

“I and the Father Are One”

The Thirty-Fourth in a Series of Sermons on the Gospel of John

Texts: John 10:22-42; Psalm 82:1-8

When Jesus entered Jerusalem during the Feast of Booths, he began teaching regularly in the temple. Although his hour has not yet come, it is drawing near. Jesus’ messianic mission is reaching its conclusion. Through a series of discourses and debates with the Jews, Jesus is preparing his disciples for that day just months away when he will depart from them. There is much for them to learn and not much time remaining for Jesus to teach them. But through these discourses and debates, Jesus is also bringing God’s covenant judgment upon unbelieving Israel. His words do two things—they give life to his sheep, who hear his voice in his word, and his words serve to harden the hearts of the Pharisees who have opposed Jesus’ messianic mission from the moment he first set foot in the city. During the Feast of Dedication, once again, Jesus demonstrates that he is Israel’s Messiah and one with YHWH. And once again the Pharisees seek to arrest him.

In John 10:1-21 Jesus gives the “Good Shepherd” discourse in which our Lord affirms that he is the faithful shepherd over God’s messianic flock, that one who was foretold by Moses and Israel’s prophets (especially Ezekiel and Jeremiah). Throughout the books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Zechariah, Israel’s unbelieving kings and rulers are described as false shepherds who seek to exploit the people of God. Many are singled out for God’s judgment in the form of covenant curse. When Jesus gives the “Good Shepherd” discourse in John 10, it is clear to all listening to him that Jesus sees the Pharisees as false shepherds (strangers, thieves, and robbers). These are men who, barring repentance, can expect to face the same covenant curses meted out upon Israel’s unbelieving kings as in the days of the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel, and the southern kingdom of Judah. The Pharisees’ mistreatment of the people of God is exemplified in John 9 by the cruel and callous way they treated the man who had been blind from birth, and who had been healed by Jesus. These men are nothing but hirelings who care nothing for God’s sheep.

The “Good Shepherd” discourse takes up the first half of John 10, while the second half (vv. 22-41) serves as an elaboration and an extension of the themes set forth by Jesus in vv. 1-21, who has identified himself as the “Good Shepherd” of Israel, who has come to tend to God’s scattered flock, and who, unlike the false shepherds and hirelings, will lay down his life for the sheep. Jesus will not abandon God’s people when savage wolves approach. He will do whatever is necessary to protect God’s flock, and lead God’s people into those green pastures spoken of by the Psalmist in the 23rd Psalm.

As we have seen throughout the last several discourses in John, whenever Jesus speaks, those listening to him are divided among themselves as to whether or not Jesus is a dangerous false teacher, or the coming of God’s prophet as predicted by Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15). There are messianic implications to virtually everything Jesus says and does. As we saw last time, when Jesus finished his “Good Shepherd” discourse, we read in verses 19-21, “*there was again a division among the Jews because of [Jesus’] words. Many of them said, ‘He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?’ Others said, ‘These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?’*”

What follows in the balance of chapter 10 is the continuing debate about Jesus’ true identity. In verses 22-30, John’s focus is upon the debate about whether or not Jesus is Israel’s Messiah, while in verses 31-39, the debate centers around Jesus’ use of the title “Son of God.” Jesus’ application of divine titles to

himself, forces everyone listening to him to decide whether or not he is who he claims to be. How can Jesus perform the miracles he has performed if God is not with him? Yet, why is it that the biblical scholars and lawyers who are supposed to know these things are so opposed to Jesus, even to the point of calling him a blasphemer, accusing him of being demon possessed, and seeking to put him to death.

Turning now to our text (vv. 22-41) of chapter 10, John identifies both the time and location of the two exchanges which follow. In verse 22, John tells us, “*at that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter.*” The Feast of Dedication is not a “biblical feast” established by God, but rather reflects Jewish history after the Old Testament canon was closed with the prophecy of Malachi. In 167 B.C. the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes (whose humble name means “god manifest” and who is a type of antichrist) captured Jerusalem. He then desecrated the temple by setting up a pagan altar, and slaughtering a pig—leaving the temple ceremonially unclean. The Maccabees, who were Jewish guerilla fighters who under the leadership of “Judas the hammer” (Judas Maccabees), eventually recaptured the temple, and then re-consecrated it in a solemn ritual which was followed by an eight-day celebration. The Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) is an eight-day feast which commemorates that event, and which is known for the use of lamps and candles (“feast of lights”).

The Feast’s importance in John 10 is primarily that the celebration of this particular feast is an easy way for John to tell us events are moving swiftly toward the climax of Jesus’ death and resurrection (“his hour”). The Feast of Booths, which was a harvest festival was celebrated in the Fall (John 7-8). It is likely that the healing of the blind man as well as the Good Shepherd discourse follow shortly after (John 9 and John 10:1-21). The events of John 10:22-41 occur three months after the Feast of Booths (during Hanukkah) with three months still to go before the Passover (in the spring). The account of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead (in John 11) takes place shortly before the Passover, and brings us to the very brink of that dreaded hour of which Jesus is speaking—when he reveals the glory of God through his death upon the cross, and in his resurrection from the dead, before he leaves the disciples for that place where they cannot follow (his ascension to the right hand of God).

John tells us that “*Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon.*” Since the colonnade was on the east side of the temple, Jesus and those listening to him, would have been sheltered a bit from wind or inclement weather (Israel’s weather is in many ways like that of California). After Jesus’ resurrection, the early church and the apostles would assemble here to preach the Gospel (as in Acts 3:11 and 5:12), and perhaps John mentions this when he writes his gospel some time after the Fall of Jerusalem as a sort of personal reminiscence. Regardless of the reason, we read in verse 24 that “*the Jews gathered around him and said to him, ‘How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.’*” In other words, “Jesus, this has gone on long enough. Are you the Messiah (the Christ) or are you not.” The question suggests annoyance on the part of those asking it.

On the one hand, we can be a bit sympathetic (but only a bit) to the fact that the question of Jesus’ identity is dividing the people of Jerusalem, just as Jesus brought division to the Galilean region throughout the two years he ministered there. The people of Jerusalem may be wearying of the constant debate and upheaval. Every time Jesus appears, crowds immediately gather, and the people quickly divide into three camps—those who follow him (his disciples), those who oppose him (the Jews), and those who do not care, and just want all the debate to go away (apathetic unbelievers).

Whenever he speaks, Jesus’ words force decision about the most important question of life—who is he? and whether or not to trust in him as one would trust in YHWH. It is clear from our time in John’s Gospel that while Jesus is always merciful and compassionate, the image of a meek if not effeminate

figure, who wears a halo, walks on tippy-toes (as in the minds of late medieval artists who could not think that the holy Jesus would get his feet dirty) and who is the sort of figure so heavenly minded that he's a no earthly good, must go. We need to see Jesus much as we would an Old Testament prophet, bringing words from YHWH which are very difficult to both hear and accept. Jesus' message opens a chasm under people's feet—they must jump to one side or the other. Jesus is ushering in a new age in redemptive history and this creates great angst and anxiety whenever he speaks in public.

On the other hand, Jesus' appearance in Jerusalem is the most important period in Israel's history. He is that one foretold throughout the Old Testament. Any annoyance on the part of the Jerusalemites, reflects sinful human impatience, and an unwillingness to trust God to work out his purposes according to his good pleasure. Furthermore, it is not as though Jesus has said nothing about his identity to this point—he was openly speaking of himself as the Son of Man (the divine figure in Daniel 7), and he repeatedly uses the I AM formula of himself when speaking—one of YHWH's own self-designations.

But so far in John's Gospel, when dealing with the Jews, Jesus has only alluded to being the Messiah (using messianic imagery of living water, light of the world, giving sight to the blind, and being God's messianic shepherd, etc.). The only person in John's account to whom he made a precise declaration that he is the Messiah was the Samaritan women back in John 4:25-26. *"The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.' Jesus said to her, 'I who speak to you am he.'"* The Jews in Jerusalem who want Jesus to declare whether or not he is the Messiah, will not like the answer. He will not tell them what they want to hear. But he will prove he is the Messiah to anyone who has the eyes of faith.

According to verses 25-26, *"Jesus answered them, 'I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep.'"* Jesus has not told the crowds directly, "I am the Messiah." However, the miracles which he has performed have proven that he is, as have the biblical texts he has cited or alluded to. But, exactly, what would have happened had Jesus given in to the crowd's demand and declared "I am the Messiah?" We can but imagine the difficulties this would present.

Because the Jews of Jesus' day believed that the messianic kingdom was geo-political, no doubt they would have completely misunderstood Jesus' intentions and purpose. The Jews did not understand that their Messiah is also the suffering servant of Isaiah 52-53. The Jews, who chafed under Roman oppression, would have sought to make Jesus king (some Galileans already tried). They would expect Jesus to raise and lead an army (like a Judas Macabbee) and drive the Romans from the land. Whenever Jesus even implies that he must suffer and die to save his people (by going to the cross to die for our sins), even his most trusted disciples do not understand him, and Jesus must rebuke them when they seek to prevent him from going to Jerusalem where, as he has been saying, he must suffer and die, and then be raised from the dead on the third day.

Returning to the illustration he used in the "Good Shepherd" discourse—only this time in reverse—Jesus tells the crowds the specific reason why they do not believe that he is the Messiah despite all the evidence he has given them. The reason? They are not of his sheep. Those demanding that Jesus identify himself are not elect (of the YHWH's flock), therefore they do not believe. In the "Good Shepherd" discourse Jesus said plainly that his sheep (those chosen by YHWH) hear his voice. They follow him when he calls them. When the Gospel is preached, the Holy Spirit ensures that the elect hear Jesus' voice (the doctrines of effectual calling, and regeneration), and then they believe in him and are converted (they exercise faith and repentance). The people making demands upon Jesus will not, and

indeed cannot, believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

We do need put to ourselves in the Jews' sandals for a minute in order to understand how shocking Jesus' words to them must have been. The Jews of Jesus' day took Deuteronomy 8-9 very seriously. Many believed that Israel had been chosen by YHWH (of grace) because he took pity on them. But many Jews also believed that they lived at a time when the nation of Israel (by and large) is observing the law, and properly honoring YHWH through the feasts and sacrifices in the temple. This is called covenantal nomism—Israel became God's people by election (grace). But Israel remains God's people by doing good works, observing Sabbaths and feasts, and performing sacrifices, all of which are viewed as meritorious. The Jews were YHWH's people, his flock. How dare Jesus even speak of other sheep beyond Israel—i.e., the Gentiles—as he did in the “Good Shepherd” discourse? No wonder Martin Luther saw the medieval Roman church on the eve of the Reformation as resembling the attitude of the Jews of Jesus' day. The Pharisees of Jesus' day and the Cardinals of Luther's both hated *sola fide*.

How dare Jesus stand there and now tell learned Jews that they were not YHWH's sheep, and that they are like the godless Gentiles—the obvious meaning of Jesus' words. When the Jews reject Jesus, demand miraculous signs, don't believe he is the Messiah when he performs the very signs they demand of him, when they demand that he identify himself as the Messiah after he has shown them just who, exactly, he is, and then still don't believe him, there can only be one reason—they are not YHWH's sheep. Barring a gracious work by God upon their hardened hearts they won't believe Jesus if he performs a thousand miracles—even if he raises the dead. This is what the Fall of Adam has done to every human heart.

In verse 27, Jesus puts himself in the place of YHWH, and then repeats what he has just said. “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*” YHWH's sheep are Jesus' sheep (“my sheep”)—those who believe his words and attribute his miracles to the fact that Jesus is Israel's Messiah. This too is a remarkable assertion, and must have left his audience completely stunned by the ease at which Jesus repeatedly demonstrated and claimed to be the Messiah, even though he won't say the precise words, to them “yes, I am the Messiah.”

In verse 28, Jesus goes on to tell them, “*I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*” This another doctrinally loaded assertion—much like those we considered last time in the “Good Shepherd” discourse. In the shepherd discourse, Jesus implied that there is an eternal covenant in which YHWH has commissioned him to undertake his saving work on behalf of the elect which includes Gentiles (this is the covenant of redemption). Jesus asserts that he calls us by name through his word (effectual calling). He told us that his people will hear his voice in his word (the work of the Holy Spirit in illumination). Jesus told us of his saving intention—to lay down his life for his sheep (particular redemption), which he does willingly (Jesus' passive obedience). All of these are important doctrinal distinctives of the Reformed tradition.

In the second-half of the discourse Jesus teaches divine monergism (salvation is by grace alone because we are unable to do anything to save ourselves), and that Jesus gives his sheep eternal life—not as a reward because Jesus knows we will be good sheep, but because Jesus' sheep have been chosen by the Father in eternity past, are given to Jesus by the Father, so that Jesus will fulfill God's eternal purposes by laying down his life for his sheep, and only for the sheep.

Jesus gives his sheep *eternal* life. Not six month's life. Not five year's life. But eternal life. This assertion is the basis for the doctrine of perseverance—all those who are Christ's (those chosen by God, for whom the shepherd has died, and who hear Jesus's voice in the Gospel, and will therefore follow

him) presently possess eternal life (life without end). Because the Good Shepherd tends his flock (he gives his sheep the Holy Spirit) they will follow him all the way to that promised green pasture. He will not lose any of them. As Jesus put it back in John 6:37, “*all that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.*”

In verse 29, Jesus affirms much the same thing—only this time as it relates to his faithfulness as God’s messianic shepherd. “*My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.*” Jesus speaks of YHWH as his Father—another claim to deity. He also affirms again that his sheep (including Gentiles) have been given him by the Father, and that he and the Father together will protect all his sheep—unlike the false shepherds and hirelings (the Pharisees).

But it is what Jesus says next (v. 30) which infuriates the crowd. “*I and the Father are one.*” Jesus is not affirming that he and the Father are the same person—how then can Jesus pray to the Father, or speak of the Father as a distinct person different from himself? In the context of this exchange, what Jesus is explicitly affirming is that he and the Father have exactly the same purpose for Jesus’ messianic mission—the eternal salvation of God’s sheep. Yet, we are not going too far to say that implied in the statement that Jesus is one with Father, is the fact that they are of the same divine essence (a foundational aspect of the doctrine of the Trinity). Ironically, in verse 31, we get some interpretive help here from those who heard Jesus say this. “*The Jews picked up stones again to stone him.*” The Jews took Jesus’ assertion to be one with the Father as a claim to deity (and therefore blasphemy if the assertion is not true), the penalty for which was stoning.

Jesus does not flee and go into hiding. He responds to the threat of stoning with the power of his words. We read in verse 32, “*Jesus answered them, ‘I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?’*” Jesus’ miracles are indisputable. A man who was lame for thirty-eight years was healed. A man who had been blind from birth had his sight restored. On what basis do the Jews seek to put Jesus to death? What grounds do they have? What law has he broken? The Jews attempt an answer to Jesus’ question in verse 33. “*The Jews answered him, ‘it is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.’*” We now get to the root of the issue. Jesus’ miracles show that he is from God. When Jesus says he is from God (or is one with YHWH), the Jews do not believe him. They see him as a blasphemer because he says such things. Yet, the Jews all but admit that Jesus’ miracles prove that he is from God.

The hypocrisy and contradictory nature of answer given by the Pharisees as to why they want to put Jesus to death is quickly exposed by Jesus. “*Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods?’*” Jesus appeals to “your law”—the Old Testament Scriptures which the Jews claim to be using as the basis upon which to stone Jesus for blasphemy. Jesus quotes from Psalm 82:6-7 (our Old Testament lesson) which reads in its entirety, “*I said, ‘You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince.’*” The word “god” can be used in a number of ways—even in the Old Testament. If the Psalmist is addressing Israel at the time when the law was given—just as Jesus indicates in verse 35, “*if he called them gods to whom the word of God came*”—then the Psalmist is referring to the incident of the golden calf. God’s word came to the Israelites (the law), but since the people were disobedient and unbelieving that whole generation died in the desert of the Sinai.¹ Those among the Israelites who acted like “gods” ended up dying in their rebellion, unlike the true and living God (YHWH) who cannot die.

¹ Carson, The Gospel According to John, 398.

Because “*Scripture cannot be broken*”—God’s word cannot be proved false, something everyone present believed—then the issue is not the authority of the law. This point is not under dispute. Jesus is not endorsing the idea that there are other “Gods” beside YHWH. But he is exposing the Pharisees’ failure to realize that the very same Scripture they are using to refute Jesus, clearly indicates that others can be called “gods” (lower case) and “sons of gods.” Technically, the Jews are not correct. No doubt, they realize to their embarrassment that Jesus knows the bible better than all of them put together.

The key is verse 36, when Jesus declares, “*do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God?’*” At the Feast of Dedication the Jews celebrate the re-consecration of the temple. Jesus has already spoken of himself as the temple of God in John 2:20-22, and now he tells the Jews that YHWH has consecrated Jesus to come and fulfill his messianic mission. Since YHWH has sent Jesus—consecrating him as the true temple of God on earth—how can the Jews object when Jesus speaks of himself as the Son of God? It is important to notice that no one has yet thrown any rocks at Jesus. The Jews are stunned.

Jesus does not give them any quarter and speaks directly to the contradiction apparent in the Jews’ rather lame and spontaneous argument for putting Jesus to death. As we read in verses 37-38, “*If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.*” Jesus’ words are difficult. He knows that. But his words are backed by his deeds. How can the Jews say it is not because of his miracles, but because of his claims that they are seeking to put him to death? The one thing (the miracles) is inseparably connected to the other (Jesus’ claim to be one with the Father). The miracles themselves prove he is from God. Why not believe in Jesus solely on the basis of his miracles? The Jews have hoisted themselves on their own petard, and have no where to go. They have no answer to Jesus since they have so obviously contradicted themselves. They do not believe, because they do not want to believe. They have proven Jesus’ point that they are not YHWH’s sheep.

Sadly, their response (in verse 39) proves the depths of human depravity and unbelief. “*Again they sought to arrest [Jesus], but he escaped from their hands.*” Jesus now leaves Jerusalem, not to return again until Palm Sunday. As John explains in verse 40-41, “[Jesus] *went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there he remained. And many came to him. And they said, ‘John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.’*” John the Baptist proclaimed that one greater than he was coming after him. He was telling the truth. The people out in the wilderness seem not to be sure just who, exactly, Jesus is. But they knew enough to know that this is the man who John the Baptist identified as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

What then, should we take with us by way of application? For one thing, it is clear from this text that Jesus gives eternal life to his sheep. Although the Roman, Lutheran, and Arminian traditions teach that genuine believers can fall from grace, and even perhaps be lost, it is crystal clear from Jesus’ words that eternal life is a present possession of every Christian and those none of those (the elect) given to Jesus by the Father can be snatched from his hand. Why? Because as Jesus says, “*I and the Father are one.*” Jesus is therefore greater than all things which may threaten our salvation—even our sin and unbelief!

Jesus promises all those for whom he lays down his life (his sheep) that they will be saved from the Father’s wrath on the day of judgment. This is why we can be confident that Jesus, our Good Shepherd, will never leave us or abandon us, that he always care for our souls, and that he will always protect us from any danger which might befall us. He does the works of the Father, and no one can snatch us from his hand.

