

April 22, 2012

Living Out The Gospel In Real Life

The Unbroken Word

John 10:22 – 42

At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. John 10:22-23 One of the things you need to recognize about this section is that it is about two months after the events that began at the Temple in Jerusalem back in chapter 7. The events of chapter 7, 8, 9, and the first part of chapter 10 took place in and around the time of the Feast of Booths – now it was winter in Jerusalem – specifically it was the last week of December during the Feast of Dedication. This feast was a celebration of the rededication of the temple about 164 BC after it had been desecrated for several years by Antiochus IV; or more commonly known as **Antiochus Epiphanes**.

Epiphanes was a designation he gave himself which means 'the great one'. He had a rather humble view of himself. However the Jews had another name for him and that was Antiochus Epimanes – or 'Antiochus the mad one' mainly because of his weird eccentric behavior. Antiochus ruled the Selucid Empire, a huge chunk of the area conquered by Alexander the Great that stretched from Pakistan in the east to Palestine in the west, for about 11 years. He was a great lover of all things Greek; and a great hater of all things Jewish. He loved Greek art, Greek philosophy, Greek religion, and he hated Judaism and everything it stood for.

In 167 B.C., he heard a rumor that the Jews were in revolt against him and came with his army and sacked the city, killing 40,000 and selling another 40,000 men, women and children into slavery. He robbed the temple treasury of everything that was there and laid down new laws. It became a capital offense to own a copy of the Law, the Torah – and if one was found in your home or on your person you were immediately executed. It also became a capital offense to circumcise your child, anyone who was caught circumcising their child would be crucified with their children hanging around their neck. The temple then was turned into a house of prostitution and the burnt offering altar was turned into an altar to Zeus on which they offered pork to pagan gods. The entire temple court was profaned and polluted.

The Jews tolerance for this kind of blasphemous oppression was short-lived. After Antiochus issued his decrees forbidding Jewish religious practice and setting up altars to Greek gods, a rural Jewish priest, Mattathias the Hasmonian, sparked the revolt against the Seleucid Empire by refusing to worship the Greek gods. In fact Mattathias killed a Jew who stepped forward to offer a sacrifice to an idol in Mattathias' place. He and his five sons fled to the wilderness of Judah. After Mattathias' death about one year later in 166 B.C., his son Judas Maccabee led a Jewish army to victory over the Seleucid dynasty in what was essentially guerrilla warfare. Once the war was won and Antiochus and his army gone, the temple was immediately cleansed and temple rituals and service were restored. But the Maccabees had a problem, because the Law commanded that the lamp stand, the Menorah, be lit continually, day and night, and they only had enough consecrated oil for one day. According to Rabbinic tradition, they could only find a small jug of oil that had remained uncontaminated by virtue of a seal, and although it only contained enough oil to sustain the Menorah for one day, it miraculously lasted for eight days, by which time further oil could be made and consecrated.

And then **Judas Maccabaeus** stood up and said, "From this day on the cleansing of this temple will be commemorated on the 25th of Chisleu by a great feast called the Feast of the Dedication." **Hanukkah** then is the commemoration of the revolution that ended in the great cleansing of the temple. It's a memorial then to the purification of the temple and it takes place two months after the Feast of Tabernacles which we read about in chapters 7 to 10. *The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly."* John 10:24

So here we have Jesus walking through one of the covered court areas called **Solomon's porch** when the Jews surrounded him, no doubt in the excited spirit of the festival, and said, "How long are you going to hold us in suspense? This feast brought to mind the great exploits of the Maccabees and Jewish independence couple of centuries earlier, and no doubt stirred thoughts of the coming Messiah whom they thought was going to rid them once and for all of foreign tyranny and oppression. And here was the guy everyone was hailing as the Messiah and they wanted to know if He really was the Messiah.

And it is interesting to note that John specifies that it was winter. And the spiritual significance of that shouldn't be lost on anyone. From this point on, Jesus doesn't have any more conversations with the stubborn, rebellious leaders of Israel. It is as though the season of harvest was over for them, spring and summer had turned to winter, and Jesus' public ministry was nearly over. And the words of Jeremiah the prophet could be applied to them: "*Harvest is past, summer is ended, and we are not saved.*" Jeremiah 8:20

Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. John 10:25 It is not as though these guys did not have enough evidence to conclude that Jesus was the Lamb of God, that He was the Messiah, but their pre-determined bias led them to draw the wrong conclusions from all the evidence Jesus gave. He had told them that He was the Son of Man in John chapter five. He had told them that He was the one of whom Moses wrote. He told them that He was the living bread that had come down out of heaven from God in chapter 6. In chapter 8 He told them that Abraham had rejoiced to see His day. All of these were statements which clearly demonstrated that He was the promised One of the Old Testament.

In addition to that, His works bore conclusive witness to who He was. The way Luke tells it, when John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask Him, 'Are you the One (the Messiah) or should we look for another? Jesus sent them back with this message: Go tell John what you have seen and heard – the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the gospel is preached to the poor'. These were the precise qualifications for the promised Messiah laid out in Isaiah 35.

No, it wasn't because they didn't have enough information – they were, many of them, witnesses to these very things. They saw the evidence, but didn't draw the right conclusions. Here is a drawing of a **fossilized squid** which in itself is fairly unremarkable. What makes it more remarkable is the fact that the ink used to draw this picture came from the fossil itself. And even more remarkable than that is the fact that according to evolutionary scientists, this fossil was dated at 150 million years! Phil Wilby, the researcher who led the excavation looked at this and said: "***It is difficult to imagine how you can have something as soft and sloppy as an ink sac fossilized in three dimension, still black, and inside a rock that is 150 millions years old.*** Difficult? How about "miraculous," "impossible," "beyond comprehension," "outside the bounds of all known scientific laws"? Why would you conclude that this fossil was 150 million years old with the evidence staring you in your face that it can't possibly be that old? Why would these Jewish leaders and scholars look at the evidence for Jesus being the Son of God and then ask Him to clarify? Why would they look at the evidence and conclude as they did a couple months earlier that He was either insane or had a demon?

There are two parts to this answer and the first part is the answer Jesus gives them: "*But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep.*" John 10:26 The reason they can look at the evidence and draw wrong conclusions is because **they are not His sheep**. They don't belong to Him. Ray Comfort has come out with a new book called: ***You Can Lead an Atheist to Evidence, But You Can't Make Him Think.*** And his assertion is, that just like leading a horse to water, if the horse isn't thirsty for water he's not going to drink. And these guys were not thirsty for the truth of Jesus because they were not His sheep. From an eternal perspective, there are only two kinds of people in the world – those who are the sheep of Jesus and those who are not His sheep. We looked at this in detail last week so we won't spend a lot of time this morning on it. But I need to point out again that we are not sheep **because** we believe – we believe **because** we are His sheep. **That is before time began the Father chose some out of all the tribes and tongues and peoples and nations on the earth to be His people, and then in time gives them to the Son so that they can be saved by faith in Him.** That is the first part to the answer.

The second is the reason these guys could look at the evidence and draw the wrong conclusions is because of their willful and stubbornly rebellious **unbelief**. They didn't have a lack of evidence – they weren't ignorant – ignorance does not produce unbelief – its the other way around – unbelief produces ignorance. Remember Jesus' words to this same crowd in John 7: *If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.* John 7:17 Unbelief is an act of the will. It is saying, 'In spite of the evidence I choose not to believe'. This is what Paul says in Romans 1 when he tells us that all of creation is displaying the invisible attributes, eternal power and divine nature of God – that when we look at creation we should conclude that God exists – but some look at that and choose not to believe. "*For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks...*" Romans 1:21 They knowingly, willfully, rebelliously chose unbelief. So putting these together, the reason these guys didn't believe in Jesus is because they were not His sheep, and because they chose not to believe.

And I can hear your objections right now. 'How can these guys be held responsible then for their unbelief? If God didn't choose them, then they can't believe so how is He going to judge them fairly?' And one of the reasons many people reject the doctrine of sovereign election is because it seems to contradict what the Bible teaches about man's responsibility for his actions. But the fact is, scripture teaches both that **God is sovereign and that man is responsible for his actions**. Some try to resolve the issue by substituting man's reason for the Bible. They hold to one set of facts and deny the other. They hold to man's freedom to choose and restrict God's sovereignty in choosing. Man then has the control and the free will to act as he wills. God will not override his will. His sovereignty is generalized and limited to the giving of free will and the supervision of man's actions.

There are others who resolve the contradiction by taking the opposite extreme. They look at the numerous verses declaring God's sovereignty and choosing, and holding firmly to that, they deny man's responsibility, claiming that man only acts as God has foreordained and cannot will to choose. But the Bible teaches both. **God chooses – and we must choose – and that we are responsible to God for our choice**. It is equally true that God has foreordained all things **and** that God commands all men every where to repent. You must believe. It is your duty and responsibility. And if you don't you cannot blame God. You must blame only yourself. But if you do believe, remember that it was God who "works in you both to will and to do according to his good pleasure.

Charles Spurgeon wrote on this and concluded: ***"That God predestines, and yet that man is responsible, are two facts that few can see clearly. They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory to each other. If, then, I find in one part of the Bible that everything is foreordained, that is true; and if I find, in another Scripture that man is responsible for all his actions, that is true; and it is only my folly that leads me to imagine that these two truths can ever contradict each other."*** At the end of the day, it is the unbreakable word of God that gives the final answer. We are too finite in our existence and too limited in our understanding to grasp how this can work. We can only say, 'This is so because God's word says it is so' and one of the glorious results of eternal salvation is that we will have an eternity to search out how this is so.

And I know there are those, perhaps even sitting here that will say, 'I guess I'm not a sheep because I don't believe' and go merrily on their way. But such a person would use any excuse to justify his unrepentant heart. I believe one of the reasons Jesus puts this in His message to unbelievers is to awaken faith in those who are His sheep. It is a fearful and frightening thing to hear 'You don't believe because you are not My sheep'. Nothing is better suited to show the utter lostness and helplessness of man without Christ and may serve to awaken your deadened soul to salvation.

On the one hand, we cannot know who are sheep and who are not – that has not been given to us. But we can know one thing with certainty – whether we are ourselves sheep or not. Jesus said: ***"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish;*** John 10:27-28a And because we went into this in detail last week, I will just say that the two crystal clear evidences that you are a sheep is that **you hear His voice** this morning and **you follow Him**. Does the word of God fill you with hope and joy and eternal expectation? Or does it put you to sleep? Does His word ignite a fire in your soul to know Him more, or is it cause to doubt who He is? Do His commands delight your heart or do they discourage you? Is there joy in doing what He says, or could you care less? Don't base your status as a sheep or not a sheep on emotional ecstasy or moral behavior but on whether you hear His voice calling you and you follow.

And then Jesus gives his detractors one of the clearest statements He has given yet on who He is: ***"...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 the Father's hand."*** John 10:28b-29 The testimony of Scripture is this: The Father has sheep – He has given them to the Son – no one can snatch you out of the Son's hand in verse 28 – and no one can snatch you out of the Father's hand here in verse 29. It is a double guarantee. When He says you can't get out of My grasp and you can't get out of My Father's grasp, He is saying those whom God has chosen will come to Him and never be lost. You cannot lose your salvation. And if you say, as some might, 'Well, maybe nobody else can snatch you out of His hand, but you can jump', you really don't understand what is going on. What is going on is that the Son holds His sheep in the palm of His hand, and the hand of the Father comes over the top to keep us in. We are held in the everlasting grip of God Almighty and will never be lost.

And then Jesus removes all doubts by stating outright the claim of deity: *"I and the Father are one."* John 10:30 The Jews instantly recognized the force and impact of Jesus' claim because immediately *'The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him.'* John 10:31 The reason we know they knew that He was not just claiming to be some great teacher, or moral authority or miracle-worker is the exchange that follows: *Jesus answered them, "I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?" The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God."* John 10:32-33

Jesus says, 'I have spent three years giving sight to the blind, healing to the lame, cleansing for the lepers and life to the dead. For which of these are you going to stone Me?' They were almost prepared, it seems to accept Jesus as a miracle worker. At least they said they wouldn't stone Him for those good works – but they couldn't accept Him as their Savior. In other words, His miracle-working power was insufficient basis for saving faith. It is not enough to be convinced of His power. Plenty of people saw His power during His ministry. Even his brothers we saw back in chapter seven had seen the evidence of His miracles and yet the Scripture says they didn't believe in Him. Miracles are good, miracles are great – I love to see the evidence of God's mighty power in my life and yours. But miracles alone are not enough to bring us to faith. We need something more. And so Jesus turns to the Scriptures.

Jesus answered them, "Has it not been written in your Law, 'I SAID, YOU ARE GODS?' "If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God?' John 10:34-36 What Jesus does is take them to Psalm 82. He doesn't even take them to a well-known portion of the word or one of the great prophets – He takes them to a bit of poetry by a fairly obscure author named Asaph. Why does He do that? What is He saying here? I believe what Jesus is saying, and what these guys understood Him to say was one thing – and that one thing had tremendous implications.

In the middle of quoting Psalm 82, Jesus says *'...and the Scripture cannot be broken...'*. The truth about the word of God is that **it cannot be broken**. What does that mean? It means at least two things. It means that the word of God cannot be false and the word of God cannot be disobeyed. **First of all it cannot be false**, it cannot be disproved. A broken word is a false word. If you tell me that you will meet me at Forza's at ten, and you don't show, that means your words are broken – they don't correspond to reality – they are untrue. And when Jesus talks about Scripture being unbroken, what He is saying is that it is all true in its entirety. Nothing it asserts, nothing it teaches, nothing it says can be disproven – you cannot find anything false in the word of God. And He shows this to them not by using the great well-known passages but a fairly obscure text.

He quotes Psalm 82:6, which is talking about the judges of Israel. And the reason they are called gods here, is because a judge represented God's justice, God's righteousness, and exercised God's authority and judged His people. It has nothing to do with becoming deity. And so Jesus is saying, 'If they called them gods, what about Me? I have come, sent from the Father – I represent God perfectly with unique authority not only to judge the people of Israel, but the whole world – if they called them gods - how much more should that apply to Me?' We may not understand perfectly the force of this argument because He was using a rabbinical argument they well understood, but they certainly did – and now they **really** wanted to kill Him.

So the point is that when Jesus lays claim to divinity, He doesn't go to the Law, He doesn't go to the prophets, He goes to the Psalms and He takes one little obscure piece of Scripture by a little known author – and not only that He takes one verse and one word out of that verse and builds His whole case on it. What He is showing them is what He told them earlier, and we see it in Matthew 5: *For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.* Matthew 5:18 What Jesus was teaching here was the plenary authority of the whole Bible – it is all true – not of it is false. Every verse, every piece, every part is God-breathed and true – **Scripture cannot be broken**.

What that says to us is that it is all or nothing for us. Either we believe it all, even though we don't understand it all, or we believe none of it. There's no picking and choosing what texts we will take and which ones we will reject. Scripture cannot be broken. It's all true. There is no doubt that Jesus had this view – and there is no doubt that you cannot call yourself a follower of Christ unless you have this view as well. It is all inspired – it is all inerrant. There are plenty of people who like certain things about the Bible but other things are too hard, too counter-cultural. I'm pressing this today because this is now more than ever under assault. Listen, for the first 1800 years of church history, this is the view that the church held.

It is only in recent history that so-called Biblical scholars have challenged the authority of Scripture. A friend of mine told me a few months ago that his pastor came out and told the congregation that the Bible, because it was written by men, because it has been passed down for 2000 years, is mostly true but there are parts that cannot be trusted to be accurate. My advice to my friend was 'Run, don't walk, don't pass go, get out of there and get into a church that believes in the unbrokenness of Scripture. If you believe that parts of Scripture can be disproven, how do you know the parts that are left are true? Spurgeon once wrote: ***"I would recommend you either believe God up to the hilt, or else not to believe at all. Believe this book of God, every letter of it, or else reject it. There is no logical standing place between the two. Be satisfied with nothing less than a faith that swims in the deeps of divine revelation; a faith that paddles about the edge of the water is poor faith at best. It is little better than a dry-land faith, and is not good for much."***

The second thing Jesus is saying when He declares that Scripture cannot be broken is that **it cannot be disobeyed**. The Bible does not have only cognitive authority it has functional authority. It doesn't just have authority over what you believe but authority over how you behave. You see that when Jesus says, 'Is it not written in your Law...?' And here Jesus equates the Psalms with having the force of the Law. And He was saying that 'No matter what part of Scripture you read, it is not only something you have to believe but you have to obey'. To break a command is to break the Scripture.

Sometimes when you talk to someone about Christianity, you get a reaction that is rather condescending, patronizing. You may not get outright hostility or opposition, instead you'll hear them say something like, 'I'm glad that Christianity works for you – some people need others to tell them what to do'. And the implication is that believing in Christ and the word of God is good for children, but when you are all grown up you don't need that sort of thing. You're an independent, fully-actualized individual who makes his own decisions and has put away childish things. But what they fail to understand is the very nature of childishness. The heart of childishness is this - 'I want my way NOW! And I want the world to revolve around me! I want to be my own boss and I want the world and everyone around me involved in meeting my needs and making me happy!' That is the essence of childishness. Listen, a world view that says, 'You have to find truth, you have to find fulfillment inside yourself – be your own authority' – that's the very essence of childishness. The staggering revelation that brings a person from being a child to being an adult is the revelation that the world does not revolve around you.

Jesus Christ comes to us and says, 'There is an unbreakable, authoritative word from outside of you that says you are not the center of the universe, God is. The universe does not revolve around your happiness but God's glory. (And you need to know that we can only know true happiness under the shadow of God's glory) And the great secret of life is also the great irony of life and that is until you give up your claim to independence and autonomy, to your quest for happiness and joy – you'll never know real happiness or joy. Until you become a person under authority you'll never be free. Until you submit to the word of God you'll never have clarity of thinking. Until you give up your right to happiness, you'll never have happiness.

Because children are children, the commands of their mother or father come to them sometimes as distasteful things. Sometimes they don't see the sense in them. Sometimes they appear capricious and meant to simply put obstacles in the way of their happiness. What they don't realize is that those commands are not only for their good, but they are evidence of the parent's love for them. Martin Luther, who was often surprisingly earthy in his remarks, once said, ***"If God told me to eat the dung from off the streets, not only would I eat it, but I would know it was good for me."*** God's word is not there just so we knuckle under and do the hard thing – God's commands are life and light and joy and happiness for us. We just need to grow up a bit to understand that. Look at Psalm 119. There you don't see a child – you see a mature man: *I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate on Your precepts and regard Your ways. I shall delight in Your statutes; I shall not forget Your word* Psalm 119:15-16

Submitting your will to Christ, saying the Scripture must not, cannot be broken, in my life – is the road to happiness and wholeness and maturity. Our problem really is that we don't believe the promises. Deep down we think they are aimed at making us unhappy. We're children. We don't believe the psalmist when he says that it is only by keeping the commands of God's word that we can be free. *So I will keep Your law continually, forever and ever. And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts.'* Psalm 119:44-45 Deep down we see keeping His law as troublesome and hard – we don't see what the writer saw that *'The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.'* Psalm 119:72 Those who follow Christ will say with the psalmist: *'O how I love Your law ! It is my meditation all the day.'* Psalm 119:72 And *'Your testimonies are wonderful; Therefore my soul observes them.'* Psalm 119:72

When Jesus says that the Scriptures cannot be broken, He is telling us that they are true all the way through – not the smallest detail, or the tiniest assertion can be disproven or false. And He is saying that it must be the authoritative force over all our lives and cannot be disobeyed. The gospel calls you this morning to submit to the word of Christ and stop being a child and come on to maturity. Let it so permeate your soul and saturate your mind that you begin to see the beauty and joy and soul-satisfaction of His commands.

Our gracious Father,

Grant that we would love Your unbroken word and find it precious beyond all earthly treasures. Let it pierce through our hardened hearts and penetrate all our defenses and waken eternal life in our souls. Incline our hearts to Your word. Confirm the foundation of our faith and make us real through and through. Let us not be satisfied with a faith that paddles about the edge of the water but cause us to launch out into the deeps of divine revelation. May we hear Your voice calling this morning and come and follow You and delight ourselves in You through Your word, Jesus Christ, and spread His joy through the gospel to all people in the name Jesus Christ, the living word, we pray, Amen.