

19. John 10:22-42

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Jesus' sheep hear the voice of their master and receive eternal life

Getting started

What name(s) do you personally use for God? Why?

Note: The Feast of Dedication was a Jewish festival not mandated by Scripture. It celebrated the time when the Jews, under Judas Maccabeus, recaptured the temple in Jerusalem in 164 BC from the brutally repressive Seleucid ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes. It was also called the Feast of Lights. It is now known as Hanukkah, and occurs in late December.

Observation

1. Who did the Jews think the 'Christ' or 'Messiah' would be and what did they expect him to do? ('Messiah' in Hebrew means 'anointed one'. The Greek translation is 'Christ'.)
2. By chapter 10, what 'miracles' or miraculous works has John recorded Jesus doing?

Note: the word 'miracle' is not used in John's gospel. John's preferred term is 'sign'. In verse 25 the word that some translations record as 'miracles' is 'works'. So Jesus is referring to the works he does in his Father's name.

3. Whose acts does Jesus say his miracles/works are?
4. Why were the Jews so hostile towards Jesus?
5. How is the attitude of John the Baptist towards Jesus affirmed in verses 40-42? (remember John 3:27-30)

Interpretation

1. Why might the 'Jews' want to know plainly if Jesus is the Christ/Messiah?
2. What link does Jesus make between the works he does and his relationship with God?
3. What does Jesus imply when he links 'listening' to his voice and receiving eternal life? (cf. John 3:16)
4. Why can't anyone snatch Jesus' sheep from his hands?
5. In what ways are Jesus and his Father 'one'?

Many people over the years have answered this by talking about function and purpose. But consider whether Jesus maybe talking about a shared divinity that goes beyond shared function and purpose.

Implications

1. Have you heard the voice of Jesus? How?

2. What effect did the voice of Jesus have on you?
3. How do the works that Jesus does help you in your faith?
4. In what ways does this passage help you believe Jesus is 'the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name'? (see John 20:31)
5. Jesus says that the ones who listen to his voice will receive eternal life and will never perish. No one can be snatched from his Father's hand. This fits well with John 6:37-40 and 17:2. But how does this sit with Matthew 13:21, John 15:6 and 16:1, Hebrews 6:6, and your own experience of people who seemed to be Christian 'falling away'?

Prayer suggestions

1. Thanks that you have seen the signs of who Jesus is and you have heard the voice of Jesus.
2. Praise for Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, who gives us eternal life.
3. Pray for people (both known and unknown to you) that they will listen to the voice of Jesus.
4. Pray that no one will fall away.

Extra note on John 10:34-35

Some people in your group may have questions about verses 34-35, in which Jesus references the Old Testament Law which seems to call human beings 'gods'. Here are some notes to help you think through what is going on here:

1. Jesus' opponents have just attempted to kill him (v31) for calling himself the son of the heavenly Father (v 29), thus making himself (in their mind) equal to God (v33). They think that a human being cannot be spoken of as the son of God.
2. Jesus makes a rebuttal to their objection using their own Old Testament Law - as one commentator summarises it: "A single clear idea is in mind as Jesus cites this scripture: In the "Law" (ie, the OT, of which the Law is the chief part; cf 12:34; 15:25), the term "god" is applied to others than God himself; if those addressed by God in this passage can be called gods (and sons of God), how much more can he whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world be so termed?" (Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary).
3. Who are those Old Testament people who are called gods? Perhaps it is false gods or some spiritual forces (they are being demoted to mortal status after all in verse 7!), or perhaps the high flying judges of Israel, or (more likely, I think) Israel herself. I say more likely because in Exodus 4:21 it is clear that Israel as the people of God is properly called God's son. So in a poetic way they can be referring to as gods, though this does not in any way mean that the individual people in Israel are divine, eternal, all powerful or equal to God in his being.

The important thing is to distinguish between what the original Psalm is saying, and what Jesus is using it to do in his debate. The original Psalm in no way elevates them about mortal status; even though it uses the word 'god' it is in a very different sense to Yahweh. Yahweh, the one true God judges them and reduces them to mortality.

When Jesus uses the phrase he is doing something tactical - he is responding to their accusation with a clever point to outwit them - so we need to take his argument as an attack on their position not a complete statement of Jesus' self-understanding. Jesus is the son of God in a way which is far more significant than the people of Israel (John 1:14)!

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