

Ben Libby

Sermon

March 7th, Lent 3

To Jesus Christ who, being found in appearance as a man, humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross, to Him be eternal glory. Amen. Our sermon text this morning is taken from John, chapter 10, starting at verse 24.

**So the Jews gathered around Jesus, asking, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” 25 Jesus answered them, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I am doing in my Father’s name testify about me. 26 But you do not believe, because you are not my sheep, as I said to you. 27 My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will 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.” 31 Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him. 32 Jesus answered them, “I have shown you many good works from my Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?” 33 “We are not going to stone you for a good work,” the Jews answered, “but for blasphemy, because although you are a man, you make yourself out to be God.”**

This is the Word of The LORD!!! The congregation may be seated...

Mercy, Grace, and peace are yours through your God and Father, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, true God and Man, dear fellow Sons and Daughters of the King...

How can you tell if someone is Christian? This sounds like a set up to a joke, but it's not. It's no laughing matter, not when a soul's salvation is on the line. How can we tell whether or not someone else has saving faith in Jesus?

One time in my 11th grade religion class, I was asked this question. My professor randomly called on me and asked me whether or not another randomly selected person in the class was a Christian. I answered without hesitation, "Absolutely". I had known that particular person practically my whole life, and I knew where their faith lied. He then followed up, "How do you know?" And I said, "because of their fruits of faith." Later, after class, my professor came up to me and said, "Isn't it amazing that you were able to answer that question without even thinking about it?" It was amazing, and it wasn't a credit to me, rather it was a credit to that person and the God who gave them their faith.

How indeed can we know? Have you ever heard of "the duck test"? The duck test goes something like this: *"If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it's probably a duck."* The

duck test is a form of what is known as "Abductive reasoning". It starts with a set of observations and then seeks to find the simplest and most likely conclusion from them. This process yields a plausible but not positive conclusion. There remains an element of doubt. "Then it's PROBABLY a duck."

The same is true for the sheep test. Is someone a Christian, that is, is someone a sheep who follows the Good Shepherd? Well, do they look, act, and speak like a Christian? Then they probably are a Christian. But you cannot know for certain. In determining something that is truly unknowable, all you can do is make conclusions based off of what you can observe.

We cannot see into someone else's heart. But just because we can't doesn't mean God can't. The Good Shepherd knows who the sheep are. Jesus says in the verses prior to our text this morning: **I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. (Joh 10:14 NKJ)** When it comes to faith, our primary concern is our own faith. What about me? Am I a Christian? Am I part of that flock? Jesus, that Good Shepherd, tells us here that His sheep know Him and are known by Him. Both the

Shepherd and His sheep are testified by works, are led by the Word, and are kept by the Hand of God. And so we pray: KEEP US IN YOUR HANDS ALWAYS OH LORD, AND SANCTIFY US BY YOUR TRUTH, YOUR WORD IS TRUTH. AMEN...

The works, deeds, and miracles of Jesus provide a real litmus test for how one views Jesus. The Gospel of John is all about revealing Jesus to be the Son of God. What is the very first miracle that Jesus did? It was at the wedding in Cana, recorded only in John, when He turned the water into wine. What is the commentary that John gives us after that event? **This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him. (Joh 2:11 NKJ)**

In the previous chapter, a man who was born blind was healed by Jesus on the Sabbath day. There was this whole fallout over this healing among the Pharisees. They tracked down the man and grilled him about who healed him and how he was healed. There was then this division among them over the miracle. **Therefore some of the Pharisees said, "This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" (Joh 9:16 NKJ)**

Jesus' powerful works scared them. In our text, the Jews press Him, perhaps out of desperation, and ask **"If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."** What Jesus said to them before our text key. Jesus had just described Himself as the Good Shepherd. To those who actually heard what He was saying, that fact that He was the Christ was quite clear. That is why Jesus comes back with, **"I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I am doing in my Father's name testify about me."**

The things He did truly do testify to His nature, to the fact that He is the Son of God. After Jesus says what He says here, and they pick up stones to stone Him to death, what does He say? **"I have shown you many good works from my Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?"**

They try to stone Him. That was the Old Testament way of dealing with blasphemy. Of course, Jesus didn't

blaspheme. Far from it. It's not blasphemy for Jesus to claim that He was God. It's simply the truth. It's blasphemy for any other man to say that. But not for the God Man. It's simply a fact.

What about our works? We should be so thankful that we are called and saved by Him, our hearts should be overflowing with all kinds of good deeds. Should we be trying to heal the blind as a result? Well, yes and no. No, we shouldn't rush over to a center for the Blind and try to heal their physical infirmities. Those types of deeds are not necessarily given for us to do. That's not to say that it would be impossible. Jesus said, **"all things are possible to him who believes."** (Mar 9:23 NKJ) The ability to heal the blind isn't above our paygrade. Actually, it's a bit beneath us! Why? Because we are called not to restore physical sight, rather spiritual sight. We shouldn't try to open the physical eyes of the blind, but the eyes of the spiritually blind!

Think back to the encounter between Jesus and another Pharisee, Nicodemus. Nicodemus came to Jesus, secretly of course, in part because of His works. What did they say to each other? This man came to Jesus and said, **"Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."** **3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (Joh 3:2-3 NKJ)**

Sight of the heavenly kingdom is based on being baptized and brought to repentance. The work that we have been given to do is the very same. When we make disciples and baptize them in the name of the Trinity, we are restoring true sight! Healing blind eyes will improve the quality of life for that person for a while. But healing blind souls improves the quality of their eternal life!

So, what about us? Do the works that we do in the Father's name testify about Jesus? Well, they should! And yet, so often our works don't testify about Him. Instead, they testify to our own weakness. We have been given the tremendous gift of grace through faith in Jesus. How do we live? Oftentimes no different than the rest of the blind world we stumble around in. We

need to be better and we need to be different from the world because we have been made better and different (righteous) through faith! Should the Lord's sheep behave like goats? Help us Lord live a life that reflects that love you have for us!!!

The Shepherd continues: **But you do not believe, because you are not my sheep, as I said to you. 27 My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.**

The Shepherd was led by the Word. Jesus always did things in a way in which the scriptures might be fulfilled. He was always about the Father's business. That was what He was there for. When Jesus says that His works testify about Him, what did He mean? His work was not just healing the blind or turning water into wine. It was His ultimate work of healing blind souls and turning sinners into saints that truly testify to His Holy nature.

Have you ever been told by someone, "You don't know me!" That is, to say, "You are making all these assumptions about me, but you don't even know me!" You might get this response when something you say really provokes the guilty conscience. We might hear it when we lovingly try to point out someone's sin. A typical response is: "How can you sit there, all high and mighty, and tell me that I am wrong. You don't even know me! Who are you to tell me that I am wrong and you're right! You DON'T know me!"

The person who says this is correct. We don't know them, can't know them. Even the people that we are closest to, we don't really know entirely. How could you? You can know character, but what's in the heart is only revealed by choice.

What can we know? We know the Words of the Good Shepherd. We know what He says is true, and that why we follow it. We know His the Word is **profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, (2Ti 3:16 NKJ)** That is why when we point out someone's error, it's not a personal judgement, rather it is an application of the His Word! Let's go back to the duck test. *"If it looks like a sinner, lives like a sinner, and talks like a sinner, then it's not just probably a sinner."* There is no doubt

in this case, no matter the person. You don't need to know someone to know that they are a sinner. Rather, they need to know it.

And of course, so do we. We don't know much, but we know who and what we are. We may not look outwardly like a sinner, but we know that within us nothing good dwells. We may not openly live like a sinner, but we know that sin ever dominates our lives. We might not always talk like a sinner, but we know how many times our sinful tongues have sinned against both God and men.

And yet, we live. Why? Because He has given us life! He gives us eternal life by going where only He could go, to the cross. He knows His sheep. We know Him by faith and He knows us by God's grace!

The Shepherd and the Sheep are both kept by the Holy Hand of God! **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."**

First Jesus says that no one can snatch them out of His hand. Then, He goes on to say that no one can snatch them out of His Father's hand. Why are both those things the case? Well, simple. **I and the Father are one.**

This was a scandalous thing to say to these Jews who prayed the Shema everyday. **(Deuteronomy 6:4-"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!")** The things Jesus said were going over the heads of these people. They do not believe, and that's why they couldn't understand that He was saying that He was Christ. But this statement they did not miss. When Jesus says, **"I and my Father are one"**, it triggers them. Even though Jesus doesn't answer them plainly as they desired, He is claiming LORDship here. As our Athanasian creed says, *"So the Father is LORD, the Son is LORD, and the Holy Spirit is LORD; and yet there are not three LORDS but one LORD."*

The people's hands of unbelief reached for stones. But this was not yet His time. John says, **Therefore they sought again to seize Him, but He escaped out of their hand. (Joh 10:39 NKJ)** Now was not the time. Later, He would fall into the hands of sinners.

What was Pilate's original response when the Jews brought Jesus before him? **"You take Him and judge Him according to your law." Therefore the Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death," (Joh 18:31 NKJ)** It's ironic that the Jews before Pilate hid behind their laws and regulations. It's true, it wasn't lawful for them to put anyone to death, but that didn't stop them from trying in the past! Our text is only one of three different times (that we know of) where the Jewish people tried to kill the King of the Jews.

The reason that Jesus died wasn't because of the flawed plan of the Pharisees, or because of a pressured Pilate, rather "He was wounded for our transgression, He was bruised for our iniquities". Even while Jesus was abandoned on the cross, where was His confidence? In the hands of the Father! **"Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." (Luk 23:46 NKJ)**

To be in the hands of God is either terrifying or awesome. It's either frightening or it is the ultimate comfort. As the writer to the Hebrews says, **It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Heb 10:31 NKJ)** It is fearful. But that doesn't mean it's frightening.

So, what makes the difference? The term "The hand of God" is used in all kinds of ways in the Bible. It is ultimately used as a term of deliverance or as a term of judgment. All people will either fall into the hands of God or will be held lovingly by them. The difference is how you get there! Will your sins and rebellion get you there? That's a terrifying thought and should make all sinners shiver. But if you are led into the hands of God by means of your Good Shepherd, it is the greatest comfort ever! To know that the hands created you now actively keeps you, what can truly now alarm us?!

Not only do the hands of God keep us, they chose us! We are hand-picked and chosen to be Sons of God from the foundations of the world. **I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.** You might be able to say to someone else that they don't know you, but not to the Good Shepherd. He knows His sheep. He bled and died for them. He doesn't just know of us, He knows

us deeply, intimately. He knows us even better than we do. That's why He came here! He knew how sinful we are, so He paid the price to save us from ourselves! He knows, calls, and redeems us, and that's why we will never be snatched out of His loving hands. His loving hands were pierced, and as a result those same hands will hold us through every trouble here until finally they hold us in heaven.

How can we know? How can we know whether or not someone has saving faith? Well, we can't, not for sure. We can look at how they walk, talk, and act. But reductively reasoning only produces probability. But, it doesn't really matter. Of course it matters, it matters personally. We shouldn't be worried whether or not someone else has faith. It's not your chief concern. No matter who you are, your number one priority needs to be, "Do I have faith in Him?" All that matters to my salvation is My savior!

Apply the duck test to Jesus. The Messiah test. Did He look like the Messiah? He was not perhaps what most Jews had in mind, but on the cross He looked just like Isaiah prophesied. Did He act like the Messiah? He never sinned one time. He performed signs and wonders, and while some stumbled over them, they truly do testify to His nature. Did He talk like the Messiah? The Jews in the crowd missed what He was talking about until He said, "I and My Father are One." But everyone of His words prove that He was who He said He was. The Christ, the Messiah, our Redeemer. We have been given faith by the Spirit to be able to say and believe these things. We know Jesus is the Messiah. He knows us too. He doesn't know us as the sinners we are. He knows us as the saints His blood saved! **For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. (1Co 13:12 NKJ)** All praise and thanks be to Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, who we know by faith, and who knows us as children of God! AMEN!!!