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Some Reassuring Words for His Sheep

May 8, 2022

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TEXT: John 10:22-33 (ESV)

At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. So 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." 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. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 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. I and the Father are one."

The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?" 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."

As human beings, we oftentimes experience some insecurity in our lives. Sometimes it's about ourselves, and other times it's about things going on in the world around us. So we need some reassurance. We seem to be born this way. It starts when we're little kids even. On this Mother's Day, I thank God for a mom who regularly reassured me of her love for me, not only with her words, but with her actions. She showed me again and again that she was there for me and that she was always rooting for me. Like other children, I appreciated and needed that. I'll bet you did too. Perhaps you've discovered like me, this need for reassurance doesn't end at childhood. As adults, we can still experience moments of insecurity, and we find ourselves looking and longing for some words of reassurance to comfort us and encourage us.

I have found this episode from John's Gospel especially helpful for my insecure moments. It's a rather sad story – people confronting Jesus, people rejecting Jesus, even trying to stone him to death. Well, that's a very sad thing to see. But in the midst of the sadness in this story, the follower of Jesus can find some reassuring words that will fill his or her heart with gladness. There are some words of promise and assurance from Jesus for those who believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God – for those who hear his voice and follow Him. And these words lift me up every time I read them and remember them. Let's take a closer look at those reassuring words for those of us who hear his voice and belong to him, those he refers to as “my sheep.”

First, Jesus says that he knows you. Like a shepherd knows his own sheep, Jesus knows you personally. You're not just another face in the crowd to him. In fact, earlier in this chapter, Jesus says he even knows you by name. That's pretty personal, isn't it? He knows everything about you and me. He knows all about our hurts, our troubles, those things that concern us, our fears and our needs. He knows you better than you know yourself. He understands you and me and all our ways – that we are like sheep who are helpless and needed a shepherd to give us security in life. Oh, we like to think we're pretty smart and capable of taking care of ourselves. But then life throws something unpleasant and unexpected at us and we find ourselves feeling helpless. And we're once again reminded that we are like sheep, and we need a shepherd. And the shepherd we need is Jesus Christ, the good shepherd who loves us and laid down his life for the sheep. And as a believer who belongs to him, remember, you've been bought with a price, the blood of Christ, and as the Bible says, you matter to Him.

Jesus once told a parable about a shepherd who left the 99 sheep and went looking for the one that was missing. And when he found it, he laid it on his shoulders and carried it home, rejoicing. He knew the sheep you see, and considered it valuable enough to go to the great trouble of looking for it and recovering it. He rejoiced when he found it. I was with my young grandchildren recently at an event, and we happened to run into one of my grandson's teachers who called him by name and talked with him a little bit, and he just beamed. He was thrilled by the knowledge that she knew him and even took time to talk with him in a setting that was outside of the classroom. As adults, just think of how important we feel when someone prominent knows us and stops to talk with us and even calls us by our name. It makes us feel like we matter. Well, consider this the king of kings and the Lord of Lords knows you and you matter to Him. As

believers in Christ, I encourage you to lean heavily into that truth as you're facing your insecurities, remembering that Jesus knows me.

Next, as his sheep, He's given you eternal life and you will never perish. When Jesus talks about eternal life, He's talking about a new kind of life, an eternal kind of life, which is life with Jesus – that actually begins now and fills our lives with His blessing and direction and purpose as we live out the years on this planet that have been given to us. Jesus knows what makes our life work best. He knows where the green pastures and still waters are that are needed to refresh us. He knows the right paths to take. God's ways that are not only good for you, but they honor God. He walks with you in all circumstances as you walk through dark valleys, even comforting and protecting you with his rod and staff. A friend of mine once commented, “You know, I thought I knew what life was all about until I met Jesus.”

But eternal life is also life that lasts forever. On Easter, we joyfully remember that death has been conquered by The Good Shepherd. And because he lives, we shall live also. We can confidently join the Apostle Paul in thumbing our nose and taunting that old enemy of ours with these words: “O death, where is thy victory, o death where as thy sting?” Jesus’ sheep will never perish, will never be eternally lost. It's just like the well-known Bible verse tells us: “God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” Trusting in Jesus, then, we have eternal life with Him – forever life. And those reassuring words give courage and confidence to believers as we consider our own mortality. Perhaps you're familiar with the name Bishop Desmond Tutu. He was a South African Nobel Prize winner and a believer in Jesus Christ. He died December of last year [2021]. Now, Bishop Tutu said a lot of amazing and wonderful things, but one particular statement he made has always stuck with me and touched me and reassured me in my own service to Jesus Christ. Being under constant scrutiny by his apartheid government's Eloff commission, the bishop declared,

There's nothing the government can do to me that will stop me from being involved what I believe God wants me to do. I don't do it because I like doing it. I do it because I'm under what I believe to be the influence of God's hand. I cannot help it. When I see injustice, I cannot keep quiet. For as Jeremiah the prophet said, “When I try to keep quiet, God's word burns like a fire in my breast.” But what is it that they can ultimately do to me? The most awful thing they can do is to kill me. And death is not the worst thing that could happen to a Christian.

Did you hear it? Death is not the worst thing that can happen to a follower of Jesus. Death, you see, cannot hold the person who trusts in Jesus Christ. We're Heaven-bound. Like Bishop Desmond Tutu, we too, can say that. Not because of anything special that we have done, but because of what Jesus has done for us: dying on the cross to pay for our sins and rising again. He sets us free from death. It's a gift. He gives me eternal life, Jesus says. When I take my final breath, I will still be living with him forever in Heaven.

Finally, Jesus' sheep are "un-snatchable". Listen to these reassuring words and claim them for yourself. Jesus says, "No one can snatch my sheep out of my hand. 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. The father and I are one." Now, Jesus is claiming divinity here, of course, but because of the context of this statement, he's describing the oneness of mission and purpose that he and the Father have to protect and take care of his sheep. We're in good hands. Who is this "no one" that Jesus is talking about, who's trying to snatch us away from him? Is it false teachers? Probably. He talks about them earlier, but ultimately Jesus is describing Satan. In Christ Jesus, we his sheep are safe, secure, protected from the clutches of Satan, who Jesus had previously described as the wolf who's out to snatch his sheep and destroy them in whatever way he can. He uses such means as persecutions, hardships, and trials in our lives, or even good things like prosperity or seductive temptations, promising to satisfy our appetites and make our lives comfortable and complete. But Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is stronger than Satan. He holds fast to us through every storm and every trial and every temptation that is thrown in our direction. He will not let you go. There's a beautiful hymn, I hardly ever hear it sung anymore in worship, that rejoices in this great assurance that Jesus gives his own. The hymn is entitled *O Love That Will Not Let Me Go*. Keith and Kristen Getty, who are modern day hymn writers, captured this same truth. And in their hymn that we're going to hear in just a few minutes, it's called *He Will Hold Me Fast*. He holds me fast.

On this Mother's Day, these images of mothers come to mind as I think of the good shepherd's protecting hands holding us. I picture a mother holding on to her child's hand at the state fair. She's determined to not lose the child who is so enthralled and attracted by all the sights and sounds around him. And he wants to run freely to it. But his mother protectively holds that hand. Or even more recently on the news, we've seen images of Ukrainian mothers bravely hanging on to their children, protecting them as they walk through bombed areas or as they stand in crowded train stations trying to escape the missile attacks on their homes. He holds us fast.

So there you have it. Words of reassurance. The Good Shepherd knows me. He gives me eternal life. No one can snatch me from his strong hand. That's quite the assurance that Jesus is giving his followers. As he answered his critics' doubts about him, He must have been motioning to the disciples as he began to talk about this promising future and present for his sheep. I wonder how they felt at that time as they listened to him, as he was describing his care for them. More importantly, though, how about you? How do you feel about all this? Maybe you've been listening to this message and you've wondered to yourself, "Can I really count on these reassuring words? Are they trustworthy and true?" And the answer to that question is an unequivocal yes. Yes, you can. And I say that based squarely on the fact of the resurrection of Jesus. Easter, you see, is God's "yes." When God raised Jesus that first Easter morning, he was affirming everything about Jesus: who Jesus is and what He said and what He promises us. Easter is God's "yes" to you and to me – reassuring us that we can trust in these words of Jesus Christ. No single moment of your life will ever be lived alone if you're among Christ's sheep. That's a promise to build each day upon all the way to your what I call graduation into Heaven. It's true. It's true. It can be a big, old, scary world that we live in. May this message, though, for today, serve as a reassuring word from Jesus, the good shepherd to you. That trusting in him is your Savior and Lord you are in very good hands. Amen.

Let's pray: Lord, we are like sheep, helpless, dependent upon you for life. Forgive us when we stray or fail to trust your words and help us to build our lives upon your reassuring truth, so that we might live courageous, contented and committed lives to the honor and glory of your holy name. Amen.

Now I invite you to listen closely to the words of this next hymn and even try singing along on the chorus which declares "He will hold me fast, for my savior loves my loves me so. He will hold me fast."