. He admitted he was scared to death. The North-Vietnamese could have been anywhere as the patrol set out from their encampment in the pitch-blackness of night. Leading them was a staff sergeant with over 20 years of military experience. Dan remembers asking him anxiously, **“Hey Sarge, do you think the enemy is out here tonight.”** The battle-tested sergeant, wanting to reassure his new recruit, simply said, **“No, I don't think they're out tonight. We got nothing to worry about, kid. Just stay close to me and do what I do.”** Dan expressed how incredibly reassuring the sergeant's words were that night. Dan said, **“I wanted to stay as close to him as possible.”**

This raises an important question. **How close do we want to stay to Jesus?** Are we listeners to God's Word? There are many competing voices in our world today, including the voice of sinful self-reliance, urging us to trust what seems right or best in our own eyes. But a sheep will listen to the voice of his shepherd. A pastor by the name of **Bob Crabtree** was traveling by car in a rather barren stretch of country in Eastern Europe when he saw two shepherds, with their flocks, come together for a chat in the middle of the road. Together

their flocks totaled about 300 sheep that intermingled on and near the roadway while the two shepherds talked. As Crabtree watched this scene from his vehicle, he wondered how the two shepherds would ever separate their sheep once their conversation was over. He would soon find out. As one shepherd turned to leave, he called to his sheep, in a low voice, to come after him, and wouldn't you know, his sheep immediately began following him. The sheep knew the voice of their shepherd **(Tim Zingale, SermonCentral)**.

Jesus wants us, as his sheep, to hear his words and follow. He wants us to know and believe that He is our shepherd who has our best interests in mind, that it is He who will lead us into green pastures and beside still waters **(Psalm 23)**. Sometimes, however, we become distracted in the rush of life in this world. We hear what we want to hear and disregard the rest. We listen when it's convenient. That's our old nature giving in to the loudest voices. The Lord has something better in mind. Two men were walking along a crowded city sidewalk. Suddenly one of the men remarked, ***"Listen to the lovely sound of that cricket."*** The other man couldn't hear a thing. How could this be? The first man was a zoologist and had trained himself to hear the sounds of nature regardless of background noise. He simply said, ***"We hear what we listen for."*** Sheep have come to trust their shepherd's voice – that's who they'll follow. Christians trust the Word of Jesus, amidst the din of competing voices, to lead them along the way everlasting.

## **II. "... I Know Them, And They Follow Me" (v. 27b).**

In Scripture there are numerous examples of people who really did approach Jesus with a willingness to listen. **The Rich Young Ruler** is one example. With some background in the Word of God, he felt that he was generally on the right path – after all, he hadn't committed adultery, murdered anyone, or stolen anything. Yet, there was some lingering doubt in his mind. The question, “**Have I done enough?**” nagged him. So one day he came to Jesus and asked him, “**Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?**” (Luke 18:18). He seemed sincere in his asking, and Jesus' answer was crystal clear. He said,

***“You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me” (Luke 18:22).***

The Rich Young Ruler heard what Jesus had to say, but it was too difficult. So what did he do? The parallel passage in **Mark 10:22** says that his face fell and he went away sad because he had great wealth. The young man was willing to listen, but not to follow.

**What might following look like for us?** In the beginning we have good intentions – Remember how Peter once said “I'll follow you anywhere, Lord,” before he denied Jesus three times on the evening of his arrest? Thankfully, Peter found forgiveness and restoration. But what does following Jesus look like if you're **a kid in school**? It probably means not cheating, even if you didn't have time to study for the test the night before; or it means obeying your parents even when their request seems unreasonable. You're a **Christian teen** who starts dating and God says, “**Stay sexually pure.**” But the reality is that

you're afraid your boyfriend won't understand your decision. You're a **Christian parent** and God says, "Bring your children up in the faith, have family devotions, be regular in church attendance." But inside you feel the time crunch. Your schedules are already full, and besides, the kids find church activities a little boring. Jesus says to **Christian spouses**, "When your mate is insensitive, don't retaliate. Show kindness, instead." But everything inside you wants to make him or her pay. A sheep in the Lord's fold listens and follows, even when it's difficult. Jesus once said to his disciples, "***If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me***" (***Matthew 16:24***). Following Jesus goes against the grain of our old nature, and often against the current of our culture, but we must remember that He is our **Good Shepherd** who will be with us every step of the way to lead and guide, and when we stumble and fall, to pick us up and forgive.

### **III. "... No One Can Snatch Them Away From Me, ...." (v. 28c).**

Whenever we honestly look at ourselves to determine if we're really one of Jesus' sheep, we see our blemishes and shortcomings. Thank goodness our status and value don't depend on our own external qualities. There's a story in Genesis about Jacob (Isaac's son) and his uncle Laban (brother to Jacob's mother, Rebekah). Jacob worked for Laban, who was a wealthy shepherd. When it came time for Laban to pay Jacob for his labor, Laban asked him, "What can I pay you?" Wisely, Jacob said,

***"Let me go through all your flocks today and remove from them every speckled or spotted sheep, every dark-colored lamb, and***

***every spotted or speckled goat. They will be my wages” (Genesis 30:32-33).***

Laban was all for it. In his mind, Jacob was choosing the weaker, less numerous rejects from among Laban’s vast flocks. Laban thought he was getting the better end of the deal. But as events unfolded, God prospered Jacob’s herds more than Laban’s. The point of the passage is not to exalt Jacob’s resourcefulness and skill in animal husbandry, as much as to recognize God’s work on behalf of his own, and to demonstrate His faithfulness to his covenant blessing, given first to Jacob’s grandfather, Abraham.

Back to our text from **John 10**, when it comes down to having confidence in whether or not we are one of the Good Shepherd’s sheep, it’s not about the externals, our appearance or performance, it’s about God’s work on our behalf. Notice what Jesus says in **v. 29** of our text about this –

***“My Father, who has given them (my sheep) to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.”***

Being part of Jesus’ flock isn’t dependant on what we do – but on what the Father does for us. The sheep don’t find the shepherd, the Good Shepherd finds us. Just as the sheep Jacob received were given to him by Laban, – the sheep of Jesus’ fold are given to him by the Father. And then, as our Good Shepherd, Jesus gives us ***“eternal life”*** and the assurance that we ***“shall never perish;”*** and that no enemy (sin, death, or the power of evil) will ever ***“snatch”*** us ***“out of his hand” (v. 28).*** What a secure status is ours through the care and provision of Jesus, our Good Shepherd!

How does Jesus, our Good Shepherd give us eternal life? **John 10:11** says, ***"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep."*** As our Good Shepherd, Jesus not only risked his life for us, as any shepherd would do for his sheep, but he gave his life for his sheep. **The good news for today is that the Good Shepherd, Jesus, rescued us** – not with a great display of earthly power, but by becoming a weak and lowly sheep himself, like us, on whom God the Father could pour out His wrath for our sin, which is precisely what happened when Jesus died on the cross. On the cross, Jesus became our sacrificial lamb – dying the death we deserved because of our sin. On the cross, He became our substitute, taking the Father's wrath for our sin upon Himself. You could even say as does the Apostle Paul in ***II Corinthians 5:21***, ***"God made him (Jesus) who had no sin, to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."***

## **CONCLUSION**

Interestingly, today's text, the events of which precede Holy Week, is an Easter text as well on this 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter. It's as if Jesus, our Good Shepherd is saying to us, ***"I have given my life for you, I have paid for your sins on the cross. But I have also risen from the dead, breaking sin's power, and allowing me to grant you eternal life and security for your souls against every enemy."*** As sheep of our Good Shepherd, Jesus, we are certainly called to listen and to follow, but our strength lies not in our own ability to do so, but in the voice, the leadership, and the strong arms of Jesus, our Good Shepherd, who is One with the Father, carries us in our weakness, and is the giver of eternal life. **A-MEN.**