

Part 3, Wed (Toronto Spiritual Life Convention 1993)

by Eric J. Alexander

Christ's sheep are secure because of the nature of Christ's sacrifice, the nature of the gift Christ has given, and the nature of Jesus' promise.

Duration: 46:42

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 10:28-29, Romans 8:28

Topics: "Eternal Security", "Assurance Salvation"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the assurance and security of believers in Christ. He highlights four reasons given by Jesus in John 10:28 for why his sheep will never perish. The first reason is the nature of the sacrifice Christ has offered for them, showing his willingness to save them from insecurity. The second reason is the evidence of being Christ's sheep, which includes saving faith, a hearing ear, knowledge of Christ, and moral obedience. The preacher emphasizes the importance of understanding these reasons to have confidence in one's salvation.

Transcript

The Choir, and it's a great privilege to be gathered together to listen to God speak to us from his Word. I thought for a moment when we were having the notices that I had come to that place which every Scotsman must dream of where he hears someone say, go to the bookstall and help yourself. And when the notice is given by another Scotsman you cannot but believe that it's true.

But it is good to be gathered together and to be assured that God in his great mercy is ready to meet with us and to answer the deepest needs and longings of our hearts as we come to open his Word together. Now I invite you to open it with me at John chapter 10 this evening. Our theme on these three evenings is the theme of Christian assurance, or the security of the believer as some would describe it, or as the Reformers would have the theme the perseverance of the believer, by which they were really meaning, of course, the perseverance of God with the believer.

And last evening we considered together the broader affirmation that the Apostle Paul gives to us in Romans 8, 28, where he says, We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Now this evening I want us to turn together to these four uncompromising words of Jesus which were in our Scripture reading. In John chapter 10 verse 28,

speaking of Christ's sheep, he says, They shall never perish.

They shall never perish. He then elaborates that truth in the next sentence and says, No one can snatch them out of my hand. And in verse 29 he reinforces the truth again, saying, My Father who has given them to me is greater than all.

No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. Now the idea, of course, of God being the shepherd of his people is one that is common in the whole of the Bible. It is an idea that the Jews who were listening to Jesus originally in this passage would be very familiar with.

For example, the idea of David being not only the king but the shepherd, and thereby reflecting God himself who was both king and shepherd. And they would sing regularly as we do, The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not lack anything. They would have known that great description of the Messiah in Isaiah chapter 40, when the prophet is urging them to behold the sovereign Lord coming with power, his arm ruling for him, his reward with him, and his recompense accompanying him, and this mighty God coming with power.

How is he described in the very next sentence of Isaiah 40? He tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart. He gently leads those that have young.

Throughout the whole of the Old Testament there is this picture of God being a shepherd to his people. And constantly alongside that picture there is the whole concept of the security that the flock enjoys under the care of God as their shepherd. Now in this conversation with the Jews, Jesus really speaks about the security of Christ's sheep by approaching the subject from two directions.

First of all, he deals with the evidence in the lives of the sheep that are truly Christ's sheep. And secondly, he deals with the determination in the Godhead that they will remain Christ's sheep. So there are two questions really that Jesus is answering in this brief passage.

First, how can you tell Christ's sheep? What are the distinguishing marks of those who are Christ's sheep? And second, how can you be sure that they will never perish? Let me turn to these two issues with you then this evening, and we will find the answer to these two questions in these verses that we read together. There are four marks of Christ's sheep which Jesus presents to us, four evidences in their lives that they are truly his. And the first is this, and it's in the first sentence or two after verse 22.

The first mark of Christ's sheep is that they are distinguished because they believe in him. The background is in verses 22 to 25, where you will remember at the Feast of Dedication, as it is called here, modern Jews would call it Hanukkah. And my Jewish friends and neighbors in Glasgow celebrate Hanukkah at the very time that we would be celebrating Christmas.

Well, you will notice John says, then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's colonnade. The Jews gathered around him saying, how long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly, they said.

Their implication was, of course, that Jesus was playing games with them in some sense, that he was keeping them in suspense. How long will you continue to keep us in this suspense, they asked. If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.

Now, of course, if you had been reading through to this part of John chapter 10, you would be well aware that there were several occasions when Jesus had told them very plainly, precisely the answer to their question. And he says in verse 25, I did tell you. Jesus answered, I did tell you, but you do not believe.

The miracles I do in my Father's name, they speak for me. For example, although he had told them clearly, verbally as well as through miracles. But he says, verse 26, you do not believe again.

And then he gives them the explanation for their unbelief. You do not believe because you are not my sheep. Now notice the implication.

If they had been Christ's sheep, they would have believed in him because it is one of the hallmarks of the genuine sheep of Christ's flock that they have saving faith, that when they hear the word of Christ, when they see the evidence of who he is and the authority of his voice, they will believe in him. They will rest upon Christ as their Saviour. They will receive him as their Lord.

And he says, if you were my sheep, you would believe because true, personal, saving faith is what Charles Haddon Spurgeon called the livery of the Lord's people. It is the primary mark of God's people that they have repented, turned from their sin, and rested upon Christ as their only Saviour. So if you are wanting to know the first mark of Christ's sheep, the first mark is the evidence of genuine, credible, saving faith and true repentance, which always goes along with it.

So there is the first mark of Christ's sheep, the evidence that we are truly Christ's sheep is that we have saving faith. May I say to you, therefore, this evening, my Christian friends, that if you find in your heart this evening the reality of a resting on and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ in all his person and glorious work as your only Saviour and Lord, if you have known the reality of repentance from sin and resting upon Jesus Christ alone, then you have the first mark of Christ's sheep. You belong to him.

For that is the first evidence of belonging to Christ. Here is the second in verse 27. My sheep, says Jesus, listen to my voice.

That's the second evidence of being one of Christ's sheep. And it is certainly one of the primary evidences of a work of God's grace in our lives, that we listen to the voice of him who is the true shepherd. Now that's something that many of us will have discovered in a most profound and personal way in our own experience.

We may have been awakened out of our spiritual lethargy, out of our spiritual sleep, and known the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ sounding in our souls. We may have known what it is to hear him call us to himself, Come to me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. And we have listened to the voice of Jesus, and we have found it like music in our ears.

And we have said, I heard the voice of Jesus say, come unto me and rest. I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad. Now it is this listening to the voice of Jesus, which from the very beginning of this account of Jesus as the good shepherd, is the mark of Christ's sheep.

They listen to his voice and it becomes an increasing mark of Christ's sheep. As they go on following him, they are eager to hear the voice of the shepherd. There is no music in the world like the voice of their Savior.

There is nothing that delights them like the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the Lord Jesus says here is the second great mark of Christ's sheep. They listen to his voice, not merely in the sense that they become acquainted with what his teaching is, but they listen to it as Jesus taught us in the parable of the sower, the good soil receives the seed of his word.

They listen to it in that they open their inmost being to what he says. And they receive it and hunger for it and long that they might rise up in obedience to embrace it. Now that's the mark of Christ's sheep.

Thirdly, do you notice not only are Christ's sheep those who believe and those who listen to Jesus' voice, they are those who know him. That is, they are in a unique relationship with him. Look back to verse 14 with me.

I am the good shepherd, says Jesus. I know my sheep and my sheep know me. Now notice how he helps us to understand what it means for Christ's sheep to know him.

He says, my sheep know me just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. Now we need to pause to let that staggering statement sink into our minds and spirits. Here is the third great mark of Christ's sheep, and it is that they have this unique relationship with him.

My sheep know me, he says. Now that is not simply a matter of recognizing him or knowing his voice, and many of you will know that genuine shepherds in the east know all of their sheep, and many shepherds in other parts of the world have the same capacity for knowing their sheep, even recognizing them by their appearance. I have a friend who is a shepherd in the northwest of Scotland, and he has several times taken some of us out onto the hill and stopped by one of his sheep and said, now I remember that one.

We had this one in the farmhouse for some time. It wasn't very well years ago when it was a lamb, and here it is now healthy and well, and we would say to him, how on earth do you recognize it? But it is part of the capacity of a shepherd that he knows his sheep, and that the sheep know him. But of course, if you are acquainted with the biblical vocabulary, you will realize that the whole idea of one person knowing another is not merely a matter of acquaintance or of a kind of normal personal relationship.

The idea of interpersonal knowledge, the one of another in scripture, is something that goes to the deepest possible level of life. It is frequently used of what the Bible is speaking about when it says, Adam knew his wife Eve. It is speaking of the most intimate, profound relationship that you could begin to think of, and certainly that is what Jesus is reflecting when he says, my sheep know me and I know them.

But it is even something infinitely deeper than that. When Jesus says in verse 15, I know my sheep and my sheep know me just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. Now, do you see what Jesus is saying? He is saying it is the mark of Christ's sheep that they have a communion with me that is akin to the communion that I have with the Father and the Father has with me.

Now, that is the most amazing thing if you begin to grasp, as we can only grasp, the very edges of that truth. We cannot really fathom with the equipment we have in this world what that means, beloved, but it is something infinitely glorious that Christ's sheep are intended by him to have such communion with him that is only paralleled by the communion of the Father with the Son. Now, let me say to you this evening that that is intended by God to be the great mark of being part of Christ's flock.

It is that we know him. It is not surprising, therefore, is it, that you find the apostle when he is expressing the great ambition of his life doing it in this kind of language. He says, I count everything but loss.

I regard it as rubbish in order that I may know him. That's the consuming passion of his life. It is nothing by comparison with the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.

Now, we need to pause for a moment and ask ourselves, is that the great distinguishing mark of my life, that I know Christ like that? Am I recognized as one of Christ's sheep because I have saving faith, because I have an eagerness to hear Christ's voice, because I know him? And by contrast, do I ever find--I found myself asking this as I was reading this passage coming over in the plane--do I ever find myself crying out to God as the Lord Jesus cried out to him in John 17 in his great high priestly prayer, O righteous Father, the world has not known thee? Now, to Jesus, clearly, that was the greatest anguish that he could ever contemplate. And that is the world's tragedy this evening, not that it is threatened by all kinds of disaster. The world's greatest tragedy is that it does not know God.

And that's true of our comfortable, well-integrated neighbors, as well as the people whose need is more public and obvious. And it is a mark of Christ's sheep that they know him. Now, here's the fourth mark of Christ's sheep.

Verse 27, they follow him. My sheep listen to my voice. I know them, and they follow me.

Now, that is really very simple. What he is saying is the fourth mark of Christ's sheep is that they do what I tell them. They go where I lead them.

Their life is distinguished by this above all other things, that they follow me. Martin Luther says the sheep, though the most simple creature, is superior to all animals in this, that as soon as he hears his shepherd's voice, he will follow no other. I remember very vividly as a small boy, my family belonged to Galloway in the southwest of Scotland.

And at the beginning of our school holidays, my brother and I were shipped off immediately to Galloway to my grandparents. And they had a farm, and we met all kinds of extraordinarily interesting people. One was a sheep farmer, a friend of my grandfather, and he used to take us up onto the hill.

And I remember what seemed to me an extraordinarily cruel thing that he was doing one day. He was marking the ear of one of his sheep and taking what seemed to me a very substantial kind of V-shape out of the top of the ear of the sheep. And when we remonstrated with him, my brother and I being defenders of animals, he said, ah, but that's how I know him.

He said, sit down there, sit down there. He was one of these men you did not disobey. And we sat down on the rock.

And he said, now listen to this boys. Christ's sheep have two marks. I've never forgotten this.

One in the ear and another in the foot. They listen to his voice, and they walk in his ways. Now don't forget that.

So I went straight back home and said to my grandmother, do you know how many marks Christ's sheep have, Granny? And she said, what on earth are you talking about? You've been with that old man again. But I came across it the other day in an old journal of my brother's. My brother led me to Christ before he died, and my mother and my father, and I remember seeing it in his journal.

Christ's sheep have two marks, one in the ear and one in the foot. They hear his voice, and they walk in his ways. That's how you know them.

So there are the evidences of being Christ's sheep. Saving faith, a hearing ear, a knowledge of Christ, and moral obedience. Now if that is how we may know Christ's sheep, how can you know that they will never perish? That's the second issue, is it not? Do you remember? How do we know Christ's sheep? How do we know that they will never perish? And there are four reasons that Jesus gives us.

You will notice that this is just another way of having a sermon that's got eight points, when all the time you thought that it just had two. But here are Jesus' four reasons. Let me tell you them as briefly as I can.

The first is undoubtedly the nature of the sacrifice Christ has offered for them. Look at verses 14 and 15 with me. I am the good shepherd, I know my sheep, and my sheep know me just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father.

That is the relationship. And I lay down my life for the sheep. Now more than that, he lays down his life for the sheep.

Now the point about that, of course, is that the sheep are insecure. They are in danger. There is the possibility of these sheep being devoured by wild animals or by hirelings.

And the reason that the good shepherd is ready to give his life for the sheep is simply that he wants to save them from their insecurity. He gives his life in order that he might secure their lives. And the sacrifice that the shepherd makes is the guarantee that the sheep will be secure.

Now that is the principal reason, I believe, that we may know that Christ's sheep will never perish because Christ has dealt with the enemy who would destroy them. And in his death, he has borne everything upon his own spotless soul that would endanger the sheep's eternal well-being. And this is the first great reason that we may know that Christ has secured his sheep eternally.

That's why the Apostle Paul says in that great eighth chapter of Romans, when he describes what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, he says, who then will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus has died. More than that, he has been raised to life.

He is at the right hand of God. And if Christ Jesus has died, there is no possibility of condemnation. Now, my dear friends, that is the great secret of the security of the believer.

My security rests in the fact that Jesus Christ, in his death, has done everything that was necessary to secure my eternal well-being. And there is nothing left that needs to be done. Here's the second reason we may know that Christ's sheep will never perish.

It lies in the nature of the gift Christ has given them. Look at verse 28. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.

So, what he gives is eternal life. Now, that is, of course, spiritual life, divine life. But here it is described as eternal life.

And by its very definition, eternal life can never cease. Is that not true? If Christ has given you eternal life, and you can lose it, it ceases to be eternal. By its very definition, eternal life makes you secure for all

eternity.

And if God implants that eternal life in your soul, by definition, it is there for all eternity. So says Jesus, I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. What we have, therefore, now, as children of God, is eternal life.

God has clearly, infinitely more to reveal to us and to give to us when he brings us to glory. But the verse of that great hymn is still true, which says of those who are in glory, more happy, but not more secure, the glorified spirits in heaven. The only difference between believers who are in glory this evening and ourselves lies not in their security and a question mark over ours.

It lies in their happiness, in their enjoyment of the infinite wonders of the presence of the Savior. But their security is no greater than ours. So the nature of Christ's gift to us guarantees that we shall never perish.

And the third reason we may be sure that they will not perish is the nature of Jesus' promise. In verse 28, I give them eternal life. Now, don't miss this.

And they shall never perish. Notice what Jesus is saying. He is not saying God's people will never be in trouble.

He is not saying his sheep will not be harassed by their enemies. But he is saying that they will never, ever perish. They are eternally secure.

Backslide, they may. Disobey God, they may. Fall into unfaithfulness, they may.

But perish, they never shall. That is what Jesus is saying. And that is not the mere promise of a fallible man.

It is the word of him who is revealed to us in the book of Revelation as the faithful and the true one who cannot lie. It is the word of him who said heaven and earth may pass away, but my word will never pass away. So let the heavens fall, let the earth remove, but God's people will never perish because Christ has promised it.

And when you are prone to doubt it, you need to inquire whether you would rather take the word of the Son of God or believe your own heart or the devil's lies. Now here is the last of the four reasons that we know that Christ's sheep will never perish. And it is not only the nature of Jesus' promise and the nature of the gift he gives and the nature of the sacrifice he has made.

The fourth reason is the very nature of the Godhead itself. Do you notice how in verse 28 Jesus adds something to his assurance? They cannot be plucked out of my hand. My Father, he says, who has given them to me.

Did you know that that's how you became Christ's? That God the Father gave you to Christ as his bride? And you became God the Father's possession by his grace and he gave you to Christ. Now Jesus says, my Father who has given them to me is greater than all, there is none so great as he and no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.

Now there is a unity in the Godhead which Jesus speaks of very frequently in John's gospel. The oneness of the Father and the Son within the Godhead is one of the central elements in his teaching about the Trinity. But in this instance, that unity is engaged in a combined operation to prevent Christ's sheep from

perishing.

The Father and the Son together combine in order to secure the eternal well-being of Christ's sheep. No one can snatch them from my hand, he says, but the Father is greater than all and no one can snatch them from my Father's hand. So do you see what the Lord Jesus is saying? He is, as it were, taking his own hand and placing it around the believer and then telling us that the Father's hand is around that and that there is a security there between the Father and the Son that it is impossible to breach.

For heaven or earth or hell, it is impossible. Now you see the point, do you? I think what the Lord Jesus is saying to us is God the Father who has created the universe and called the stars into being and made the sun and the moon, who has formed the mountains and created the sea, who has been the architect of all the glory of the creation, who has made me and given me life and breath and all things. He the creator of the ends of the earth has me in his hand so I can never doubt his power not only to save but to keep me.

Ah, but if I am ever likely to doubt his love, I have to recognize that these hands that hold me are not only the creative hands of the Father but the pierced hands of the Redeemer and the blood of Jesus Christ guarantees to us what the apostle says in that passage last night, nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, nothing, because the eternal God has laid hold upon us and has given us his word into the bargain. In greater days in Scotland there was an old minister called John Brown who ministered in Haddington in East Lothian, the beautiful part of the eastern side of the Scottish coastland, and John Brown had a remarkable ministry in that little town. He had some wonderfully gracious ladies, elderly ladies who had been brought to faith later in life.

He was visiting one of them one day and she was dying and he said to her as he sat by her bedside, they had talked together, they had even laughed together, and he said to her, Jeannie, what would you say if at the last God let you perish? And she opened both her eyes and said, oh minister, minister, that could never be, and he wanted her to tell him, so he coaxed her a little, why not, he said, and he was expecting some profound theological reply because some of these old Scots had some great theology, and she said to him, it could never be because he would have more to lose than I. What do you mean, said Brown? Well, she said, I would just lose my soul, but he would lose his name and his character, and that is unchanging. I think it's time you went, she said, and they went thanking God for someone who had grasped such a truth. Let us pray together.

Our great God and Father, we worship and adore you, that you are the faithful and true shepherd of your people. We bless you that you will never, ever let us go. We pray that we may rest in the glory of a full salvation through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer.

Amen.

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