

## "Appreciating Our Good Shepherd's Guarantee"

John 10:11-30

*11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."*

*19 There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. 20 Many of them said, "He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?" 21 Others said, "These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"*

*22 At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, <sup>23</sup> and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. <sup>24</sup> So the Jews gathered around him and said 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 bear witness about me, <sup>26</sup> but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. <sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, 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."*

This is a very rich passage which certainly could generate more than one sermon. In fact, if you've been attending this church for some time, particularly if you were here last year, April 2009, we heard a sermon on virtually the same passage, not quite all the way to verse 30, but the majority of what I've covered. I hope I won't be repeating too much of what was preached 15 months ago, but, in fact, I'd like to make a particular focus on several key aspects of our Triune God's redemptive work, and I want to consider what our Lord Jesus Christ is saying here in this context where He is addressing antagonist Jewish clergymen. He's there in the temple, and His audience is not all that friendly. I want to do something different, and because I'm doing something different, I can plead, "Yeah, what's my excuse?" "Well, I'm a missionary, this is a missionary sermon, and missionaries are always a little bit different." That's a polite way of putting it. So, I want you to imagine something while I'm preaching. Imagine your Muslim friend, and if you don't have a Muslim friend, talk to me afterwards, and Oetje and I can make that happen. Imagine that your Muslim friend or Muslim neighbor is sitting next to you in church and then you go out for coffee afterwards, and you discuss the sermon and how Abdullah or Fatima could react to what's being preached here, what's being expounded from Scripture. The reason I'm doing this is not just because I've been working with Muslims for 31 years or Som... for 28 years; that's part of it. It's not just because the second largest Som... population is here in King County, although that's part of it. I'm not just doing it for those reasons. I want us as followers of Jesus Christ, if we are following Christ, to appreciate the blessing that we have and that we have a Savior who is our Good Shepherd and what that means for us, not just to appreciate for ourselves, because that wouldn't be right. We should also appreciate it for the fact of our friends who don't have this guarantee of eternal life, who don't know the Good Shepherd, that are not part of this one flock. So I am going to use that approach to the sermon, and hopefully we'll all benefit from it, but I'm not going to be too terribly weird or different. I will have three points in the sermon, so be comforted:

1. Christ clearly teaches His sacrificial death.
2. The Messiah will fulfill the covenant promise to Abraham.
3. Jesus Christ grounds our eternal security in His divine power.

So let's look at this matter of Christ clearly teaching His sacrificial death:

*11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

"I am the Good Shepherd. I'm going to lay down my life for the sheep." Now, we know that frequently in the Old Testament, the idea of a shepherd was a key illustration of God's relationship with His people, particularly the leaders of His people, kings, prophets, sometimes priests. We think of David as a shepherd. That's especially spoken of or comes through in Psalms, but then we move into Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and also a bit in Zechariah. There's a lot of imagery about shepherds, and some are good shepherds, and some are not so good shepherds. The shepherds have this protective role in the context of herding these vulnerable and not terribly clever creatures called sheep, and that's how God has seen fit to designate His people. We're sheep-like creatures—not very flattering, but probably quite true. The wolf symbolizes Satan here in this passage, a very serious sort of enemy, a menace to both the sheep and the shepherd. But what I want us to consider and recall is what Jesus is talking about here and emphasizing is voluntary sacrifice. It's not just going to happen by accident. It won't be because He's not in control. "*I lay it down of my own accord*" is what He says. And Jesus also has this really close relationship to His flock. When it says, "*I know my sheep*," it's not just "I know their names, I'm aware of them, I have this information (or "data" would be the term we use these days) about these creatures, these sheep. Now, this is knowledge that implies commitment, relationship based on commitment, and a deep knowledge. So the Messiah's followers know Him, they know His voice, and Christ is dying specifically for these specific sheep that He knows. It's not just some general generic death for anonymous humanity, but is something very focused.

Let's reflect on the whole idea of sacrifice. Here's a clear statement that Jesus is making Himself that He has to die for our salvation, and the reason I want to emphasize that Jesus is making the statement is oftentimes you'll encounter people who'll try to divide the New Testament of scripture up and will say, "Oh, all that stuff of a sacrifice and blood and death, that's all Paul's idea, but Jesus, well He's talking about love and being nice and so on." The whole idea of shedding blood, being purchased like we're slaves of sin and being redeemed from that is not necessarily so popular with everyone. For many people, it's not threatening, it's not difficult to say Jesus Christ is a great prophet, great teacher or great example for humanity. But, in our postmodern culture where we live right here, blood, death and sacrifice is not such a popular concept. Certainly for our Muslim friends, Abdullah or Fatima, that would be a very troubling verse to deal with, because in Islam, the theology has no place for sacrifice or atonement. It's do your best. You know, it's interesting, if you read the Qur'an (it's available in English translations), you'll see a lot of reference to Old Testament characters. Moses and Abraham come through quite a lot, but the sacrificial system with a few exceptions is pretty well skipped over: it's not talked about. So the idea that God takes initiative to save His people is out of the question. It's not even considered. There is no concept of original sin. The whole idea of how you get to heaven in Islam is an investment in merit. You do good deeds which is an investment for the future. Now, we all know of 401Ks, and in the last few years, those of us who are more mature and have white hair tend to think more about our 401Ks. When I was much younger, I didn't even know they existed. Maybe they didn't, but, of course, you invest and you hope that when you retire, you have something to look forward to. In Islam, you're investing your good deeds for the future. You hope that you will not be in deficit on the day of reckoning, and as for eternal life, well God only knows. So, what do you have to do now in this life? You have to overcome your ignorance. How do you overcome your ignorance? Get God's revelation to Mohammed, the most recent revelation, and obey it. It's all about trust and obey. So the sort of relationship described by the Messiah here, relationship of a shepherd and His flock, is not possible. Not only that, the sacrifice that Jesus is referring to, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is specifically denied in the Qur'an, because from the Muslim point of view, why would God allow His prophet to die on the cross? That would be to suffer defeat, and God is all powerful. Why would He allow that? Just as we see in 1 Corinthians Chapter 1, where Paul is talking about the cross being a stumbling block or foolishness to Jews and Greeks, so the same way for Muslim people, this is something that's a major stumbling block.

Moving along now to our second point, the Messiah will fulfill the covenant promise to Abraham. Jesus is telling these Jewish leaders there at the temple, the very center of the Jewish religion at that point, "I've got followers that are beyond the 12 tribes of Israel." And if you think about it, the Messiah was from His very birth interacting with non-Jewish people. He was visited from the Magi who came from what is now Iraq and Iran. He went to Egypt and spent two years as a refugee in

Egypt. Later on, He dealt with the Samaritans a number of times. He healed the servant of a Roman centurion. He healed the daughter of a Phoenician lady. Now, here Jesus Christ is explicitly stating, "The sum total of my followers is far greater than what you see here in this flock, this chosen people of God, and I must bring them in also." "They will listen to My voice." Here Jesus is foreshadowing The Great Commission that He would make two months later to His own disciples, and this is a really radical statement. Jesus doesn't flesh it out too much in detail. He basically gives a headline: "All others are not of this flock." We know in The Great Commission that He gives more detail. But what I like about the Great Commission is that there is no fine print, no exceptions. I lived 22 years overseas, and I owned a number of cars in Som...a, Kenya and Ethiopia, and none of them came with warranties, which didn't feel too bad for me. I came to America and bought a used car here, got a warranty, and then whenever I had a problem on that car (I know it's probably only happened to me, not to you) I had the kind of warranty that always had exceptions for every kind of problem I had. Okay, maybe you've all had that problem too. The Great Commission is not like that kind of warranty. It doesn't say, "Well, these and these people are worthy of God's love, and these and these nations will be in heaven, and well those people, they're difficult, they're troublesome, they're not going to be there." No! No exceptions. No fine print. No exclusion clauses in the Great Commission. And as we think about it, the Old Testament had many promises where it says "*the nations, all nations,*" and really think about the word "nation" and the word "gentile". They are basically the same word. So the next time you read the Old Testament, put "Gentile" in every time and see how that makes you feel, hopefully comforted. But certainly at the time Jesus was talking, this was fairly radical language. Even today as we're working here in this area with Som... people, we have to emphasize that Jesus has other sheep, and some of them are among the Som... people.

Another thing that we see here that Christ is bringing out and has talked to the Jewish leaders about is the importance of the church and its unity. He's demonstrating this here in a number of ways, and nowadays the value of the church is often minimized by many Christians in America and around the world. Some evangelicals even suggest a follower of Jesus can remain within his own religion: "You can just stay a Muslim and follow Jesus" or "stay a Hindu and follow Jesus." "You can just be an Insider." They say, "Jesus didn't come to start another religion." No, maybe He didn't in the strict sense of a religion that you follow these principles and you'll appease God, but Jesus did come to gather a flock, one flock, and He gave this flock not suggestions but commands about things like the Lord's Supper, like baptism. Later, apostles were inspired to talk about church government and what the church is all about. The church is what Jesus came to found. He didn't just come to bring individual salvation to isolated individuals, and I would suggest, at this point, rather than spending more time on it, for you to read an excellent book written by Timothy Keller, *The Reason For God*. It's a good idea to read that book for a lot of different benefits you can get from it, but the whole idea of the relationship between religion and a living faith or relationship with God through Jesus Christ is described far more eloquently and intelligently by him than I could explain to you.

Again, we have to remember that the church was not God's Plan B. It's not like there were the 12 tribes of Israel that were chosen. They rejected the Messiah, so then, "Oh, what am I am going to do?" "Well, we'll have the church." No, the church was the focus of God's redemptive work from the beginning of time, and the centrality of the church, the body of Christ was developed even further, of course, as we read the letters from Paul, Peter, John and the author of Hebrews. But there is a challenge for us here at First EPC [First Evangelical Presbyterian Church]. Let's consider this today. How are we doing as a congregation in terms of being part of Jesus' work of building His multinational, multicultural, multilingual flock, that "one" flock? Again, you've heard it several times this morning, but you're going to hear it one more time: Come this evening, 5 o'clock, come here and hear from our own high school students, the Jordans and Irene Millikan, people supported from our church as missionaries in the Ukraine and in Hong Kong, what's going on in those parts of the world. Hear more about it, come this evening, and be part of that.

Now, lets look at this idea of one flock from a Muslim perspective. From a Muslim point of view, Jesus was just a prophet to the Jewish people, and as I work with the Som... language website, every week I saw an email come in from a Som... Muslim somewhere in the world, and he or she would say, "Jesus, yeah, He was a great prophet, but His time has passed. He was for His nation, for the Jewish people, and now the final revelation of Mohammed is for all nations, for all peoples." So there is a

strong emphasis that there is a worldwide Muslim community, an "umma" that supposedly cuts across all racial and national barriers, and Islam, like Christianity, is a missionary religion. Many of the Muslims who move to the West have a missionary agenda, just like we all should have. They want to see people come to their faith. So how do we respond within the church? While we could respond with fear, or even worse, hatred, I don't think that's what Christ is calling for here. We have a verbal witness, but another part of our witness is demonstrating oneness within the flock, the flock that Jesus died for.

Just three months ago, I had the privilege of being in Kenya and attending a missionary conference there. It was with missionaries working to bring the gospel to the Som... people. And where were these missionaries from? Well, there were some Som... missionaries there working among their own people. There were Ethiopian and Kenyan missionaries. There were missionaries from Nigeria, Zambia and from South Africa, from Korea, Brazil and Ecuador. There were Norwegians, there were Dutch, there were Germans, and there were a few Americans and a Canadian or two as well. What this shows is that missionaries come from all over the globe. We have to get rid of that old idea that missionaries come from here, and we send them there. Missionaries are going all directions. Christianity is not the white man's religion, and whatever corner of the globe we come from, our oneness is rooted in being part of one flock gathered by one Good Shepherd.

Finally, we get to the point that Jesus Christ grounds our eternal security in His divine power. He says in verse 28 and verse 30, "*No one snatches them out of My hand.*" Why? God the Father is omnipotent, and "*He has given them to me. The Father has given these sheep to me, and He has them in His hand. No one can get them out of His hand. No one can get them out of My hand. I and the Father are one.*" It's an incredible comfort here. So our relationship with God in this life and on the Judgment Day is not ultimately based on our performance or our obedience. Rather, it's a guaranteed outcome. Let's go back to that idea of the 401K investment. It's guaranteed by the Sovereign of the universe. It's not one of these financial things you get involved in, and you spend the rest of your life worrying about its value going up, or more likely down. The payment was made at the cross. The work of redemption is finished, and when God looks at a member of the flock, He sees the righteousness of Jesus, and it's not only that. If we want to keep on boggling our minds we should recall that every day Jesus is interceding for each one of us before the throne. This kind of knowledge is hard to process. It's hard to understand, but definitely if we believe it, it should spur us to obey and to try and please God out of gratitude. That's eternal security from our perspective.

Now let's think about our Muslim friends. From their perspective, eternal security doesn't exist. It's a doctrine that's totally foreign to their minds. It's unthinkable to know your eternal destiny. I am reminded of a good friend back in college days when I was in grad school at Utah State University 30 years ago or more. I had a friend from Saudi Arabia. We called him "Ali". He was very devout, very pious, and I had a lot of religious discussions with him. I remember one time saying, "Well, what's going to happen to you when you die, Ali?" And he said, "I have no idea." He said, "The road to paradise goes over these flames, and it's a little bit like the end of the *Lord of the Rings*, the Mines of Moria, the Bridge at Khazad-dum. But this is not a bridge that's made of stone that's this wide (gesturing 2-3 feet). This bridge is a sword's blade, and that's not the flat side. You're walking on the edge of the blade, and you could fall off very easily on either side." Then he told me something that was really chilling. He said, "You could be the best person in the world, do all sorts of good deeds, be a really good Muslim, and then just before you die you might mess up so bad in your last five minutes of life or two minutes, you'll end up in hell. Or you could be one of the worst Muslims in the world, and somehow you might do something so good in your last two minutes in life, you'll end up in heaven." And I thought, "Whoa, there's no comfort there!" I think the way you have to look at it is to imagine opening an Excel spreadsheet on your computer (those of you who have the misfortune of having to deal with those programs) and trying to scroll down to see the bottom line: Where am I standing in my sins versus merits department, and there's all these columns, but you can't get to the bottom line. You get to the bottom line, and there is a little warning: "You won't know until the Judgment Day, the Day of Reckoning." That is the life our Muslim friends live: a life of constant worry and fear.

I recently encountered a beautiful example of this doctrine. The Doctrine of Eternal Security is not some abstract theory that theologians came up with. It's not just some beautiful Bible verses. We can read about it in John 10. It's true, and you meet

people that testify to it, and I want to explain a little bit about how this happens in real life. There was a listener to *The Voice of New Life*, a Som... radio broadcast I've been working with since 1989, and his brother began writing emails to our office in Addis Abeba back in 2003, beautiful emails. One of them (I never remembered which one) wrote beautiful poetry, and it was really impressive to see how these people expressed their faith in Christ, even while living in Mogadishu. To live in Mogadishu, Som... as a Christian is not good for your health, to put it mildly. It's probably the hardest place in the world to be a Christian that we could think of. But then in 2008, something heartbreaking happened. We got an email from one of them saying, "I've gone back to Islam, and you guys ought to as well." He sent us a number of emails that year in 2008, talking about reverting to Islam. That was really tough, and that's when you start to wonder about eternal security. You say, "Lord, he professed faith in you and He could express it so beautifully. What gives?" But 14 months ago, we got this wonderful email from him, and I'll read you just a portion of the translation of that email:

"I want to testify how the Lord returned me. Truly, I did not want Christianity, but due to the great love of God, he did not allow me to continue on in my own direction, because this is really the false way for me. After much running, my God settled my heart. My Lord chose me in His mercy because He never left me alone even when I had denied Him. I have found victory after much heated conflict, struggle and battle. I won victory, but truly it was not my victory, but my Lord who is the True Victor. He keeps me protected in His hand. Praise be to God through Jesus, the Messiah. Amen."

Well, back in May just at the end of this conference in Nairobi, I went to worship one evening at Trinity Baptist Church. That's the church where I just mentioned a month ago when I introduced my dad that a member of that church, a Som... Christian is now resettled in Kennewick just over the Cascade Mountains. Well, there was my friend at the church, and he introduced me to the guy who wrote this email, and I said, "Whoa, are you the guy who writes the poetry?"

"No, that's my brother."

"Are you the one who...?"

"Yeah, I'm the one who went back to Islam."

And just three days ago, I got an email from him. I had been trying to help him find some work with missionaries that I knew in Kenya, and I had written him an email Monday, apologizing that so far I hadn't been able to scare up any work for him. He wrote a beautiful email to me that I received on Thursday. He said, "Don't sweat it about not finding me work: God is providing for me. He's taking care of me. That'll come." But he said, "One thing I ask of you," and I'd like to put that request that he gave me over onto you. He said, "Just keep praying for me. I really need your prayers. Pray for me that I'll be strong in faith, that I can express my faith to other people." So, you've heard it: Pray for my friend in Nairobi. Eternal security is not just something you rejoice about, but something you keep partnering and praying for. But this eternal security, again, is something where it comes out of the fact that Jesus can say, "I and the Father are one." In this claim of divinity, what happened? Was that appreciated? No. We go to verse 31:

*The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him.*

So here, this is just before the crucifixion is going to happen, and already people are getting quite angry at what Jesus is claiming about Himself. Now there are more than a billion people in this world who recognize Jesus as a great prophet but deny His divinity as the Muslim people. In fact, Mohammed put words in Jesus' mouth in the Qur'an. It has Jesus speaking in the Qur'an where He'll say, "Don't worship me, only God should be worshipped, I'm not divine." So this is something that is, you could say, is hardwired into the Muslim religion: Jesus is not divine. Yet, I don't want to leave you with the thought, "Oh, this is hopeless. Here are a billion people who all have a sacred scripture that they considered inspired that tells them that Jesus is not divine." Just Friday afternoon, I was looking at another email that had come in from the website, and this was a young man I believe is up in Som...land in the Northwest of the country. He has been writing about a month to us, and the subject line was (it was pretty brave for a guy to write this) "I Believe in Jesus. That was the subject line where people would be looking over his shoulder at the Internet Cafe and see, and he basically sets it out. He says, "Yeah, Jesus is different from the prophets. He's not a normal person. He's someone who can heal people without medicine, someone who

can give up His life and then be raised from the dead. I believe in Jesus, but now that I believe in Him, what am I going to do? How do I worship Him? What things are forbidden for me?" He still has a bit of Muslim mindset: "What is forbidden for me? What is lawful for me? How can I worship Him? How can I pray? Should I pray to Jesus or should I pray to God?" So we see that the Holy Spirit is working. The gospel is breaking through.

In conclusion, Islam may deny the heart of the gospel, but Jesus told us clearly that He has died for His sheep, and Jesus has sheep for His one flock from all nations that includes: Som..., Arabs, Turks, Iranians, Pakistanis, Afghans, Indonesians. No exceptions. Again, this is not a warranty with fine print. There are no exceptions in this plan. "I must bring them also." This is the work that Jesus has entrusted to us. He entrusted it to His apostles, and it goes on throughout church history to this day to us in this sanctuary, whether it's in our own neighborhoods here in South King County, across the country over in Baltimore or overseas. And so, as I think of the work that Oetje has with refugees here or the work I have globally working with the website, both of us can testify that we see spiritual hunger. We see the Holy Spirit softening hearts. We see Jesus Christ taking control of individual lives. We see the Messiah gathering His flock, and we see the Good Shepherd preserving His sheep from attempted snatchings. Now, all of us have a role in gospel proclamation, and that role can be broken down in a number of sub-points: Prayer: I just told you to pray for my friend, but pray for people on both ends. Pray for the missionaries and the people they're sharing the gospel with. Supporting missionaries financially is another way to be involved. And then praying for opportunities to share yourself, and I suspect this is a prayer sometimes you pray, and you realize it could take a long time to get an answer to this prayer. This is not one of those. I suspect if you pray to God, "Give me opportunities to share the gospel," more often than not, that might happen quicker than you really want. There are also things we have to do with our own lives. I think there comes with it the part of time management. Are we managing our time that we can build friendships with non-Christians? Are we just spending our time with each other or are we spending time with people who don't know Christ? And then speak the message. Tell people about Jesus, and don't stress, because the Holy Spirit is within us. Leave the results to our Triune God. He's the one who'll bring them. So, Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd. He willingly died for His flock. He's eager to expand His flock, and He guarantees that He'll bring them safely to the finish line. Amen.

Let me pray. "Father in heaven, we thank you for the beauty of the gospel, so amazing. Every time we consider it, we see its beauty shining. It's nothing that comes from our own minds or invention, but it's only of You. We thank you Lord for being the Good Shepherd. Lord, we confess we are like sheep, and Lord, we do thank you that you are building us into one flock. Lord, help us to be part of your mission work. Help us to realize the fields are white unto harvest, and whatever corner of the world we come from, wherever we may be going, give us opportunities to share the hope that is within us. We ask this in the name of Jesus our Lord and Shepherd. Amen."