

Bible Study Guide: Week of 5-2-2022

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

John 10:22-30

²²At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. ²⁴So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” ²⁵Jesus answered, “I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me; ²⁶but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. ²⁷My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand. ³⁰The Father and I are one.”

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ²Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. ⁴Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” ⁶He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish.

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The festival of the Dedication is what we would today call Hannukah. In Jesus’ time it was a relatively recent festival. It commemorates the reclaiming of the temple and Jerusalem from the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes in 165 BC. In that year, Judas Maccabeus and his brothers led a revolt to retake the city and temple mount. After retaking the temple the people lit lamps and cleansed the temple of pagan idols and restored the furnishings inside the temple. You can read about this event in the intertestamental book of 1 Maccabees, chapter 4. According to the Talmud, a later source, there was only enough oil to light the lamps for one day, but by God’s power the oil lasted more than a week and the lamps burned for 8 days on that same oil. For these reasons, Jews in Jesus’ time sometimes called the festival “Lights.” This is why today our Jewish neighbors celebrate the 8 day Festival of Lights called Hannukah by lighting the candles of the menorah. This festival would have had special meaning to those gathered around Jesus at this “festival of lights” that commemorated a fairly recent political revolt since Jesus just stated in chapter 9 that he is “the light of the world” and since many had messianic hopes involving Jesus.

²⁴So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”

The question of the Jewish folks gathered around Jesus at that time (and remember Jesus himself and all of his early disciples were also Jewish) is actually a bit misconstrued in this particular translation. Rather than saying “How long will you keep us in suspense?” they literally ask Jesus, “How long are you taking away our life?” This is clearly an

idiomatic phrase. Rather than the meaning we get translated for us here, the phrase most naturally seems to mean “How long will you keep annoying us?” Those who heard Jesus but didn’t (yet) believe in him seem flustered by Jesus’ recent actions—not just his signs and miracles, but probably specifically his “figures of speech” (see, for example, just before this passage in 10:6 when Jesus tries to explain himself to the crowds using a metaphor about gates and sheep). Rather than speaking in “figures of speech,” they want him to “tell them plainly.” They want him to stop speaking in riddles and give them a simple “yes” or “no” to the question of Jesus’ messiahship.

²⁵Jesus answered, “I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me; ²⁶but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. ²⁷My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand. ³⁰The Father and I are one.”

For an answer, Jesus points the people to his “signs”—the changing of water into wine, the healing of a sick child, the healing of a man who had been ill for almost 40 years, the feeding of the 5,000, the healing of a man born blind, and so on. Those actions, he claims, testify to him. The lack of faith by the crowds, he says, is a result of their not belonging to Jesus’ sheep—that is, not listening to him and not following him. Note the irony here that when they questioned Jesus here his opponents say to him, literally, “How long are you taking away our life?” Yet Jesus says to them that his purpose is to give eternal life. He can only give this to those whom the Father has given to him. This raises an uncomfortable question about election. How does one know whether one has been given to Jesus by the Father and invited into faith or not? Ultimately, it seems that one will be known as a sheep of the shepherd by one’s actions—hearing and following. In the same way, Jesus is made known by his actions—doing the work of God. This is the unity Jesus claims in v. 30—unity of work and purpose. The work of Jesus *is* the work of God. So in the terms that they are asking, no, Jesus is not the Messiah. Or perhaps we should say he is not *that type* of Messiah—a revolutionary like the Maccabees. Rather, he is one with the Father and is God’s power and essence on earth.

Note that v. 29 can be read either the way it reads above *or* as “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.” Both are possible. The first emphasizes the great importance of the “sheep;” the second emphasizes the great might of the Father over and against all other forces that seek to separate the sheep from the shepherd.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. Why do you think Jesus can’t give the people a “plain” answer about his identity as the Messiah?**
- 2. When Jesus says that those whom he is speaking to “do not belong to my sheep,” is that a permanent condition or do you think it is possible that some of those folks would come to believe in Jesus? How do we reconcile the idea that God loves all people with Jesus words here about those who “don’t belong to his sheep,” “don’t believe,” and who apparently aren’t among those given to Jesus by the Father?**
- 3. See my note above about v. 29. Do you prefer one translation over the other in terms of how it helps you think about what Jesus is saying and doing in this passage?**