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Series: The Gospel of John
Message: Safe in His Hands

Transcribed Message
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John 10:19-39

Turn in your Bibles this morning to the book and to the chapter that is one of the most familiar metaphors in all of Scripture. Not only is it one of the most familiar metaphors in all of Scripture, it gives to us what might very well be the clearest teaching in all the Bible regarding the security of the believer. And, of course, you know it's John chapter 10, and you know it's verses 28 and 29. We're going to look at all these because in this chapter, as we've seen, this is the great metaphor of Jesus being the good shepherd. And one of the things that the shepherd does, he loves and he cares for, he provides for, and he keeps his sheep safe. And that's what John's going to bring before us this morning. Our big idea, the truth, this wonderful truth of the security that we enjoy in Christ does not rest on what we do. It rests solely on who our shepherd is and what, in fact, he has done for us.

A quick review as we come back to this 10th chapter, I remind you again, we've seen this before. It's a word we're not all that familiar with, but this is an *inclusio* again. And an *inclusio* is just simply a literary device in which the writer begins something at the beginning of a passage, and then he closes it out with that same theme. And that's what we have here in these sections of verses that we've been looking at. Going back to chapter 9 and verse 40 and 41, John talked about the response of the religious leaders to Jesus and how they were in this state of unbelief. And then as you come into the 10th chapter in verses 19 to 21, he basically brings that same truth forward, the blindness of the religious leaders, and then everything in between those two opening and closing comments feeds into that narrative. So that's coming to this 19th and 21st verse of chapter 10.

Then we've seen this wonderful metaphor about the shepherd, a good shepherd, the shepherd who is like no other shepherd. And I mentioned last Sunday, and we just put it out there briefly, that we have these three adjectives that modify this word shepherd in

the New Testament. Obviously, in John chapter 10, Jesus says, I'm the good shepherd. He's the good shepherd, he says, because he lays down his life for the sheep. He does it willingly. He does it voluntarily. He lays down his life for us. We talked about the fact of a vicarious, substitutionary, atoning death. It is Jesus literally taking our place and being the sufficient sacrifice for our sin.

But he's not just the good shepherd. He's also the great shepherd. That takes us into the present. In Hebrews chapter 13 verse 20, the writer of Hebrews talks about the fact that this good shepherd is also the great shepherd, and he's been raised from the dead. He ever lives to make intercession for us. There is a sense in which Jesus, as the great shepherd, is interceding for us in the present.

And then the third one is in 1 Peter 5:4. And in 1 Peter 5:4, Jesus is presented as the chief shepherd. The one who is chief over all. And that, of course, looks forward to his return and his coming again. So, we have all of those that we see regarding the good shepherd, the great shepherd, and the chief shepherd.

Well then, as we saw, we have this response that likes all the others. So, this *inclusio* ends in chapter 10, verses 19 to 21, and the response of the leaders is just like it has been all through Jesus' ministry. It is a response of division. On the one hand, you have those that say, he has a demon. Which is just simply, in that culture and time, not only underscoring the demonic side, but also just to focus on the fact that he's crazy. He's out of his mind. And then, of course, John says, there were those who believed. And so, you have these differing responses to the life of our Lord. It takes us right, really, to what C.S. Lewis has said when he talked about the fact Jesus is either Lord or he's a lunatic, right? To say the things that Jesus has said, he's either who he said he is or he has lost his mind. And that's really kind of drawn right out of a passage like this. He's either a madman or he's the Son of God. He's either Lord of lords and King of kings, or he literally is a lunatic. So, you can be sure. That's what we look at this morning. You can be sure.

We come in verses 22 and 23, just John giving us the background, and so let's read those verses. At the time of the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem, it was winter.

And Jesus was walking in the temple in the colonnade of Solomon. So, there are three things that John brings to us here, just in introducing this background. And the first one is when this happens. Remember, we've talked often about the fact that John loves to give these time stamps. He loves to tell us when there's a change in a time and we need to be aware that the calendar has changed. So here we are, again in verse 22, he says, at that time, which is the Feast of Dedication, this takes place and it was winter. John is cluing us into this. There is a time gap between these verses. So, when you look back at verse 21 and then go to verse 22, there's a time gap of about 10 weeks. We were back in a point of time when it was the Feast of Tabernacles, and that takes place in the fall. Well, now John says we're at the Feast of Dedication and it is winter. And so, we've got a time gap between verses 21 and 22. We are about three months away from the cross. So, we are getting closer to the end of Jesus's earthly life.

The break in time, however, does not break the theme of the Good Shepherd. This story and this picture, this metaphor continues of Jesus being the shepherd. What is in view? John tells us it is the Feast of Dedication. And as I just mentioned, the Feast of Tabernacles takes place in the fall. Now we're at the Feast of Dedication. If we turn into the Old Testament and we look up the Feast of Dedication, what do we find? We don't find anything. Because there is no Feast of Dedication in the Old Testament. The Feast of Dedication started in what is called the intertestamental period. With the end of Malachi's prophecy, we enter a period of 400 years of silence in which God doesn't speak to his people. Four hundred years of silence before Jesus comes on the scene. In that 400-year period, obviously, history moves on, doesn't it?

The Feast of Dedication was a celebration that occurred and began about 164-165 when the Maccabees defeated the Seleucids. Remember Antiochus Epiphanes, an evil, evil ruler, comes to Jerusalem in anger. He literally sacrifices a pig on the altar in the temple and just profanes the temple, which is kind of a foreshadowing of what's going to come yet in the future. But when the Maccabees defeated Antiochus, they began this feast called the Feast of Dedication and that was what is being celebrated here. Today in more

modern language, it's Hanukkah. And so that is what they are remembering, this victory over the Seleucids.

Where does this all happen? It happens, John says, at Jerusalem. Jesus is back in Jerusalem. It's very possible that he left Jerusalem for this period of time and now he's back again. He's at the temple. This celebration is going on. Jesus, like many other rabbis, would be walking around the temple grounds and people would come to hear the teaching of the rabbi and that's what we'll see happens here again. So, Jesus is back, but the saga continues very much like it was before.

Let's look at that. And we begin in verse 24 with really the obstinance of unbelief. The obstinance of unbelief. 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. Now remember, again, we've said this before. When we read those words, the Jews, that's not pejorative, even though liberal scholarship often says John was anti-Semitic because he references this group of people in this way. But it's not that at all. When he talks about the Jews, he's talking about the religious leaders. And he's saying this about the religious leaders.

There are no doubt other people in the crowd as well, but John tells us that they gathered. See that? So, the Jews gathered around him. Sounds like a nice time, doesn't it? Let's all gather together. Let's gather together. But it's a word that has a little more intensity to it that let's just gather together to ask the Lord's blessing. That's a song, isn't it? Well, this is not exactly what was happening. It's a little bit more like this picture. And Jesus is kind of in the middle there somewhere. And I don't know where he is, but there was a throng of people. They are pressing in. That is the idea of this word gathered. They're surrounding him because they have this question for him, don't they? It really is an ironic question and it's a misleading one.

Look at it in this way. It's ironic on a lot of different levels. When they say to him, how long will you keep us in suspense? If you're the Christ, tell us plainly. It's ironic because this is the same question you remember back in the opening first chapter of the Gospel of John. When the religious leaders sent the contingent out to John the Baptist, what did they say to him? Who are you? Who are you? What is it that you're doing

Everybody's coming out here to hear you and see you and be baptized by you. Who are you? And so here we are, ironically, at this point, they're asking Jesus the same question.

Jesus has done everything to this point, but say, I am the Messiah. And I know it often comes to our mind as to why didn't Jesus at some of these points just come out and say, I am the Messiah. We know the reason is because there was such a false hope and a false idea about what the Messiah was going to do and because their idea of the Messiah was so wrapped in political language and military victory that there was no way Jesus was going to link their idea of the Messiah with his announcement that I am the Messiah. So, he took a totally different approach.

When they say to him here, why don't you just tell us? Well, of course he does say that to the woman at the well, doesn't he? In that private conversation, he lets her know, this is the one that you're talking to. He does it to the man who was born blind. He says, you're seeing him now. I am the son of man. And so in those private conversations he does.

But you know what Jesus has done often? He has often said those words that we're familiar with, *ego eimi*, I am. That phrase that takes us back to Exodus chapter 3 and verse 14, when Moses is getting ready to be sent by God down to Egypt to deliver the people, and remember Moses is afraid and he's anxious and he doesn't really want to take the assignment. And one of the things that comes out of his mouth is, well, who am I even going to say has sent me? You know, I just show up and who am I supposed to say sent me down here? And what does God say? God says, you just say, I am who I am has sent me unto you. Which is just to say, God has sent me unto you. So, every time Jesus said, *ego eimi*, I am the bread of life. I am the light. I am the door. I am the good shepherd. He said before Abraham was, I am, right? And every time Jesus said, *ego eimi*, it was like a bomb went off because he was in effect saying I am the son of God. I am the one that you have been waiting for and anticipating. So, it's not like he hasn't said anything to help them, right?

It's not just ironic to me, but it's a very misleading question. When they press him for, why don't you just come out and tell us? Tell us that you're the Christ. Tell us that you're the Messiah. What do they really want from him if he were to say that? They want to

then accuse him of blasphemy. And so, anyone who would stand before them who looks like Jesus looked, right? He looked like a man. There wasn't anything about him, Isaiah said, that would cause anybody to think this is God. No, he looked like a man. And so he was really being pulled into this with a misleading question. Yeah, tell us that you're the son of God. Tell us that you're the Messiah and we will kill you for blasphemy. So, Jesus knows their hearts, doesn't he?

And look at the clarity of truth that Jesus brings to them. The clarity of truth. It's plain enough to see. Verse 25, 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. Jesus doesn't say, don't you guys remember when I held the press conference and I said I'm the son of God? Don't you guys remember when all the press was there and I said, I'm here to announce today I am the Messiah of Israel. Pay attention. This is very important. No, of course not. He didn't do that. But what did he do?

How could anyone not conclude that Jesus was the Messiah? Not by the words that he spoke alone, although there certainly was enough there, but it was by the works that he did. That's what he says. Jesus says my works are my words. Remember back in chapter 3 and verse 2, when Nicodemus meets with him at night, Nicodemus is one of these Jews. He's one of these religious leaders. And what does Nicodemus come to him and say? He basically says, I don't know exactly what's going on, but I know this, that the things that you do, nobody could do if they weren't sent from God. Now that was early on in Jesus' ministry that one of these religious leaders had already concluded and acknowledged that the things that Jesus is doing point to one thing. This man must be from God. So that's what Jesus points them to here. Everything the Old Testament said the Messiah would do, Jesus has done. He's going to open the eyes of the blind. He's going to open the ears of those who can't hear. He's going to open the mouths of those who can't speak. He's going to raise people who are dead back to life. All those things are the works of Jesus. And he says those works are in fact my words to you in the sense that they illustrate who I am. I am the Christ.

Just think back when John the Baptist finds himself in prison and he's going through this time of severe doubt as to who it is that Jesus really is. It's a fascinating picture into the life of John the Baptist at that moment, isn't it? And Jesus sends John's disciples back to John and says, you just go and tell John about all the things that you're seeing that I'm doing. And that will affirm to him that I am who I say I am. I'm the Christ. I am the Messiah. The function of Jesus' miracles wasn't just to do supernatural things. The function of Jesus' miracles wasn't just a physical function of giving sight and speech and hearing and life. It was to bear witness to the truth that he is the Messiah, that he's the Son of God, that he's the sent one of God.

So, here's the question. With all that truth in front of them, how is it that they don't believe? How do they not understand? How do they not believe? Let me personalize it. How is it that on any given Sunday, people sit in this auditorium and they hear God's word and they hear the gospel and they don't believe? What is it that's going on when one person hears the gospel and believes and the person sitting right next to him hears the same gospel and doesn't believe? Well, Jesus speaks to that. Verse 26, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep.

Now what we want Jesus to say at this point? What we want Jesus to say is something like the reason they don't believe is they just don't get it yet. The reason they don't believe is they just need a little more time. The reason they don't believe is they just need to hear it again. We would even probably be okay, although this is a little harsh, we maybe would even be okay if he said they're just not the sharpest knives in the drawer. I mean, they just don't get it. It's right there in front of them, but that's not what Jesus says.

What Jesus actually says, let me read again. But you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. On any level, that is a startling statement. But you do not believe because you are not my sheep. We want Jesus to say, you're not of my flock because you don't believe. That's what we want him to say. You're not of my flock because you haven't believed yet. But that's not what he says. Jesus says, you don't believe because you're not of my flock.

Have we heard anything like that before? Well, we have if you've been here, because if you turn back a couple of pages to the sixth chapter in verse 43, Jesus answered them, do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day. And then look over at verse 65. There Jesus says, and he said, this is why I told you, that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.

This is called the doctrine of divine election. And that's disturbing to some people, and it makes some people uncomfortable and even troubled. But I always say this, when we come to places in the Bible where this truth is put before us, I simply say this, if you believe your Bible, you believe in the doctrine of election. Now, you may not believe the doctrine of election the way I believe it or the way somebody else believes it, but I'm saying to you this morning, if you believe this book is the word of God, and if you believe that God has spoken to his church in this book, then you believe the doctrine of election. The doctrine of election begins in the book of Genesis, and it ends in the book of Revelation, and it is in almost all books in between.

It is in Genesis chapter 12 that God selects a man who is a Gentile named Abraham, who is an idolater, and says, Abraham, you're going to be my man. And you're going to be the father of a great nation. And all the nations of the earth are going to be blessed through you. And Abraham, I'm picking you because you are an incredibly great guy. And I just can't think of anybody on the earth that is better than you. Well, absolutely not. His family was a family of idolaters. God simply said, you're my man. He did the same thing in the national sense with Israel, of course, that Israel would be God's chosen people to the world, to bring the gospel to the world. We see this all the way through.

Here's all I want to say about this, because this is not the focus of our whole morning here, but I want to say two things. First, the invitation to come and believe is extended to everybody. The gospel is extended to everyone. It is freely offered to all. That message can't be missed as you read your Bible. All who desire to come are going to come. And they will not be turned away. There isn't going to be anybody who's going to say, I wanted to come, but I couldn't. They wouldn't let me come. No, no, that is not what the

Bible teaches. From the human viewpoint, we become God's sheep by believing. That's what the whole gospel of John is written to tell us. I've written these things, John said, so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing, have life in his name. So, the message from the human viewpoint is you become one of God's sheep by believing.

From the divine viewpoint, we believe because we have been chosen to be his sheep. And that's the picture that the scriptures give. Is there mystery there? Absolutely there is. Am I willing to walk into that mystery? I am. Am I willing to submit to the fact that God is wiser, greater, more immense, more infinite than I could ever imagine? Yes, I am. And so, I simply take God at his word.

What this doctrine does, it underscores our inability. It underscores our inability to come to God of our own initiative. It is always of God's calling. It is always of God's grace. It strips away all the pretense of self-righteousness and human effort. And that really becomes the rub for most people.

So, what does this say? It brings us then to the certainty of eternal security. In verses 27, 28, and 29, you just need to mark down in your mind and in your Bible, this is the central passage regarding the eternal security of the believer. And so, I want to start off by just stating this doctrine so that we all understand what we're talking about, and I want to just define it for you in this way. Eternal security means that those who have been saved by God's grace through faith in Christ alone will never, for any reason, be in danger of God's condemnation or loss of salvation.

Now, I understand it's possible for some of you to have grown up in a church setting where that statement was viewed as heresy, that it was viewed as being simply wrong, but I believe this is what the Bible teaches, and I want us to see why that is true. Because the most important question that we always face with any of these doctrines is, what does the Bible say? And so, let's look and see.

The doctrine supported. We're going to stay in John 10. I've put on your outline, even though the print is rather small, but I wanted to get as many passages as I could, and then on your outline there, you can see a lot of these other verses where you can go to and see

this same doctrine supported. But, beginning in verse 27, my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand.

Seven truths from these three verses that underscore the truth of being eternally secure. The first one is simply the kind of summary of these verses. It is to say, Jesus is the one responsible. Jesus is the one responsible. When you read these verses, it's all about the shepherd. The focus is not on you, and it's not on me. The focus is on the shepherd. It's the shepherd's job to care for the sheep. It's the shepherd's job to feed the sheep. It's the shepherd's job to keep the sheep safe. He's the one who said that we will hear his voice, and we will follow him, and he will give eternal life. So we begin with the right focus, and the right perspective. It's like what Paul says in Philippians chapter one, he who has begun a good work in you, he is the one who will continue it until the day of Jesus Christ. So, the focus of the doctrine of security is not me hanging on to God, it is God hanging on to me in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now notice secondly, it speaks about the kind of life given. The kind of life that is given, it's called what? It's called eternal life. That's what it's called, eternal life. How long is eternal life? The last I looked, eternal life is forever. It's life that is without end. When does eternity end? It never ends. So if we've been given this gift of eternal life. Look, eternal life is forever. It's life that is without end. When does eternity end? It never ends. So, if we've been given this gift of eternal life, it by definition is not temporal. It's not for a period of time. If it's not eternal, then Jesus gave it the wrong name. He should not have said, I give you eternal life. He should have said something like, I give you temporary life. I give you life as long as you hold on to it. I give you a chance at anything other than this bold statement that I give you eternal life because if it's not eternal life, then Jesus misspoke.

Thirdly, it is received without merit, and it is undeserved. That's the point of the beginning of verse 28. I give them. It's a gift, isn't it? You didn't earn eternal life. It was given as a gift. It's not something you did. It's something that was done for you. You don't retain it. You don't hold on to it. If you earned your salvation, I could fully understand your having

to keep earning it and keep holding on to it. But you didn't earn it. You didn't work for it. It was given to you as a gift and it was given to you as a gift by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Number four, there's a double negative here in this 28th verse. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. What is the one thing that Jesus says will never happen to the sheep? They will never perish. They will never perish. It really can't be said any stronger in the Greek text than the way it is said here. That's why I've referred to this as a double negative. So, if we just took the Greek text and did a literal translation, it would read like this. They will never, no, by no means ever perish. Now the only thing that they could have added was *me genoita*. They could have put that at the end of that and said it ain't going to happen. It's never going to happen, right? No way, no chance. How strange again would it be for Jesus to say this, that no sheep will ever perish if there were going to be some sheep who perish. I don't think he would say that.

Number five, we're in the hand of the Son. We're in the hand of the Son. The last part of verse 28, no one will snatch them out of my hand. The word snatch is the same word in 1 Thessalonians 4.17 when it talks about the church being raptured and snatched away at the end time and that's the same word here. Jesus makes it very clear that we are in his hand and he's holding us in his hand. This is the sovereign Son of God holding us in his hand.

Now what's the thing that we often hear when people see this verse and they're not sure that it means what it seems to be saying? They say, well, okay, I understand that we're in his hand and he's got us, but what if I crawl out of his hand? Okay, somebody can't snatch me away from him. I get that, but I can crawl out of his hand. Really? Seriously? You can crawl out of his hand. You are united with Christ. You are in union with Christ. You are one with him. You're one of the fingers now. You're in his hand, and he's got you by virtue of the fact that you belong to him. That's what he keeps saying over and over in this passage, right? That you are his. These are my sheep. He's got you in his hand.

And then notice number six, a gift from the Father to the Son. Verse 29, my Father who has given them to me. Now how cool is that? How cool is that? That we're in the hand of the Son and then we have this idea of being a gift from the Father. A gift from the Father,

right? To the Son. I just love that idea. We are a gift from the Father to the Son. What an amazing truth that is, right? There's no way the Son is going to lose you. Can you imagine that interchange? The Father saying to the Son, hey, Son, have you seen Carlon lately? And the Son saying, you know what? I haven't. I kind of lost track. I don't know where he is. No, we have Jesus in the parable of the shepherd going out and seeking after, don't we? He cares for us. We're a gift to him.

And then the last one, the seventh one, in the hand of the Father. Last part of that 29th verse. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. This unified determination that we are in the Father and the Son. Once a sheep, we're always a sheep. We're in the hand of the Son. The visual picture is then the Father's hand is over the hand of the Son. There's no one getting out.

And then that 30th verse, we're going to look at that further next week, Lord willing. But Jesus says, I and the Father are one. This picture of unity.

So, what do we take away? I want to say this. There is much that a believer can lose by disobedience. But everlasting life is not one of them. The life that Jesus gives us is now and it's forever. It is so important that we understand that. It's not just that you know that you have eternal life, but that you know how it is that you receive that eternal life. That's what we want to be clear as we close this morning. Not just that we know we have it, but I want you to understand and know how it is that we receive it. John repeats it over and over 98 times in his gospel. It is by believing, isn't it? He does not say if you live a good life, you will have eternal life. He does not say if you go to church every Sunday, you'll have eternal life. He does not say if you're baptized in the right way or go to the right church, you'll have eternal life. He doesn't say if you're as good a neighbor as you can be, you'll have eternal life.

Listen, my friend. He does not say if you raise your hand at a meeting, you'll have eternal life. He does not say if you go forward at a meeting, you'll have eternal life. He does not say if you invite Jesus into your heart, you have eternal life. Those are all things that we have, in a sense, added to this truth. There isn't anything inherently wrong in any of those things, but this is why I always say to parents, when you're explaining the gospel to your

children, and part of the language that we use, and I understand why this has happened, is we want them to invite Jesus into their heart. Okay, but you make sure that as they progress and grow in that wisdom, that they understand fundamentally what they need and what they have to do is they have to believe.

And what do they have to believe? They have to believe what God says about His Son, and they have to believe what God says about us. And what God says about us is all of us have sinned, and what God says about all of us is sin has separated us from Him. And what He says about His Son is that His Son, Jesus, is very God of very God, and He came to this earth and took upon the form of a man specifically to fulfill the mission of dying on the cross in my place and yours, in payment for my sin and yours. And if I believe that, then He says, I give you the gift of eternal life. That's all that John calls on us to do. But we have to believe what it is that God has said.

Let's pray. Father God, as we close again, as we do every Sunday, we call out to you and ask that you would open the heart of anyone here this morning who has not yet believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that in believing has life in your name. Lord, we pray to that end that your Holy Spirit will do that good work. And Father, for those of us who have trusted Jesus as our Savior, let us rejoice in this amazing truth of the security of our salvation forever and ever and ever. And let us live a life of gratitude and service to you all our days. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.