

From far across the dusty hills of Israel, you can see him. He looks weather-beaten, tired, and worn. He has withstood winds, rain, incredible heat, and bitter cold. His face shows the strain of the long nights when wild animals attacked, or robbers slipped upon him unawares and tried to take his life or the lives of those in his charge. His clothes seem tattered, almost dissolved into rags from the intensity of the sand and the winds.

But there is something special in his eyes. It is a look of satisfaction, for he has weathered the season, and come home without so much as losing one of his flock. He has aged, and he has paid a price, but to him the price was worth it. His one goal was to protect the sheep; to provide for his sheep; and to bring them safely home again. He is the shepherd of Israel.

Even today you can see him. But in the days of Biblical history, he was more than a novelty, he was an oft-seen sight; and though in fact, there were hundreds of him, each seemed to have about him a similar look, a similar set of objectives. He was to take a group of not-so-intelligent animals, see that all of their needs were met, and see that they were kept totally safe from the legions of enemies that lurked in the shadows. In other words, it was his responsibility, not the sheep's, to see that they arrived safely at their destination. Sheep were not able to get there themselves. All they could do was trust the shepherd. Some of them were so rebellious, so cantankerous, they really didn't deserve to make it back. But that wasn't the issue. The shepherd had taken the responsibility for their lives; it was no longer theirs. They may have suffered some unnecessary bruises from disobeying, but still the shepherd would see that they arrived safely home. That was his job. The issue wasn't whether or not they deserved to die; but whether or not he was able to keep them as he promised. The keeping was his task. Being sheep was theirs.

It isn't that we are so interested in the care and keeping of sheep. Granted, they are interesting animals, but in about twenty minutes, you can learn enough about sheep to know what they're used for, what their intellect lacks, and what a job it is to care for them. But we are interested in knowing God. And God, knowing how difficult it is for we who live on planet earth to grasp things spiritual, decided to write a handbook on the Christian life, using as his backdrop the care and keeping of sheep. In fact, God designed sheep in eternity past for that purpose. He created sheep so they would need a shepherd. Then He made the "spiritual switch". He called His people, Israel, His sheep. And He called a shepherd named Moses from tending His father-in-law's flock to shepherd His people. Then He called a shepherd boy named David to be His king. And finally He sent His own Son to earth and once He had formed a team of disciples who were to carry out the work of His Kingdom, He sat them down, and pulling those sketches from His picture book of spiritual truth, He addressed the subject of sheep and shepherds. He then proceeded to clarify some of the deepest messages of the Kingdom, using the lowly sheep as His illustration.

The disciples didn't understand. They usually didn't. So, lovingly, kindly, the Master Teacher explained in ever-so-detailed a way, just what it was that He was saying. He took the eternal photograph of sheep and shepherds engraved in Scripture and poured into it the rich hues of personal application. In other words, He taught them how to make the spiritual switch. It is that tender expression of His heart that we have been looking at these past few lessons. Here we conclude our brief look at the Good Shepherd and His sheep by examining the last truth in the passage, last but certainly not least. In fact, no Biblical reality other than the truth of salvation by grace stirs the human heart more deeply. Our title and outline are as follows: "And They Shall Never Perish."

- I- The Reality (John 10:16, 24-27)
- II- The Remedy (John 10:28a)
- III- The Results (John 10:28b)
- IV- The Reasons (John 10:29,30)
- V- The Reassurance (Romans 8)

We have looked at the cast of characters one by one, and seen described the sheep, the robber, the stranger, the shepherd, the hireling, and the door. We have seen God's plan unfold as we have seen that there is only one way into the sheepfold; there is a high price to shepherding; there is a high price to pay for listening to the voice of the stranger; and that we belong to the Shepherd who knows us by name, calls us by name, and cares for us so much that He gives us His Name as our own. We conclude this mini-study by looking at one of the most incredible facts of all about shepherds and sheep, the accountability factor. Locked up in that one fact lies both our comfort, our security, our responsibility, and our primary reason for praise. Let's journey back to John 10 and see what it says.

I- THE REALITY

Our study begins with Jesus continuing His discourse on spiritual shepherding and kingdom principles. He is explaining just how many kinds of sheep there are, and how the exclusiveness of one of those kinds was about to be shattered by an "open door" policy to the sheepfold of God. It reads like this:

"I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.

As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.

And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd."

(John 10:14-16 NKJV)

Two great truths emerge instantly from the Master's explanation. We will take the simplest first: Jesus is saying that His fold is to be enlarged to include any sheep who wants to enter. His chosen sheep will balk at His entrance requirements, and flee from the gate. Then, He will open the gate to all who want to enter, provided they enter His way. But once in, they will all be part of one flock. Not Jewish sheep and Gentile sheep, just sheep...His sheep. The second truth is a further reminder of the reality of the "door". It is that there are only two kinds of sheep in the world: those who are His and those who are not. He knows His own, and His own know Him. They hear His voice and follow Him, but those who are not His will enjoy none of the benefits His sheep enjoy. None. When He speaks, they won't hear. When He leads, they won't follow. When He calls, they won't come. Jesus knows His sheep in the same intimate way the Father knows Him (vs. 15), and because of that, those are the only sheep who will enjoy the benefits of the Shepherd's sacrifice.

You either belong to Jesus or you don't. You either enter by the door, or you enter not at all. You either are "born again" into the kingdom of God, or no matter what an attractive, intelligent sheep you are, when the Good Shepherd returns, you will not be one of His. When He divides the sheep from the goats, the ones who bear His brand from the ones who do not, you will be asked to "depart" for "He never knew you". Anyone can enter the sheepfold. But no one can enter unless they come by the door, and no one can understand what the Shepherd is saying, unless they are His sheep.

Jesus explains it this way.

Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.

Jesus answered them, " I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me.

But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you.

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." (John 10: 24 NKJV)

Jesus said "Only my sheep understand what I'm saying, and unless you can come to me on my terms, you are not one of my sheep." To use an analogy that might be more current, imagine that you are applying for entrance into the "Baa-Baa Black Sheep University of Eternity"; the college of knowledge for lost sheep. And imagine that you come to the registrar's office to apply for acceptance. You have been told that the benefits are incredible; the education unparalleled; and the Chief Instructor is "divine". You are well aware of your own credentials. You are not at all a bad student, you have made good grades in the High school of Worldly Acceptance and you seem to have a bright future. What school wouldn't want you? Your scores have been high and your behavior nearly exemplary. But as you approach the registrar's office, you are shocked at this unexpected turn of events. For there you are greeted by this sign:

Baa-Baa Black Sheep University of Eternity Entrance Requirements for a Degree in Eternity

Spiritual	Minimum Grade
Abilities	Accepted

"Minimum grade 100%?" you exclaim. "Nobody has a spiritual grade of 100!" You're right. Nobody does. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." But, Beloved, God cannot lower the entrance requirements and still be God. He is Holy. He cannot coexist with sin. And so for Him to allow you to enter eternity, having come short of His Glory, would defile His nature and destroy His Holiness. "What do they use to determine my score?" you ask. The registrar points to still another sign.

Grade Points For Entrance Consideration		
(Romans 3:9-25)		
Worthiness0		
Works 0		
Religion0		

So here you stand. You want the benefits of being "in" the University, but you can't pass the entrance exam. All the things you thought qualified you add up to nothing. And yet, you look like a successful sheep. You attend all the sheep meetings, get sheared regularly, and even know most of the spiritual buzz words sheep use. Surely, the Shepherd will just kind of mix you in with the rest and accept you. So you're not perfect; who is? Why not just pull yourself up by your fluffy wool, and be the best sheep you can? That way, the Shepherd can see how good you are, and accept you into the flock. That seems so natural. That seems so traditional. That seems so fair.

II- THE REMEDY

Jesus answer begins like this:

"And I give them eternal life," (John 10:28a NKJV)

You don't need to be a good sheep to be the Shepherd's sheep. You need to accept a gift. The word "give" indicates someone is about to receive something they did not earn, cannot buy, and for which they cannot pay. If they earn it, it's salary. If they buy it, it's a purchase. If they pay it back, it's a loan. But if it's given, it's free, undeserved, and permanently a gift. The word "them" indicates the sheep who agree to be accepted into the one fold. The word "eternal" can best be defined by John 3:14-16, the best known passage in the Bible. In its simple form, it means this: That which cannot be ended...

That which excludes perishing...

That which describes the attributes of God...

Spoken of God	(Romans 16:26)
His Power	(I Timothy 6:16)
His Spirit	(Hebrews 9:14)
His Glory	(I Peter 5:10)
His Redemption	(Hebrews 9:12)
His Resurrection body	(II Corinthians 5:1)

What God is saying is that though no one can earn entrance or pay his way into the sheepfold, God has a scholarship program that will allow anyone to enter. Look at His amazing alternative. God's scholarship program:

Tuition free and paid for	. (Ephesians 2:8,9)
Available to all	(Revelation 3:20)
Past accomplishments void	(Titus 3:4-7)
No "preferred" order	(John 1:12)
No limit to privileges	(I Peter 1:5)
No time limit on education	(John 17:11)
No one can "fail" once in	(Romans 8:38)
There is no other way in	(John 14:6)

Now it all begins to make sense. No one is good enough to be admitted, but no one is bad enough to be excluded. Anyone can come, but only on a scholarship. You say, "That's good news." Beloved, that is "The" Good News. But, if it were possible, there is even better news. Read on.

III- THE RESULTS

"And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand."

(John 10:28 NKJV)

If you have never entered into the sheer freedom of that thought, you are living the Christian life in unnecessary bondage. God has told His sheep that once they are in the sheepfold, having come by means of an unearned, non-repayable scholarship, they will never be expelled, because they are not there by virtue of having met the requirements in the first place. They are there as His guests, and He knew when He let them in that they couldn't make the grade, or ever get to the grade point average of 100% set for them by the registrar. God has given to you and to me, once we enter the Kingdom His way, (and there is no other way to enter) eternal life; that is, life that is unending, unchanging, imperishable. And the result of that gift is simply that "we shall never perish".¹

Not might; shall! A completed, affirmed, unchangeable fact limited only by the ability of the one making the promise. Shall "Never": a final negative that excludes option or alternatives. "Perish": be destroyed, be released, be subject to decay or decline.² Jesus has just said that those sheep who enter the sheepfold by way of scholarship are unconditionally guaranteed by the hand of the same one who gave them the right to enter, that they cannot under any conditions, be it circumstance or choice, be released from the fold, or gradually be lost from the fold, as they make their way through the fields of the Christian life. I believe the most beautiful words in the Bible are "I give unto them eternal life". But I also believe that the next most beautiful and perhaps the least appreciated are those incredible four words that follow: "They shall never perish".

Never. Not under any circumstances. Not because they deserve to be kept. They never deserved to be saved. But they shall never perish because the Shepherd who saved them has assumed the sole responsibility for seeing that they make it back to the sheepfold safely. Yes, the enemy will attack. And yes, the sheep will be bruised and wounded and weary. But they shall never perish. He may carry some of them into the sheepfold in His arms, battered and bleeding, but He will carry them home. The Shepherd knows His sheep. And He gives them unending, unchanging spiritual life. Because He gives it to them, nobody can take it away.

IV- THE REASON

The reason nobody can take it away is spelled out by Jesus very clearly. He adds:

"My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand.

I and My Father are one." (John 10:29,30 NKJV)

Your salvation and your security are based, Beloved, on only

¹ John 10:28

² I Peter 1:3-5

one thing: the power of God. The reason you are secure is the same reason you are saved. A loving God wrapped us up in His cloak of love and gave us as a love gift to His Only Son. And He promised His Son that He would keep us forever. It all boils down to one question, then. Can the Father keep us? The answer is crystal clear. The Father is greater than all. Therefore, no one is able to pluck us out of His Hand. And since the Son and the Father are one in essence, no one can take us "out of Christ". No one. Not ever.

V- THE REASSURANCE

The apostle Paul wanted to be sure we understood that. So in Romans, chapter eight, that wonderful love letter of assurance, he wrote:

> And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

> For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

> Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

> What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

As it is written, "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,

nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:28-39 NKJV)

Do you see Paul's logic? Listen.

1- Nothing that can ever happen will void God's plan (vs. 28).

2- The reason is: God has done it all (vss. 29,30). He called us. He justified us. He will glorify us. It's all Him and we're all His.

3- Who, then is strong enough to take our salvation from us (vs. 31)? If God has determined to save us, who is strong enough to "lose us"?

4- And if God saved us based only on the merits of His own Holiness, then who can bring any charge against us that will nullify that goodness (vss. 33-35)?

5- In fact, the very One who saved us now intercedes for us every time any one brings a charge against us (vs. 34).

6-Sowhoorwhat could ever take our salvation from us (vs. 35)? Circumstances?

7- No (vs. 36). We are nothing more than sheep who deserve to be in the slaughterhouse. If it weren't for the shepherd, we wouldn't even be in the sheepfold, let alone secure.

8- Rather, the very things Satan would use to take us from God are the very things God uses to build us into conquerors. What the enemy designs to destroy us, God redesigns to change us (vs. 37).

9- So think about it (vs. 38). If this is true, nothing in this life, nothing associated with death, nothing in the heavens, nothing on earth, nothing that has happened, nothing that is happening, nothing that ever will happen; no thing and no person can ever remove us from the sheepfold; because once we are in the sheepfold we are "in Christ", and "in Christ" we are eternally secure.

Because we deserve it? Again, I remind you we never deserved to be there in the first place. The only reason we are in Christ is that God so loved the world that He gave Himself away. The only reason we are eternally secure is that He will never stop giving Himself away. Therefore, we are always and will always be the recipients of His grace. As the recipients of His grace, the only way you or I, once we are saved, could ever be lost would be for one of these things to happen:

1- God would have to change His Mind.

2- God would have to nullify His Word.

3- God would have to disregard His Son.

4- God would have to take back His gift. Or

5- Someone or something would have to be powerful enough to wrestle us from the hand of a determined God, whose Word is immutable, who by nature is omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, and sovereign, and who by an act of His will has determined that no one or no thing shall ever be able to pluck us out of His hand.

You say, "But that's not logical". No. Neither is salvation. How logical is it that a Holy God would take sinful man and, seeing that not even one of His creation is deserving by merit of their goodness, would pay the penalty personally to redeem them so He could give them Himself. Is that logical? Is that natural? Praise God, no, it's supernatural. You are a "kept" person. I Peter says it all.

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

> to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,

that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, (I Peter 1:3-7 NKJV)

My friend your inheritance is incorruptible. (It cannot lose its purity; not by what you do, Satan does, or anyone says.) It is undefiled. (It cannot lose its power.) It fades not away. (It cannot gradually lose its existence through apathy) because it has been reserved (reservations have been made in Heaven for you that cannot be canceled) if you are among those who are kept by the power of God. If you are in the "keep" of the castle, that room that is on the inside, secure and protected from the dangers that threaten those on the outside, you can rejoice! Yes, you will be tried. And yes, you will fail. And yes, you may even "feel" lost. But, Beloved, that fire that engulfs you that Satan thinks is destroying you, God is using to purify you so that when you stand (not if) but when you stand at the Bema Seat of Christ those very fires may prove to be to His honor and praise and glory.

I know. You know someone who said they became a Christian, but they fell back into a life of sin, and maybe even renounced their relationship with Christ, and based on that experience, you have assumed that your salvation is only as secure as your ability to withstand temptation or hold on to your commitment.

Negative. You are not in the sheepfold because of what you have done, and you won't stay there because of what you have or haven't done. You are there and will stay there because of what Jesus has done. He has saved you. He has "branded" you. You are "sealed"; you are "kept". Read II Corinthians 1:21-22, Ephesians 1:1-14, Ephesians 4:30 and I Peter 1 again. Remember the "seal" of the Spirit that secures a container so that the contents cannot be corrupted. Remember the "brand" or "seal" of the Spirit that marks you forever as His sheep. Remember the "earnest" or down payment of our inheritance that guarantees delivery on redemption day. Remember the "keep" of the castle, and the incorruptible inheritance that cannot be destroyed because it is kept by God.

That person you know or knew or heard about (or maybe that person is you), must be examined in the light of Scripture, not experience. And in the light of Scripture, either he or she tried to enter the sheepfold another way, and was never His, or they have strayed from the flock, and through the wiles of the enemy have come to deny whose sheep they are. But, Beloved, assuming that sheep was once "branded" as His, when the Master Shepherd makes that final entrance into the sheepfold of eternity, and roll call takes place and He calls His own sheep by name, that one who may be nosing around in the enemy camp, a disgrace to the Kingdom, will be found nestled in the Shepherd's arms, safe and secure. Will he or she receive the kinds of rewards that others who have been faithful will receive? No. As I Corinthians 3:12-15 so clearly explains, his works will go up in smoke, but he will be saved, as one who has been snatched from a burning building, safely, but with nothing left to show for his journey.

So shall we just live a life of compromise, knowing that no matter what we do we shall be saved? Paul asked that question in Romans 6:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?

Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? (Romans 6:1,2 NKJV)

The assurance that we are eternally "in Christ" ought not to be our license to sin, but our motivation to praise. It ought not to be our temptation to apathy, but our inner drive to commitment. The enemy is attacking us; the world is confounding us; the sky overhead is filled with lethal-looking clouds, so ominous we want to run and hide. But wait a minute. If God be for us, who can be against us? We need not be like insecure children always showing off to get our parents' attention, hoping to prove they love us. Our Heavenly Father will always love us. Nothing can separate us from that love. So we ought then, filled with gratitude to have a Father like that, be spending our lives living in total harmony with His desires, giving our every breath to obey His wishes, our every moment to pleasing His heart. Why? To assure our salvation? No! Our salvation is secure. He did that. We serve Him out of love, not fear. We serve Him out of gratitude, not penance.

Beloved, if you have never trusted Christ to save you, but have been doing "good works", coming to church, trying to live a life worthy of God's acceptance, may I remind you of the entrance requirements to God's University of Eternity. All you have done, are doing, and ever can do will give you an "SAT" score of "000". All of your righteousness is as filthy rags in God's sight. They add up to less than nothing. But praise God, you don't need to measure up to enter. God has a scholarship plan for you. It's totally free; it is available to all; no one is preferred before you; there are unlimited privileges; and once you have been admitted, you're in.

But you must acknowledge that you can't get in any other way. And you must humble yourself before the Registrar of

Eternity and receive His gift in order to be accepted. Won't you do that right now? Give your life to Jesus Christ. He alone can save you. He alone can keep you. But He alone will save you, and He alone will keep you.

And if you are a believer who has been struggling with the assurance of your salvation, may I remind you in closing that the Good Shepherd knows His sheep. He knows them so well, He calls each one by name; and He calls them by His name. That Great Shepherd of the sheep wants to remind you this moment that once you are His, you are His. He gave you eternal life. You did not earn it. And you shall never perish. Never. Why? Because His Father gave you to Him, and His Father is greater than all; so no one can take you out of His Father's hand. No one. Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come. Neither height, nor depth, nor anything else can ever separate you from His love.

So stop listening to the enemy's lies. Instead of being filled with fear and frustration, run to the Shepherd, Beloved. Run to His waiting arms, and stay so close to His nail-scarred side that you would never intentionally do anything to break His heart. To assure your salvation? No. He has done that.

To show Him you love Him, Beloved. You can do that. And you can do that gratefully; for because of Him, you shall never perish.

OH, WHAT VICTORY

Oh, what victory, oh, what joy, Oh, what peace divine, Just to know that I am God's And to know that He is mine.

Oh, what gentle, sweet assurance Fills my heart with praise, I've been to His heart adopted, I'll be His through all my days.

It matters not what evil venom Is hurled at by fiery dart, Nothing ere by man or demon Can remove us from God's heart.

Nothing ere by our own doing Be it deed or evil plan, Can be strong enough by merit, To release us from His hands.

Oh, what comfort, oh, what love That though trapped by evil deed, He who died now sits in heaven Bound by love to intercede.

Is the cause that we deserve it? Oh, Beloved, learn it well, All that we deserve or merit Are the vicious fires of hell.

No, it's only that God loves us And He's promised every one That if we but will receive Him He will give to us His Son.

And the gift is everlasting Bound in cords from God above, Safe, secure and non-decaying Kept forever by His love.

A Challenge to Further Study

1- Read Romans 8:28-39 again carefully. Now put it in your own words and personalize it. Read it as though it were written specifically to you. For example: "For I now know that all things work together for my good and for God's glory, because I am called by God according to His purposes." When you come to verses 35-39, use words you can understand to describe "tribulation, distress, etc." Now pray that passage back to God and end with a time of praise and thanksgiving.

2- Reread the statements on pages 10 and 11 of the transcript and ask God to clarify the issues in your mind.

3- Meditate on I Peter 1:5 and 6. What does the word "kept" mean? What is "keeping" you? How strong is it? Are you commanded to rejoice because you are being "kept"? Do you? Does this mean no problems? No temptations? No persecution? How do you know?

A Challenge to Further Application

1-Do you understand the "scholarship" principle of admission into God's kingdom? Do you understand that you do not even partially qualify for admission apart from that scholarship? Why does Satan fight that so? Review the differences between earning something, buying something, and being given a gift (page 6). Do you clearly grasp that? Can you explain it to someone else?

2- Can you bow before God and recite the words, "I shall never perish" and not be filled with gratitude and awe? How often do you thank Him for the permanence of your salvation?

3- Does an understanding of your security in Christ make you more prone to sin or less? How does the concept of rewards balance with eternal security?

A Challenge to Scripture Memory

Memorize John 10:27-30

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