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Speaking Plainly John 10:19-29

Intro: For several weeks now, we have been looking at the Lord's declaration that not only is He the true Shepherd of God's sheep but that He is also the Good Shepherd. As has been mentioned, this is probably one of the most loved and revered of the 7 "I am" statements in John's Gospel. This is not only because of the comfort that it has brought believers through the centuries but also because of what it reveals about the character of Jesus as our Shepherd. He faithfully provides His sheep (works hard for them). He's patient, self-sacrificing towards them and He does all of this because of His great love for His sheep. How could you not be moved to respond to such love and compassion with your own love? How could you not submit yourself to this One who alone can protect and provide? With all the information Jesus has just shared, a person would have to be crazy to reject such an amazing life. This truth only serves to make the opening verses of our study so surprising, even shocking to our ears and sensibilities!

19- Immediately upon revealing the wonderful characteristics that make Jesus our Good Shepherd, once again, He is shown as the dividing line of humanity. Now, man has come up with multiple ways of dividing people, separating them, even categorizing them in order to bring about a separation. They will divide people based on ethnicity, social status, gender (which is more difficult to do these days), sexual preference, religious beliefs or political leanings. When most of these divisions are removed, people will separate by schools, neighborhoods or the bayou they live on. It's just human nature to seek to distinguish ourselves from others but the truth is, there are really only 2 kinds of people in this world: those who are willing to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and those who reject Him as Lord.

This is not the first time we have seen this in John's gospel. We saw it in **ch9** immediately after Jesus had healed the man who had been born blind and now we see it again immediately after He had just given this beautiful discourse on being the Good Shepherd. As alarming as this is, it's exactly what Jesus said would be the case when He said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth, I did not come to bring peace but a sword" **Mt**

10:34. It's what Simeon prophesied over Jesus when His parents first brought Him to the temple (**Lk 2:34-35**). It's the reality of Jesus Christ and His amazing, yet completely logical claims that continue to bring division in our world today. He came to bring a message of peace with God, but that message of peace has been met with stubborn opposition and it never ceases to reveal the inner most thoughts and desires of everyone that hears it. Some respond in faith and seek forgiveness and salvation while others respond in rebellion and manufacture preposterous reasons for their refusal.

20-21- What a ridiculous charge! It's interesting that the only time the word "demon" appears in John's Gospel is when the religious leaders are accusing Jesus of being possessed by one or when Jesus is defending himself from such a charge. What was Jesus doing to here to merit such a charge? Why, He was instructing the hopeless and telling the wretched that He was going to have to die in order to save their souls! And this is how they respond?

There's an important lesson for believers here in this passage. Last week we look at the amazingly encouraging promise Jesus gave in **vs16**; that, not only does He have other sheep that are not of the fold of Judaism (**Gentiles**) but these other sheep must be brought to Him and – they will hear His voice and will enter into His fold as His sheep.

That verse alone should get the evangelistic blood boiling and it does! We know that Jesus has other sheep in our community and they will hear His gospel and will respond positively to it! Yes and Amen! But that doesn't mean everyone who hears His Gospel will respond positively. In fact, we know from God's Word and personal experience that most will not. But, we should not allow this to deter us from sharing the gospel every chance we get with as many people as we can. Just understand that some will balk, some will resist and reject – but some will believe!

One group accuses Jesus of being possessed while the other group recognizes that this position is preposterous! This group had been impressed with both His words and His deeds. Their respect for the facts prevented them from prejudging the case and jumping to ridiculous, illogical conclusions. But we must also be careful here not to assign belief in Jesus to this group automatically. Their position on Jesus is still a negative one – they are willing to say what Jesus is not but they make no attempt to say what Jesus is. This group is made up of reasonable people but human

reason does not produce salvation – only faith can do that. Thankfully, reason can and does often lead reasonable people to a position of having saving faith in Jesus Christ but reason itself cannot save anyone.

Let us, as God's people, resolve in our hearts to recognize that there are other sheep all around us and ask the Lord to tune our hearts to hear His voice and follow His leading that we might be instrumental in bringing many of these sheep into the fold. This is not a task that one just falls into, there must be preparation of the heart and mind, a daily seeking and submitting to the Lord's will for each of our lives and then a courageous willingness to respond faithfully when the Spirit moves or when the Lord opens the door to share the truth with others. Don't be shocked or allow yourself to be discouraged when you come across resistance or outright rejection. Jesus faced this and as our good Shepherd and great example, we should expect nothing less. Some will reject but some will also believe!

22- This may just be a timing reference that John often employs in his Gospel or it may have a deeper meaning but in order to discover this, we must have a short history lesson. The Feast of Dedication in Jesus' day was a relatively new addition to the Jewish religious calendar. It had only been a Jewish holy day for about 150 yrs. This Jewish holiday is still observed today, it's about the only one most Gentiles know but we know it today as Hanukkah – the Festival of Lights. It was a Feast that commemorated the rededication of the Temple Judas Maccabaeus in 165 B.C. after it was grotesquely profaned by Antiochus Epiphanes.

Antiochus the 4th was a Seleucid king that had forcibly taken control of Israel from a rival Greek king. At the time, Israel was populated by Hellenistic Jews (secular) who had accepted pagan practices and Greek culture and traditional Jews (orthodox) who were faithful to the Mosaic laws and the Jewish traditions. Antiochus believed a civil war would erupt between these 2 factions so to eliminate that possibility, he made a decree outlawing all Jewish religious rituals and worship and ordered all Jews to worship Zeus instead of Yahweh. That should settle things down, right? Obviously, he didn't know the Jews very well. They immediately rebelled against his decree!

In an act of brazen disrespect, Antiochus raided the Temple and stole millions in gold and silver from its treasury. He then declared that

possessing a copy of the Law was punishable by death, circumcising a child was punishable by death and any mother who did circumcise their children would be crucified with their children hanging around their necks. Antiochus then turned the temple into a house of prostitution. He set up an altar to Zeus above the great altar of burnt offering in the temple and sacrificed pigs on it. When the Jews expressed their outrage over the profaning of the temple, Antiochus responded by slaughtering 80K and selling just as many off as slaves.

The rise of the Maccabees ended these horrors. After vanquishing Antiochus and his Seleucid army, the Jews set about immediately cleansing and restoring the temple. After the temple was purified and the great 7-branched menorah was re-lit, they could only find one small cruse of unpolluted oil to use as fuel. The cruse was still intact and was marked with the seal of the High Priest. By all normal measures, there was only enough oil in the cruse to light the menorah for one single day. But, miraculously, the oil lasted for 8 days, until new oil could be prepared and consecrated for sacred use. That's why Hanukkah is known as the Festival of Lights.

What does this have to do with our text? Quite a bit, actually! In using the symbolism of the Feast of Dedication, John brings us to the last act of Jesus' offer of salvation to the Jews. This Feast commemorated the rededication of the temple in 165 B.C., which was the last great deliverance the Jews had known and it was in their minds a symbol of their hope that God would again deliver His people. But, here in **ch10**, John presents us with the last act in Jesus' public ministry and with the Jews final rejection of all that Jesus stood for: Messiah, Savior, Shepherd. The Feast of Lights pointed to the sovereign God of Israel, acting against all human probabilities, delivering His people out of their darkness and enabling them to offer real worship. He did it for them in 165 B.C. but He was doing it for them in an even greater way at this time, through His Son Jesus, yet they could not see it. Jesus will soon explain why.

23-24- This is several months after the events of ch9 and even the discourse in the first part of this chapter, but the Jews see Jesus walking in the temple and they descend upon Him, surrounding Him. This was a hostile ambush; this act of encirclement indicates a determination on their part to finally get a straight answer from Jesus. They are serious and they want a clear answer. But, their question is disingenuous. Rather than just

acknowledging that they simply didn't want to believe Him; they, instead, accuse Him of failing to teach them plainly. Worse than that, they're actually trying to place the blame for their lack of belief on Jesus. In their minds, their failure to believe was His fault in spite of the fact that He had been clear in His teaching and had been doing miracles among them for 3 years now.

A typical human response, seen from the very beginning! God placed Adam and Eve in a perfect environment with absolute control over everything and complete freedom to do as they please with 1 minor exception. They were not to eat of that 1 tree in the center of Eden. That tree was a symbol of man's dependence on God and they weren't to eat of it. Apparently, this bothered Adam. It didn't seem to bother Eve much. Nowhere does the Bible indicate that she found this rule offensive. Eve sinned because she was deceived – she believed the serpent instead of trusting God, so she ate. But Adam wasn't deceived – he sinned deliberately, understanding precisely what he had done.

When God came calling, what happened? Adam denied responsibility. We like to say that Adam blamed Eve but he only blamed the woman as a secondary cause, but he blamed God as the primary cause of his sin because it was God who had given him the woman after all. This is what we are all guilty of, for it's the nature of sin to blame others. Thus, we find the people of Christ's day blaming Him for their lack of belief and many today blame Him also. This is dangerous. **1 John 1:9** says confession of sin to God is good. But, if you instead blame God for your sin, your heart becomes hardened and the day of grace may well pass you by. Unbelief may seem logical to the human way of thinking, but it is not logical to God's way of thinking; and it's only His thinking that matters. According to Him, we've been told everything we need to know and are thus, without excuse if we fail to believe in Jesus as our Savior.

25- Jesus response is that He has told them plainly. Besides that, the works that He did further substantiated His claims. The words alone were enough to cause some to believe. The Samaritans said believed on Jesus because we have heard for ourselves (**4:42**). The nobleman in the same chapter believed the word Jesus spoke and his son was healed. Peter testified, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life (**6:68**). Yet, there were also Jesus' many works that proved His words to be true. The miracles were unmistakable signs that pointed to the unusual ability or

character of the one performing them. To ask for evidence or for plain speech is a good procedure if evidence or plain speech is lacking. But if these are present, then to ask for more evidence or for plainer speech is only an attempt to avoid responsibility and shift the blame.

26-27- They had asked Jesus to speak plainly, probably hoping that He would finally incriminate Himself. But, they asked Him to speak plainly, and this is precisely what He does. It's a dangerous thing to ask Jesus to speak plainly, because when He speaks plainly, He gets right to the heart of the matter. Previously, Jesus had told the religious leaders that they were not true shepherds. Now He's telling them that they're not even true sheep! How does He know? Because the Messiah's sheep hear His voice and follow Him. These are the two distinguishing marks of a true sheep: they not only hear the voice of the Shepherd but they also follow His lead.

28-29- Here, Jesus lists some of the benefits of being a sheep. 1) Eternal life – we often like to emphasize that this relates to a quality of life, a life that we possess now, that abundant life that Jesus came to bring those who accept and follow Him. While all this is true, the emphasis here is on the quantity of life: eternal, everlasting, without end. If it were anything less it would be less than eternal. Jesus Himself defines it in the very next phrase saying that those who possess eternal life shall never perish. Of course, eternal life is a gift because He gives it to His sheep: it's undeserved and unearned. If it was earned, it'd be wages; if it was deserved, it'd be a reward. But eternal life is neither of these. It's a gift, meaning it originates solely in God's good will toward men.

2) Eternal safety – it's difficult to see how anyone could be safer or any doctrine could be clearer than that. 1st, Jesus says we are secure in His hands and that's a secure position for any object but especially for us, considering whose hand it is that holds us. But, for that extra bit of security, He says the Father's hand is over His hand so we as His sheep are enclosed in 2 divine hands – doubly secure. If you get that picture in your mind then you will also notice that the Father and Son both still have one hand free with which to defend us. What a blessed picture. It provides us with a knowledge of the love and grace of God that protects us and discourages us from sinning.

Of course, Jesus is using poetic language here but that doesn't mean it is

any less true. What do we know about these hands? The hands of the Father are creative. He knows us because He made us so nothing we do can ever surprise Him. This also tells us that we were made for a purpose and that we should acknowledge this and worship God thankfully. His hands are loving. They're hands that continue to care for and provide for that which they have created. His hands can also be angry! They are hands that can administer judgment and will administered it to all whose sin is not covered by the blood of Jesus and who are thus not among the company of God's people. It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God ([Heb 10:31](#)).

What about the hands of Jesus? They're the hands of a work man, rough hands that know labor and understand toil. Jesus understands us and feels for us in our infirmities. They're also outstretched hands, reaching out to heal, to save (Peter) and to bless. They're also wounded hands. As the old hymn says, when we get to heaven, the only thing there that will be made by man are the scars in the hands of Jesus. These scars are how we will recognize Him! Let Thomas be our pattern. His scars are how everyone will recognize Him when He returns to this earth. The Bible says they will look on Him whom they have pierced. They are the evidence of His love for us.

Are the wounds in Jesus' hands evidence enough for you of His love? God action in Christ for your salvation is perfectly clear; so much so that there's no excuse for a failure to believe or accept it. Today, it's the hand of a gracious God that extends to you the way of salvation. Will you not accept His gift? Put out your hand and touch that wound. It's irrefutable evidence of God's love for you. That hand was struck for you. The One extending it died for you. Allow Him to enclose you in His hand and bring you into that great company of those who have eternal life and will never perish.

This doesn't mean there won't be dangers. In fact, it implies them; for if Jesus promises that no one will succeed in plucking us from His hands, it's obviously because there are some who will try. Christians will always face dangers—dangers without, from enemies, and dangers within. Still, the promise is that those who have believed in Jesus will never be lost. We may add that the Christian may well be deprived of things. He may lose his job, his friends, his good reputation. But he will not be lost. The promise isn't that the ship won't sink, but that the passengers will all reach shore. It's not that the house won't burn down, but that all the people inside will escape safely.

Do you trust the Lord's protection? Do you trust it enough to be obedient and do the work He's calling you to do? 😊