

The last passage we studied in John took place between the Feast of Sukkoth, which is a fall festival, and the Feast of Dedication. The Feast of Dedication is a month after Sukkoth and known to us as the celebration called Hanukkah. This year's celebration of Hanukkah just ended last week. Many think of it as the Jewish alternative to Christmas, but it started long before Christ was born. It celebrated the rededication of the Temple after it was defiled by Antiochus Epiphanes almost two centuries earlier. When the Jewish people had retaken their land, they cleansed and rededicated the Temple to God.

The story is told of finding only enough consecrated oil to light the giant Menorah in the Temple for one day. That one day supply miraculously lasted the eight days of celebration, the time required to make more sanctified oil. The feast celebrates that miracle as well as the cleansing of the Temple. The story took place between the Testaments and so is not in our Bible but is told in brief in the Apocrypha. (1Maccabees 4:56-59)

Jesus' message for Hanukkah is somewhat ironic in that Hanukkah celebrates the cleansing of the Temple from defilement by a man whose name meant the manifestation of God. Jesus' message is that He is the true manifestation of God. If there was ever a difficult and yet appropriate time to teach this truth, this was it. It would divide the people even further in choosing sides for or against Jesus. (John 10:19)

Jesus was walking in an area called Solomon's Colonnade when the Jewish leaders surrounded Him. Solomon's Colonnade is the eastern side of the Court of the Gentiles. It was on the Temple grounds but not in the Temple itself. The colonnade was two columns deep and rose to a height of 38 feet. This was probably the area in which merchants had previously sold their sacrificial animals and exchanged foreign currency. That practice apparently ended after the first visit of Jesus' ministry when He chased them out. (John 2:16) In a few months, just before the next Passover, it would begin again. (Matthew 21:12-13) It is very possible that it started again because the Jewish leadership thought Jesus would not return to Jerusalem after this life threatening confrontation. (John 11:8)

*<sup>24</sup> The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."* They wanted to know if Jesus was claiming to be the long awaited Messiah. I don't think they had any intention of following Him even if He claimed to be the militant Messiah they expected. They just wanted to end the suspense so that they could denounce Him. They were losing money from the elimination of the Temple business that the former high priest Annas had established.

Today is no different. People think that accepting Jesus as God is going to mean some kind of loss, financially, or of pleasure, or of freedom. We are in a war being waged over the hearts of men and the enemy's chief tool is lies. (John 8:44) He tells mankind that Christ is a hard taskmaster, when in reality His yoke is easy and His

**Commented [notes1]:** "For eight days they celebrated the rededication of the altar. Then Judah and his brothers and the entire congregation of Israel decreed that the days of the rededication... should be observed... every year... for eight days. (1 Mac. 4:56-59)"

**Commented [notes2]:** 19 At these words the Jews were again divided. John 10:19 (NIV)

**Commented [notes3]:** 16 To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" John 2:16 (NIV)

**Commented [notes4]:** 12 Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. 13 "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'" Matt 21:12-13 (NIV)

**Commented [notes5]:** 8 "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?" John 11:8 (NIV)

**Commented [notes6]:** 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. John 8:44 (NIV)

burden is light. (Matthew 11:29-30) It is sin that demands the greatest price for the least joy. (Romans 6:23)

It was now only three months until the Passover, Jesus' appointed time. (Matthew 26:18) Up to this point, His expressions about His role were somewhat enigmatic. He never came out and said, "I am Messiah!" He gave no indication that He would be the militant kind of messiah the Jews expected. Most of the things He said about being the One predicted in prophecy could have been taken in two different ways. Yet, if anyone had an honest and open heart, what He was saying was quite clear. It was infinitely greater than what the typical Jewish person expected of a messiah!

*25 Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, Jesus did tell them! He told them over and over as we have seen. They even attempted to stone Him for saying, "Before Abraham was, I am." John 8:58 The problem was that their expectation of Messiah was not God incarnated. They wanted another King David. But there was a greater problem than their misunderstanding of Messiah; their hearts were not open to God.*

Even if they didn't believe His previous claims of being the bread of life, the living water, the light of the world, the One to Whom you must come to receive eternal life, and the judge of mankind, they should believe because His miracles declared Him to be the fulfillment of prophecy. (John 5:36) The Messiah was to cause the lame to walk and the blind to see. (Isaiah 35:5-6) Jesus had done that and much more. How could any serious student of Scripture doubt that He was the Messiah? But again, let me remind you that their expectation is a military leader, not a Savior of souls, and definitely not God incarnate. (This is in spite of Isaiah 9:6-7) When our hearts are set on something other than the will of God, we close ourselves off from the work of God all around us. We misinterpret what God is doing because we have another agenda. Their agenda was wealth and power. (John 11:48; Zephaniah 3:7) Jesus was a threat to that.

Returning to His analogy of the sheep and their Shepherd, Jesus said, *26 but you do not believe because you are not my sheep.* People don't believe when they have another god. Their hearts are not open. They are in another fold, not the sheep pen of Jesus. We witness this frequently. You share with someone again and again. They don't want to believe. They aren't honest about the information and don't look at it objectively. They are not His sheep. I've heard many simply say that it is not a matter of truth or error to them, they just choose not to believe. At least some are honest about that. Surely they can become God's sheep if they will open their heart. Then they will have an ear to hear. (Revelation 3:20)

*27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.* Jesus reiterated a point from His sheep and shepherd sermon. Sheep know their master's voice. They follow their master. The Jewish leadership wasn't following Jesus because they weren't His sheep. Jesus is clearly saying that His way is different from that of the Jewish established system and leadership. He is distinguishing Himself from them as He had done in the previous message. (John

**Commented [notes7]:** 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.  
30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."  
Matt 11:29-30 (NIV)

**Commented [notes8]:** 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
Romans 6:23 (NIV)

**Commented [notes9]:** 18 He replied, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.'"  
Matt 26:18 (NIV)

**Commented [notes10]:** 36 "I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me."  
John 5:36 (NIV)

**Commented [notes11]:** 5 Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.  
6 Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.  
Isaiah 35:5-6 (NIV)

**Commented [notes12]:** 6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Isaiah 9:6 (NIV)

**Commented [notes13]:** 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."  
John 11:48 (NIV)

**Commented [notes14]:** Zephaniah 3:7 (NIV)  
7 I said to the city, 'Surely you will fear me and accept correction!' Then her dwelling would not be cut off, nor all my punishments come upon her. But they were still eager to act corruptly in all they did.

**Commented [notes15]:** 20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.  
Rev 3:20 (NIV)

10:8) He gives His sheep eternal life, a relationship with the eternal God, and promises that they will never perish. That doesn't mean they won't die physically, but that their souls will not experience the second death. (Revelation 2:11) In the language of Jesus, life was a relationship with the eternal God. Death is a separation from Him who is Life. (John 1:4)

Jesus made a reassuring claim here. "No one can snatch them out of my hand!" Just as a good shepherd keeps his sheep from being stolen or harmed, so Jesus watches over us. Satan can't rip you out of the fold. There is some debate over whether or not you can walk out of the fold of your own free will. (Hebrews 6:4-6) The best suggestion I've heard on the subject is that if you are afraid of the Devil pulling you away from Christ, cling to this verse as a promise that Jesus won't let Him.

On the other hand, if you are thinking this verse means you can live in sin and you'll still wind up in heaven, you'd better believe in the freedom to walk away from the fold of your own free will. (1John 1:6) If your desires aren't changed, perhaps you aren't a new person in Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

In the context of this passage, Jesus is telling the religious leaders that they aren't going to get His followers back under their leadership. They are His sheep and there is nothing they can do about it.

*<sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.* God won't let them steal Jesus' sheep. They are in God's hands. Being in Jesus' fold is being in God's hands. What a comforting promise. God is greater than all. There is no enemy powerful enough to get you out of God's hands. We are secure. Praise God! It reminds me of the line in Martin Luther's hymn. "And though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us, we will not fear for God has willed His truth to triumph through us!" Jesus was warning them that they better not try to fight against Almighty God. (Acts 5:39)

He just declared the Father God gave Him His followers and that God is greater than all. Then He made this statement, *<sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one.* Did you hear that claim? He is one with the greatest of all! They asked Him to declare plainly if He was the Messiah. He did! (John 14:9) But again, let me remind you, this is not what they are expecting a messiah to be, this is much greater.

Interpreters try to get around this statement by saying that Jesus wasn't declaring equality with God. They say we've misinterpreted it. "It really just means He is on God's side. He is in unity with God." Well, the best way to understand what was meant was to see the reaction of the people in that time in that culture hearing the original language Jesus spoke. *<sup>31</sup> Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him,* They wanted to kill Jesus for blasphemy. They knew He was declaring equality with the One that is greater than all. This is confrontational language Jesus is using. Let me give you my contemporary version. "These are my followers, my sheep. Almighty God gave them to me to shepherd. They are in His hands, and you thieves can't do anything about it. God and I are in total unity." Jesus declares that to the

**Commented [notes16]:** 8 All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.  
John 10:8 (NIV)

**Commented [notes17]:** 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.  
Rev 2:11 (NIV)

**Commented [notes18]:** 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men.  
John 1:4 (NIV)

**Commented [notes19]:** 4 It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, 6 if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.  
Heb 6:4-6 (NIV)

**Commented [notes20]:** 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.  
1 John 1:6 (NIV)

**Commented [notes21]:** 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!  
2 Cor 5:17 (NIV)

**Commented [notes22]:** 39 But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."  
Acts 5:39 (NIV)

**Commented [notes23]:** Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"  
John 14:9 (NIV)

enemy of your soul. They not only heard what they thought was blasphemy, but they heard themselves being called the instruments of Satan. (John 8:44)

<sup>32</sup> but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" Jesus is surrounded. It isn't time for Him to die. It isn't the manner in which He is to die, yet He continues to calmly give them reasons to believe. (1John 3:12)

The word for "great" in this verse is the same word that is used for "good" in "good shepherd". *"It is impossible to find a single English word equivalent to the Greek, which suggests deeds of power and moral excellence, resulting in health and well-being"* (Barrett 1978:383). Truly great deeds come from God as the source and should cause us to worship God in awe, not respond in anger. (Luke 5:26)

<sup>33</sup> "We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God." They knew what He was saying! He told them plainly. They just refused to receive it. He'd proved it with His miracles. They didn't care. They were so steeped in tradition and the teachings from men that they couldn't see it any other way. They are not His sheep. He isn't the kind of Messiah they seek.

Then Jesus tried to reason with Scripture. <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'?" <sup>35</sup> If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came--and the Scripture cannot be broken-- <sup>36</sup> what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'? At least He might talk them out of the worst crime a man could commit by showing them that God even calls those to whom the word of God comes, "gods". Since that is the case, why accuse Him of blasphemy for saying, "I am God's Son?"

Jesus was not denying who He is. In fact, He reiterated that the Father set Him apart as His very own and sent Him into the world. *"The psalm (from which Jesus quoted, Psalm 82\*) is actually a condemnation of the judges (of Israel\*) for not exercising their responsibility faithfully, thus corresponding both to the condemnation of these Jewish leaders in John and to Jesus as the true judge."* BibleGateway Commentary (\*) my additions. It is another lesser to greater argument. If the judges of Israel that received the Law could be called "gods" then why couldn't Jesus as Messiah refer to Himself as the Son of God?

It is interesting that Jesus describes Himself as the One God "set apart". The term, "set apart", is also translated "dedicated" and that is what the Jews are there to celebrate, the dedication, or sanctification, or setting apart of the Temple. Jesus is saying He is sanctified (perhaps even as the new place of worship) just as they celebrate that earlier dedication of the Temple. (John 17:20)

That is why they should be open to considering the miracles as proof, the fact that Jesus is uniquely sanctified, different from all others before or since. <sup>37</sup> Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. <sup>38</sup> But if I do it, even though you do

**Commented [notes24]:** 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. John 8:44 (NIV)

**Commented [notes25]:** 12 Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. 1 John 3:12 (NIV)

**Commented [notes26]:** 26 Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today." Luke 5:26 (NIV)

**Commented [notes27]:** 19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. John 17:19 (NIV)

*not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.*" Jesus is pressing His claim that they should consider the mystical oneness He has with the Father because of the miracles He has performed in public, unmatched works of power that authenticated His claims.

Again, Jesus miraculously escaped from their hands. (John 8:59) He went to the other side of the Jordan where John baptized. This location has recently been discovered. An early church was discovered on the site along with baptismal pools. There was somewhat of a revival of Jesus' ministry to larger crowds as the time for the final Passover approached.

<sup>44</sup> *and many people came to him. They said, "Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true."* The major predictions of John, Jesus being the Lamb of God and baptizing with the Holy Spirit had yet to be fulfilled. We should take this as the prediction that Jesus was greater than John and John's testimony was that Jesus is the Son of God. (John 1:34)

It's been 2000 years and the same issues are at stake. Who is Jesus? His followers understand that He is one with God the Father and yet separate. He shares the Father's heart and attributes but He is distinct from the Father. He didn't say the Father and I **am** one, but that the Father and I **are** one. He talks with the Father as a separate being and yet, He claims the sheep are in His hands in one verse, and in the next He says they are in the Father's hands, as if there is no difference.

The real issue is this, will we accept the words of the person who claimed to be one with God and proved it by miraculous signs and the fulfillment of prophecies? Will we see that the miracles proved that when He claimed to be the only Good Shepherd, He was speaking the truth? Will we believe He is God because the miracles were only possible because He is in God and God is in Him?

Later in the Gospel of John, Jesus will invite us to be in Him as He is in the Father. (John 17:21) Will you examine His claims and decide to side with those who accepted John the Baptist's testimony, "He is the Son of God"? Will you enter into Jesus and invite Him to enter you today?

As we start this New Year, are you letting the Great Shepherd guide you? As you look back over this last year, can you say you've been following the Shepherd, or listening to your own voice? Who have you been following? Perhaps this morning is a time to dedicate this New Year to listening to His voice and following the One who is one with the Father.

<sup>20</sup> *May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,* <sup>21</sup> *equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*  
Hebrews 13:20-21 (NIV)

**Commented [notes28]:** 59 At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.  
John 8:59 (NIV)

**Commented [notes29]:** 34 I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."  
John 1:34 (NIV)

**Commented [notes30]:** 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.  
John 17:21 (NIV)