

Armagh Baptist Church – Sunday 17th January 2010
‘The Unbelief of the Jews’
John ch.10:17-42

Introduction

So far in John’s Gospel we have come across four of the ‘I am’ sayings of Christ:

- ‘I am the Bread of Life’
- ‘I am the Light of the World’
- ‘I am the Gate for the Sheep’
- ‘I am the Good Shepherd’

We looked at that one last Sunday night.

So far in John ch.10 we have seen:

1. ‘The Gate for the Sheep’
2. ‘The Work of the Shepherd’
3. ‘The Security of the Sheep’

But it’s really the reaction to all of this teaching that we want to look at tonight. Increasingly over the last few chapters of John’s Gospel we have seen the Jews in Jerusalem responding with growing anger to all that Jesus has said and done. Particularly during the Feast of Tabernacles, that animosity has been growing very strong indeed. As we look at the second half of John ch.10 tonight we will see frustration with Jesus reaching boiling point as far as these Jewish religious leaders were concerned. But what sparked it all off? Well let’s take up the story from v.17. Here...

1. Jesus Predicts His Death (vs.17-19)

‘The reason my father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No-one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.’

These verses teach us clearly that when Jesus died on the cross, he did so voluntarily. He did so willingly. He died in absolute control of what was happening to him. He laid down his life of his own accord. He says that he had received this command or this authority to do so, to lay down his life and to take it up again, from his Father.

In other words this was all part of God’s great plan of salvation for lost mankind. From eternity past God knew that Adam and Eve were going to disobey him and fall into sin. But he had already chosen from before the foundation of the world, a Lamb that would be slain for the sins of the World, and that Lamb was the Lord Jesus Christ. He had come into this world as a baby to Bethlehem’s manger, born of the Virgin Mary – fully God and fully man at the same time. He had lived a spotless, perfect, sinless life, so now he was

the Lamb of God who was about to take away the sins of the World, by dying on that cross for our sins.

The fact that he was arrested by a company of Roman soldiers at the betrayal of Judas Iscariot, the fact that he was tried on trumped up charges by the Jewish religious leaders, and then by Herod and Pilate, and then sentenced to death as if he was a common criminal, must never take away from the fact that God was in control of all that was happening to his Son.

Indeed when Pilate sent out the soldiers on that Good Friday evening to break the legs of the 3 men hanging on the crosses, so that their bodies would not still be there during the Jewish Sabbath the next day, they found that Jesus was already dead, so they didn’t have to break his legs to hasten his death. This is further proof that Jesus laid down his life of his own accord. He chose the moment of his death. He cried out, ‘It is finished!’ when he decided to do so – not a moment too late, not a moment too soon, and then breathed his last. He laid down his life of his own accord, as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

But he also took it up again on the third day - on that Easter Sunday morning – before the women even got to the tomb to embalm his body, before the soldiers on guard could do anything about it, Jesus had risen from the dead, and the earthquake struck, breaking the seal and rolling back the stone, to leave the tomb open for us all to see in, that Jesus had risen – He was no longer there! It wouldn’t have mattered how many soldiers they placed on guard over that tomb, or how much wax they used to seal it, Jesus had authority to take his life up again and rise from the dead. That authority He had received from his Father. It was all part of God’s great plan of salvation. Jesus actually says here in v.17: *‘The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again.’* So they were in this together – the Father and the Son – in a bond of love – doing all that was necessary for your salvation and mine. So Jesus here predicts his death once again. But look at:

2. The First Reaction of the Jews (vs.20-24)

‘At these words the Jews were again divided. Many of them said, “He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?”

*But others said,
“These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon.
Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”*

So here they are again, instead of listening to the importance of what Jesus has just said to them about his death and resurrection, they are still trying to psycho-analyse him! For the second time some of them thought he was demon-possessed and raving mad. (They had said the same in John 7:20). But others realised by now that the miracle he performed in ch.9 when he restored sight to the man who had been born blind had at least ruled that

theory out. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind? He had done something **good** for this man; a demon would have done something **evil** for him instead!

Now in v.22 we're told that another Jewish Feast has come around. It was the Feast of Dedication or Hanukkah, and we're told it was winter.

The Feast of Dedication actually dates back to the year 165 BC. So it was not strictly an Old Testament Biblical Feast. Before 165 BC the Jewish people living in Judea were under the rule of the Greek kings of Damascus. During this time the Seleucid King, Antiochus Epiphanes (the one who gave his name to the 15 cities across the Empire called 'Antioch') took control of the Temple in Jerusalem and forced the Jewish people to abandon their worship of the Living and True God, and he made them bow down to all of the Greek gods instead. According to the records, this King, Antiochus IV, defiled the Temple in Jerusalem by sacrificing a pig on the altar and spilling its blood on the holy scrolls of Scripture.

As a result of the severe persecution and pagan oppression, a group of four Jewish brothers, led by Judas Maccabee, decided to raise up an army of religious freedom fighters. These men became known as the Maccabees. They fought for 3 years until they achieved a miraculous victory and deliverance from Greek control.

After regaining the Temple, it was cleansed by the Maccabees, cleared of all Greek idolatry, and the rededication of the Temple to the Lord took place in the year 165 BC, on the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev.

So Hanukkah received its name, the Feast of Dedication, because it celebrated the Maccabean victory over Greek oppression and the rededication of the temple. Judaism still celebrates it to this day even without a Temple! It was held this year from the 9th – 17th December, just before our Christmas.

It seems that Jesus stayed around Jerusalem for this Feast, because we're told in v.23 that he was again in the Temple area walking in Solomon's colonnade. The Jews gather around him again demanding an answer from him in v.24:

'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.'
It's then that Jesus goes on to talk about...

3. The Evidence for His Sheep (vs.25-30)

Jesus answers them straight in v.25: *'I did tell you, but you do not believe.'*

So Jesus believes he has already clearly answered their question during the Feast of Tabernacles which was 2 months earlier. He is the Messiah. He had already told them so. In fact more than that, he had given them plenty of evidence and proof that he had come from God – by his miracles:

'The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me' (v.25b).

So what was the problem then, why had the penny not dropped for these Jews? Well Jesus goes on to say,

'But you do not believe because you are not my sheep.' (v.26)

Why was that?

Because:

'My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no-one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.'

In other words, if these Jews had really been part of the flock of God, as they thought they were, they would have listened, they would have believed, and they would have responded to what He, the Son of God, was saying to them! The fact that they had now refused to believe in Him, proved that they were not part of the flock of God at all; they weren't counted among Christ's sheep, therefore they were lost!

In fact to use Matthew's terminology, if they weren't sheep, they were actually goats! Come that great judgement day they wouldn't hear those words, *'Come you who are blessed of my Father, enter into the joy of your Lord.'* Instead they would hear, *'Depart from me I never knew you!'* These people who thought they were leading Israel in the worship of the living and true God, weren't even right with God themselves, they were in fact lost!

But if **we** listen to Jesus' voice, and respond to his claims about himself, and believe in him and follow him as his sheep, then he will give **us** eternal life, we will never perish, and no-one and nothing can ever snatch us out of his hand! And if we're in his hand, then we are in the Father's hand too – and no-one can snatch us out of the hand of God. Jesus and the Father are one. So we have nothing to fear! We are eternally secure, if we are his sheep, by faith. But that last statement that Jesus said, *'I and the Father are one!'* got a:

4. Second Reaction from the Jews (v.31-33)

'Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him.' (v.31)

This was the second time they had tried to do that: (See John 8:59).

They are really angry with him now. Why? What was the cause of their anger? Because Jesus kept on claiming to be God! So Jesus confronts them in v.32:

*'I have shown you many great miracles from the Father.
For which of these do you stone me?'*

(v.33) They replied:

***'We are not stoning you for any of these...but for BLASPHEMY!
Because you, a mere man, claim to be God!'***

Now we have it. This is what has really got to them. This is what has made them so angry. They have got the point of what Jesus has been saying loud and clear – He has been claiming to be God; He has been claiming to be at one with God the Father (v.30). They have realised that all of his 'I am' sayings have been his claims to deity, taking the OT name for God for himself. That's why they wanted to stone him to death – because of blasphemy. So...

What evidence do we have for his Deity?

5. The Evidence for His Deity (vs.34-38)

Jesus does a strange thing here – he appeals to an obscure passage of OT Scripture - Psalm 82. (Please turn to it for a moment).

In v.1 it says,

'God presides in the great assembly; he gives judgement among the 'gods'.'

The Great Assembly was the Jewish Sanhedrin – their Ruling Council – like our High Court. And when it says, *'he gives judgement among the gods'* that was referring to the Judges over the people. So God referred to human judges as 'gods' with a little 'g'. By that he meant that they were in the place of God, as they sat in judgement over the people and decided on their cases (v.2-5).

But then he says it again in v.6:

'I said, 'You are 'gods'; you are all sons of the Most High.'

But you will die like mere men; you will fall like every other ruler.'

Again referring to these Judges over the people, God says again that they were 'gods' in the sense that they were all sons of the Most High God. They were sons of God (with a little 's'). They would die in the normal way, so he didn't mean they were eternal beings, like God, but they were still regarded as 'sons of God.'

The Psalm finishes with v.8 and a worldwide vision of God's people:

'Rise up, O God, judge the earth, for all the nations are your inheritance.'

But what was the point that Jesus was trying to make back in John 10:34-36? Well the point is if God could call the judges of his people in the Old Testament, 'sons of God' even though they were 'mere men' (v.6), then why did they have a problem with him calling himself 'God's Son' (capital 'S')? He was only a mere man in their eyes, yes, but he was far more than a mere man as far as his miracles were concerned! He was claiming to be the Son of God, not just a mere man, and the evidence he was pointing to was the miracles he had performed before their very eyes. (Read v.37-38). He wasn't claiming to have done these miracles in his own strength or by his own power; he was claiming he had been able to do them because He and the Father were one. The Father was working through him to perform these miracles. God had come among them in power, and yet they were rejecting Him. And they do it again:

6. The Third Reaction from the Jews (v.39)

'Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.'

For the third time in this chapter they react against Jesus: They thought he was demon-possessed and raving mad in v.19, they tried to stone him in v.31, and now again they try to seize him in v.39, but are again unable to do so.

What is going on here?

Well it is just as Jesus said back in vs.18:

'No-one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.

I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.

This command I received from my Father.'

They could try as hard as they might, but no-one would be able to seize Jesus, or touch one hair on his head, until God the Father said so, until his time had fully come, until it was time for Jesus to lay down his life for the sins of the world. Until then he was invincible. And so the chapter closes with...

7. Jesus Departs from Jerusalem (vs.40-42)

'Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptising in the early days. Here he stayed and many people came to him.'

According to John 1:28 John the Baptist had originally been baptising people at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, so this was just at the top of the Dead Sea where the Jordan River flows into it, just across from Jericho. This is where Jesus withdraws to. We're told that he stays there for some time, and many people came to see him there.

This was the place to which many people had gone out to John while he was preaching in the desert, *'Prepare the Way for the Lord'*. That's where people had come out to him from Jerusalem. Well it's as if Jesus does the exact same thing here now. He has gone out from Jerusalem to this desert place near the Jordan. He has preached his message in Jerusalem around the Temple Courts for the past two months. Now it's time for a response. Now he goes to the gate of the sheep-fold as it were, and he calls his own sheep by name and he waits to see what will happen.

Conclusion

And lo and behold, many people did come out to him there. (v.41).

And what were they saying?

They said, "Though John never performed a miraculous sign,

all that John said about this man was true."

In other words they have weighed up the evidence: They thought back to the days of John the Baptist's ministry when he had pointed to Jesus and said,

'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!'

They thought back to all the miracles that Jesus performed:

The Changing of the water into wine in Cana of Galilee,

The healing of the nobleman's son in Capernaum,

The Clearing of the Temple in Jerusalem,

The healing of the man by the pool of Bethesda, and the man born blind.

They have thought about all that Jesus has taught, and claimed to be...

And so in v.42 we read: ***'And in that place many believed in Jesus.'***

Have **you** weighed up the evidence for Jesus? **Will you now believe in Him?**

