***Improving Our Listen***

**Faith Practices: Listening January 15, 2023**

***The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep.
The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice.
He calls his own sheep by name and he leads them out.
When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them,
and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.*John 10:2-4**

**Listening and knowing**

*“I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2 The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. 3 The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” 6 Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them . . . .*

John 10, note that “they” try to kill Jesus by the end of this discussion (see 10:31-33)

1. The shepherd knows the sheep by name before the sheep know the shepherd’s voice

2. Listening always results in following

3. The practice of listening begins with the discipline of discerning between voices (see 1 John 4:1)

3. The first gift to those who listen: knowing the shepherd’s heart

*7 Therefore Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

*11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.*

*14 “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep . . . .*

**A song about listening and the word: Isaiah 55**

Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,

 and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.

3 Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live . . . .

9 “As the heavens are higher than the earth,

 so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

10 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,

 and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish,
 so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,

11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty,

 but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Isaiah 55

1. Isaiah’s song is God’s invitation to the goodness and transformation of God’s word

2. Isaiah’s song looks back to the central truth of the *shema’* – “The Lord our God is Lord alone!”

3. Because God’s ways are “higher”, his word will be our primary way of knowing him

**Listening to each other**

*19 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. 21 Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.*

*22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.*

James 1

1. James knows that listening happens in the context of the curse and conflict

2. Listening is still a great response to conflict

3. “Mere” listening loses its transforming power

**Blessings from listening**

1. We begin with a God who listens

I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy.

 **2** Because he inclined his ear to me,

 therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

 **3** The snares of death encompassed me;

 the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;

 I suffered distress and anguish.

 **4** Then I called on the name of the Lord: “O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul!”

Psalm 116

2. Listening is at the heart of true wisdom

13 He who answers before listening— that is his folly and his shame.

Proverbs 18:13 (see 8:34 for the patience part of listening)

3. Listening answers some very important “pastoral” questions about salvation

*22 Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, 23 and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon’s Colonnade. 24 The Jews gathered around him, saying, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”*

*25 Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me, 26 but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. 27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. 30 I and the Father are one.”*

John 10

4. Listening is how we get to the promised land – and how we live in the promised land!

*These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, 2 so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. 3 Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you.*

*4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

Deuteronomy 6

**Resources for further studies in faith practices**

“Faith Practices” is available from Faith Alive at [*https://www.faithaliveresources.org/Products
/810786/faith-practices.aspx*](https://www.faithaliveresources.org/Products/810786/faith-practices.aspx)

Doug likes Spurgeon’s “sheep” sermon on John 10 at [*https://www.monergism.com/sheep-who-will-never-perish*](https://www.monergism.com/sheep-who-will-never-perish)

Bob Deffinbaugh has two “Shepherd” sermons on John 10 at [*https://bible.org/series/you-might-believe-study-gospel-john*](https://bible.org/series/you-might-believe-study-gospel-john)

Yohanna Katanacho has a look at John 10 in his *Reading the Gospel of John Through Palestinian Eyes* (Langham, 2020), pages 51-57.

Two books that make a theological argument for listening during conflict:

 Munayer and Loden’s *Through My Enemy’s Eyes* (2013) was written by a Palestinian Christian and Israeli Messianic Jew.

 *Managing Polarities in Congregations* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2009) is the book that Rev. Al Postma uses when working through conflict in the church

Several of the “wonder” articles I looked at this week:

 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/passion/201509/7-ways-spark-your-sense-wonder>

 <https://berghconsulting.com/13-ways-to-cultivate-your-sense-of-wonder/>

 <https://www.thispilgrimlife.com/cultivate-wonder-kids/>

 <https://richinwhatmatters.com/2022/03/05/reclaiming-the-wonder-of-ordinary-life/>

Lewis addresses wonder in his “[Weight of Glory” essay](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwidxsvqgbf8AhUzJX0KHbsLAVAQFnoECC4QAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.wheelersburg.net%2FDownloads%2FLewis%2520Glory.pdf&usg=AOvVaw2zwICBMGsnDkvAVSqCl-ve) at with a good analysis at [*https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/the-weight-of-glory-c-s-lewiss-remarkable-and-surprising-sermon/*](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/the-weight-of-glory-c-s-lewiss-remarkable-and-surprising-sermon/)

Several of the “listening” articles I looked at:

 “Harvard Business Review” at <https://hbr.org/2012/06/the-discipline-of-listening>

 From the CRCNA Network: <https://network.crcna.org/topic/spiritual-formation/faith-practices/difficult-spiritual-discipline-listening>

 Piper’s “Ten Reasons to Listen” at [*https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/ten-reasons-to-listen-to-questions-before-you-answer*](https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/ten-reasons-to-listen-to-questions-before-you-answer)

# Sheep Who Will Never Perish

### by C. H. Spurgeon at [*https://www.monergism.com/sheep-who-will-never-perish*](https://www.monergism.com/sheep-who-will-never-perish)

“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 can 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. I and the Father are one." [John 10:27-30]

Our Savior did not hesitate to preach the deeper doctrines of the gospel to the masses gathered before him. When he began to preach where he was brought up, they all gathered around him with admiration, until he preached the doctrine of election; and then, immediately, they were so angry with him that they wanted to destroy him. They could not bear to hear that the widows of Israel were passed by, and the widow in Zarephath chosen; nor of a heathen leper healed, while the many Jewish lepers were left to die. Election seems to heat the blood and fire the wrath of many. Not only did they not really care to be chosen by God themselves; but they also wanted to keep other people from having the privilege. Not even the bad attitude of these Jews prevented our Lord from sharing these critical truths of the Word. Here, when addressing the Jews, he did not hesitate to speak, even to a rude crowd, concerning that glorious doctrine. He said, “You do not believe because you are not my sheep.” [John 10:26] He does not lower the standard of doctrine; but he holds his ground, and carries the war into the enemy’s camp. The notion that certain truths are not fit to be preached to a mixed gathering of people, but are to be kept for the special gathering of the saints, is, I believe, horribly wrong. Christ has not commanded us to keep a part of our teaching secret; reserved from the common folk, and set aside only for the spiritual elite. He is for openly proclaiming all truth. “What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.” [Matthew 10:27]

There is no truth that we need be ashamed of, and there is no truth that will do any harm. We admit that every truth can be twisted; but even this would be a lesser evil than the concealment of it. Whatever the doctrine may be, ungodly men can pervert it according to their own desires; and if we have to stop preaching a doctrine because of the possibility of perverting it, we shall never preach anything at all, for every truth may be perverted, and made to be the mother of infinite harm. Our Savior did not teach his disciples to keep certain things for the instructed few who were able to receive them; but he commanded us to make known all the great truths, since they are necessary for conviction, for conversion, for edification, for sanctification, and for the perfecting of the people of God. Even to his rough opponents he spoke boldly. Right in the faces of his adversaries he preached this great, but humbling truth, “You do not believe because you are not my sheep.” [John 10:26] Your unbelief is evidence that you were not chosen, that you have not been called by the Spirit of God, and that you are still lost in your sins.

The Jews had said to him, “If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” They professed that they just wanted to know for certain that he was the Messiah. This was a vain pretense, for he had told them all they needed to know, and they had not believed him. Therefore he answered them to a large degree by making them know more about themselves. Sometimes the point in which a man is lacking is not in his understanding of the gospel, but rather his own need of it. He may know all of Christ that is needful for his salvation, but he may not know enough about himself and his own lost condition; and therefore Christ does not appear precious to him, because he is ignorant of his deep and terrible need of a savior. So the Savior began to talk to them, not so much about himself, but rather about his people, and what they were to be. “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”

I pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will bless the word to many, that they may learn more about the work of Christ in their hearts, and more about their need of it, and thus may be led to seek Jesus, and find him tonight as their Savior and their Shepherd.

There are two things in my text which will suffice for our meditation. First, here is a description given of the Lord’s people. “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” And then, secondly, there is a privilege guaranteed to them, namely, their everlasting, unquestionable safety. “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can 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. I and the Father are one.”

**I. I can say very little on this first point, considering the vast scope of the subject, let us notice THE DESCRIPTION HERE GIVEN OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD.**

**They are first described as a unique possession: “My sheep.”**

All men are not sheep, for some are foxes, or voracious wolves, and others are compared to dogs and lions. All persons who might be called sheep are not Christ’s sheep. All do not belong to his flock. All are not gathered into his fold. There is a uniqueness of possession. There may be many sheep, but the Savior speaks of “My sheep,” those whom he chose to be his before the world was created, those who were given to him by the Father, those who have been bought with his blood, redeemed from among men, and in due time have been ransomed by his power, for he has bought them back from the hand of the enemy, and therefore claims them to be his own. “The Lord’s portion is his people.” Other lords have their portion, and Christ takes his portion. His people are his inheritance. He speaks of “my sheep” as a special heritage, whom, as a shepherd, he claims for his own. Of these he is the sole Owner. He is not merely their Custodian, but their Owner. We read of the hireling or mercenary shepherd, “whose doesn’t own the sheep”; but in the case of our good Shepherd, “he brought out his own [sheep].” [John 10:4].

**There is a unique character about them. They are “my sheep.” They are dependent, timid, trembling, obedient, teachable; they are made sheep by his own Spirit.**

They have received a nature which is not that of the canine world, nor that of the swine multitude, nor that of the wolfish persecutor; but that of men indwelt by the Spirit of God, who are therefore clean, gentle, loving, and gracious. He calls them “My sheep,” for they have a special relationship to him: they are like Jesus. Being his sheep, he has become their Protector as well as their Owner, and they look up to him as such. They are sheep to him, and he is a shepherd to them.

We may judge ourselves tonight by considering whether or not we are Christ’s sheep. Do we acknowledge ourselves as belonging to him, spirit, soul, and body? Do we regard ourselves as being, in relationship with him, no wiser, no stronger, than sheep to a shepherd? I know some who are certainly not sheep of Christ’s flock, for they will be led by nobody in heaven, or on earth; but must have their own sweet way. They are critics of the Bible, not disciples of it. They might be very good dogs, but they are very abnormal sheep. They would make very respectable wolves, for they are great with destructive criticism; but they certainly are not sheep; and their disposition and spirit are such that they would scorn the character, if they understood it. “What! to go where I am led? To lie down where I am told to lie down? Not to choose my own way? Just to see nothing, and know nothing; but to have my eyes always on the Shepherd, and my wisdom subject to his? To be shepherded by another mind than my own? Is it so? Am I to be nothing but a sheep to the Lord Jesus?”

Yes, it is true; and therefore the modern wise man and woman are indignant, and proudly repudiates the character of a sheep. As for us, we accept all that the name implies. O brothers and sisters, we can act as a man or woman before other people, but when we come before our Lord, as the sheep is a mere animal in comparison with its shepherd, so we feel ourselves to be less than that. How often have we cried with David, “I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.” [Psalm 73:22] O my Lord, in your presence I sink as low as low can be, and you become very high, yes, everything to me, the Shepherd of my weak, vacillating, trembling spirit! There is a uniqueness, then, about these people in the description. I have only time to hint at it.

**A chief characteristic of Christ’s people is attention to their Lord, “My sheep listen.”**

They can hear, because they have had spiritual ears given to them. Once the Shepherd could have spoken all day long, and they would not have heard him; but it is not so now. Even from the cross our Lord’s mournful cries were not heard by them; but now he has given them spiritual capacity and perception, and they can hear, and they do hear what his dying love would make them know and understand. Their Lord has spoken to them. They have heard his voice, and have known it to be his; they still hear it, and they distinguish between his voice and other voices. “They will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.” [John 10:5]

Don’t you say, sometimes, to a child that is disobedient, “Didn’t you hear what I said to you?” In the same way, Christ may say to many who hear with the ear, but who will not yield obedience, that they have not heard him; for indeed they have not listened with the inner ear. Their ear does not reach down to their heart; and thus, for spiritual purposes, it is not an ear at all. It is an awful thing when the ear is a closed passage, shut against the voice of the Savior. You can tell who the sheep of Christ are by the type of ears that they have, “My sheep hear my voice.” They may not hear a lot that other people hear; they may even be glad to be deaf to it. There are many invitations that are like music to carnal ears, which have no charms for them. They try to be deaf to some voices from which they could gain nothing but temptation; but they hear Christ’s voice. They are all there when he speaks: their soul sits at the door to hear his softest whisper. They try to hear: they are very careful that they never miss a sound from heaven. They do hear; but they long to hear yet even more completely, and to be more obedient to that voice which rings through their soul. Oh, how sometimes, we have listened very carefully to Christ! I have heard him with my body, my soul, my spirit; at least, I have thought so; but whether in the body, or out of the body, I could not tell. If in the body, every pore has been an ear for my Lord’s sweet voice. As though my blood were tingling from the crown of my head to the sole of my foot, so has my spirit been wholly and entirely affected by the charming tones of the voice of the Lover of my soul. Oh, that he would speak tonight! Can’t you hear him? Oh, my brothers and sisters, isn’t he now calling to us now? Don’t you rejoice to hear him?

***No music is like his charming voice,
Nor half so sweet can be.***

So, we see, that a significant uniqueness of the elect ones lies in their attention to Jesus, their Shepherd. He calls in vain to others; but his sheep hear his voice.

**Another characteristic of the Lord’s people is intimacy. “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them.” “I know them.”**

Yes, the Lord discerns them. He singles them out, for “the Lord knows those that are his.” Sometimes we do not know them; but he says, “I know them.” In the dark times of life the child of God may begin to doubt who they are; but Jesus says, “I know them.” When a child of God does not know whether he is a child of God or not, his Father knows his own children, and the great Shepherd knows his own sheep. His is a discernment which never fails. The hypocrite cannot get into the true fold of Christ. He may get into the visible fold; but not into the real spiritual fold of Christ; for Christ does not know him, and tells him to depart. This is the very seal of their salvation- “The Lord knows those that are his.” His eyes discern between the righteous and the wicked, between those that fear God and those that do not fear him; his is a knowledge of quick and positive discernment.

But this might make us tremble if we did not know that the expression, “I know them,” literally means a knowledge conveying warm approval and praise. “I know them,” says the Shepherd; “I take a delight in them. I know their secret sighs and times of tears. I hear their private prayers. I know their praises in the silence of their hearts. I know their dedication, and their aspirations to walk in holiness. I know the longings of their heart and their love for me. I know how they delight in me. I know how they trust my promises. I know how they look to my atoning blood. I know how in their inmost souls they rejoice in my name. I know them, and approve their secret thoughts.” Brothers and sisters the Lord’s people have an intimate relationship with their Master-Jesus foreknew them in his sovereign grace before the creation of the world; and now he personally knows them by taking a delight in them.

This divine contentment leads to a very intense observation of them. “He knows the way that I take.” “The Lord knows the way of the righteous.” He has an eye on them, and notes their paths. His ears are open to their cry, and he hears their petitions. Though the entire world is before him, for his omniscience to consider, yet he looks on each one of his saints as much as if they were the only person in the universe, Oh, to think of this! “I know them,” sounds like music in this sense. He that knows the stars, and knows the infinite multitude of living creatures in the universe, has a special and intimate knowledge of his own chosen ones. “I know them,” he says; and he means that he knows them by intense observation. Now, beloved, examine your heart, right now, to see whether you are part of the people that Jesus speaks of, when he says, “I know them.” Does the Lord know you as his own? Does he have a personal and intimate relationship with you, and you with him? Or will he have to say to you at the end of your life, “Depart from me, I never knew you”? Why, some of you have made yourself known to him! You have gone to him in such trials, and in such troubles, and you have cried to him in such bitterness and such anguish, that, if he asks your name, you can say,

***“Once a sinner near despair
Sought your mercy-seat by prayer;
Mercy heard, and set him free;
Lord, that mercy came to me!”***

When you helped me in my great need, when you forgave me my great sin, then you knew me, O my Lord! “Do you ask me who I am? Oh, my Lord! You know my name.” Just as some men clearly know the name of the persistent beggar who is often at their door, so the Lord also certainly knows some of you, for every day you go begging at his gate, and you constantly receive grace from his hand. Besides that, you go every day thanking him for the mercies you receive. He knows your name: the name of one who is drowned in debt to his infinite bounty. He can never forget your groans and cries; and day by day your praises are a memorial to him.

By his love, and pity, and compassion, he is sure to remember you. A woman can sooner forget her nursing-child than your God could forget you.

Well, these characteristics of the Lord’s sheep are things well worth remembering-uniqueness, attention, and intimacy. Are these yours?

**But here is one more characteristic of the Lord’s people: actual obedience. How does he put it? “I know them, and they follow me.”**

All the Lord’s sheep are clearly marked as his. “They follow me.” That is to say, they openly affirm him as their Shepherd. Other shepherds come, and other sheep go after them; but these sheep know the Lord Jesus, and they follow him. He alone is their Leader. They are not ashamed to confess it. They take up the cross, and follow the Cross-bearer, and they bear his name.

More than that, they live out their confession, and they follow him in daily life, copying his example. They not only say, “He is my Leader,” but they follow him. Christ’s sheep try to follow in the track that the Shepherd marks for them. Christ’s people are never so happy as when they can put down their feet where Christ put his feet down. We desire, all day, and every day, to follow the very marks that he has left by his bleeding footsteps. Beloved, be very careful to do this! Do what Jesus did, according to your ability and power. This is what the people of

God try to do. If you do not endeavor to be like Christ, you are not his sheep; for it is true of his sheep, “I know them, and they follow me.”

And this is personally true of each one of them. I could not tell you exactly in English words, but the Greek word here gives a kind of personality to the whole flock. “My sheep listen to my voice,” that is, the whole of the flock of God. “I know them,” that is, again, the whole flock of them, altogether. But, “they follow me,” is in the plural number. It is as though it said, “They, each one, follow me.” We, who are the Lord’s chosen, hear en masse, and the Lord knows the whole church, for, as a whole, it is redeemed by Christ; but we individually follow-each one for himself, through grace. We each one follow him. “They follow me.” I like that singular personal pronoun. It is not written, “They follow my commandments,” though they do. It is not said, “They follow the route that I have mapped for them,” though they do that. But, “they follow me,” distinctly. In their individual personality they follow their Lord in his individual personality. They have recognized him beyond his words, beyond his ways, and even beyond his salvation. “They follow me,” he says. This is a great mark of a Christian, not merely a life of morality, a life of integrity, a life of holiness, but a life of all these in connection with Christ.

They follow him, not holiness, nor morality, nor integrity, apart from Christ, but they follow their Lord. A good life is good in any man. We cannot speak evil of virtue, even when we find it in the ordinary moralist; but this is not the complete mark of Christ’s sheep. The virtues of Christ’s sheep are in connection with Christ himself. The Christian is holy, and all that, but that is because he follows his perfect Master, and stays close to him. This is one of the distinctive and unfailing marks of the child of God.

Now, I have run through, very briefly, the description, and I now leave you to meditate on it when you are alone. This description of the sheep of Christ is worthy of reading, noting, and inwardly digesting.

**II. But my main object tonight is to show you THE GREAT PRIVILEGE CONFERRED ON THE PEOPLE OF GOD. Christ has secured for them the priceless blessing of eternal security in him.**

No sheep of Christ shall ever be lost. None that he has purchased with his blood, and made to be his own, shall ever wander away so as to perish in the end. This is the doctrine of the verses now before us. At any rate, if I wanted to express that doctrine, I could not find words in which I could set it forth more definitely, nor more completely, than is done by the words before me.

**1. The security of the people of God lies, first of all, in the character of the life which they have received. Listen to this: “I give them ETERNAL LIFE.”**

All the spiritual life which every sheep in the flock now possess has been given to them by their Shepherd. Never was there another flock of which this could be said. No shepherd but this one can give life to his sheep; but he gave them all the true life that they have. No, stop: he not only gave them life, but he sustains that life by a constant gift. Observe, it is not written, “I gave them eternal life,” but “I give them eternal life.” They are always living by virtue of the life which he is always giving. They are constantly receiving life from him, according to that assurance, “Because I live, you also will live.” What he always gives they must always receive, and therefore it cannot cease.

**Notice the nature of that life. “I give them eternal life.”**

Now, you all know what “eternal” means, however, none of you can form an idea of eternity which can fully grasp its endless duration. You only know this, that it has no end, and therefore cannot ever cease to be. If anybody said that he had eternal life and lost it, he would be flatly contradicting himself. It could not be eternal, or else he would still have it. If it is eternal, it is eternal, and there is no end to it; and thus there is an end of further argument about it. If the life that Christ gives us, when we are born again, can die, then it is not “eternal” life, or else words have ceased to have any meaning at all. In its nature, as being the work of the Holy Spirit, and emanating from God, the life bestowed in regeneration is an everlasting one. Hasn’t the Holy Spirit described us as “being born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”? The life of God imparted by the Holy Spirit must live forever. And just as the gift is continuous, and it is always being given, and as it is in itself eternal life, therefore it must always exist.

**But, principally, I dwell on the glorious character of the Giver. “I give them eternal life.”**

The life that Christ gives is not that poor, paltry life which lasts the person professing faith in Christ only about three weeks, and then dwindles down, and dies out; or, say, three months, and then the revival is over, and the convert returns to his old ways, and has to begin again. Such is the religious life which is energized by men; but it is not so with the life which comes from God. I said that the false convert begins again, though how he begins again I don’t know, because I read in Scripture of people being born again; but I have never read of their being born again, and again, and again, and again. I am told that some evangelists and revivalist have had their people converted and born again more times than they can count; and I heard that a woman had been born again twelve times down at a certain revival meeting; but he who stated the fact said shrewdly that he feared that she was not truly born again the last time. No, I do not think she will ever be truly born again in that way. He that is born again, according to Scripture, has received eternal life; and this is the only life worth receiving. I would not preach my very soul away in order to proclaim such a cheap, meaningless, temporary salvation as that; but to preach the Lord Jesus as giving eternal life is worth living for and dying for.

I tell you, it is this that brought me to Christ. While I was still young, and thinking things over, I saw young men that were brought up with me, excellent in character, who left their homes to start their own careers, and after a while the temptations of the world overcame them, and they went astray, and had no religion at all. But when I read that Christ gave his sheep eternal life, I looked at it as a kind of moral life insurance for my soul, and I came to Christ, and trusted him to keep me to the end. I will suffer a grievous disappointment if I ever find out that the life of God in me is not eternal, and that the new birth does not assure final perseverance. I did not buy a ticket for a quarter of the distance to heaven; but I bought a ticket for the entire trip. I trust, no, I know, that according to my faith, it will be done to me. I am very glad to have my non-stop ticket with me, and I believe that unless the train of Almighty grace gets derailed-which it never will-I shall get through to the Celestial station as surely as ever divine power can draw me there; for so it is written, “I give my sheep eternal life.”

Now, depend upon it, it is what you hold out to people that has much to do with how they behave themselves afterwards. Tell them that if they believe in Christ, they are going to get, not eternal life, but life for a little while-life for as long as they take good care of it, and I fear it will prove to be so. It may do them good to get the poor little change you offer them; but as surely as they are converted to a temporary life, they will die out before long. You told them that they would. You did not propose any more to them. But when you propose to them this-“Here is everlasting life to be had by believing in Christ. It is not temporary, but eternal life”-why, then they accept it as such. They believe in Christ for that, and according to their faith it is done to them; and the Lord and Giver of life is glorified in giving to them this great and splendid gift, the gift of all gifts. “I give my sheep eternal life.”

I don’t know another way to preach from this text than the way in which I am preaching from it. Somebody says, “Oh, that is Calvinism!” I don’t care what it is. It is Scriptural. I have this inspired Book before me, and I cannot see any meaning in the words before me, if they do not mean that those who have received life from the Lord Jesus have an endless inheritance. I cannot make them mean anything else. “I give my sheep eternal life,” must mean that believers are eternally secure.

Someone cries out, “It is dangerous doctrine.” I have not found it dangerous, and I have tried it these many years. I believe that it would be far more dangerous to tell people that they could be truly converted, and yet the work of grace would end in six months, and then they could come back again, and begin all over again, and do so as many times as they liked; whereas the Word of God tells them that if they fall away, it is impossible for them to be brought back to repentance. Men may fall and be restored; but if they utterly fall away, there remains no other work which can be done for them. If this everlasting life could die, the Holy Spirit would have done his best, and nothing more would remain to be done. If it were true that this salt which is good should lose its saltiness, how could it be made salty again? See what a great gulf opens before you. Do not look for a salvation which will not endure every possible strain. Oh, that you may get this eternal life!

**So we take a step further. Again, the children of God are safe, not only because of the life they receive, but because of the inner dangers which are averted.**

Take the next sentence-“And they shall never perish.” They have a tendency to spiritual sickness, but their Shepherd will minister to them so that they shall never perish. They are sheep, and have a tendency to wander; but their Shepherd shall keep them so that they shall never perish. Time tries them, and they grow old, and the novelty of religion wears off; but they shall never perish. Think what you will of them, “they shall never perish,” for so the promise stands.

The first statement, “I give them eternal life,” is as broad as it can be, and this is broader still-“they shall never perish.” The rule has absolutely no exception. All of the Lord’s sheep shall be preserved. Let them live to be as old as Methuselah; they shall never perish, whatever temptation may assail them. They may be tried, and troubled, and broken down, so that they may be hardly able to live; but they shall never perish. “Never” is a long day; but it is not longer than grace will last. Blessed be God, this grand promise stands firm-“They shall never perish.”

**Now we must go a step further. We have no time to drive these arguments home with any more detail. The sheep are safe, next, by outer injuries being prevented. “No one can snatch them out of my hand.”**

Many will tug at them, but none shall snatch them away. The devil will give many a horrible tug and pull, to get them away; but he shall never take them out of the great Shepherd’s hand. Their old friends, and the memory of their old sins will come, and tug at them very hard, and very cunningly; but the Savior says, “No one can snatch them out of my hand.”

So, first, here is their security: they are in his hand; that is, in his possession, and he clutches them, as a man holds something in his hand, and says, “It is mine.” Neither shall anyone take them away from being under his protection. Never shall they be snatched away from Christ. When he says this, he pledges his honor to preserve them, for if one could be snatched out of his hand, then the devils in hell would rejoice, and say, “He could not keep them. He said that he would, but he could not. We have managed to snatch this one, or that one, out of the pierced hand of their Redeemer.” But such a horrible exultation shall never be heard throughout the ages of eternity. “They shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.”

Some one wickedly said, “They may get out of his hand all by themselves.” But how can this be true, when the first sentence is, “They shall never perish”? Treat Scripture honestly and candidly, and you will admit that the promise “they shall never perish” shuts out the idea of perishing by going out of the Lord’s hand by their own act and deed. “They shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.” Who can loosen the grip of that hand which was pierced with the nail for me? My Lord Jesus bought me at too dear a price to ever let me go. He loves me so much that his whole omnipotence will work with that hand, and unless there is something greater than the Godhead, I cannot be snatched away from that dear, tight-fisted grip.

**Now, to make His promise even more secure, and to pile on the comfort, the Savior goes on to add the care and power of God the Father. Our Lord says, “My Father, who has given them to me.”**

The saints of God are safe, because the Father gave them to his Son. He did not give him a temporary inheritance. He did not bestow on him something which he might in time lose. Will the Lord Christ lose what his Father gave him? You know how people say, “Oh, I hope that, if a burglar takes anything from my house, he will not take that cup, which is an heirloom. My father gave it to me.” If a man had to defend his property, he would be sure to take care of that which was a very special gift, given in his honor, as a memorial of a great work. So is it with our Lord Jesus: he values that which his Father gave him. I delight in the thought. I picture my blessed Lord looking at each one of his believing people, and saying, “My Father gave you to me.” That poor woman, that struggling young man, that decrepit old lady, that man who is half-starved, but who loves his Lord-Jesus says of each one, “My Father gave this soul to me.” He cannot lose what his Father gave him. He would sooner die again than he would lose them. His death has made their salvation safe beyond all jeopardy. He laid down his life for the sheep. The lion came, and leaped into the fold; but the Shepherd met the lion; yes, he grabbed him with his pierced hands and held him down. It was a terrible fight. The Shepherd sweat great drops of blood as he held the monster; but he overpowered him, and he hurled him to the earth, and said, “It is finished:” and it was finished. He has so saved all his flock until now that we are sure that he will never lose one of those whom his Father committed to his trust. “My Father gave them to me.”

**Then he goes on to say that his people are kept by the Father’s power; for he says, “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.”**

Beloved, although God gave us to Christ, he did not cease to care for us himself! I must bring to your memory our sweet text from last Sunday night. I could not fully preach from it, but the text was enough without a sermon: “All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them.” [John 17:10] We tried to show you how we were none the less the Father’s because we were the Son’s, and none the less the Son’s because we belonged to the Father. So here Jesus in effect says. “My Father gave you to me; yet he takes care of you none the less, but all the more, because he is determined that what he gave to me shall be mine, the Father will put forth his wisdom and power to preserve you.”

Let me illustrate the latter words of the text. There lie the children of God in the hand of Christ. Do you see that tightly fisted hand? They are safe enough there. Jesus says, “No one can snatch them out of my hand.” But see the Father, he puts his hand over the hand of Jesus! There, now: you are inside two hands, “And no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.” Oh, the serene security of those who hear the voice of Christ, and whom he calls his sheep! A double-handed force keeps them safe against all danger. Tug away, Satan! You will never snatch them out of the hand of Jesus, and the hand of his Father! “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” It is impossible to be done.

**And then the Savior finishes everything by saying that, while he has spoken of the Father and himself as two-and two they are as persons-yet in their divine essence they are but one. He says, “I and my Father are one;” and especially one in love to his people.**

“The Father himself loves you,” even as he loves his Son; and, while you read of the love of Christ in his death, you must also read of the Father’s love just as much in that great sacrifice. It is true of our Lord Jesus that-“He loved the church, and gave himself for it;” but it is equally true of the Father-“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.” They are one in an infinite love to all those who, called according to the divine purpose, are following Christ, and listening to his voice. I fall back with great joy on this blessed conviction-that he will not allow those to perish whom He has given eternal life. Of course, if you have only taken temporary life-if you only believe in that-you will get no more than you believe. Your gift will be measured by your faith. But if you say, “I gave myself up to Christ that he might be the Alpha and Omega to me; and I wholly trust myself to him without reservation, throughout all my life, to save me,” he will do it; for “I am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.” “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” “The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.”

You are safe in Christ’s hand. Know it, and feel the joy of it. “Oh,” says one, “but if I thought that was true, I would run into sin!” I am sorry for you: things act very strangely on you. Nothing binds me to my Lord like a strong belief in his unchanging love. “Oh,” but you say, “that it would be far safer to tell your listeners that they may be overcome by sin, and perish!” I will not tell them what I do not believe. I will not dishonor my Lord by a lie. Shall I come home to your house, and tell your children that, if they do wrong, you will cut their heads off; or that, if they disobey you, they will cease to be your children. If I were to propound that doctrine, your children would grow angry at such a slander on their father. They would say, “No, we know better than that!” I would rather say to them, “My dear children, your father loves you; he will love you without end, therefore do not grieve him.” Under such doctrine true children will say, “We love our ever-loving father. We will not disobey him. We will endeavor to walk in his ways.”

***“‘Tis love that makes our willing feet***

***In swift obedience move.”***

Our loving Lord will not cast away those to whom he is bound by the bonds of marriage.

“Well, but suppose we sin.” He will chasten us, and restore us

“If I believed that doctrine, I would live as I pleased,” says one. Then you are not one of his sheep, for his sheep love holiness, and will not love iniquity. The change brought about by the new birth is such that a man will not return to his old ways of sin and folly. This is the doctrine; and how can you make it to be an indulgence to sin? True saints never turn the grace of God into an excuse to ignore the very commands of God, but the very mention of eternal love leads them to careful obedience.

One thing I must say at the end. Some ministers preach a gospel with a very wide door to it, but there is nothing to be had when you get inside. I am sometimes told that I make my door a little too narrow. It is not true, for I preach the gospel to every creature under heaven, with all my might; but if the door is narrow, there is something worth having when you enter through it. Even if the way is narrow, once you get in, you have found eternal life, and you shall never perish, neither shall any one snatch you out of Christ’s hands. Sinner, come and have an eternal blessing! It is worth having. Come and have it! If you believe, you shall surely be saved. “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved;” saved from sin so as never to go back and live in it again; so saved as to be made holy; so saved as to be preserved in holiness. Holiness shall be the main current of your life, until, made perfectly holy, you shall dwell with God above. Into his hands let us commit our spirits tonight, and we may rest assured that they shall be eternally safe. Amen.