



The Gospel of John

Session 22: The Unbelief of the Jewish Leaders

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

In today's text we will examine the final public exchange between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. Their ongoing threats and challenges to Jesus's ministry did not dilute the people's interest in Him. Though the Pharisees sought to discredit Jesus, many came to faith in Him.

We'll also examine the final words of believers throughout church history. In their last moments, they pointed people to Christ and spoke with assurance about their confidence in heaven. Romans 14:12 teaches, *"each of us will give an account of himself to God."* This should not make us frightened as believers—our accounting comes from our faith in Christ, not our efforts—but should cause us to consider how we want to live as faithful witnesses to God's goodness and mercy. In today's text, we see how Jesus remained faithful until the very end, and, in doing so, secured our eternal place with God.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

John 10:22-42

THE MAIN IDEA

Jesus boldly declared His eternal position with the Father, and the safety of our relationship with Him. Not even death can separate us from His love and care.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How might we express (and come to really experience) confidence in our eternal safety with Christ?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

John 10:22-30 During the winter Feast of Dedication, the religious leaders again tried to catch Jesus in a verbal trap. They wanted Him to declare that He is the Messiah "plainly." Instead, Jesus pointed to His works and reminded them that His true sheep know His voice and follow Him.

John 10:31-39 As the religious leaders continued to spar with Jesus, He reminded them that their own Scripture points to Him. Further, His works give testimony to the validity of His claims. Finally, Jesus declared, "I and the Father are one."

John 10:40-42 Jesus and His disciples retreated to the Jordan Valley, the site of His baptism and the inauguration of His public ministry. Though the religious leaders tried to discredit Him, people still came to Jesus, declaring faith in Him. No one can stop the movement of the gospel. As Job declared of God in Job 42:2, *"I know that you can do anything and no plan of yours can be thwarted."* Even though they threatened Jesus, His work of salvation continued.



START HERE

A person's final words communicate what they care most about. Today, we'll examine Jesus's final public exchange with the religious leaders, where He boldly declared He and the Father are one. If you had to distill your faith into one enduring sentence, what would it be? As we study today, we should each assess what we want our enduring witness to be.

DISCUSS

How would you most like to be remembered in life? What motivates this desire?

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. Because Jesus is one with the Father, His sheep are eternally secure.

John 10:22-30: *Then the Festival of Dedication took place in Jerusalem, and it was winter. Jesus was walking in the temple in Solomon's Colonnade. The Jews surrounded him and asked, "How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."*

"I did tell you and you don't believe," Jesus answered them. "The works that I do in my Father's name testify about me. But you don't believe because you are not of my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

Unpacking John 10:22-30

A Christian's final words often reveal their faith in God, hope for heaven, and love for family and friends. Famous nineteenth-century revivalist, pastor, and Sunday School founder D.L. Moody's last recorded words were *"Earth recedes; heaven opens before me . . . This is my coronation day."* Moody believed his eternity was secure in Christ, and from that belief he entered eternity rejoicing.

In today's text, we'll hear Jesus's final words to the religious leaders of the day. After this discourse in John's Gospel, Jesus would not address them again publicly, allowing this discourse and the raising of Lazarus from the dead in chapter 11 to speak for themselves. Jesus is Lord. Those who come to Him by faith will be saved, and those who reject Him, like the religious leaders, will experience eternity apart from Christ.

As you might recall, John 7–10:21 recounted Jesus's interactions with the religious leaders around the Festival of Shelters, which occurred each autumn. In John 10:22, the writer moved



ahead by eight to ten weeks, picking up at the winter Festival of Dedication (also known as Hanukkah), and Jesus was again in the temple. Verse 23 says Jesus was walking along Solomon's Colonnade, a covered structure along the east side of the temple where the scribes held their schools.

The Jews surrounded him and asked, *"How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly"* (v. 24). The Jewish leaders again pressed Jesus to declare Himself. No amount of discourse or miracles would have been enough to convince them. Jesus addressed His relationship with the Father on numerous occasions, and yet it was met with disbelief and hostility. The problem was not a lack of testimony; it was a lack of faith.

"I did tell you and you don't believe," Jesus answered them. "The works that I do in my Father's name testify about me" (v. 25).

Jesus's words testified that He is the Messiah. In John 6:35, He declared Himself the Bread of Life. In John 8:12, He claimed to be the Light of the world, and in John 10:7-9, He said He is both the gate and the Good Shepherd to God's sheep. In John 8:58, Jesus declared, *"Truly I tell you, before Abraham was, I am."* His words consistently reflected Old Testament prophecy and pointed toward His eternal relationship with the Father.

Beyond His words, Jesus performed signs and miracles that pointed to His divinity. At this point in John's Gospel, Jesus had already performed six of his seven miracles. Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-12), healed the official's son (John 4:46-54), healed the man disabled for thirty-eight years (John 5:1-18), fed the five thousand (John 6:1-15), walked on water (John 6:16-21), and healed the man born blind. (John 9). We will examine His final miracle, raising Lazarus from the dead, next week. Jesus told the Pharisees in John 5:36 that His works testified for Him: *"But I have a greater testimony than John's because of the works that the Father has given me to accomplish. These very works I am doing testify about me that the Father has sent me."* Yet, because of their hardened hearts, the religious leaders still resisted Him.

How could those who had studied the Old Testament Scriptures extensively and witnessed many of Jesus's miracles remain unchanged? Jesus answered this question in verse 26: *"But you don't believe because you are not of my sheep."* These words pointed back to His statements weeks before at the Festival of Shelters: *"I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. I lay down my life for the sheep"* (John 10:14-15). The Scribes and Pharisees would not inherit eternal life based on their knowledge of the Old Testament, rather they must enter through the gate, which is Christ. In the same way, we will not enter heaven by our knowledge of the Bible, our attendance record in church, or our good deeds. The only ones who will inherit eternal life are the sheep who belong to the Good Shepherd.

"My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me" (v. 27). Jesus laid out three essential things that give evidence someone belongs to Him. First, they hear His voice.



Ephesians 1:13 says, *“In him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed.”* Faith comes by hearing and responding to the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

Second, Jesus knows His sheep and His sheep know Him. In John 10:14 Jesus said, *“I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me.”* We are saved by faith, but even that faith is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8-9). In fact, Jesus said the only way we can come to Him is if the Holy Spirit draws us (John 6:44).

Finally, Jesus’s sheep follow Him. *Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you continue in my word, you really are my disciples”* (John 8:31). A willing heart to follow Jesus is a sign of a true disciple. Just as Jesus called Peter and the disciples to follow Him, He calls us to do the same. Followers of Jesus follow Jesus.

However, sometimes believers can struggle with believing they really belong to Christ. Sin, forgetfulness, or misplaced priorities can make some people question if they are truly saved. In John 10:28-29, Jesus spoke of the believer’s security: *“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”*

When we know and follow Jesus, we belong to Him eternally. No one can steal our salvation. Because we are not saved by our own efforts (John 6:44; Ephesians 2:8-9), we cannot lose our salvation by our own efforts. As Christ’s sheep, we belong to the Shepherd forever. Later in his life, as John reflected on eternal life with Christ he wrote, *“And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. The one who has the Son has life. The one who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life”* (1 John 5:11-13). If we have humbled ourselves, confessed our sins, and professed Jesus as our savior, we are eternally safe in His love. It is possible, John said, to know that we have eternal life. As John Calvin wrote in his commentary on John, *“If we are united with Christ by faith, we are as safe as Christ himself.”*

Jesus concluded this section with perhaps His most provocative statement to that point: *“I and the Father are one”* (v. 30). We are eternally united with Christ through faith, just as Christ is eternally united with the Father. By claiming He and the Father are one, Jesus left no wiggle room to question His authority. As the religious leaders requested, He told them plainly He is the Messiah.

DISCUSS

- *What marks Jesus’s sheep in verses 27-28?*
- *Where might you be tempted to seek security outside of Christ’s hold?*
- *What would you change if you deeply believed no one or nothing could snatch you from Christ’s hand?*



2. When truth is challenged, it must be defended with Scripture.

John 10:31-39: *Again the Jews picked up rocks to stone him.*

Jesus replied, “I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these works are you stoning me?”

“We aren’t stoning you for a good work,” the Jews answered, “but for blasphemy, because you—being a man—make yourself God.”

*Jesus answered them, “Isn’t it written in your law, **I said, you are gods**? If he called those to whom the word of God came ‘gods’—and the Scripture cannot be broken—do you say, ‘You are blaspheming’ to the one the Father set apart and sent into the world, because I said: I am the Son of God? If I am not doing my Father’s works, don’t believe me. But if I am doing them and you don’t believe me, believe the works. This way you will know and understand that the Father is in me and I in the Father.” Then they were trying again to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.*

Unpacking John 10:31-39

Before her death, Christian writer and speaker Kay Arthur recorded a farewell message urging believers to remain grounded in Scripture. Her lifelong refrain, echoed in her final words, simply said, “Beloved, you must be in the Word of God for yourself.” Likewise, Jesus’s last discourse with the Jewish leaders was rooted in a public defense of Scripture. Truth is not defended emotionally; it is defended biblically.

“Again the Jews picked up rocks to stone him.” This was not the first time the religious leaders of Jesus’s day attempted to stone Him. In John 8, Jesus proclaimed to have seen Abraham, boldly saying, *“Truly I tell you, before Abraham was, I am”* (John 8:59). In each instance, Jesus’s claim, not His miracles, are what provoked the religious leaders to assassinate Him.

In the Old Testament, stoning was a form of capital punishment. Capital punishment was allowed by God for certain sins within the nation of Israel. They included murder (Leviticus 24:17), idolatry (Deuteronomy 17:2-5), approaching near to Mount Sinai while the presence of God was there (Exodus 19:12-13), practicing necromancy or the occult (Leviticus 20:27), various sexual sins (Deuteronomy 22:24), and blasphemy (Leviticus 24:16). Stoning could even pertain to animals, whose behavior, like goring, might indicate disease. (Exodus 21:28) Stoning was a horrible way to die, and the threat of it served as a deterrent against sins which could threaten the people and political structure of Israel as a theocracy.

Jesus questioned the religious leaders’ motives. *“I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these works are you stoning me?”* (v. 32). Jesus’s miracles had only served to help people—healing the sick and feeding the masses. What was the basis for capital punishment?



The Jewish leaders replied, *“We aren’t stoning you for a good work,” the Jews answered, “but for blasphemy, because you—being a man—make yourself God”* (v. 33). It’s interesting that the leaders call Jesus’s miracles *“good work.”* They understood that the people believed in Jesus precisely because of His works, and it would be nearly impossible to pretend those miracles hadn’t occurred. Since they couldn’t dispute His works, their focus became on His words.

Jesus’s claims were not ambiguous. He shared through words and deed that He is the promised Messiah. If He had not intended to communicate He is the Son of God, this opportunity would have been His chance to set the record straight. An angry crowd holding rocks makes someone really question their choices! However, Jesus never backed down. When Peter proclaimed Jesus is the Messiah, He didn’t correct him but blessed him (Matthew 16:15-17). He received worship (Matthew 14:33; John 9:38; Matthew 15:25), and He proclaimed that His words are trustworthy to build a life on (Matthew 7:24-27). When other people acknowledged Jesus as the Christ, He received their worship rather than rebuking it, and His works were the proof that His claims were true.

At first glance, Jesus’s words in verses 34-36 are confusing. To understand these statements, it’s important to look back at the verse Jesus quoted: Psalm 82:6. In Canaanite culture, humans of great influence or spiritual beings in the heavenly realm were called *“gods of the most high.”* In this psalm, God rebuked their thinking. He declared that a *“god”* would *“provide justice for the needy and the fatherless; uphold the rights of the oppressed and the destitute. Rescue the poor and needy; save them from the power of the wicked”* (Psalm 82:3-4). In essence, Jesus is saying that based on the merit of His works, which are consistent with God’s activity, He could rightly claim He is God. The Canaanite gods, by contrast, had nothing to show for their claims, and thus came to nothing.

Jesus is the only One worthy of our worship. He is altogether set apart from false gods who make claims to deity but cannot perform miracles to corroborate their stories. History is full of false teachers, cult leaders, and charlatans who make unsubstantiated claims. Psalm 82 tells us what happens to false gods *“However, you will die like humans and fall like any other ruler”* (Psalm 82:7). Jesus, however, can be trusted based on His Words and His works.

“If I am not doing my Father’s works, don’t believe me. But if I am doing them and you don’t believe me, believe the works. This way you will know and understand that the Father is in me and I in the Father” (vv. 37-38) Jesus’s final words to the religious leaders ends with the same choice every person must make—do we trust, based on His words and actions, that Jesus is who He claimed to be? If so, we are to believe He is God’s anointed One, and trust in His name.

DISCUSS

- How does Psalm 82 help clarify Jesus’s words in this passage?
- When challenged about your faith, do you respond from emotion or Scripture? How might you continually rely further on Scripture?



- *Is there an area in life where you are struggling to believe that Jesus is true to His Word? How could you practically move away from doubt and towards renewed faith?*

3. Rejection does not stop God from producing fruit.

John 10:40-42: *So he departed again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. Many came to him and said, "John never did a sign, but everything John said about this man was true." And many believed in him there.*

Unpacking John 10:40-42

In AD 155, Polycarp, the Bishop of the church in Smyrna, was serving his congregation faithfully when he was arrested and tried for refusing to deny Christ and deify Caesar. At the age of 86, Polycarp was well known among the early church, and possibly the last church leader to have personally known an apostle. Church history tells us he was discipled and installed for ministry by John. When he was brought to the arena for trial and execution, the Proconsul gave him the opportunity to deny Christ and live. Instead, Polycarp bravely faced death by fire, proclaiming with his final words, *"Eighty-six years have I have served him, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?"*

Facing one's own mortality has a way of distilling life down to what is important. At life's end, a person's wealth, influence, or possessions don't really matter all that much. In the end, it is the quality of a person's relationships with people and with God that is the measuring stick of a life well-lived.

After Jesus dismissed the religious leaders, he returned with His disciples back to where His ministry began. *"So he departed again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there."* It was in this place where John the Baptist first boldly declared the truth of Jesus's identity, *"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1:29), and where the Lord confirmed it saying, *"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased"* (Luke 3:22). It was in this place Jesus called His first disciples and prepared to begin His public ministry. As His earthly ministry approached its conclusion, He retreated to the Jordan Valley. When He next returned to the city, it would be in service to His friend Lazarus, and in preparation for His final ascent into Jerusalem.

The site of Jesus's baptism is also the site of the ministry of His cousin, John the Baptist. It is not surprising that in the weeks before His death, He returned to the place where His cousin's ministry and bold declarations about Christ led to His own arrest and execution. John the Baptist has no recorded miracles, but he has an enduring testimony. His ministry of faithfully proclaiming Jesus continued beyond his life on earth. Perhaps as Jesus approached His own death, he drew comfort and strength from the witness of His friend and relative.



It is said that the final recorded words from Jonathan Edwards, the famous eighteenth-century American revivalist were *“Trust in God, and you need not fear.”* Edward’s faith in God allowed Him to face death with assurance. His faithful witness drew people to God until the very end of his life, and his ministry endures even to this day.

The religious leaders who provoked and threatened Jesus could not stop the advancement of the kingdom of God. When Jesus and His disciples returned to the Jordan Valley, people continued to seek Him out. *Many came to him and said, “John never did a sign, but everything John said about this man was true.” And many believed in him there (vv. 41-42).*

The people recognized the enduring witness of John the Baptist. Though he performed no miracles, He proclaimed Jesus until the end and his words about Jesus came true. Jesus performed many miracles and spoke faithfully about God’s kingdom. By the testimony of John the Baptist, combined with people’s personal experience with Jesus, many put their trust in Christ. The religious leaders of the day could threaten but could not control. God’s Kingdom is an ever-expanding, growing movement as sinful people are reconciled with a loving God. No one is strong enough to thwart God’s plans. As the author of Hebrews said, *“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful. By it, we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and awe . . .”* (Hebrews 12:28).

In Jesus’s final public exchange before the cross, we see three enduring truths: He is One with the Father, His sheep are eternally secure, and rejection does not stop the spread of truth. Last words reveal what is anchored in the heart. What will our testimony be when the pressure comes? Will we listen to the demands of the crowd, or listen with faithful ears for the call of the Good Shepherd?

DISCUSS

- *What do these verses show us about the legacy of John the Baptist?*
- *What kind of spiritual legacy are you building?*
- *Where might God be redirecting you for His purposes? How will you obey?*



DEEPER FOCUS

REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

- *Who is someone whose life or final words have really impacted your faith? Why?*
- *Why is Jesus's declaration "I and the Father are one" central to our faith?*
- *Have you had a season where God had you "withdraw" in some way in preparation for something difficult to come? How can a season of retreat help strengthen our faith and resolve?*

RESPOND TO THE TEXT

- Jesus said that we are His sheep, and nothing can snatch us out of His hand. How does that promise comfort you today as you think about your life or those you love?

APPLY

How do you sense God wants you to seek Him in a further intentional way as you face life's challenges?

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