

My Sheep or Not

HN 31/07/05 pm

Reading: Mark 14:32 – 65, Romans 8:12 – 30

Study Text: John 10: 22 – 27

Sing Psalms: 103:1 – 5; 103:8 – 12; 47:4 – 9; 65:1 – 4

The High Priest asked him – ‘are you the Christ, the son of the Blessed’ (Mark 14:61). Jesus answered – I am. And they all embraced him as the long awaited Messiah or anointed one promised in the Scriptures. Is this what happened? No! The Jews were all looking for the Messiah to come and save them but they had come to the idea that he would be a political or military figure who would save them from their Roman oppressors. Jesus did not speak of such salvation.

Rather than embrace Jesus or fall at his feet as the poor beggar did, the High Priest tore his clothes in a rage. The whole Council of the Jews lashed out at him. They spat on Jesus and started slapping him. Soon they would have the whole crowd shouting ‘crucify him’. They rejected the Christ of God, the anointed One who God sent into the world to save them...from their sin.

That was at the trial of Jesus at Passover. It was probably just a few months before this when Jesus was asked the same question by Jews who surrounded him in the porch of the temple. It was at the Feast of Dedication or *Hanukkah* which occurs near the winter solstice – 25th of Kislev. This Feast is not found in the Hebrew Scriptures for it arose in celebration of the victory of Judas Maccabaeus over Antiochus Epiphanies in 167BC. The pagan altar set up in the temple by this Syrian invader was removed with great celebration.

How long do you keep us in doubt/suspense? The Jews pressed Jesus for an answer. *If you are the Christ tell us plainly.* What would have happened if he had told them plainly – I am the Christ? No doubt the response would have been exactly the same as that at his trial. This was not a sincere question but a loaded one.

The title Messiah or Christ meant different things to different people – and was mostly misunderstood. It comes from Scripture but the Jews had added a lot of their own baggage to the title. A coming *Messiah the Prince* is spoke of in the prophecy of Daniel (Daniel 9:25). He would be like David, and One who would restore Jerusalem. Under Roman oppression the Jews found some hope in the promise of a Messiah but they thought of him not only as religious but also as a political or military type figure.

Jesus wanted to avoid this title because it carried these overtones. Whilst the Jews looked for such a deliverer the Romans would not have pleased with such a figure arising in Israel. Sent by God and anointed – yes; but a political deliverer – No.

Told you

Jesus therefore could say in answer to the question of the Jews – *I told you*. They accused him of keeping them in suspense or literally ‘lifting up our soul’. They wanted a straightforward word. But Jesus was not hiding anything. He told them that he was sent by the Father to do things God had

ordained for him to do. That was the extent to which their idea of Messiah coincided with that of Jesus.

Besides they were not sincere in their request. If they had a clear statement from him it would be something they could hold against Jesus. They had already condemned him for saying God was his *Father making himself equal with God* (5:18). Would the Messiah be able to make a greater claim than this – that God was his Father! I told you said Jesus.

Jesus was willing to use the title Messiah when it would not be misunderstood. He identified himself as the Messiah to the Samaritan woman at the well – *I who speak to you am he* (4:26). This woman did not carry all the political baggage that the Jews did. The Messiah she looked for would tell about the truth and about worship. We also read that some of his disciples referred to Jesus by this title (1:41).

The works that I do in my Father name, they bear witness of me (10:25). Jesus had earlier listed his works as a witness to his divinity. He multiplied the loaves and fishes, he healed a long term paralytic, he healed a man born blind, and soon he raise a man from the dead. What more powerful witness did they want to his being sent by God? They could not avoid this witness – all they do was attribute his works to Satan and not God and so reveal their unbelief.

Sadly this is often the case still today when people are confronted by the gospel. The more some people hear the gospel the harder their hearts become. As hard as they try they cannot prove anything in the Bible wrong. They develop an intense hatred for the word of God and for his people who keep talking about Jesus and worshipping him. In India only 2 – 3% of the people are Christian, but hard Hindus go out of their way to persecute them. You will find the same among friends or even family members who reject the gospel – they can become aggressive in their rejection.

Not believe

You do not believe. I told you said Jesus but you would not believe. They would not accept the witness of his words or his works. They went on in blindness and unbelief.

They would have embraced him if he had done what they wanted. They would have followed him if he had said he would deliver them from the Romans. At this feast they were celebrating a man who had led an uprising against political oppression. They would later call for Barabbas to be set free instead of Jesus. They had more regard for such a deliverer.

How tragic it is when men and women become preoccupied with the things of this world, even worthy things, and neglect matters of eternal significance. We get concerned about political freedom, about the environment, about justice and the poor. God does of course command us to pray for kings and those in authority and to remember the poor. But he also tells us to seek first the kingdom of God. If we lose concern for the eternal destiny of own our souls, and for the souls of those around us we have become as blind as these Jews seeking first and foremost political freedom.

You do not believe answered Jesus. Even if their question was sincere they had no excuse for their unbelief. I told you said Jesus. These were educated men who knew the Scriptures. Yet they would not believe the one who fulfilled all the promises of Scripture. The Samaritan woman, and the poor beggar who believed put to shame the worldly – wise Jews and all who follow them in unbelief.

Not of my sheep

You do not believe. Is that it? Was it simply the case that the Jews looked at the evidence and decided Jesus did not measure up? Jesus did not see this as the end of the matter. He did not leave it at that. Their unbelief was evidence of their not being Christ's sheep – not the cause. *You do not believe because you are not my sheep.* What are we to make of this statement?

The final cause of their unbelief is the sovereign choice of God. *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him* said Jesus (6:44). This tells of the sovereignty of God in election. 'The predestinarian note ensures that their massive unbelief is not surprising: it is to be expected and falls under the umbrella of God's sovereignty (Carson). God chooses some to be his sheep and others not to be his sheep. Some theologians called this double predestination. And this must be true if God is to be absolutely sovereign. You do not believe because you are not my sheep.

My sheep

The sovereignty of God is maintained in the next verse. Jesus speaks with sovereign certainty about **my** sheep, about those whom the Father has given to him. *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me.* This is very self centred language – it is language we would expect from a sovereign. This is the Father's will, therefore it is Jesus' will and therefore it will come to pass. Let us make his will our will – your will be done O Lord!

The flock belongs to Jesus from beginning to end – from the beginning into eternity. He chooses his sheep, he calls them, he knows them and he gives them life. He laid down his life for them.

This is the good shepherd we have – God the Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. What a comfort it is knowing that in his sovereign grace he predestined us, he called us, he justified us and he glorified us. He predestined us *to be conformed to the image of his son that he might be the firstborn among many brethren* (Romans 8:29).

Are you encouraged, are you strengthened, knowing this truth? Will you strive to follow the good shepherd more closely? Let us each one seek to more like Christ in all we say and do. Let us serve him faithfully, proclaiming his name among all peoples, that all his sheep might soon be brought into this one flock of Jesus Christ our Lord.

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