

“A JOURNEY THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF JOHN” SERIES

#19: “I and the Father Are One”

SCRIPTURE: John 10:22-42

INTRO:

In this part of chapter 10, John takes us from the Feast of Tabernacles in September to the Feast of Dedication in December. So, John is omitting three months of Jesus’ ministry between verse 21 and verse 22.

It’s the beginning of winter in Jerusalem – rainy in the lower altitudes and snowy in the higher.

I found this interesting. The Feast of Dedication had its beginning as an annual celebration in 163 B.C., a year after Judea became an independent kingdom. Let me give you a bit of Jewish history. In 170 B.C., Antiochus Epiphanes, a Greek king of the Seleucid Empire, reigned over Syria, which included Judea, from 175 BC until 164 BC. He’s famous for almost conquering Egypt and for his brutal persecution of the Jews, which precipitated what’s known as the Maccabean revolt. Antiochus Epiphanes was a ruthless and often capricious ruler. He’s properly “Antiochus IV,” but he took upon himself the title “Epiphanes,” which means “illustrious one” or “god manifest.” However, his bizarre and blasphemous behavior earned him another nickname among the Jews: “Epimanes,” which means “mad one.” One of the things he did that helped earn him that name was to order the sacrifice of a sow on the altar of the temple, which was an ultimate insult to the Jews.

Antiochus was determined to wipe out Jewish culture and religion and replace them with Greek, or Hellenistic culture and religion. Failing to accomplish this peacefully, he attacked Jerusalem in 170 B.C., killing 80,000 Jews and establishing martial law. He stole from the temple treasury to the tune of \$2 million, turned the temple chambers into a brothel, and ordered that no children be circumcised. Copies of the Law of Moses were banned.

Judas Maccabaeus led a revolt against Antiochus, and in 164 B.C. with much smaller numbers, defeated the army of Antiochus, and the Jews became an independent kingdom once more for the first time in 400 years. The temple was cleansed, purified, refurnished, and rededicated. The annual Feast of Dedication memorialized that rededication.

It was during the reign of Antiochus that a religious separatist group was formed that became known as “the Pharisees.” They were the “right wingers” who wanted to preserve the old Jewish religion and culture.

Now, let’s consider today’s Scripture passage, noting that...

THE JEWS WANTED TO KNOW IF HE WAS THE MESSIAH OR NOT.

“How long will you keep us in suspense?” they asked. ***“If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”*** Of course, He *had* told them plainly. So, why would they speak to Him in such a way?

You have to realize what these Jews have been through. Many of them could remember the times before the Romans seized power, when they were an independent Maccabean nation. They didn’t want to get their hopes up again only to have them dashed again. You see, they believed that the Messiah would be another King David, who would chase the Romans back to Italy. In the midst of the Feast of Dedication, political freedom and social reform were uppermost in their minds. They finally have Jesus “cornered,” and they want to know if He’s the Messiah they’re looking for or not.

Jesus answers them, saying that...

...THOSE WHO ARE HIS SHEEP FOLLOW HIM.

He had told them in so many words that He was the Messiah, but He hadn’t used the words they wanted to hear. Their problem was not their hearing; it was their unbelief. They couldn’t seem to believe that someone like Him could be the Messiah they were looking for. And that was their problem: they were looking for the wrong kind of Messiah! They were looking for a military leader, not a shepherd to follow like sheep.

Jesus came to lead the flock of God to eternal life, not to lead an army to victory on the battlefield. He came as a shepherd to lead believing sheep into the sheepfold, not as a General to lead obedient soldiers to war. He came to lead those who believe in Him to heaven, not to lead enlistees to fight in a holy war.

Nicodemus believed in Him and was ready to follow him. The man who received his sight believed in him and was ready to follow him. But the Pharisees and the other religious leaders didn’t want such a man to be the Messiah, so they weren’t willing to believe.

Jesus tells these religious leaders: ***“The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, 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.”***

What did He mean when He said, ***“...they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. . . and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand”***? There’s an old adage that says, “No one can snatch us out of the Lord’s hand, but we can certainly jump out ourselves!” I think Jesus was referring to the protection He and the Father provide us who believe. While we are in the fold, no thief can get to us, nor any wolf harm us. Our body can be stolen or killed, but our soul is safe.

Then comes the statement that stirred the Jews to pick up rocks to throw at Him: ***“I and the Father are one.”*** In other words, to be in His hand is the same as being in the Father’s hand.

So then, John tells us that

THEY DECIDED TO STONE HIM FOR BLASPHEMY.

Stoning is a method of execution during which a group of people, usually peers of the guilty party, throws stones at the condemned person until he or she dies. Death by stoning was prescribed in the Old Testament Law as a punishment for various sins. Both animals and people could be the subjects of stoning (Exodus 21:28), and stoning seems to have been associated with sins that caused irreparable damage to the spiritual or ceremonial purity of a person or an animal.

Some sins that resulted in stoning in the Old Testament were 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), and blaspheming the name of the Lord (Leviticus 24:16). Stoning was probably the punishment for various types of sexual sin, as well (Deuteronomy 22:24); the related passages in Leviticus 20 do not specify the method of execution, only that the guilty party was to be “put to death.”

The Mosaic Law specified that, before anyone could be put to death by stoning, there had to be a trial, and at least two witnesses had to testify: “On the

testimony of two or three witnesses a person is to be put to death, but no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness” (Deuteronomy 17:6). Those witnesses “must be the first in putting that person to death, and then the hands of all the people” (verse 7). In other words, those who testified against the condemned person in court had to cast the first stone. Examples of stonings in the Old Testament are the deaths of Achan and his family (Joshua 7:25) and Naboth, who was condemned by false witnesses (1 Kings 21).

Stoning was the method of execution chosen by the unbelieving Jews who persecuted the early Christians. Stephen, the church’s first martyr, was stoned to death outside of Jerusalem by the Sanhedrin. On that occasion, a young man named Saul, who later became the apostle Paul, held the coats of those who cast the stones (Acts 7:54–60).

Jesus responded to their threats with: ***“I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?”*** The gospel writers tell of at least thirteen miracles of healing and mercy that Jesus did before this time: raising of the dead; opening of the eyes of the blind; cleansing lepers; casting out demons; and healing many other infirmities. These Pharisees and other religious leaders needed to stop and think about what they were about to do.

They were blinded by their love of their traditions, by their hatred of a humble Nazarene who spoke truth, and by their bigotry toward anyone who challenged their beliefs.

Their blindness took away the joy that they should have had for those who were healed and who benefitted from the ministry of Jesus. All they could see was that their Sabbath traditions had been ignored. They also missed the purpose of the miracles and of the teaching: to provide evidence of Jesus’ identity and His divinity.

They tell Him that they’re not going to stone Him for His good works but for “blasphemy.” We see some form of this “blasphemy” several times in Scripture? What does it mean to commit “blasphemy”?

The word “blasphemy” or “blaspheme” is a translation of the Greek word BLASPHEMEO, which means to rail at or revile, to speak contemptuously at or about, or to defame, curse, or speak evil of. In Leviticus 24:10-16 is the account of an Israelite woman’s son who got into a fight and ***“blasphemed the Name and cursed.”*** The young man was brought to Moses who consulted the Lord. The ESV has it: ***Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Bring out of the camp the***

one who cursed, and let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him. And speak to the people of Israel, saying, Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. Whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death.”

The most common form of “blasphemy” is taking the Lord’s name in vain, which means using words like “God,” “Lord,” or “Jesus” as an expletive or for emphasis. I’ve heard such expletives as “Lord, no!” and “My God!” or “God, yes!” That’s using the Lord’s name in vain.

Well, Jesus was accused of “blasphemy” in that He said that He and God were equal.

At this juncture, Jesus slipped away and

WENT ACROSS THE JORDAN, WHERE MANY BELIEVED IN HIM.

Tell me, what was the difference between the people in Judea and those on the other side of the river? What was it that made the Jews on one side of the river reject Him and want to stone Him and those on the other side believe Him?

Butler comments: “All the evidence in the world will not convert a man and cause him to believe in Jesus Christ if he doesn’t want to believe. There has to be a balance of three characteristics in man before real faith comes: will, reason, and obedience or action. Every proclaimer of truth and righteousness has found this to be the primary barrier to bringing men to living faith – the desire, the will to believe in Jesus and surrender to Him! This was one the purposes of the spectacle of the cross. The divine love evinced there was intended to break stubborn wills and turn them to God.

“This moral rebelliousness had so hardened the hearts of the rulers that they would not even consider the miraculous and merciful works of Jesus. All they could think of was taking Him and using Him for their evil purposes” (Vol. II, p.128).

IN CLOSING:

Do you know people like these religious leaders – who aren’t believers because they don’t *want* to believe?