

Easter 4
April 17, 2016
Shepherd Sunday

“Jesus Wants 21st Century Sheep to Depend on Him”

JOHN 10:22-30

Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. ²⁴ The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." ²⁵ Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. 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. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

Sheep thrive in large numbers throughout the world because they are dependent on shepherds to take care of them. The domestic sheep is not like the big horn sheep of the Rocky Mountains. These big horn sheep can jump up steep cliffs and live in places where no mountain lion, wolf or bear can get them. If an enemy does confront them on their mountain home, massive horns and strong legs can push them off the steep cliffs. They find their own food and water. Their thick wool keeps them warm on the coldest winter nights.

Not so the domestic sheep we see on our ranches or that people saw dotting the Judean hills at the time of Jesus. These sheep cannot outrun their enemies. They waddle more than run. They cannot find their own food and water. They have a tendency to wander off and get lost. They have no big horns, or sharp teeth or claws to defend themselves. Yet sheep thrive in large numbers all over the world because they depend on shepherds to find them food and water and protection from their enemies.

Jesus wants people to depend on him the way sheep depend on their shepherd. He wants people all over the world, even people living in this 21st century to stop depending on themselves and start depending on him. He wants people to be able to confess the words of Psalm 23, "The Lord is my Shepherd." Not just the Lord is a Shepherd or the Lord is the Shepherd or even the Lord is our Shepherd. He wants everyone to depend totally on him and confess "The Lord is my Shepherd." The theme for our sermon today is "Jesus Wants 21st Century Sheep to Depend on Him." First we will see from these words we just read to you that Jesus wants those who reject him to depend on him. Then we want to see how much he wants people like you and me who depend on him to depend on him even more.

Jesus wants those who reject him to depend on him

It is winter. Jesus is in the temple courts during the Feast of Dedication, another name for the Jewish celebration called Hanukah. He is walking around the temple court looking for people to come to him and depend on him as their Shepherd. In Matthew 9 it says that Jesus looked at the crowds coming to him and had compassion on them "because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd." If sheep don't have a shepherd taking care of them they become totally confused and helpless.

Notice what happens next. As Jesus walks around the temple courts people start surrounding him. These are not his friends or people who want him as their shepherd. These are the people who want to kill him. "The Jews gathered around him saying, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.'" They gather around him not as friends but as vicious wolves who want to destroy the Shepherd who has come to save them. They wanted Jesus to tell them whether he was the Christ or the Messiah so they would have the evidence they need to put him to death.

Oh, how much our Lord Jesus loved these people who hated him. He wants them to be his sheep and come under his care and be dependent on him. He wants them to give up trusting in themselves to escape eternal death and punishment. Jesus does not walk away or tell them to get lost. He answers them. "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep."

If you and I were there in the temple courts on this winter day we would hear nothing but the deepest love and yearning and longing in the words of Jesus. He tells them the reason they do not believe is because they are not

his sheep. Jesus clearly told them he was their Messiah who had come to seek and save the lost. He showed them his power as God by performing mighty miracles, even raising people from the dead.

Why did these people not want Jesus as their Shepherd? So we ask the question of people living today in this 21st century? Why do they not want to depend on Jesus and let him rescue them from the consequences of their sin? Some don't realize the danger they are in just as a sheep that is lost does not realize how dangerous it is to be separated from the shepherd who can protect it. Others feel very secure and safe in what they are doing to rescue themselves. They honestly feel in their heart of hearts that the good things they do in life can be balanced out with the bad, and that will put them right with God on judgment day. I cannot emphasize enough just how much Jesus loved these people who hated him and wanted nothing to with them. His love is the same for people today.

Do you want further evidence that Jesus wants even his worst enemies to be people who depend on him? Then recall with me that story Jesus told about two men who went up to the temple to pray. The religious person, the Pharisee prayed, "God I thank you that I am not like other men, robbers, evil doers, adulterers-or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get." It says in Luke 18 that Jesus spoke these words to people who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on others. In contrast to this religious person who trusted in himself Jesus shows us a tax collector who bowed his head and beat his breast and said humbly, "God be merciful to me a sinner." This tax collector put no hope in himself. He was totally dependent on God for mercy.

If Jesus were walking the streets of this community and speaking to people, he would use stories and pictures like this of sheep depending on a shepherd or little babies depending on their parents to teach people how much they need to be dependent on him and not on themselves to be saved. When God's word says "We all, like sheep, have gone astray" and "each of us has turned to his own way" we do not walk away and say, "That's nonsense. That does not apply to me." No we jump up and say, "That's me. That's exactly who I am. I need Jesus to be my Shepherd and save me." We confidently proclaim, "The Lord is my Shepherd." With him I lack nothing.

And what do I want in my life more than anything? I want to become more dependent on Jesus as my Shepherd and experience more of his care and concern for me with each passing day.

Jesus wants those who follow him to depend on him even more

Tell me dear Christian if these words don't define who you are? "My sheep listen to my voice: I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." You have come to know and love the voice of your shepherd. I love what one of our former members Luella Bestul often said, "The more you know about Jesus the more you want to know." The more you hear him speaking to you the more you want him to speak to you here in his Word. He is your Shepherd who leads you out of the wastelands of the 21st century in which we are living and takes you up into the mountain heights. He locates meadows and valleys with rich green grass and quiet cool waters. He feeds you with by showing you over and over again how much he loves you and cares about you. Nobody loves you more than Jesus. He knows and plans the moments when he will quiet you with his love.

Jesus says that he knows his sheep. Oh how he knows you. Psalm 139 says, "If I go to the heavens you are there, if I make my bed in the depths you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn and settle on the far side of the sea, even there you hand guide me and your right hand will hold me fast." Nobody knows the trouble I see, Nobody knows but Jesus."

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He is capable of taking care of his sheep all over the world. He knows them each by name. An elderly Jewish man once asked if Jesus hears the prayers of Christians. I said, "Yes he does." Then he asked how it would be possible for Jesus to hear my prayer if Christians all over the world were praying at the same time. That's not a problem for Jesus. He can hear our prayers. He already knows how he is going to rescue you from some bad patch you get yourself into even before it happens.

Your Shepherd speaks to you this morning and says, "I give them eternal life and they shall never perish." You know the last words of Psalm 23. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." The best is yet to come. The wonderful moments you have had with Jesus your Shepherd and his love for you are a precursor of eternity of joy waiting for us in the place Jesus has prepared for us. "The Lamb at the center of the throne will be their Shepherd, he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away all tears from their eyes." Then it goes on to say, "Never again will they hunger, never again will they thirst..."

The best is yet to come, but the best is not here yet. There will be dark places to pass through in this life. There will be valleys of the shadow of death. There will be sloughs of despond. Satan is the roaring lion who will never stop prowling. He is the wolf who will never stop howling. The people of this 21st century will laugh at us for being dumb sheep and believing what we believe about our Shepherd. But that's OK. You see we rest in the arms of our loving Shepherd. Jesus said, "no one can snatch them out of my hand." He reminds us that our heavenly Father is great then all and no one can snatch u from the hand of our heavenly Father. Jesus and our heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit are one. You are safe dear Christian because you depend on Jesus as your Shepherd. Romans 8 says that nothing in all creation will ever separate us from the love of God that exists in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Hanging in our one bedroom is this project we made in our Star Bible Camp. It shows Jesus holding a lamb in his arms. There is a smile on the Savior's face. We actually pounded and distressed a board, and burnt it with blow torch. This distress was intended to show what Jesus went through to rescue us on the cross. It also was intended to show the distress we go through in life as we carry our crosses for him. Always the smile is there on the face of Jesus as he holds us tight and says triumphantly and victoriously, "No one can snatch them out of my hand." 21st people desperately need Jesus as their Shepherd. Amen.