

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Verses & Notes September 20, 2006

John 10:22-31

22: *It was the feast of the Dedication at Jerusalem;*

23: *it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon.*

24: *So the Jews gathered round him and said to him,*

"How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

25: *Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe.*

The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness to me;

26: *but you do not believe,*

because you do not belong to my sheep.

27: *My sheep hear my voice,*

and I know them, and they follow me;

28: *and I give them eternal life,*

and they shall never perish,

and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.

29: *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.

30: *I and the Father are one."*

31: *The Jews took up stones again to stone him.*

Discussion Notes:

Context: Who, when, where?

- "Feast of the Dedication"
 - *Hanukkah*; instituted by Judas Maccabeus (1 Mac 4:52; 2 Mac 10:5)
 - Commemorates the renewal of worship in the temple in 165 BC, after it had been profaned by Antiochus Epihanes.
 -
- "Winter"
 - Aprox to 3rd wk of December
 - "It was winter, and they were frigid." St. Augustine
 - Therefore, why they were all in Solomon's portico, the eastern side of the temple from the desert winds.
- "At Jerusalem ... in the Temple, in the portico of Solomon."
 - Jesus is no longer out in the backcountry, far away from the Jewish religious leaders; he has come into Jerusalem for the feast & to face his accusers.
- Who are "The Jews"?
 - In John, this refers to "official" Israel who from the beginning are hostile to Jesus and send scribes and priests to confront & question him.
 - From a positive perspective: they have a responsibility under God to protect the people of Israel from false prophets;
 - From a negative perspective: they were too often blinded by pride, power, & position.

The Dialogue: A mostly one-sided conversation, however, based on other Gospel accounts, we can guess their “silent” questions, which help us understand why Jesus said what he did.

- Mark 2:6-8
Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question thus in your hearts?"
- John 2:23-25
Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs which he did; but Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man; for he himself knew what was in man.
- Two theological / apologetic ideas in this dialogue:
 - One primary, central to the Jewish leaders’ question;
 - Another, secondary issue, for which this passage has often been used and even abused.

The Primary issue, expressed in the Jewish leaders’ question:

"How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

Jesus’ Response:

"I told you, and you do not believe"

- He has been telling them with Messianic imagery that they should have understood.

Their *silent* question:

["When did you tell us?!"]

His response:

"The works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness to me; but you do not believe"

- The power of the “signs”
- Jesus is making higher claims than Messiahship; he is reiterating his relationship to the Father, for which they have already taken offence:

(Jn 5:17-18: "But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is working still, and I am working.' This was why the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the sabbath but also called God his Father, making himself equal with God.")

Their *silent* question:

["But why should we believe in you?!"]

His response:

[You won’t or can’t] "... because you do not belong to my sheep."

- Has just given discourse on The Good Shepherd (10:1-18)
- 10:6, Jn says that his Jewish listeners did not understand his imagery;
- so in vs 7, Jn says, “So, Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep...”, & vs 11 & 14, “I am the good shepherd.”
- Very clearly, Jesus uses Messianic imagery which they should understand;
- How did they respond? Vss. 19-21, his words causes a division among the Jews

Their *silent* question:

[“What difference does this make?!”]

His response:

*“My sheep hear my voice,
and I know them,
and they follow me;”*

- Repeating what he had just proclaimed in his Good Shepherd discourse.
- Essentially repeating his Messianic imagery.

Their silent question:

[“So?! What difference does this make?!”]

His response:

*“and I give them eternal life,
and they shall never perish,
and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.”*

- “Eternal life” (mentioned dozen times previously in Jn) = life everlasting with God / the divine life of God;
- BUT his emphasis is NOT on what he means by Everlasting life, but rather his audacious claim that He gives this to His followers!
- The rest of this passage brings us to the other theological / apologetic issue of this passage, which we’ll set aside for a moment.

Their silent question:

[“By what authority do you say such a blasphemous thing?!”]

His response:

*“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.”*

- Here he again reiterates what he said in the Good Shepherd discourse,
- Jesus has said this before: The Father draws the sheep to Jesus ((6:44)
- Here we have the mystery of God’s choice & our free response;
- but his emphasis is on, not only his relationship to the Father, but His oneness with Father. He’s more than the Messiah they’ve been awaiting; He’s the son of God, and here claims it clearly.

Their response:

“The Jews took up stones again to stone him.

But this dialogue is often used for another common theological / apologetic issue:

... THE ETERNAL SECURITY OF THE BELIEVER.

27: *My sheep hear my voice,
and I know them, and they follow me;*

28: *and I give them eternal life,
and they shall never perish,
and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.*

29: *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.*

- *“It is the power exercised by the violent [from the Good Shepherd discourse] that is particularly envisaged, and this notion of the Shepherd’s unconquerable power to keep his sheep from every adverse force is the point of connection with the difficult verse that follows.” (i.e., the thief and robber climbing over wall) from A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture (1950), pg. 1000.*

- *Many verse emphasize that WE can turn away from the Shepherd: i.e., John 15:5-6*
 - 5: *I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*
 - 6: *If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned.*