

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."** (NIV84)

Theme: Safe and Secure in the Arms of our Shepherd

Do you feel secure or vulnerable? That question can cover a multitude of different topics, can't it? With everything you do online, is your identity secure? What about your money? Is the security at your favorite store, bank, and website good enough so that they won't get hacked, all your information leaked, and your identity stolen? If not, you may purchase something like Lifelock. Do you feel physically secure? Is locking your doors at night enough, or does it make you feel less vulnerable to purchase a security system like ADT or Simplisafe. What about our country as a whole? Do you feel secure that no one can do us no real harm, or do you feel vulnerable because of crazy dictators, radical Muslims, and every other enemy we may have?

What about spiritually—are you secure? Peter describes the devil as, **a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.** Paul describes us as, **sheep to be slaughtered.** The devil has studied you. He knows your weaknesses and he has a plan in mind. He doesn't need to get you know; he just needs to get you before you die. So he will wait for just the opportune time; and then he come in for the kill and drag you down to hell with him. The devil is a ferocious lion; you are a vulnerable and defenseless sheep—are you secure?

One winter day Jesus was walking in Solomon's Colonnade, a covered portion of the temple, that would have been somewhat shielded from

the elements, when some of the Jews pounced on him like a pack of wolves. They wanted Jesus to answer one simple question, **are you the Christ?**

To be fair, there are some who were there that day who were sincere in this question. They honestly wanted to know who Jesus was and if he was the long-promised Messiah—the Savior of the world, whom they had been waiting for, for thousands of years. And they wanted a straight and simple answer—is Jesus the Christ? They didn't want any beating around the bush, they didn't want any parables; but they wanted a simple and to the point answer.

Jesus replied, **I did tell you, but you do not believe.** Jesus had numerous conversations with the Jews and others. Earlier in his ministry he revealed himself as Christ to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well; but these Jews were not there. So Jesus was probably referring to the general thrust of his teachings, which made it clear that he was the Messiah.

But it wasn't just what he taught that proved that he was the Messiah, but also the miracles that he did. As he told the Jews, **The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me.** No one here can do anything outside of the laws of nature. Jesus did again and again, performing miracles of many kinds. These miracles prove that Jesus isn't just a man, but he is also true God. Miracles point us to the man performing them and the words that he speaks. And he is who he says he is—the Savior of the world and the Christ. But the Jews didn't believe him because they chose not to believe him. They saw the evidence and heard the words, but in their hearts they rejected Christ.

Jesus isn't talking around the question like a seasoned politician, he is trying to point out to them that he has already revealed himself as the Christ, in many different ways. Of course, we know that already. We are his sheep. He has brought us to faith through the waters of baptism, he has kept us in the faith through the Word. He adopted us as his own and we are his. He knows each and every one of us personally—better than we know ourselves. He is our Good Shepherd who laid down his life for us. He loves us and so we love him. And because of this, we listen to him. We know his voice, we know what he says in his Word and we willingly listen to his Word. The devil calls us to us through the unbelieving world—they try to entice us away with the excitements of sin and wickedness. They try to lure

us away from God with so-called science and the use of reason and logic. But they are not our shepherd. The Lord is our Shepherd. He hear his voice and we follow him when he calls to us through his gospel—the same gospel by which we were brought and kept in the one true faith. No other voice matters to us, for the Lord's voice alone is true and his is the only voice that listen to.

As Jesus says, **My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.**

Notice what Jesus gives us as his sheep—eternal life. That verb is in the present. Even before his death the Good Shepherd was giving the gift of eternal life. And certainly after his death and resurrection he still continues to give us that gift. Often we think of eternal life as something in the future. But eternal life is something we already have for Christ has already won the victory and has given it to us. He has already brought us to faith in him, so even though we are sinners who will all one day die, eternal life is something we already possess in the here and now. Even now we are eternal.

And we will never perish. The Greek is much more emphatic. There are two negatives in the Greek, for emphasis, so literally we read, they will not ever perish into eternity—not ever by any means will we die eternally. Sure, we will all die, that is, our bodies will die, be buried, and eventually decay, but our souls will live on. When we die our souls in go to heaven and await for the Last Day when our bodies will be raised and glorified and join our souls and complete we will live with our Savior forever. We will never perish.

And since Christ has already won this salvation, it can never be taken from us. Jesus says, **no one can snatch them out of my hand.** Jesus has already defeated the devil. He has power and authority over all things in the world. Therefore we have nothing to be afraid of. No one can take us away from God. We are his, he knows us by name, and he watches over us and protects us from all harm and danger. No one and nothing can take us away from the Lord, our Good Shepherd. And yet, the devil is still prowling around, he is still our enemy who has studied our weaknesses and vulnerabilities. And he often strikes where we are the weakest: our feelings and emotions. He tries to convince is that our feelings and emotions matter more than God and his Word. 'If you don't feel happy, you should do something else—something that's fun or that makes you happy—after all, God just

really wants you to be happy. If you feel that God's Word is too old-fashioned and out of touch with modern society, you're exactly right, it was written thousands of years ago. If you feel as if the church is unfair and unloving toward certain groups of people, well, you should just leave for a place that is more accepting toward all people in society. If you don't feel saved or as if God doesn't love you, it's because he doesn't—it's all a lie." You see how the devil works? He uses your feelings and emotions against you, leading you to believe a lie here and a lie there, so that he can lead you to believe that one big lie—and then he's got you devoured.

The truth is that there are many who are enticed away and entrapped by the devil. But they only have themselves to blame. They are enticed away by enemies both foreign and domestic. That is they are led astray by things outside of them and inside of them. They go after the false teachings of sinful mankind. They look for someone to scratch their ears, who tells them what they want to hear instead of what God says; and eventually the reject Christ all together. Or they tell themselves that they don't need God's care and protection. Their sinful nature leads them away from God and his Word. They think they can somehow make it to heaven on their own—they don't need to hear the gospel or receive the Lord's Supper. They don't need to follow Christ's Word; they'll find spiritual nourishment on their own and they'll somehow figure out a way to survive against all the ferocious enemies who are looking to devour them! Many fall away and are destroyed by the devil; but they only have themselves to blame.

But the Lord's sheep? As we already said—we will not be snatched away for no one and no thing can take us from our Shepherd. How can this be? Because Jesus is who he says he is! He is the Christ—the Promised Messiah, the Savior of the world. Jesus gave up the glories and riches of heaven to live on this earth as true God and true man at the same time. He lived on this earth for more than 30 years, facing the same temptations from the devil that we face. But not once did he sin so that on the cross as he took our sins upon himself and suffered their eternal damnation, he could give his perfect life to us. Then he made the ultimate sacrifice for us by suffering through the eternal punishment our sins deserved and then giving up his life. Thus our Good Shepherd made himself a sheep so that he could suffer and die in our place. And then, of course, he rose from the dead three days later.

This was no small feat—it was no small thing that Jesus did to save us. And if he spent so much time and effort to save you; then you can rest assured that he is going to invest the same amount of time and effort taking care of you and guarding you from all temptation!

But Jesus isn't just the Christ, he is also true God. That is what Jesus meant when he said, **I and the Father are one.** Jesus and the Father are both persons of the Trinity; they are persons of the one true God. So whenever one does something, the other does the same. We not only have Jesus guarding and defending us from all harm and danger, but since he is one together with the Father, we also have the Father watching over us, guarding and protecting us. The devil and the world stand no chance.

We know, then, that we are safe and secure. We may be vulnerable by ourselves, but we have the Lord and there is no vulnerabilities when it comes to the Lord. And our security doesn't depend on how we feel. Our feelings and emotions don't play into the equation at all. And that is a good thing. Our feelings and emotions can be faulty, they ebb and flow, changing with the weather. But our security doesn't depend on our feelings but on the power of our Good Shepherd. We know, based on facts told us in God's Word, that we are secure—even if we don't feel it!

One final thing: how does the Lord keep us safe from the attacks of the devil—especially when the devil attacks our faith? Through the gospel. So when we face attacks, whether they are attacks from the outside or those that come within, we turn to the word of the Good Shepherd. We know his voice and so we follow him.

It is through his Word that he assures and comforts us. It is the Word that is our Lifelock and our security system. We need not worry about anything. For us and our salvation is safe and secure in the arms of our Good Shepherd. Amen.