

## **Eternally Safe**

### *These Things are Written that You May Believe Series*

**John 10:22-42**

Pastor Bryan Clark

Almost immediately after this whole virus thing came out and people were quarantined, you started hearing TV commercials, radio commercials, internet messages, email messages about people and companies responding to the situation with everything you need. As a matter of fact, one of the first ones I heard was a fast food restaurant—fast food chain—and the commercial ended with the person on the commercial saying, “We just want you to know that we’ll be there for you.” And I remember thinking, “Outside of a burger and fries, what are you going to do for me?” Shortly after that, there was a commercial on the History Channel, and it had pictures of all the celebrities from the different shows. And it ended with the same words, “We just want you to know that we’ll be here for you.” It’s been one of the most common expressions through this whole thing. Yet stop and think, “What does that mean? How can those people be there for me?” So a lot of it is just marketing, but let’s imagine that most of it’s just sincere, caring people wanting to help. You’re still left with the question, “Well, help with what? What exactly can they do for us?” Also, remember that this virus thing is like a little bitty slice of what’s wrong with the world. There are hundreds of things wrong with the world, and you’re left with this question, “What can anyone do for me?” There’s only one person who actually can be there for me in my hour of need, and that’s what we want to talk about today. So, if you have a Bible, turn with us again to the Gospel of John, Chapter 10.

If you’re new with us, we’ve been working our way through the Gospel of John. We are about halfway through chapter 10, and we’ll finish up chapter 10 today. Last week Jesus identified Himself as the Good Shepherd, the noble shepherd who cares for His sheep. Most scholars think the passage we’ll look at today is either part of that same discussion or within a pretty close proximity of time. And this is actually the last public discourse that Jesus will have with the crowds and the religious leaders until He enters in on Palm Sunday, and into the final Passion Week.

John tells us this is the time of the Feast of Dedication. You see that in verse 22, and so that would be what we know as the Festival of Lights or probably more commonly known as Hanukkah. So this wasn’t one of the Old Testament feasts that are prescribed by God in the old covenant, but it was a very important feast. It was a great celebration during what we call the silent years—those between the end of the book of Malachi and the beginning of the Gospels. There are 400 years where there was no book of the Bible written, no revelation given, so we call them the silent years, and it was a very difficult time for the nation of Israel. During that time they were defeated and conquered by a variety of powers. One of those powers was the Syrians. Antiochus Epiphanes was the name of the Syrian king that conquered Jerusalem, who came in and defiled the temple and actually offered a pig, a sow, on the altar, basically mocking the God of the Hebrews. The temple was run by corrupt priests. It was just a mess, but there was a group of very heroic Jews that weren’t willing to accept this. And so for about three years they waged kind of a guerrilla war and finally they defeated the Syrians. They drove them out; they recaptured the city; they recaptured the temple, and on December 25, 165 B.C. Judas Maccabeus, (Judas the hammer is what that name means) came in and actually dedicated the temple back to the God of the Hebrews. So that’s what Hanukkah is. It’s the celebration of that moment, and still a very worthy celebration. It was eight days long and full of pageantry, much like

the Festival of Tabernacles. As a matter of fact, some referred to it as the Winter Tabernacles, so a lot of the similar lights and imagery—and Jesus used that imagery to help support His teaching. One of the things that happened during the celebration was they would rehearse the corruption of the priests in the temple, and then they would celebrate the rededication of the temple back to God. So if you think back to when Jesus entered the previous Passover, He cleansed the temple and drove out the corrupt practices and rededicated the temple, but also basically identifying that He Himself was the fulfillment of the temple. He would be the rededicated temple, the place where sinful people could experience a relationship with a holy God. So there's a lot of interesting background to this part of the story. I'll pick it up in verse 22:

**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. 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.”** (\*NASB, John 10:22-24)

So the **portico of Solomon**, basically was at the eastern edge of the temple courtyard. The temple proper sat in the middle of the courtyard, and then it was surrounded by a massive courtyard. Clear to the eastern edge of that was a long rectangular portico or colonnade that basically was pillars—thirty-foot pillars—with a roof over that provided a place where teaching was often done. In the summer it was shady; in the winter it kept people out of the elements. So it was a common place for rabbis to teach, and that's where we find Jesus. **The Jews**—the religious leaders find Him, and the Greek text literally says—*they encircled Him or surrounded Him*. You get the idea that they surrounded Him and weren't going to let Him leave until they got their answer. And they wanted Jesus to speak plainly, “Are you or are you not the Christ?” It's the exact same question they asked John the Baptist all the way back in chapter 1. Jesus responds to them, knowing they are not really asking from the sense of “so we can believe,” but rather they're wanting Him to say what they need Him to say in order to have a basis to arrest Him. So maybe in modern terms it would be like they are undercover, wearing a wire, and they just need to get a recording of the right thing in order to arrest Jesus. That's what they want, and Jesus then responds to them:

**“I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep.”** (Vs. 25-26)

So Jesus answers by saying, “*I've told you, but you won't listen. I've done miracles but you won't believe.*” The answer to their question is a little bit tricky because they had such a messed-up view of the Messiah. They saw the Messiah as someone they would use for political and military purposes to overthrow Rome and put them in charge. So you remember, after Jesus did the miracle of feeding the 5000, we were told that the crowd tried to take Him by force to Jerusalem and make Him King. This was always the concern, so Jesus was pretty careful with how He answered the question. Jesus didn't come for political and military purposes. He came to seek and to save the lost. He came as the Lamb of God, to take away the sin of the world. He came to be the Messiah, the Savior who would die for the sins of the world, to save the sheep as the Good Shepherd. So He tells them, “I've told you; you won't listen. I do miracles; you won't believe, and the problem is **you are not My sheep.**” This goes back to the conversation that we talked about last week from the front half of the chapter—this idea that the shepherd would go into the pen; the sheep hear and recognize the voice of the shepherd, and they follow him out. But these religious leaders are determined not to listen and not to follow. That's what He's saying. Verse 27:

**“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; 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. I and the Father are one.”** (Vs. 27-30)

So in verse 27, **“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”** This is what Jesus said in a passage we studied last week. This is not cold, dead religion. It's a relationship. “My sheep know Me; I know My sheep.” You hear people say it all the time. It's become kind of cliché — that Christianity is not a religion; it's a relationship. But it *is* true. That's what Jesus is saying, “My sheep know Me; I know them.” So what does the Good Shepherd give the sheep? Verse 28: He gives them **eternal life, and they will never perish.** So we learned last week that the Good Shepherd is the gate. The sheep go through Jesus, through the Good Shepherd. What do they get? They get *abundant life*. It's the going in. It's the going out. It's pasture. It's water. But we also learned it's healing; it's care; it's kindness; it's forgiveness; it's compassion; it's peace; it's security; it's rest. To be a sheep in the wilderness without a good shepherd, meant you had no chance at life. Sheep were defenseless; they would not survive. But with the Good Shepherd, they not only had life, they had abundant life. Jesus now is referring to this as **eternal life**. This is compared or contrasted with *perishing*. This is not the first time we've heard this. John 3:16: **“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish...”** exact same word, **“...but have eternal life.”** Exact same word!

So there's this contrast between the two roads that go into eternity. Eternal life is not just a duration of life; it's a quality of life. So before God created, there was God. *“In the beginning, God.”* God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit—three persons—one God. It's the mysterious doctrine of the Trinity. But within that, there was life. It's the essence of life; it's the origin of life. This is where life comes from. When God created people, He created people in His image, which means they have the capacity to experience and know God and enter into that life that has defined God forever. Within that, then, there is everything that our soul was made for. People today, if they were to be honest, would say, “It just feels like I was made for something different. I was made for something more. This just doesn't seem like the world as God wanted it to be.” People search for meaning; they search for purpose; they search for that which will satisfy, and most in their most difficult moments of life would say, “It just feels like there's got to be something more.” The reason we feel that way is because we actually were created for a different world. We were created for something more; our souls feel it deeply, and our souls long for that.

Animals are not created in the image of God. Animals don't long for a better world. Animals exist. They live; they eat; they die. But humans have something within them that longs for something more. What they're longing for is this eternal, soul-satisfying life. So that's what Jesus is saying. It's contrasted then with **perishing**. Perishing isn't just physical death. As a matter of fact, if at the end of the story people just died—that's the end of it—it'd kind of be like, “Well it's not that big a deal; it's over.” But the Bible teaches that everybody goes on forever. Physical death is not the end of the story. There are two paths. One is that which delivers the soul-satisfying life that we long for. The other is the contrast to that, so it's a life of dissatisfaction. It's a life of searching, but never finding what will satisfy. It's a life that is defined by searching and emptiness and loneliness, away from God.

One of the most practical ways to understand this, is to think that in this life we have moments that seem almost magical. They're just these wonderful moments that fill us with joy, and there's a depth

to these moments that feels like, “I wish life could be like this all the time.” They're just kind of moments; they're glimpses, but what they are is actually a glimpse of the world to come. It's a glimpse of the world as God wanted it to be, and it just gives you a taste of what God is offering in this idea of eternal life. Contrasting that is, in this life we have terrible moments. We have moments that are so hurtful and so disappointing, moments that are just so devastating, and we understand those are but glimpses of the world to come without Jesus. That's where that path leads. It's not that someday we will be judged. John's already told us in chapter three, “We're already judged. We're already separated from God; we're already on that path.” That's why we feel those things. What Jesus is offering is a chance for eternal life, a chance for the life that God has always wanted for us, if we're willing to enter through the gate, through Jesus, and receive His gift. So that's what He's talking about. His sheep hear His voice. What does He give them? He gives them eternal life, so they will not perish. That phrase *will not* is what we call the emphatic in the Greek, which means they absolutely will not perish. Even the *will not* is not present tense; it's future tense. It's the idea, this is so sure that He's saying you absolutely **will not ever perish**.

So think of it this way. This is the Good Shepherd. He's guarding the gate to the sheep. As we talked about last week, the wolves are howling. This Shepherd is not just saying, “I'm telling you I'm here all night, and nothing's going to happen to you tonight.” He's saying “I'm here forever and there's never going to be a wolf that will ever get to you and remove you out of this pen.” As a matter of fact, when He says the reason is because the sheep are in the hand of the Shepherd, and, “**No one will snatch them out of My hand.**” That word **snatch** is the exact same Greek word that's used in verse 12—that the wolves cannot snatch the sheep away from the Good Shepherd. It's great imagery. The wolves are howling; they're coming for the sheep. But what the Good Shepherd is saying is, “When you're in My flock, when you're with Me, I'm telling you there will never be a moment where the wolf will ever get to you and snatch you out of My hand.” What the Shepherd is saying is, “In your hour of need, I will be there for you. Absolutely!”

He goes on in verse 29, and also identifies that the Father is in on this, that the Father also has the sheep in His hand, and no one is greater than the Father—no *one*, no *thing*! The Father is greater than all. It just simply isn't possible that there's anyone or anything that can snatch these sheep out of the hand of the Father. He identifies that **I and the Father are one**. So understanding that what the Good Shepherd is offering is this eternal life as a gift. This life after death, even though we die, we will live. We're going to talk about that next week—the promise that He will deliver you to the place that your soul longs for, and there you'll find the life that you've always searched for.

That is ultimately the hope of the gospel. It's not that everything in this world is going to make sense, that everything in this world is going to fall into place. It's that He will be there with you every step of the way and will ultimately deliver you to the new heaven and the new earth—the world as God intended it to be. Jesus says, “I've got you in My hand; the Father's got you in His hand. I promise I'm going to get you there.” The hope of the gospel is not determined by how tightly we can hold on to God. It's determined by how tightly God has promised to hold on to us. It's that assurance that gives us what we need to face the most difficult moments in life. Verse 31:

**The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. 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.” (Vs. 31-33)**

So they hear what Jesus is saying, that He's claiming to be God, and so they're determined to stone Him. What's interesting about this is, they're not confused. That is what Jesus just said. That's what He's been saying all along. Yes, God became a man. He is a man who is also God in the flesh. They are understanding that. They just don't like it and they're determined not to believe it. So Jesus' response, verse 34:

**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'? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.'" Therefore they were seeking again to seize Him, and He eluded their grasp. (Vs. 34-39)**

So this is by far the most confusing section of John chapter 10. So what is Jesus saying? Jesus is quoting from Psalm 82, verse 6, where in that psalm God is speaking and He identifies humans in the psalm—the judges as gods—the Hebrew Elohim. That seems strange to us, but the word Elohim mostly referred to God, but occasionally was used to refer to humans—oftentimes leaders, judges, people that represented God on earth. It's not so different from us using the term God in a similar way, where we say, "We gathered to worship God;" "We trust God." "We believe in God," but we turn right around and refer to the "gods of this age" or "the gods of this world" or people worshipping the "god of materialism" or the other religion and their gods. We're using the same term. We're just meaning it differently in a different context. It's similar to how the word Elohim was sometimes used. This was a very familiar passage to the rabbis, very familiar to the religious leaders, would have been discussed in the synagogue a lot. So Jesus is saying, "This is *your* Law." In other words, this is in the Old Testament, and you affirm this. He also goes on and says that this Law cannot be broken; it can't be annulled. We know this is true. The rabbis debated about whether this was a reference, then, to the judges, which is probably what Psalm 82:6 is referring to. The judges were to represent God and bring justice to the land, but they were corrupt, and God was calling them out on it. The next verse after this in the psalm says, "***But you will die like men,***" because you're not God, and you're just called to represent God.

The rabbis also thought this was a reference to the children of Israel when they received the Law from Mount Sinai. They were the people of God; they uniquely received the Law of God, and that's what it says in the Exodus texts. They're even referred to as *sons of God* or *children of God*. So they were the called-out people of God to represent God. The idea is that Jesus is saying, "Those people were called gods, and you're okay with that. But now I'm the perfect fulfillment; I am God in the flesh, and you accuse Me of blasphemy?" So He says, "If I can't do any miracles, don't believe in Me. But if I am doing miracles, it validates My claim." He identifies Himself as the one who is sanctified, which means set apart...consecrated...dedicated.

So this takes us back to John chapter 1, verses 1-5: Jesus is the eternal Son of God, who was the one who was set apart to take on human flesh (verse 14) ...in order to exegete, or reveal the Father, (verse 18.) And so this is what Jesus has been saying, "I'm sent from the Father to tell you the truth about how to have a relationship with God, how to experience God's salvation, but they just won't listen."

And so Jesus calls them out on that in verse 39. Once again they're determined to seize Him and arrest Him and kill Him.

So there's lots of commentary on this part of John 10, and it can get very confusing. But I did come across one of the commentators who wrote like a little parable to help explain it, that I thought was actually very helpful. So I'm going to read the story. I've condensed it a little bit for time. But sit back, take a deep breath. It's Storytime with Bryan.

*“They found the music, a single original copy, among the piles of unsorted paper the composer had left at the time of his death, a solo piece for violin, but it looked difficult, daring, even unplayable. Above it was scrawled, To the City Violinists.*

*The violinists were honored, but embarrassed. None of them could play the piece. Copies were made, and each member took one home to try it out. When they met later, they tried to pass it off with excuses. Anyway, it seemed very strange – though they couldn't deny there were some interesting passages. All of them declared that they'd give it another try...one day. Some even wondered aloud whether the old man had meant for it to be played at all. Soon they all forgot about it.*

*Until one day, many years later, there came to the city an old man with a long straggly beard and a battered violin case. He hardly looked like a real musician. He took lodging by the city square and soon afterwards, stories began to circulate of strange and beautiful music coming from his room. Finally, some of the city violinists gathered to listen.*

*There was no mistaking it. They were listening to the music that had been dedicated to them. It was, indeed, almost unplayable but he was playing it, making it dance and leap and fall. It was wild and strange and sweet.*

*As it died away, some of the city violinists burst into applause. But others were furious. ‘That was our music,’ they said. What right has he got to come here and play it? Is he trying to make us look stupid?*

*The old man spoke through his open window. ‘I’m the son of the composer, He taught me to play the piece.*

*‘Rubbish!’ shouted the angry violinists in the square. ‘You’ve no business here! How dare you play it!’*

*The next morning the old violinist was gone, and the music was never heard in the city again.”*

*©Wright, N.T., John for Everyone Part 1, 2002,2004, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, pgs. 158-159.*

The parable is basically saying the Law was the music, and it was given to the nation of Israel to play, to reflect the composer. But it was hard, and they couldn't play it. They couldn't keep the Law. They had concluded no one can play it. As a matter of fact, by the first century it was almost doctrine among the religious leaders that the Law was not possible to keep. Then along comes Jesus, and to everyone's surprise, He's playing the music, and it's beautiful. Some applauded, but the religious leaders were angry, “Who told you, you could play our music? You're trying to make us look stupid.” He was exposing their self-righteous hypocrisy, and they didn't like Him. All they wanted to do now was shut

down the music and kill Him. That's a good story to illustrate what Jesus is trying to say here. No matter what He does, no matter what He says, they're not going to listen. Verse 40:

**And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was first baptizing, and He was staying there. Many came to Him and were saying, "While John performed no sign, yet everything John said about this man is true." Many believed in Him there.** (Vs. 40-42)

So this is the last time Jesus will be in Jerusalem speaking to the crowds until he reenters on Palm Sunday. So that's about three months out at this point. He goes back to what is North of Jerusalem and to the East of the Jordan River. It's an area that would have been known as Perea and would have been under Herod Antipas. This meant the religious leaders had no jurisdiction or authority there, so Jesus was safe. It's also basically the area where the story started with John the Baptist identifying Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. So what John tells us is, because of John the Baptist's ministry, people were prepared, and when they heard Jesus, many, many believed.

And over the last 2,000 years, many, many more have believed. Millions of people in different countries, different lands, different languages, different cultures, different stories, different struggles, have found their life and hope in the promise of the Good Shepherd. The gospel has gone around the world because one thing all of us share in common as people is, "Life is hard." There's something in our souls that longs for a different place, that longs for not only something different but something more. There's something that feels like this is not the world I was made for, and that longing, that struggle, the heartache, the pain, the struggles and addictions, all that leads people to realize there's only one person that can be there for them in their hour of need. And that is Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

Jesus promises anyone who enters through the gate, He will rescue them; He will make them part of His flock. "I will give them eternal life and they will never perish. I will hold them in My hand. No wolf will ever get to them until I deliver them to the new heaven and the new earth—the place their souls have longed for." Finally, when we are delivered to that place that we've longed for, we will know that this is the place my soul has desired. We will know in that moment, "I am finally home." Until that time, life is hard. It's full of struggles. This virus thing is going to go away but there are hundreds of other things. That's just the way of it. This world is messed up. That's why we long for something different.

The only one in our hour of need that can be there for us, to give us what we need, is the Good Shepherd. He's going to take care of us. He's going to forgive us. He's going to show kindness and compassion. He's going to make it possible for us to rest and find peace and security. He's going to lead us out into green pastures and find us fresh water. He's going to make it possible for us to have life and to have it abundantly, even in the midst of the most difficult circumstances of life. And, ultimately, He will fulfill His promise to deliver us to the new heaven and the new earth, where we will finally find the home that we've longed for. It's only when we realize that our hope is in the world to come, and we are securely held in the hand of the Good Shepherd until we get there, and until then, we will get what we need to live well in the most difficult circumstances of this life. My prayer is that you will listen, you will obey, and you will follow the Good Shepherd, because in your hour of need, He is the only one that can truly be there for you. Let's pray:

*Our Father, we're thankful that the Good Shepherd has offered us a gift, eternal life. Lord, we know that that comes at a great price. It's only through the death and the burial and the resurrection of the Great Shepherd that He can offer forgiveness, that He can offer life, that He can offer a promise of a future more glorious than we can imagine. Lord, may we listen. May we follow. May we obey the Good Shepherd. That we might experience life now and forever in Jesus' name, Amen.*

*(Video): Bryan Olesen:*

*Isn't it true that our innate desires correspond with what actually exists in reality? What I mean is we hunger because such a thing as food exists. We thirst because such a thing as water exists. We tire because such a thing as rest exists. We long for love because love does exist. Wouldn't that mean that if we long for meaning, that such a thing as meaning must exist?*

*The atheist tells us that our desires are hard-wired into our brain for the purpose of survival, nothing more. Yet our hearts tell a different story. I mean we know when we experience and listen to a beautiful piece of music; or when we see an amazing piece of art; or when we experience the majesty of a mountain; or when we experience love, true deep satisfying love, this is more than some instinct for survival. We know that this is more than hard-wiring, and we know it deeply.*

*If our hearts long for something more, wouldn't that mean that something more must exist? Wouldn't our longing correspond with some reality? I mean, we look at this broken world as it is today and something deep inside is crying out for a better place. We ache with a longing for a world where justice, righteousness, and human dignity are celebrated. But where does this longing come from if it doesn't correlate with some reality?*

*How might things change if we were to offer people just a glimpse of the world our souls our longing for? What if justice and righteousness were to flow over a sun-scorched land like a river bringing needed relief? And what if this river of justice was just a glimpse of the world to come, a world that our souls long to call home – a world our souls were actually made for? What if...?*

*...Bryan Clark*

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**Eternally Safe**  
*That You May Believe*  
John 10:22-42  
Pastor Bryan Clark

**Opening Discussion**

1. How sure are you of where you will go when you die? Real sure? Kind of sure? Not sure at all?
2. What would you consider to be glimpses of heaven (the new heaven and earth) to come that you see or experience today? What would you consider to be glimpses of the perishing to come for those who don't believe?

**Bible Study**

1. Read John 10:22-30. What was the Feast of dedication? Why does Jesus use these feasts as opportune times for teaching and revealing Himself?
2. What do you think prevented the religious leaders (Jews) in Jesus' day from hearing and following Jesus? How might that be similar today?
3. What does Jesus give His sheep according to 10:27-30? How might you define eternal life and what is perishing? (see John 3:16 for the same contrast)
4. What does Jesus mean when He says "no one will snatch them out of My hand?" Compare 10:12 for the use of the same term "snatch."
  - a. The word "will" is future tense in 10:28. How does this make this promise even more secure?
5. Is the surety of our salvation, according to Jesus, based on our ability to hold on or Jesus' ability to hold on to us? What's the difference? (I know it's tempting for some to flip around to verses that might challenge the idea of the believer's security, but I encourage you not to do that. Rather, focus on what this text clearly states. What about Jesus' statement is not clear? Verses need to be taken in context and not simply plucked out to make an argument)
6. Read John 10:31-39. The Jews rightly say that Jesus is a man claiming to be God. How does this line up with what we learned in John 1:1-5, 14, 18? In one way the Jews are

hearing Jesus. In another way they refuse to listen and believe. Why? Is it a lack of evidence or something else? How does this help us to understand why many don't believe today?

7. Read John 10:40-42. Why did many believe according to John? How might we prepare the way for the message of Jesus like John prepared the way?

## **Application**

1. Go back to the Opening Discussion question #1. Does this text in John help with your assurance of salvation? Why or why not?

2. How does the assurance of our salvation give us what we need to live faithfully today?