

Who is Jesus? John 10:22-31

OK, I just had to title my message Who is Jesus. I did this not just to poke more fun at Tim Farrell but because the second half of chapter eight has this clear theme. The Jews asked this question. *“How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”* In other words, who are you, Jesus? See what I mean?! I couldn't help it. The question about his identity was so plain, so obvious, that it had to become the focus of the message. And this should not surprise us since “Who is Jesus” is the overarching theme of all of John.

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30-31).

This was a crucial question for John so it should be for us as well when we study his book.

22 At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, 23 and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. 24 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.” 25 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, 26 but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. 27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 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. 30 I and the Father are one.”

John told us that this happened during the Feast of Dedication. The Feast of Dedication today is called Hanukkah. In the eyes of the world, Hanukkah is the most important Jewish holiday and they only come to this conclusion because it overlaps with Christmas. Most people think of it as a Jewish Christmas. That's kind of a strange thought when you think about it. Christmas is all about Jesus and since the Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah, why would Hanukkah have anything to do with Christmas, right?

Hanukkah is not the most important Jewish holiday, not by a long shot but it does represent a significant event, so much so that the celebration appears in our New Testament. But the specific details do not come from the Bible but from the book of 1 Maccabees. 1 and 2 Maccabees are the historical books out of the 14 apocryphal books. We do not consider these books to be inspired books but they do contain helpful historical information.

Toward the end of the Greek Empire in 167 BC, the Greek ruler Antiochus IV, captured Jerusalem and the Temple. He erected a statue to the Greek god Zeus in the temple, outlawed circumcision and sacrificed a pig in the temple. Jewish belief and practice was both outlawed and their sacred site was desecrated. Here's a section from 1 Maccabees.

The king also sent messengers with a decree to Jerusalem and all the towns of Judea, ordering the people to follow customs that were foreign to the country. He ordered them not to offer burnt offerings, grain offerings, or wine offerings in the Temple, and commanded them to treat

Sabbaths and festivals as ordinary work days. They were even ordered to defile the Temple and the holy things in it. They were commanded to build pagan altars, temples, and shrines, and to sacrifice pigs and other unclean animals there. They were forbidden to circumcise their sons and were required to make themselves ritually unclean in every way they could, so that they would forget the Law which the Lord had given through Moses and would disobey all its commands. The penalty for disobeying the king's decree was death (1 Maccabees 1:44-50).

Three years later, Judas Maccabeus (Judas the Hammer), recaptured the temple. During the rededication of the temple, they only had enough oil for one day. But as the story goes, the sacred lamp burned for eight days. This is why Hanukkah is an eight-day celebration.

So that's Hanukkah and now you know it's in John chapter 10. John seems to include it to let us know that Christ's crucifixion was just a few months away.

John 1	AD 26	Chapter 7 and eight took place during the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast takes place in the middle of October, in this case, October of 29 AD. The Feast of Dedication occurred two months later in December of 29 AD. That's why John added the phrase, "it was winter." John 12 takes place one week before Jesus' crucifixion.
John 2	April, 27 AD	
John 7/8	October, 29 AD	
John 10	December, 29 AD	
John 11	Jan-April? 30 AD	
John 12	April, 30 AD	
John 13-22	April/May, 30 AD	
John 1-6 = 3 years	year time period but the rest of the book takes place within 6	
John 7-22 = 6 months	months. And almost half of the book of John takes place in the final week of Jesus' life. So all of John is kind of rushing to the	
	crucifixion, much more so than the other three gospels.	

So that's the reason we are told that this took place during the Feast of dedication, which was also winter since it was month of December. John wanted us to know that Jesus' crucifixion was less than four months away. You'll see this play out in this passage

Once we get past the timing we get immediately to "The Question."

24 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."

It's a great question but every question has an inherent bias. Why did they ask Jesus this question? If I see you on Friday and ask you what you are doing this weekend, there are several reasons why I would be asking this question. I may just be making small talk and being polite. Or it could be that I am guessing you will be using that nice new fishing boat and I am jealous of you. And if you are going fishing, maybe I am judging you because I think you should be spending more time with your family. So whether big or small, a question always has a bias built into it.

There are two basic reasons why the Jews asked this question. Either they wanted to know so that they could worship or so that they could kill him. Which do you think was true? Don carson weighs in on this question.

“This suggests that the Jews are not seeking for clarity in order to worship him without restraint; rather they want to obtain from him an unambiguous statement that would provide an adequate basis for their attack.”¹

Verse 31 reads, *The Jews picked up stones again to stone him.*² So there’s our answer. This was an impromptu kangaroo court. By their very question, the Jews had effectively dragged Jesus onto the witness stand and wanted him to self-incriminate himself. Our justice system does not allow for this but the Jews were not seeking justice and they were not seeking truth. They just wanted to eliminate enemy number one.

But wouldn’t you think by now they would have had enough evidence against him? After three years of public ministry, hadn’t Jesus already told them plainly that he was the Messiah? Interestingly, he had not yet told them plainly. He never said, I am the Messiah.” But would they have believed him if he had been so forthright? This is especially true if he had announced it early on. Their understanding of the Messiah was mostly filled with political expectation, a king who would deliver them from the oppression of the Romans. Biblically speaking, it did make sense. God had always delivered his people from the tyranny of her enemies. And other than the 400 years of captivity in Egypt, this had been the longest period of time in Jewish history that the Jews were not completely free. Remember, this was the Feast of Dedication. They were approaching the bi-centennial Hanukkah celebration since the outlawing of Judaism and desecration of the Temple. The Jews were well aware that the Romans could do the same to them at any moment. They wanted a political Messiah and had Jesus told them from day one that he was the guy, it would have been worse.

So he had not been explicit in a legal sense. He didn’t sign on the dotted line stating, “I am the Messiah.” But on the other hand, everything he has said and done testified to the fact that he was “the Christ.” The rest of this passage through verse 30 is his answer to their question.

The first part of his answer is so great. “I told you, and you do not believe. Jesus really could have ended the conversation right there. He had already done and already said all that was necessary. Yet they still did not believe. Why did they not believe? Did Jesus not give them enough evidence? Did he fail to give them *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* and *More Evidence that Demands a Verdict*? These are classic apologetic books in case you did not know that.

What the Jews lacked was not information and proof, but rather a relationship. Jesus said, *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.* In other words, goats don’t believe. You have to be a sheep in order to believe. But doesn’t that sound almost backwards? How can I become a sheep unless I first believe? That’s what we normally think but Jesus is saying that only those who are already sheep believe.

Jesus has already said a lot about sheep in this chapter but some of the best is yet to come. Here’s the next definition of sheep. *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.* By extension, none of the Jews listening to him were his sheep, Jesus did not know them and they

did not follow Jesus. They were the exact opposite of sheep. Now the coup de grace. The finishing touches on his relationship with his sheep. Look at these six stunning phrases.

- 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.

Let's take them one at a time.

I give them eternal

Salvation is a pure gift. Jesus gives eternal life. Now don't forget that Jesus is still answering their original question. "*How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.*" How does Jesus giving eternal life to his sheep answer their question? It's pretty simple, isn't it? Can the Messiah grant eternal life to anyone? You see, he is answering their question but he's also saying so much more. The Messiah was supposed to be a man. An all-important man, but just a man. But mere men do not give eternal life. That power belongs to God alone.

and they will never perish

This phrase when combined with the previous phrase is what is known as a tautology. A tautology restates something true that has already been stated. Here are some examples of tautologies (which is another way of saying they are redundant).

- The evening sunset was beautiful. (Of course all sunsets take place in the evening)
- Charlie told his mom he made it for her with his own hands. (could he have used someone else's hands?)
- In Rome, we saw dilapidated ruins. (A ruin is, by definition, dilapidated)
- Alice started her presentation with a short summary. (There's no such thing as a long summary)
- The Gobi is a very dry desert. (Have you ever seen a wet desert?)

So to say that Jesus gives us eternal life and that we will never perish, is a tautology. Do you see the built in redundancy? If we have eternal life, of course we will never perish. It seems like a secondary promise—and it is—but it's also inherent in the first promise. If that is abundantly clear to you and me, why is it that so many Christians don't believe in the eternal security of the believer? Think about someone who can believe that Jesus gives us eternal life and the promise that we will never perish. Our response to that should be, "Really! I have everlasting life and it is impossible for me to perish?! I'll live forever with Jesus?" Some churches would respond by saying, "Yes, that's true. Jesus gave you eternal life. Unless...unless he takes it away again. It's true you will not perish...but then again, you might. You might do something or say something and God will take away your eternal life."

That doesn't make much sense, does it?

1. Legalism demands that you feed it and remain uncertain.

2. False conversions make them nervous. There's nothing worse than having someone raise their hand quickly, or a baptism or an infant sprinkling and be assured of eternal life.
3. Ultimate power in the hands of leaders.

and no one will snatch them out of my hand

This phrase is another type of redundancy but much more as well. But do you see that it is also very personal? "No one can snatch them out of *my* hand", Jesus promised. If someone wants to try to take away your eternal life, they're going to have to go through me. The certainty of our salvation increases with each of these facts and promises.

My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all

Now here we learn that Jesus gave us eternal life because the Father had given the sheep to the Good Shepherd. And we also see more the functional submission of the Son to the Father. They are 100% equal in essence but the Son always submits to the Father's will. That's why Jesus said the Father is greater than all. This harkens back to chapter six.

37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day (John 6:37-39).

The Father gives, the Son preserves and none shall be lost.

and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Such a promise! Thieves and robbers can't steal the sheep. Wolves can't take away the sheep. The security for our eternal life does not rest with us, but with God. Jesus must secure his sheep for it is the Father's will that he do so. We have God the Father and God the Son working as a team guaranteeing our eternal security. Can someone steal from these? Can Satan steal us away? Can sword or famine or angels or principalities or all of the other difficulties Paul mentions in Romans * steal us away? If anyone wants to mess with our salvation, you have to go through the Father *and* the Son.

I and the Father are one.

Remember, Jesus is still answering the original question about whether he is the Messiah or not. And of course they must be one in every possible way in order for them to work in such harmony. Jesus answered their question beyond what they had expected. He was the Messiah but more than that, he held the power of granting eternal life, which was given to him by his Father. He is the Messiah and he is God and four months later he would be the personal Savior.

A great summary verse for these precious promises is Colossians 3:3 *For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.* This verse was the inspiration for the final verse of Behold the Throne of God Above

Before the Throne of God Above
Behold him there! the risen Lamb,

my perfect, spotless righteousness;
the great unchangeable "I AM,"
the King of glory and of grace!
One with himself, I cannot die,
my soul is purchased by his blood;
my life is hid with Christ on high,
with Christ my Savior and my God,
with Christ my Savior and my God.

So what does this mean? What are the real implications for your daily life? What difference will this make Monday morning? Recently I shared in a conversation with a man who has suffered great loss. He was divorced once but then got saved after his divorce. Later he met his second wife and he adored her. He told us that when he was away on business, all he could think about was coming home to his wife and enjoying being with her, spending time with her.

But she began to pull away. They almost divorced once and then smoothed things over for a while. But not long after she was done. She left him cold turkey and is now suing him for ridiculous sums of money. Since she left his business made a horrible turn for the worse. So as he was talking with us, he was practically broke, the wife who he'd adored hates his guts and is using the courts to bleed him dry of the rest of his money.

This is just a quick summary of almost an hour's worth of stories. How do recover from such a string of difficulties? For a believer, these culmination of hardships will drive you into the arms of Jesus or else run away from God and feel betrayed by Him. Thankfully this man has chosen the former. Like often happens during times of suffering, this man's spiritual life has exploded. At first he struggled with deep feelings of abandonment. He was alone and in pain. But then he began to understand what it means that no one can snatch him out of the Father's hand. His feelings of abandonment began to ween as he realized his Father would never and could never abandon him.

He is still trying to reconcile with his wife and is committed to the marriage for the rest of his life. He now says that "fantasize about being held in the hands of the Lord." He does not want to merely survive or even do OK through all of this. He told us that he wants his life to be delightful to others, to the watching world. This kind of joy in suffering only comes through experiencing the truth of our eternal security in Christ.

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¹ Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 392). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

² See also...

John 5:18—For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

John 8:58-59—"Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.