

## *I Am the Good Shepherd (3) OR Hanukkah and Easter*

John 10.17ff

March 29, 2024 (Good Friday)

*"For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. <sup>18</sup> "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."*

*<sup>19</sup> A division occurred again among the Jews because of these words. <sup>20</sup> Many of them were saying, "He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?" <sup>21</sup> Others were saying, "These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?"*

*<sup>22</sup> At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; <sup>23</sup> it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. <sup>24</sup> The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." <sup>25</sup> Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. <sup>26</sup> "But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. <sup>27</sup> "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; <sup>28</sup> and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. <sup>29</sup> "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> "I and the Father are one."*

*<sup>31</sup> The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. <sup>32</sup> Jesus answered them, "I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?" <sup>33</sup> The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God." <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, "Has it not been written in your Law, 'I SAID, YOU ARE GODS ' ? <sup>35</sup> "If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), <sup>36</sup> do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God ' ? <sup>37</sup> "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; <sup>38</sup> but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father." <sup>39</sup> Therefore they were seeking again to seize Him, and He eluded their grasp.*

*<sup>40</sup> And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was first baptizing, and He was staying there. <sup>41</sup> Many came to Him and were saying, "While John performed no sign, yet everything John said about this man was true." <sup>42</sup> Many believed in Him there.*

**A big welcome to everyone worshiping with us in person or online.** Whether you're a long-time member or a first-time visitor, we're VERY happy you're here and we look forward to helping you and celebrating with you regarding YOUR WALK with God. I'm happy we're together.

The title of today's sermon is "I Am the Good Shepherd – PART THREE" (parts One and Two can be linked through our website or app). The alternative (and I hope intriguing) title is "Easter and Hanukkah" so let me jump right in and explain that.

The discourse and conversation between Jesus Christ and the Jewish leaders (when John uses the phrase “the Jews”, he means the clergy and leaders) – *The Good Shepherd Discourse* started at the Feast of Tabernacles (succoth in late September) and then resumed three months later at the “*Feast of Dedication*” (v. 22) in mid-December and THAT Feast is, today, called Hanukkah.

Hanukkah was not a celebration prescribed in the Torah; it celebrated the recovery of the Jerusalem Temple in the *Maccabean Revolt* against the Greeks (Seleucids) when, Antiochus Epiphanes stormed the Temple, took it over for like three years and slaughtered a PIG on the Jewish Altar and sprayed pork-broth all over everything – defiling the Temple and prompting the revolt of Judas Maccabeus to take the Temple back and cleanse it... like 165BC.

Hanukkah means “dedication” and during the eight-day rededication of the Temple, the one-days’ worth of lamp-oil miraculously burned for eight days – thus Hanukkah (*The Festival of Lights*) is celebrated with an eight-branch candelabra with and one candle at the center.

Jesus attended this festival on a cold day in the covered part of the Temple entrance (Solomon’s Portico) and as He spoke, the Jewish Leaders ran to debate Him... And when Jesus left that day (escaped! – v. 39), He took the Temple with Him – i.e., His own Body – it was a New Dedication of a New Temple, a kind of fulfillment of Hanukkah.

It's His last recorded public speech (in John’s version) and in it, He takes questions from the religious professionals about His true identity. Let’s look at this big Q&A:

- 1) Drawing Conclusions**
- 2) Rededicating the Temple**
- 3) Crossing the River**

There are three big questions asked in this episode: First, v. 24 – “*The Jewish leaders gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, “How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.”*”

*Jesus answers, “I told you but you don’t believe...”* They try to blame Him for leaving them unable to draw valid conclusions. Jesus had said many things that led to an inescapable conclusion that He was the Christ but apart from telling a recently healed, young, blind man (9.37) and a sketchy Samaritan woman (4.26) individually... He hadn’t explicitly, publicly said, “*I am the long-awaited Messiah.*”

But His words and the works that He did very openly and publicly make it crystal clear what He was claiming. It’d be like demanding Stefan Curry or LeBron James – “Tell us plainly: “Are you or are you not a basketball player?””

It's as if Jesus went up to a blackboard and wrote a big clear equation: " $2 + 2 = \underline{\quad}$ " and everyone in the class knows the sum, knows how to fill in the blank but no student will write the "4". All the students tell the Teacher, "Uh... we don't have enough information...say it plainly!"

*In truth* they didn't want to draw the unavoidable conclusion because they didn't want to lose the status quo. They were powerful and respected and comfortable and they didn't trust God that Messiah would be the best thing that ever happened to them. Look at the miracles, the signs, the works, the deeds – there's the conclusion.

After the next big sign – next chapter – the raising of the dead man, Lazarus, the Jewish leaders convene a meeting and conclude this, "If we let Him *go on* like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will take away both our place and our nation." (11.48)

They had the means to draw the right conclusion – they just didn't want God to interfere with all they'd worked so hard to achieve – "our place" i.e., their position in society and all the perks. They didn't trust God to give them something infinitely better... in the Messiah.

It wasn't an intellectual problem – it was a heart problem. They were arrogant and wanted to live independent of God because they didn't TRUST God.

The second question was raised by Jesus in v. 32 – Jesus sees them picking up stones to execute Him again and asks, "For which of My good works are you stoning Me?"

They answer, "for Your blasphemy at claiming that You are equal with God". Jesus answers, "In Psalm 82 – God the Father, talks about leaders among His people who are bad shepherds and don't care for the poor or protect the weak and God says, 'I gave you My word – you are gods and all of you are sons of the Most High' (v.6) but you've abused the position I gave you and now you'll DIE."

And Jesus asks the third question, "If God calls YOU gods because He gave you His revealed truth ...how much more am I GOD who AM His revealed truth?"

Then He returns to the Big Idea – "Look, just do the math – just look at the works that I do – even if you don't understand the words – LOOK AT THE SIGNS, the miracles, how I DO what Messiah does... I totally fit the bill... do the math, add it up... C'mon class:  $2 + 2 = \underline{\quad}$  is... You can do it ... f---  $2 + 2 = \underline{\quad}$  f-f-f-fo... c'mon...anyone?"

And in the next chapter He will raise the dead (another unmistakable sign!) and a few months later... Jesus would give them One final sign... the greatest sign of all and the reason we're here today. He will, lay down His life to pay the ransom, to satisfy the debt that justice demands – to redeem all His sheep and then, on the third day He'll rise from the dead indestructible.

He more than HINTS at it here at the start, v. 18 – *“I have authority to lay My life down, and I have authority to take it up again.”* He’s claiming to have authority over death itself and when He rises, He will be seen... by women at the tomb... by His Apostles...His followers... hundreds of people saw Him (1 Cor 15.6) ... AND they stuck to their story even when it cost their jobs... their stuff... for many, their very lives.

All they had to do was “Just admit that you never saw Him alive and imperishable (1 Cor 15.53-54) and you can live and go back to life as usual.” But none of those witnesses could recant and life could never be usual again.

He'd replied to His detractors, these same leaders, *“Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ The Jewish leaders then said, ‘It took forty-six years to build this temple, and You're gonna raise it up in three days?’ But He was speaking of the temple of His body.”* (John 2.19-21)

In the final analysis – it’s not Judas Maccabeus who reclaims the Temple... It will be Jesus Christ who fulfills the symbol that Hanukkah is. The true Temple is Jesus and joined to Him, the Cornerstone, the Firstborn from the dead – attached to Jesus are *“living stones”* ... That’s how Jesus Christ’s right-hand-man, Peter, would later put it: *“And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house...”* (1 Pet. 2.4-5a)

This little tiny, super obscure hodgepodge, starting in a town that was a joke (John 1.49), in a secluded region where no one wanted to go, this rag-tag group of bumbling fishermen and shady women (Luke 8.2) and misfits of all kind – this group that saw Jesus Christ pay for the sins of His Sheep and rise from the grave renovated, radiant and ROYAL...that group began to tell what they'd seen... and today, there are some 2 1/3 BILLION PEOPLE who claim to believe in Him.

A multitude no one can number will, one day, see Him and the very sight of His Face will make US radiant and utterly filled with JOY. That’ll be the fully rededicated Temple and the true Festival of Lights...In fact, didn’t His earliest followers, on the *Day of Pentecost*, literally look like candles – each with a flame above His head for all to see?

The passage ends where the work of Joshua, Yeshua, Jesus Christ began. Having taken the Temple out of the Temple, He retreats to the wilderness where John the Baptist told them, *“One greater than I is coming!”*

People went to John even though he did NO miracles and looked funny and called people to stop being arrogant and humble themselves before God and repent.

Just as Joshua conquered the land, so Yeshua conquered the land with the sword coming from His mouth (the Good News), Yeshua returns to the wilderness where His ministry began... His circuit is complete. There He finds humble country folk who are dumb enough to look at His works, do the math and conclude:  $2 + 2 = \_4\_.$

Last verse: *"Many believed in Him there."* The simple, rural repentance-people still remember John the Baptist promising Someone better. The wise clergymen turn out to be fools, arrogant wolves, NOT God's sheep ... They'd rather hold on to their puny positions than to trust God and be held in the Hand of Jesus and by the hand of the Father from where NO ONE will snatch them away.

So, what about YOU? Have you joined the rag-tag hodgepodge/church, or do you still have objections?

If you do have objections... search it out. Read the Bible... get some help understanding it and do the math... But DO make sure that your objections really are intellectual.

Most of the time they're NOT – often they're expressions of arrogance and a fear of letting go... You don't trust that God has good things for you so you inflate your objections and demand more evidence.

OR you could go with Jesus across the river – into the land of the broken and battered, the guilty and ashamed... the insecure and fearful.

If you go to Him... you'll find that He is actually coming for YOU... and your insecurity will be replaced... You'll find yourself HELD in the Hand that once was pierced and now brings peace – the Hand from which no one and no thing will ever be able to snatch you, not sin, not a bad past, not unpopularity or unemployment, not poverty or rejection from people, not cancer... not even death itself.

Let's pray