



The Power of Being a Sheep

By Pastor Ken Patterson

Introduction: The following lesson is intended to ensure that readers have a clear understanding of the surety of their salvation which comes through Jesus Christ. The concept of once saved always saved may be new to some. The idea is that when a person receives salvation, through faith, they have solidified their eternal future in Heaven. The transaction of paying the price for sin has been met through a substitutionary death. Jesus died for us and now we do not have to die. Now, the issue will be, how do we live with the comfort of knowing that we are safe? All of the messages which come at us tend to imply that we need to keep worrying about our future or that we need to go back and be saved again if we have messed up. This is not what Jesus taught. Rather, He tells us in John 10:28-29 that if we are in the Father's hand, we are safe and no one can pluck us out. In other words, we have protection now and in the future because we are His sheep!

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

1. Explain the concept of once saved always saved.
2. Explain how salvation covers past, present, and future sins even if a person does not mature as a Christian.

Key Verses: John 10: 22-30, Romans 3: 23, Romans 6: 23

In John 10, Jesus taught in the Jewish synagogue. The courtyard area was a place where people gathered and as He taught, the question of His identity often arose. As Biblical readers, it is important to understand that the concept of a Messiah

(The anointed one of God) was well known to Jewish people. They were looking for the Messiah to come. Jesus, however, did not fit the concept of what they were looking for in a Messiah. He did not come as a King like David. He did not come as a prophet speaking what He understood of scripture. He came speaking as God whose kingdom was not to be established here. This caused great anger among the religious leaders and put Jesus at risk because Jewish law dictated that false prophets and messiahs should be killed (Deuteronomy 13: 1-5). This issue was the justification the Jewish leaders had for killing Jesus. The question of Jesus' identity once again was part of the conversation and in the verses of the current lesson, Jesus describes the type of savior He was.

First, Jesus described Himself as a shepherd who speaks and a shepherd who knows his sheep. This concept of Jesus knowing the sheep is key to our certainty of salvation. The concept is that Jesus knows those who are His. Jesus is speaking of people who have become His disciples (followers and learners). To be His requires two choices. The first choice was God's. God so loved the world (John 3: 16) that he chose everyone to be saved. Everyone, without any exclusion, has been chosen by God to be saved. Salvation is the position of being free from paying the price/penalty of sin we all owe (Romans 3:23 and Romans 6: 23). The second choice is the one that people make to be saved. Those who accept Jesus by faith are the whosoever believeth in Him shall be saved (John 3: 16). They have heard Jesus' message to come and have then chosen to respond to the call of salvation. As a committed "sheep" we then follow the behaviors He expects. We do not simply hear Jesus' words; we also follow His teachings. Those who are known by Jesus are those who choose to be known as His sheep.

Secondly, Jesus clearly states that those who are His sheep are given eternal life, shall never perish, and cannot be snatched from His hand. Notice the progression of the thought. If one becomes a sheep of Jesus' there is an eternality given. To clarify the thought, Jesus explains that this eternal life is one where there is no perishing. The total thought is wrapped in Jesus next phrase which states that no one can snatch or take them away out of His hand. This metaphor of being held in Jesus' hand implies that if a person is saved by faith from "death" and "perishing" there is nothing or no one who can take them back to their former state of receiving "death" or "perishing." A person can have confidence in their salvation because Jesus states that once you are in His hand you are in His hand for good!

Third, Jesus elaborates on the power of one's safety by saying that above His hands are the Father's hands and there is no possibility to snatch people out of that set of hands. It is as if Jesus is saying that in the event of the impossible happening, where someone gets snatched out of His hands, the person is still safe because there is no ability to snatch someone out of the Father's hands. And, to make sure there is correct understanding, Jesus says there is unity between He and the Father. In the original language of this text, this would have been a clear indication that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.



BIG QUESTION: So, with this in mind, what does this mean for those who say they are saved but behave in sinful ways? Guess what, saved people still sin. This might be a shock to some of us who think that once we are saved our desires immediately change. This is not the case. Salvation is instantaneous but is also progressive. We are saved from the penalty of sin when we accept Jesus through faith. We are progressively saved from the power of sin over our daily lives as we continue as disciples. We will one day be delivered from the presence of sin when Christ returns. In each facet of salvation, once it happens, it is permanent. Thus, a person who truly accepts Christ but does not choose to grow simply remains an immature Christian. A fitting example can be found in 1 Corinthians 3: 1-3 where Paul writes to adult people who are behaving like infant Christians. They still had worldly behaviors and Paul chastises them (like a parent) telling them to grow up. They were saved but they had not matured beyond the infant level and as such were sinning (jealousy and quarrels). REMEMBER, we are not saved based on behavior. We are saved by faith in Jesus Christ alone. This means that you and I can be set from the penalty of sin and mess up every day and still have the assurance that we cannot be snatched from Jesus' hands or the Father's hands.

While this lesson does not lend itself to a deep discussion on sin after salvation, the writer Paul addresses this issue in Romans 6. After discussing that we are saved by grace in Romans 5, he challenges his readers by telling them that salvation by grace and not works does not give us freedom to take advantage of grace. In fact, one who keeps on sinning as if it does not matter is considered to have misunderstood grace. A true understanding of God's kindness and mercy towards mankind should elicit a behavioral response which is to work diligently to not sin.

This is done by giving oneself as a living sacrifice to God and saying I am yours (Romans 12: 1-2).

One can be saved and do even worse than be jealous and have quarrels with others. So, how does one know if their friend or child or neighbor is truly saved? To be clear, there are signs of change but the one who knows is Jesus. Remember, He is the shepherd. The sheep know His voice. He knows the sheep. WE ARE SHEEP. The responsibility of the sheep is to be a sheep and to follow. The responsibility of the shepherd is to be the shepherd and to know his flock. Since salvation is not ours to measure in someone else, we simply trust that we have done our job by sharing the gospel message clearly (Matthew 28: 19-20) and have helped people choose to be disciples of Christ (become a sheep). Then we who are more mature than the new Christians follow the mandate Jesus gave to Peter; Feed my sheep.

Questions for your consideration

1. How are you living as a sheep in Jesus' flock?
2. If someone were to ask you about the permanence of salvation, what would you tell them after studying this lesson?
3. How would you explain to someone the issue of being saved and still sinning?

Conclusion: This lesson was designed to solidify our understanding about salvation as taught by Jesus. You and I should feel confident in our position as sheep in Jesus' pasture. Further, we should know that we have a Good Shepherd who cares so much for us that He would lay down His life for us all!