

Then came the Festival of Dedication^[a] at Jerusalem. It was winter,²³ and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade.²⁴ The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

²⁵ Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about 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 will snatch them out of my hand.²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all^l; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.³⁰ I and the Father are one." (John 10:22-30)

I Am Jesus Little Lamb

Did you hear what the students just sang? I'm not just asking about the notes. Did you really listen? "I am Jesus little lamb ever glad at heart I am. For my shepherd gently guides me. Knows my needs and well provides me. Loves me every day the same. Even calls me by name...And when my short life is ended, by his angel hosts attended, he shall hold me to his breast, there within in his arms to rest." It's quite profound. And the crazy thing? They believe it.

Did you hear the words that you just spoke and sang yourself? Did you listen to them? The Lord is my shepherd I shall not be wanting—he will give me everything that I need for body and life—he will lead me, guide me, and bring me to him. And in a miracle that God works within us, we hear the Shepherd's voice and believe.

The Jews in Jesus' day hear his voice too. It was the Feast of Dedication; you might know it better as Hanukah. It was a time of joy and celebration of when God had led his people to victory over their enemies. After being away for a couple of months, Jesus returns to Jerusalem to celebrate this festival. The Jews are ready and waiting. They see him in the temple courts and quickly surround Jesus; they want to get to bottom of this! "No more picture language, Jesus. No more parables. How long are you going to keep us in suspense? Speak to us plainly! Are you the Christ?"

You can almost hear the frustration in Jesus' voice. "**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**" (v.25-26). The answer is right in front of their faces. Actions speak louder than words; we know that. Look at the work Jesus has done, the miracles he has performed, see how he teaches God's Word—there's your answer.

But that's the problem. They had their own ideas of who the Christ should be. They expected God's Promised One to act differently. He was supposed to be the Savior of the nation from the enemies of the oppressing Romans. God's Promised One was supposed to be their king who would set up his kingdom in Jerusalem and bring them political power. He was supposed to bring back the glory days of David and riches of

Solomon. They come to Jesus expecting him to be that and when he isn't they don't want to listen to his voice.

We shouldn't be too surprised; sadly we see it happen often enough. A young child hears Jesus' words and simply believes. She wasn't forced or coerced; she didn't make some decision. God chose her. She hears Jesus died and rose for her. She sees the stories play out before her eyes. She hears her Good Shepherd's voice and she simply trusts.

As she grows up, she hears more voices from the world around her. She can't help it; it's always in her face and filling her ears with promises for a fulfilled and happy life. The thing is, it sounds and looks like the right thing to do too. She may have learned it from friends. She maybe even learned it from mom and dad. Actions speak louder than words. She hears that the most important thing for her life is her relationship with Jesus. But she sees how they seem to always be able to make time for work, hobbies, school, sports, vacation, family, friends while being with Jesus is for when nothing else is planned or if they can fit it in today. She hears the importance of hearing Jesus' voice in the Word, but life gets busy; it's always busy. She learns how to push out the voice of the Shepherd to almost everything else.

She continues to grow up and, like so many, she starts to believe that she knows better. Simple trust isn't enough. She's heard, like you probably have, that life is supposed to look a certain way, with certain things, along with certain experiences and opportunities. So, Jesus, if you are the Christ, God's promised one and someone I should listen to, tell us plainly. If you are the Christ, fix my bank account and retirement portfolio. Defeat my debts and lead my life to be more comfortable. If you are the Christ, take away this pain, help him with his sickness. If you are the Christ, open my spouse's ears to hear that I am right and need to do what I say. Fix the children so they actually listen and do what they are supposed to do. If you are the Christ, rule our nation so we have the politicians I approve and we can go back to the glory days (at least what I think were the glory days). If you are the Christ, make them see that this is my life and I'm free to do what I want. If you are the Christ, do *this*...

You can understand how she might allow herself to listen to all those other voices; it's so tempting for us to do too. They are so loud. They sound so true. And when Jesus doesn't do what we think he should or he isn't what we think he should be, it's easy to tune out his voice. We wander from one thing to the next, it fills us up for a little while but then it's off to the next thing. This world and all it has to offer is so temporary, always fleeting, and never lasts.

All the while there's your Good Shepherd calling out to you. He never left. He's always been there for you. He doesn't force or coerce. He doesn't ask for a decision to be made. You are his sheep the Father gave to Him. He goes after you promising: **"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"** (v. 27-28).

Jesus is not satisfied with giving you momentary and temporary like this world has to

offer and all it can promise. Everything and everyone grows older, decays, and eventually falls apart. Instead of improving, this world and its people are on track to destruction. Even the best this world has to offer won't last forever; nothing does. Except what Jesus gives. Yes, your time in this world has an end date. We are ticking time bombs; like grass we wither and die. For those who reject Jesus' words and do not listen to his voice, this world is as good as it gets. It's still not THE end. Instead of living, they will suffer for eternity. They will perish in everlasting torment.

But not Jesus' sheep; they hear his voice and Jesus gives eternal life. Even after this mortal body turns back to dust, yet in my flesh I will see God. This perishing body that only grows older and fails, one day it will be made like his glorious body. The devil can grab and claw as much as he wants. This world can pull at you all it will. Your own sinful nature will try and drag you down. Death waits to swallow you whole and claim you as its own. They can try all they want; Jesus holds his sheep in his hands. He already snatched you from the devil's hands in the waters of baptism and for good measure he crushes Satan's head. He puts the world in its place under his feet where he rules over it all. He drowns your sinful flesh in those baptismal waters and claims you as His own. He swats away death's steely grip. You already died and rose with him in Baptism: "He is mine; she belongs to me," Jesus says. "I give them eternal life. Neither death nor life, angels or demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers or anything in all creation will can snatch them from my hand."

You can be sure because look what he did. The Good Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep. He suffered your sins. He's cut off from his Father's comforting voice and only hears the righteous Judge declare him guilty. For us sheep who love to wander, the Lord dumped on him the sin of us all. He endures your hell you deserve. He dies your death. He gives up His Spirit. He breathes his last and they buried his body in the tomb.

But God would not let his Holy One see decay. The Good Shepherd who lays down his life for us, picks it back up again. What God promised has been fulfilled for us by raising Jesus from the dead! Jesus was put to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification. Through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you—just as he says. The tomb is empty on Easter morning—just as Jesus said it would be. The suffering for your sins, the debt you owed to God for your sins, the work to save you is done. It is finished—just as he said—because He lives.

Jesus is more than a brother or helper in time of need. He and the Father are one! He's not your financial director or relationship guru. He is God. He's not here to rule a nation for some time. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. He won't make all the problems go away and frustrations disappear. He has something better: I give them eternal life and they will never perish; no one will snatch them from my hand. He and the Father are one. Eternal life is yours!

After all of that, how will he not also give us every good thing even today? Your Good Shepherd speaks to you when you are tired, strung out and wore out, when you are running from one responsibility to the next expectation, hear His voice: "**Come to me**

all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest,” (Matthew 11:28). For you who feel alone and trapped, no one seems to understand or have the time to listen, hear His voice: **“I will never leave you or forsake you. I am with you always,”** (Hebrews 13:5; Matthew 28:20). When shame weighs heavily on you and past sins haunt you, hear His voice; this is what he sees when he looks at you dear baptized child of God: **“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, (Revelation 7:14). I will remember their sins no more,”** (Jeremiah 31:34). For you who are missing loved ones who are no longer with us, for you who are troubled with thoughts of the future and death, hear what He prepared for you: **“Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,’ nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; ‘he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes”** (Revelation 7:16-17). For you who can feel yourself spiraling at thoughts of what tomorrow might bring, the uncertain future leaves you shaken, this world and everything that’s going on has you upset and you feel doubt sinking in, hear His voice: **“Be still and know that I am God”** (Psalm 46:10).

And with child-like faith that God himself works in our hearts, we simply believe because I am Jesus little lamb. You are too. Hear his voice. Follow him as he leads your through this dark valley to bring you to him where we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.