



Sermon Transcription • John 10:22-30 (NIV)

Preserved by God

Pastor Ezra Okot

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

We've been going through a series on perseverance. The Scriptures call Christians to persevere, in their faith, and there'll be sorts of challenges that we'll face - challenges either related to your faith directly and opposition because you believe in Jesus. And then also challenges regarding just day to day life - things not going right, relational fractures, financial pressures, health challenges and so on, and the Christian has been called to persevere. Now last week Jeff preached a phenomenal sermon - if you didn't watch it, if you didn't listen to it, if you want to hear, go to our website, northview.org, and watch his sermon last week. Phenomenal sermon where he's talking about running the race saying, many times when we are running our race, the temptation to look at our neighbours race, to look at someone else's life and begin to envy that life is huge, particularly when your race, your life, is filled with so many obstacles and theirs seems easy. And so sometimes we would rather live their lives, or run their race rather than ours and Jeff was calling us, using the Scriptures, "Hey run your race, run your race, keep your eye on your race not on the other person's race." So maybe you heard that sermon last week. So you go back home and you tell yourself, "Self, let me run *my race*, let me live *my life* and so you continue pursuing God, following Jesus while running your own race. But the problems are still there; the financial pressure is still there, the infertility is still there, relational break is still there. All these problems are still there, so how do you continue running this race while the problems are still there in your face; and in many cases for many of us hope begins to fade. And as hope begins to fade discouragement sets in and it's difficult to keep running this race. I would say this, one of our biggest enemies in our lives is forgetfulness, forgetting the promises of God, while we are in the race. And sometimes the challenges or the struggles are so heavy, they are so weighty, some of them are life and death issues. And while we're in it, the mind has a way of forgetting the promises of God and yet the Scriptures on so many occasion keep pushing us - bring to mind, call to mind the promises of God, who God is and what he has done. Call to mind. And this is what we often do at our community groups or we *should* be doing in our community groups or in our friendship gatherings. Where we are bearing each others burdens and reminding each other of the faithfulness of God in the midst of the challenge. Why - we've been called to persevere, so how do you do it? How do you persevere in a godly way? One of the ways is to call to mind the goodness and the faithfulness of God.

So that's what we're going to be doing this morning. We will call to mind, we will look at the words of Jesus and as we look at his words, we will call to mind two things. First - we will remind ourselves that we belong to him. We belong to him. Secondly - we will call to mind, we will remind ourselves that because we belong to him, we benefit from him. There's significant benefit that comes because we



belong to Christ. So the passage again, John 10:22-30, if you don't have a Bible it will be up on the screen, so let's read together.

"Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.' [That's a good question right? If you're the Messiah tell us plainly.] Jesus answered, 'I *did* tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you do not believe [Why?] because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand [Jesus said]. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.'

There ends the reading of the Word of God. This is a very interesting text here, and particularly the words of Jesus where he's declaring who his sheep are and I'm hoping by the end of this sermon you will be strangely warmed, like your heart will feel encouraged, knowing that you actually belong to Jesus and there are benefits that can be found in him.

[We Belong to Him]

So we belong to him, how? Let's begin by giving you a little bit of a background of what's happening here. So what on earth is this Festival of Dedication? What is it, you may be asking. Well, about a 165 years before Jesus was born, 165 years before Jesus was born, there was this Greek general, a military general with his army. He rolled into Jerusalem and he captured the city, the name of the general, Antiochus Epiphanes. So he comes with his army, takes over Jerusalem and because he's Greek and obviously in Jerusalem we have the people of God who are there, the Jews, who are there. So Antiochus brings his Greek culture into Jerusalem. So what does he do? He goes to the temple and at the temple he brings bacon. Now if my daughter was there she'd be like, "Sweet! Bacon!" But you see Jews don't do pork - they don't. But Antiochus Epiphanes brings pork and he begins to feed it to the priests which was an abomination, why, because pork was unclean to the Jews. You don't do pork. So he begins to feed the priests pork, and not only that, some of the inner chambers of the temple, he converted them into brothels, why - because that's how the Greeks worship their gods. In orgies and stuff like this. So now he wants to worship his Greek gods in the Jewish temple. And inviting the Jews to engage in the worship of other gods - and he went as far as bringing his animals and sacrificing, making sacrifices to Zeus and other gods, other Greek gods on the altar in the temple. Obviously there were many God-fearing Jews who were not too thrilled by this. And so one, Judas Maccabeus, decides to like evoke an uprising and then they gathered together an army of Jews, albeit with their sticks and stones and so on, and they come against Antiochus Epiphanes and his army and they're able by God's grace to defeat them.

So in other words, for the Jews now, God fought for us and liberated us from the Greek rule, and so Judas Maccabeus decides to go now to the temple, which was desecrated, and he begins to cleanse it and then they rededicate it. It was desecrated. False offerings offered on the altar, we need to



cleanse this thing. So they cleansed it and then rededicated it around December. And every year since, so this is 164 BC and after, every year since, the Jews began to celebrate the Festival of Lights, or the Festival of Dedication - in Jerusalem. So people would take candles and put them on their windows so it was, the city was lit up at night with all these candles as they were remembering that the temple that was being dedicated. But as they remembered, as they remembered, they'd be reading passages of Scripture that will be talking about shepherds and they'll be asking during this weeks long celebrations; where were the leaders of our nation that allowed Epiphanes to come and take us over. Where were the shepherds - oh they were busy eating pork. What should God's shepherds be doing?

So as they're asking these questions where the shepherds, what would God's people be doing every year when they're celebrating, it was around this time, in the winter, when Jesus stands up in the temple and says, "I am the good shepherd." See the connection there? "I am the good shepherd." Right then in that week. "I am the good shepherd." So this is John 10:16, a few verses up from our text today. "I am the good shepherd," Jesus says. So there they are, the Jews gathered, and so now we come to our text where John now mentions, yes the festival is going on, people are busy remembering what had happened. These Jews come to Jesus and say, "How long will you keep us in suspense then? If you're the Messiah, tell us plainly."

Now this question is not being asked by people who want to follow Jesus, nah ah. The idea is not to follow Jesus, remember what are they doing? They're remembering the liberation of Jerusalem and the fact that God is the one who redeemed them and so now they're being on guard against anything that would attack, invade Judaism. So now here comes Jesus, he's doing all these thing, he's now a threat to our religious system, so they're asking him, "Hey if you're the Messiah, tell us plainly." So they're waiting for Jesus to say, "Yes, I'm the Messiah." Of which they would drag him out of the temple and stone him to death, but Jesus knows their intentions. So Jesus says, "Hey, I did tell you, but you don't believe. I've don't all these mighty works, but you still don't believe. Why don't you believe? Yeah you're not my sheep. You don't belong to me, you're not my sheep." Then Jesus then will jump in, John 10:27,

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, [who is great than all, my Father] who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand . [And by the way] I and the Father are one.”

In other words, I am divine, just the same way the Father is divine. Huge statement. So the question then is how does this text tell us today, men and women who are going through all sorts of challenges in our lives, whatever the challenge may be. It could be a loved one who's ailing, or it could be job loss, or it could be financial pressure, or relational struggle. Whatever your challenge is - how does this passage encourage us? Well you belong to him, how do we know this? Notice John 10:27, my sheep, those are mine, Jesus is saying, they listen to my voice. My sheep listen to my voice. So it's interesting that Jesus would use this image of shepherd. In the ancient times, in the ancient times, a shepherd would take out their sheep, and as the shepherds are walking, or grazing their flock, they'd be singing.



So I'd like you to imagine this, okay. So Ezra and Jeff are shepherds and they have their sheep, so now what shepherds would do - what Ezra and Jeff would be this: Ezra would have his flute and he'd be playing music for his sheep, certain tunes that his sheep would become familiar with. And the shepherd would walk with the rod and a staff and they'd be tapping on rocks and dragging their feet on the road so that the sheep would recognize they would hear the sound of the shepherd. Why - because the sheep don't have good eyesight. They're eyesight is not great, so they'd be listening to the shepherd, "Oh he's there so I guess we got to go there. He's there so we got to go there." So Ezra is playing his flute and Jeff, also being a shepherd, he'd be singing. Now that's funny, Jeff singing. [Laughter] So he'd be singing to his sheep, and they would recognize his voice as well. And so now Ezra and Jeff meet at the watering hole. Our animals now mix, and they're all drinkinking from the watering hole right? They're quenching their thirst, it's time to leave. So what does Ezra and Jeff do? Our animals have mixed, now Ezra will look and say, "Yes my sheep are more *fat* than yours Jeff, yours are scrawny looking. So every good, healthy is mine." No they don't do that, even though Ezra's sheep are better than Jeff's, they don't do that. What do they do? What the shepherd would do when it's time to go - Ezra would grab his flute and he'd begin to play. And as Ezra is playing his sheep would begin to follow and Jeff would begin to walk away and he would sing. And his sheep, in other words, there will be a separation between the animals - why? The sheep listen to the voice.

You see, when you came to Christ you were probably in a room like this, maybe, and the preacher was preaching the gospel of Jesus - and there were many people there who are probably not a Christian, maybe you came there with your non-Christian aunt, uncle, and you yourself weren't a Christian either. The gospel was proclaimed, and then after the gospel was proclaimed an invitation was made and you said yes. And maybe your non-Christian aunt said no. You were his sheep, you heard the Saviour say, "Jeff ... Vic John ... Ezra ... Joanne." The Lord called you, "Melissa!" The Lord called you. The Lord called you; my sheep listen to my voice. Oh dear Christian how often we forget while we're in it, struggling, running our race, and things are difficult and speed bumps are there - how often we forget that our Savior called us, Savior called you by name. And not only did he call you, what else happened? My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me, *they follow me*.

So there's a preacher a number of years ago, many years ago. This is a true story, so he had a tent meeting and so he's there, had a crusade, so evangelism crusade: invite your neighbours, invite your non-Christian people to this tent meeting. And the meetings were Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, through to Friday. So the preacher comes, the music happens, on Monday this young man walks in, sits at the back because he'd been invited by a family member, "You need to hear this man." So this young adult sits at the back and is listening and is like, "Okay, yeah yeah, great." The music is done, the preacher stands up and begins to preach and the young adults heart begins to get convicted and he realizes, "I need Jesus. I need Jesus." So the meeting is done and the young man beelines down for the preacher and goes and says, "Preacher man I need Jesus, tell me how do I get a relationship - enter into a relationship with Jesus?" Preacher says, "Dude, do this: go home, come back tomorrow." Okay, so the young man goes, comes back the next day - Tuesday. Sits right at the front, preacher preaches, oh the message is better than last night, and the young man realizes, "I need Jesus!"



Meeting is done, people are coming forward to respond for prayer or for salvation. Young man comes, "Preacher man, I'm back. Okay tell me today, how do I become a Christian?" Preacher looks at him and says, "Young man, do this: go home, come back tomorrow." So the young man is a little confused. "Okay, fine, I'll come back tomorrow." So tomorrow again, sits right at the front, preacher preaches the message it's Wednesday, "Oh that message is better than Monday, Tuesday, this is great. I want Jesus!" End of meeting, young man comes up, "Preacher, I want to know Jesus." "Ah, come back tomorrow." Thursday, "Come back tomorrow." Friday, the young man comes to the preacher and says, "Preacher, there is no more tomorrow, please, please, please I'm begging you how do I become a Christian?" And the preacher said, "You become a Christian when you keep following, when you keep coming. Keep coming, keep coming, keep coming regardless of what's happening, keep coming." Oh dear Christian, in your race as you persevere through whatever struggles you're going through, you know you belong to him when you keep coming. And for many of you, you're probably in it, so your neck deep in it, and you're trying to look over the waves and you can't even see land, but you're here today, and sometimes it's feels for you that all hope is gone, you're here today. You don't have the answers that will remove you from the struggle you're going through - you're here today. My sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow me. And sometimes the Lord as you're following him, he will send you like sheep among wolves as he says in Matthew 10, I send you as sheep among wolves, but even as you go through the difficulties that the Lord will send you through, you want to remember Psalm 23:1-4 (NKJV),

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. [Even], though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."

How do the rod and thy staff comfort? Oh the sheep is hearing the shepherd doing this <tapping noise on the podium>. Right, sheep hears the shepherd is still near, is still near, is still near. My sheep hear my voice, they follow me." Oh dear Christian, you belong to him because you heard his voice and you followed.

[We Benefit from Him]

Not only that, because we belong to him, we benefit? So how do we benefit? How do we benefit from him in three ways. Now they're multiple ways, I'll only give you three from this text. So first, we are known by God. We are known by God and I find this in John 10:27,

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them."

I know them. So let me give you an example. One of the things that we love to do is networking right. We network with people. So in church, you meet people, "Hey how are you doing? What do you do?" "Oh I'm a mechanic." Great now file - Joe is a mechanic. Good, and you talk to, "Hey what's your name?"



“My name is Suzanne.”

“Oh what do you do?”

“Oh I’m a nurse.” File - Suzanne nurse. And, “Hey let me meet Melissa.”

“What do you do?”

“Oh hey I’m a accountant.” Hmm, taxes time, hmm accountant, Melissa. So I already know people, I’m already networking, so when I need help I can always say, “I know a guy. I know a guy.” When you hear someone in your Community Group - they’re having trouble with their transmission, you would say, “Hey I know a guy. Joe is a mechanic, I know a guy.” We know people. But what’s better is when those people in power, those people in authority, they know you, that’s even better for you. Why? If they’re in authority and they know you, that means you’re secure. That means if they hear that you have an issue they have the authority to make things go well for you - right. But is that the kind of knowledge that Jesus is talking about here? No, the kind of knowledge that Jesus is talking about here is more of an intimate knowledge.

So I’ll give you an example, those who are parents here, you’ll know what I mean. So imagine you’re in your kitchen and you’re making food and you’re little daughter, little son has been playing in the basement, whatever, and then they run upstairs and you’re busy dinner or making lunch, and you turn your head and you look at your child straight in the face, any parent before the child says boo - they know what the child wants. They know what the child wants. When I look at my daughters face I know she’s wanting ice cream, when I look at my son’s eyes, he wants chocolate, it’s not dinner yet, he wants chocolate, I know. Why, because they’re my child. If they’re in the school park playing on a field with all those kids, as a parent I’ll come and stand, all the other parents are there and we’re all looking at the kids playing, but every single parent has their eye on their son or daughter on the field. And any good parent will look at the child and know whether the child is having a good time, a bad time, whether their bored out of mind, they will know. Why, because there’s an intimate knowledge between you and your child. This the knowledge that God has about you. And if I know my child that well, this means that I, being a good parent, will make sure that I will provide every resource that is good for this child and I will take away what’s not good for this child. So for breakfast I’m not giving my child Coke Zero for breakfast, like Jeff likes Coke Zero for breakfast, I’m not even kidding. [Laughter] I’m not giving my child Red Bull at any point because she will say, “Daddy, I want Red Bull, it will give me wings!” [Laughter]

“We’re not going to have Red Bull honey. No.” Because I know my child, I know them well enough to give them what they need and to take away what they don’t need. And they will think that I’m really bad, I’m not giving them Coke Zero. “No aspartame for you honey.” But what is interesting also in this little passage, John 10:29,

“My Father, who has given them to me.”

Jesus speaking, saying, “My Father is the one who has given.” The Father is the one who gave you to him. How did the Father do this? Jesus will say in John 6:44,

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them.”



No one comes to the Son unless the Father draws him, how does the Father draw you? There are so many people who keep resisting the call of God right. They resist the call of God, they resist the call of God, they resist the call of God, and sometimes we think, we think that, "Oh that person has resisted the call of God, well God will just walk away and say, 'Geeze they just resisted my call.'" No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no - that's not what the Scriptures teach, the Father will overcome your resistance. You will not outrun God when he has his eye set on you. It's like a child who becomes unruly and is resisting the parent, a good parent will know how to overcome the child's resistance right. How much more the Father. How much more the Father? So you are busy running from God, and God began to pursue you. He loved you when you did not love him. He pursued you while you were busy hiding from him, and he broke your defenses and you came to saving faith, why - he knew you before the foundations of the world, he knew you. And with that knowledge comes significant benefits like you receive eternal life. John 10:27-28,

"I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish."

That's benefit number two, you receive eternal life and you will never perish. So, you've probably watched a commercial on TV by Scotiabank, you know, "You're richer than you think, Scotiabank." Right, why does Scotiabank have this commercial on TV, why? Because they know that you're probably a little anxious about what your retirement will look like and maybe you're struggling to figure out how to put your money together. So Scotiabank will come and they'll tell you, "Hey if you sit down with one of our financial advisors we will help you coordinate your money, doesn't matter how deeply in debt you are, we'll help you sort your financing, we'll help you save some - so that in the next 15, 20, 30 years, you're going to be great. You're richer than you think. Telus comes around and says, "The future is friendly now." Right, why - we love, we love to know, we want to know that the future is secure, we want to know that it will all end well.

So for example you'll go to the movies. When you go to the movies what happens? You'll watch this show and what will make that movie great is if the beginning, yeah the beginning was intense and then it just went downhill, it's a roller coaster and the difficulty and challenge and struggle and strife and it goes on and on and it comes to an end where finally there's great victory, the villains have been defeated. And now it is sunshine, and he's met the girl and they get married and they lived happily ever after, and it's great. We leave the theatre, we go to Starbucks, we buy a coffee and we just think, "Oh the world is so nice, [laughter] the movie ended well." We love this story when there is the sunset end, when it is, they lived happily ever after, right. That's your story dear Christian. Your life right now, yeah you're in the middle of the movie, it ain't over yet. It might go even further down, maybe, but the end is glorious. The end is glorious - I give them eternal life, they will never perish - meaning, your sins will never be counted against you, your sins past, your sins present, your sin future - will never be counted against you! Why, because Christ paid for it on the cross. That's why today we are calling to mind the things that Christ did on the cross, we are having communion. Why are we doing that? We are calling to mind that your sins and mine; past, present, future, paid on the cross. Amen to that - right? Right.



So, how different would you live your life if you knew that your Great Uncle Jeff Bucknam was leaving you a million dollars. How would you live your life? How differently would you live your life if you knew that Jeff, your uncle, will leave you a million bucks by Easter, guaranteed. The check written, money transferred it will be released to your account Easter weekend. How would you live your life? Question, Jesus your Lord, the one who called you, the one who knows you, says this, "I'll give you eternal life, and you will never perish". That's guaranteed, take that to the bank! So then dear Christian, how do you run your race now? You might be right in the middle of the ocean and the waves are high, you can't see the land, but you know, you know this movie ends well, it ends well! It is difficult, in the moment, but it ends well. It ends well. He'll give you eternal life, and you'll never perish.

Benefit number three, there is this guaranteed security, you will notice he says, John 10:28-29,

"No one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; [and] no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."

I love going to Williams Lake, in the summer not right now when it's minus 30, you will not see me there thank you very much. But in the summer I would go there, or in the Spring I would go there and visit some of my friends family who lived around here - they attended Northview. Then they felt like they needed to buy property, the Lord was calling them to move up to the interior. So they moved to Williams Lake, have a beautiful property. So my first time we go up there, this guy decided, "Hey let me take you to the woods." He's a hunter and he has these guns and his quad bikes and everything. So I'm like, "Sweet let's go." So we go and then we get to the woods, it's quiet, we get down and I ask him, "Okay dude, are there cougars here?"

"Mmmhmm."

"There some wolves here?"

"A few, if you go farther north, Prince George and past, yeah a lot more wolves there."

"Okay, are there coyotes here?"

"Yup."

"Bears?"

"Mmmhmm" And then he says, "Ezra, look here son, ah we will walk in the woods, so you just want to be alert, be aware of your surrounding. You might see a bear, we might see a bear, and sometimes these bears might have their cubs, so if you see a bear, you just want to kind of stay away, just back away and just go clear the area, but Ezra please, please, do not ever be in between a momma bear and the cub. Never be in that situation where momma bear is there and the cubs are here, and you're right in the middle, because that's the day you'll realize bears like dark meat. [Laughter] It's not going to go well. This story is not going to end well for you Ezra. That bear will protect, will care, will safeguard, will keep the cub at all costs."

Jesus says, John 10:28-30,

"No one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."



So think about God the Father, himself first. Let's just not talk about Jesus for a moment. God the Father himself, who is this God the Father - creator of heaven and earth, sustainer. So he's the one who keeps the sun hot. He's the one who keeps the grass green, he created it and continues to sustain it - keeps it green. He's the one who keeps oxygen in the air, maintains the balance of gases in the atmosphere, this God, think of all the birds of the air in the world. How many birds are there in the world today? Billions, right, he feeds every ... single ... one of them, every ... single day. This God, and it's not just the birds. All the rodents in the forests, he feeds them too, and all the caterpillars, he feeds them too, and all the ants, he feeds them too. This God, has you right there. Oh dear Christian, while you're in your race, this God who called you will protect you, way more than mama bear will protect her cubs. No one will snatch them out of *his* hand, no one will take away the guaranteed deposit that he's putting on your account, which is eternal life and a glorious end to this race. Oh dear Christian, see that will make you run your race differently when you know that the future is friendly, that you're secure in Christ, that makes you run differently, makes you run differently. It helps you persevere because you know the Lord is with you. As we run this race that God has placed us in, as you run your race, as I run mine, abandon the temptation of looking at someone else's race, and run your race. And even as you look above the waves and you can't see land, just know that the Lord called you - the one who called you, the one who sustains you, the one loves you, who knows you, who gives you eternal life and he will protect you. You will not die while you're in the midst of it - and your story will have a brilliant end. You belong to him. Because you belong to him, oh dear sister, dear brother, there are benefits guaranteed. Run well, run to win. Run to win. Let's pray.

Father, it is easy to say some of these things up from the stage here, but it's quite another to be in the midst of difficulties and struggles, and Lord I know there are probably some in this room here today who are just in the midst of a fierce battle; relationally, health, financial, whatever Father you know the battle, so Lord I pray while we are in it, while we are striving to persevere, help us to call to mind, help us to call to the fact that we belong to you, the fact that you are our shepherd, that we will not be in want - that even though we walk in the valley of the shadow of death that we ought not fear any evil because you are there with us. Help us to realize that we belong to you, and since we belong to you Father, there are tremendous benefits, promises that we can cling to, promises that we can claim as ours, Father. Fill us with your Holy Spirit. Help us to believe these things. For the glory of your name and for our joy, our own joy, the joy of your people, would these things be true in our lives. I pray all these things in the name of your wonderful son Jesus, and God's people said, Amen.