

“I Know My Own and My Own Know Me”

Deuteronomy 7:6-II; JOHN 10:1-30; JOHN 10:3-4, 14, 27 (TEXTS)

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Dear Congregation of Christ: As I was listening to one of the lectures yesterday at the Annual Conference of Westminster Seminary in Escondido, California, I was struck by the lecturer's Top 10 reasons why the Holy Spirit is so important in preaching. These reasons include: without the Spirit, there would be no Bible, no preacher, no people to listen, and no regeneration. The Spirit works in all of these aspects of preaching. Regeneration is the work of the Spirit when he gives life to a sinner dead in sin. But a sinner's salvation is the work of the Three Persons of our Trinitarian God. God chooses those whom he pleases to save, Jesus Christ the Son of God gives his life for those whom God had chosen to save; and the Spirit gives life to those whom God had chosen.

Our text today comes from John Chapter 10, usually called the Good Shepherd Discourse. As I was reading this chapter, I could not help but see that the whole process of a sinner's salvation, from election, to regeneration, to justification, to sanctification, and finally, to glorification, can be mined from this rich chapter. Here, Jesus likens himself to a Good Shepherd. And all believers are like sheep. So in the next four Sundays, I will be preaching on four aspects of our salvation from John 10. Last Sunday, we studied a portion of John 8, where Jesus says that all sinners are slaves of sin and dead in sin, and he is the only way to freedom from sin and eternal life.

But here in John 10, Jesus also says the same thing to unbelievers, *“You do not believe because you are not among my sheep”* (v 26). Someday, I would go back and preach on this text again. But today, we will focus on verse 4, when he says, *“I know my own and my own know me.”* He calls his sheep *“my own”* and *“my sheep,”* and he *“knows”* them. In the other texts we will focus on the sheep *“knowing”* his voice, and also that his Father *“has given them to me.”*

This morning, our meditation will be, **“I Know My Own and My Own Know Me,”** focusing on four things: first, **“My Own” Sheep**; second, **The Sheep Known from Eternity**; third, **They Know His Voice**; and fourth, **“My Father Has Given Them to Me.”**

“My Own” Sheep

Jesus' relationship with his sheep is personal. The sheep are “his”, “his own,” and “my sheep.” In this intimate relationship, Jesus declares that he is “the Good Shepherd” of his own sheep. Why does he say he is the good Shepherd? Because in Scriptures, there are also bad shepherds. In the Old Testament, the leaders and prophets of Israel were called shepherds. Those shepherds who led the people astray in idolatry and immorality, and even oppressed them for shameful gain were condemned by God, *“I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand”* (Ezk 34:10). Jesus warned his disciples that there will be wolves who

come in sheep's clothing (Matt 7:15). Paul also warned the church in Ephesus that there will be wolves among them (Acts 20:29). These wolves will even pretend to be shepherds.

Today, we are to be vigilant against these false shepherds in wolves clothing. They are not outside the church, but inside the church. These are those who teach that the Holy Scriptures are only man's words, not inerrant and not infallible. Many pastors teach that there is no hell, and that all religions lead to heaven. Televangelists preach the false gospel of health and wealth and prosperity. Some even diminish the importance of attending the Lord's Day worship. And in most evangelical churches, entertainment is primary over Christ-centered preaching, teaching, songs and the Lord's Supper.

But Jesus knows his own; he knows each of you and every believer in the whole world personally. In the Old Testament, God declared to Israel at Mount Sinai, "*you shall be **my treasured possession** among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be **to me** a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*" (Exo 19:5-6). And you who believe today, are the new Israel of God, as Peter says in 1 Peter 2:9, "*you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.*" And even when you stray for a time from God's holy laws, he still calls you "*my people*," as when he says to Israel after God allowed Babylon to destroy them, "***My people** are destroyed for lack of knowledge*" (Hos 4:6).

So be assured that even when you succumb to temptation for a time, God will call you back because you are his own treasured possession. If you were that one sheep among a hundred who went astray, who were lost, who stumbled among the worldly thorns of life, Jesus would leave the other 99 in safety, and will never stop seeking for you until he finds you, "*For you were lost, and is found, and you were dead, and is alive*" (Luke 15:24).

The Sheep Known from Eternity

This personal relationship between the Good Shepherd and his sheep began before time. Paul talks about this in Romans 8:29, "*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.*" He says that God knew beforehand whom he predestined or chosen to be saved by his Son. Most Christians think of predestination in this way: God, in eternity past, foreknew those who would believe in him. And as a result of this knowledge, he elected them. But is this what the Bible says? After Paul preached the gospel in Pisidian Antioch, Luke writes, "*as many as were appointed to eternal life believed*" (Acts 13:48). Believers were appointed and chosen, *and as a result*, they believed. Our faith is a result of God's grace in electing us, and our election is not because of our decision to believe. This is clearly seen in Jesus' own words, "*You did not choose me, but I chose you*" (John 15:16).

And what does the Bible mean when it says that the good Shepherd "knows" his sheep? Does he not know everything and everyone, since he is the all-knowing God? In Psalm 1:6, David writes, "*for the Lord knows the way of the righteous.*" Also, Nahum 1:7 says, "*The Lord ... knows those who take refuge in him.*" When God said in Amos 3:2, "*You only have I known of all the families of the earth,*" he is not saying that he did not know all the rest of the Gentile

nations. Therefore, the word “know” in the Shepherd-sheep relationship means an *intimate, loving, and saving relationship*. This is why Paul says, “*But if anyone loves God, she is known by God*” (1 Cor 8:3); and “*the Lord knows who are his*” (2 Tim 2:19). But on Judgment Day, Jesus will say to all unbelievers, “*I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness*” (Matt 7:23).

When Luke says in Acts 13:48 that those whom God appointed to eternal life believed, when did this appointment happen? Paul says in Ephesians 1:4, “[God] chose us in him **before the foundation of the world**.” He adds in 2 Timothy 1:9, “*he saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began*.” This is a wonderful teaching, for it removes a sinner's role completely from his salvation. No work, even his own decision to believe, has any part in his election and salvation. Our salvation, including God's choosing us, are all based on his purpose and grace. As Paul says again and again in Ephesians 1, our election by God was “*according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace... according to the riches of his grace*” (vv 6-7); “*according to his purpose*” (v 9); and “*according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will*” (v 11).

But most Christians today will object to this, saying, “That's unfair! What about those whom God has not chosen?” Paul knows exactly this kind of human response even 2,000 years ago! In Romans 9, he answers, “*What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy... So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills*” (Rom 9:14-18). And he adds this to those who question God's justice and mercy, “*But who are you, O man, to answer back to God?*” (Rom 9:20). How can God do this? Because he is the sovereign Lord.

They Know His Voice

Jesus says that when the good Shepherd enters the sheepfold, he calls each of his own sheep by name. And all the sheep hear his voice. And when he has led them out to pasture, they follow him, because they know his voice.

Hearing and knowing the Shepherd's voice is not merely an audible hearing. In Scriptures, to hear and know God's voice is to believe and trust and to listen intently and diligently. God wants us to listen attentively to his Word, “*Give ear, and hear my voice; give attention, and hear my speech*” (Isa 28:23).

Last week, we read Jesus' words to unbelieving Jews in John 8:47, “*Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God*” (John 8:47). Again, after Pilate asked, “*What is truth?*” Jesus answered, “*Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice*” (John 18:37). This is why John writes, “*Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us*” (1 John 4:6). Hearing God's Word marks believing sheep from unbelieving goats: the goats hear without believing and obeying, while the sheep hear and then believe and obey.

Dear friends, do you hear God's voice daily by reading his Holy Word? Do you meditate on it morning and evening? Do you look forward to hearing the voice of God every Lord's Day when the Word is read and preached to you? To those of you who are deaf to God's Word, Psalm 95:7 exhorts you to believe and be obedient to God's voice, *"Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."* Take it to heart, believe, and you will become his own chosen sheep.

"My Father Has Given Them to Me"

In verse 29, Jesus says, *"My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all."* When did his Father give his sheep to him? It was during the covenant between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in eternity past. The Father chose whom he will save, promising to give them to the Son. The Son will come down from heaven as a man to save those whom God had given to him by dying for the sins of his sheep. And the Spirit will apply the work of the Son to the hearts of those for whom he had sacrificed himself.

Back in John Chapter 6, Jesus confirms that his sheep was given to him by the Father before he came down from heaven, *"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out... And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day"* (John 6:37, 39). All of these sheep will come to him, not one less, not one more. He will lose none of them. If even one strayed away from the Shepherd, he will surely find him and bring him back to the fold.

One other certainty is that all those who will come to him in faith and repentance will never be rejected by the Shepherd. This is because all sheep who will come to him were chosen and given to him by the Father from eternity past. It is impossible for God to break even one of his good promises to his Son and to his people. Therefore, Jesus says in John 6:40, *"everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life."* What a great comfort to all believers who are afflicted, lonely, grieving, suffering broken relationships, poor, oppressed, persecuted for their faith. In the end, a glorious, abundant eternal life under the great love of the Good Shepherd awaits us.

Sometimes we have doubts when we sin or experience difficulties. Does God really love me? Am I really one of the elect? Has God cast me out from his presence and forsaken me? His unbroken promise is, *"Whoever comes to me I will never cast out."* Just struggling and worrying with questions like these is a sign that you are one of the sheep. Unbelievers never worry or struggle one bit about spiritual things, which they consider as foolishness (1 Cor 2:14).

But we can never take credit for our decision to come, repent and believe. For a few verses later in John 6:44, Jesus says, *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."* It is the Father who, by the Spirit, invisibly draws his chosen sheep to his Good Shepherd.

Dear Friends in Christ: If you believe and trust in Christ, and obey his words as a result, you have assurance that you are his sheep. He knows you and he calls you his own treasured possession. Before you were born, before the world was even created, God had already chosen you to be given to his Son for eternal life.

How then must you respond to this election and salvation? Should you take pride in your own decision to come to Christ? No, for it was God who drew you to Christ. Should you look down upon sinners who are not saved? No, for you too were dead in sin, hopeless and helpless without Christ; it is only by God's grace and mercy that you are part of his sheepfold. Nothing in you, whether your own wisdom, human goodness, or decision would have gained God's sovereign choice. If not for God's mercy, we would be unbelieving goats who would be cast out into eternal punishment.

On the contrary, because of our election, we are to trust God rather than ourselves. We can trust Christ to complete our salvation by his Spirit, to empower us to live holy lives from the day of our salvation, preserving us in faith all the way to the end of our lives.

Finally, this doctrine must not make us complacent in our witness to the world. We may think that since God had already chosen his sheep, he will surely accomplish their salvation by his own means. This is true. *But one of these means is you.* Jesus commands us to preach and teach his gospel to others. Be encouraged that your family, your friends, or even strangers that you meet, might be one of his sheep, and it is you whom God might have appointed to tell them about the Good Shepherd in order to lead them into his sheepfold. It is not us, our words, our arguments, or even our eloquence, that would save them, but it is God who will draw them to Christ by his Spirit.