

Signs and Sheep

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Preacher: Vijay Henderson

- [0 : 00] Father, thank you for your word. Thank you that this church takes the Bible so seriously. Please speak to us now. By your spirit, through your word, may we know Jesus better because of this passage.
- In your name, Amen. Well, as you can tell by all the palm leaves here, today is Palm Sunday. And Palm Sunday, it marks the beginning of Holy Week for Christians.
- For us out there, I'm sorry, for us, Easter is the most significant event in our calendar. But out there, Christmas, I think, still has the better marketing campaign. There's more for retailers to get behind at Christmas, isn't there?
- There's the presents and the decorations, summer holidays, and of course, all the food. But for Palm Sunday and Easter, it's basically these palm branches and Easter eggs.
- I don't think there's much David Jones and Maya can do with that. But here's the thing. God, being such a forgiving chap and all, is it okay for Easter to just be about chocolate and some days off work?
- [1 : 08] Or is God allowed to disrupt people's view? That's the question we're going to think about today, and I put it at the top of your handout. Is God allowed to disrupt people's view?
- On Palm Sunday, we remember that Jesus entered Jerusalem. The people waved palm branches at him as he walked in. Hosanna, Hosanna! Save, save, they cried.
- And that's exactly what he does. By dying on the cross in Jerusalem, he takes the penalty that our sins deserve. And saves us from God's judgment.
- But is that the Hosanna or the salvation that people really wanted? Is God allowed to disrupt people's view? Now, of course, God is allowed to do anything.
- Of course he is. But everywhere Jesus goes in Israel, the Jews oppose him. They try to kill him. He performs miracles. He performs signs that point to who he is.
- [2 : 09] He's the Jewish Messiah. But they refuse to allow him to disrupt their religious tradition. Occasionally, people believe here and there. But for the most part, the Jews reject Jesus.
- And actually, Jesus' own ministry in Israel has made very, very little progress whatsoever. Just for example, in chapter 9, two weeks ago, Jesus healed a man born blind.
- Do you remember that? Two weeks ago. And he said, look, see what I did to his eyes? I am the light of the world. Then he said, I am the good shepherd, as we just sung.
- But by the end of the episode, just on the screen, please. It says, many of the Jews, the Jews who heard these words were again divided.
- Many of them said he is demon possessed and raving mad. Why? Listen to him. But others said, these are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?
- [3 : 09] Is it okay for the Jews to be so divided about Jesus? Or is God allowed to disrupt their view about the son?
- Thank you for this slide. That's okay. Today, as Easter approaches, we Christians, we say that Jesus' death and resurrection are the only way to the father.

But out there, out there, people say, no, no, Jesus is just one of many equally valid ways to God. Is God allowed to disrupt people's casual view of Jesus?

Chapters 5 to 10 are the who is Jesus chapters. That's John's goal, you see, to tell us who Jesus is. He documents certain miracles that prove his identity.

After all, who is able to feed 5,000 people with a lunch? Who is able to walk on water to heal a man who's paralyzed? Who is able to heal a man born blind, not with water, but by putting mud in his eyes?

[4 : 18] Who's able to do that? Someone who's demon possessed? Someone who's raving mad, perhaps? As the Jews say. You can see on this title slide here, just in the yellow box there.

The yellow box is John's purpose statement for the whole book. We say it every week. Is it, as John says, that these things are written that you may believe. Is it that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God?

And that by believing, you may have life in his name. What I've done on the next slide. I've taken that purpose statement at the top.

And I've shown you how John has wrapped his book in that purpose statement. I asked my wife if that makes sense. And she said the color coding helps. I put it also in the box on your handout.

But do you see the purpose? These are written that you may believe. That's Jesus is the Christ, the son of God. That by believing, you may have life in his name. Do you see how the yellow is about belief?

[5 : 18] Chapters 2 to 4 are belief. The pink, that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God. Chapters 5 to 10 are the identity chapters. Who is Jesus? And the last one, that believing you'll have life in his name.

Chapters 11 to 20 are about the life we can have in Jesus' name. And the very first thing Jesus does in chapter 11 is raise Lazarus from the dead. The life you can have in his name.

I hope that's clear. Today, we are wrapping up chapters 5 to 10. We're wrapping up the pink section. The who is Jesus section. Thank you.

That's fine. And because we're wrapping up the identity section, John deliberately includes questions about Jesus' identity. Verse 24. Please have a look down.

Verse 24. If you are the Messiah, the Christ, tell us plainly. And in verse 33. Because you, a mere man, claim to be God.

[6 : 17] Is Jesus the Christ? Is Jesus God? They're the two points I put on your handout. And today, for the first time, God the Father is going to weigh in on the discussion.

And you can see that in the points. Are you the Christ? The Father has given me the people. Are you God? The Father calls me Son.

And so they're the two points that we're going to spend the most of our time on. But let's look at point number one, which is verse 22. Let me read. Verse 22. Then came the festival of dedication at Jerusalem.

It was winter. And Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's colonnade. Anyone who tells you they know where the festival of dedication is in the Bible, you can give them a gold coin because it's not actually there.

The festival of dedication occurs in the 400 years between the Old Testament and the New Testament, about 170 BC. And what it remembers is when the Jewish religious leaders, led by the high priest called Menelaus, they outlawed Jewish worship or religious worship in the temple.

[7 : 27] Instead, they allowed Greek gods such as Zeus to have a place there, to be worshipped there. By doing that, they defiled God's temple.

A few years later, a Jewish man called Judah Maccabeus, he was having none of this. And so he led a successful revolt against Menelaus. He cleansed God's temple. It's called the Maccabean Revolt.

And so each year since, the Jews would have this festival of dedication to rededicate the temple back to God. With all that background, verse 24, the Jews who were gathered there were there gathered around Jesus saying, how long will you keep us in suspense?

If you are the Christ or the Messiah, tell us plainly. It's obvious the type of Messiah they wanted Jesus to be. A Maccabeus type character who would rescue them from the Romans.

Is God allowed to disrupt their view of Messiah? Verse 25, I did tell you who I was, but you did not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep.

[8 : 38] Last week, Jesus said he was the good shepherd. Today, he talks about sheep. He says there are two types of sheep in the universe. Verse 26 and 27 makes the contrast between them.

But you do not believe because you are not my sheep. In contrast, my sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me. But you are not God's flock.

That's the emphasis. You see, when it comes to telling people plainly about Jesus, we always wish he'd just show up and do one more sign. Do you ever think that?

Do you ever think that if your loved ones could see just one more miracle by Jesus, a modern miracle, one caught on video? Not a big one.

We don't need the Red Sea part. Just a little one, just between me and my loved ones. Do you think that then they would believe? Miracles are great, aren't they? Because miracles are hard for people to explain away.

[9 : 40] Seeing is believing, isn't it? And that's what Jesus says in verse 25. The works I do, the miracles I do in my Father's name testify about me. Do you think a more miraculous sign would speak plainly to your loved ones?

Jesus says the problem isn't a lack of miracles. It isn't a lack of evidence. Because no matter what Jesus does, people refuse to listen to him.

Ultimately, it's because they're not his sheep. So they will not allow God to disrupt their views. Belief always comes down to what type of sheep we are.

Whether we listen to the shepherd's voice as good sheep do. In verse 28 and 29, we see what sort of shepherd Jesus is. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish.

No one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. Because I and the Father are one.

[10 : 47] You see, the comfort for a sheep comes down to how big his shepherd's hands are. And Jesus' sheep are always safe because no one has bigger hands than the Father.

That's what he's saying. No one can snatch them away. When we talk about belief, we often worry, will we be able to hold on to God to the very end of our lives?

Do you worry about that? I do all the time. But actually, Jesus says it's whether God can hold on to you. Here is a comfort for us. Nobody can snatch the person who believes in Jesus out of the Father's hands.

Not even dementia. Not even death, actually. As he carries his sheep from perishing to eternal life through death.

That's the sort of shepherd or Christ that Jesus is. Comforting verses, aren't they? The wider context is about who Jesus is. Yes. The answer, verse 29.

[11 : 53] My Father who has given me the people. It's a Christmas illustration. On Christmas, Jesus wakes up. He runs downstairs to open his presents.

And he opens his presents. He says, wow, thank you, Father. You've given me the nation of Israel. See, Israel belongs to the Father. The Old Testament makes that clear. But the Father gives her, Israel, to his son.

You see, we all know that you never snatch a present away from a child. The religious leaders and their man-made religion are trying to snatch Israel out of the Father's hands.

Because they will not allow God to disrupt their tradition. Jesus, if you are the Christ, tell us plainly. Well, my Father seems to think I am.

He's given me the nation. He's given me his flock to shepherd. And nobody can snatch them out of my hands. If people oppose this, it tells us which type of sheep they are.

[13 : 04] The Jews, they do oppose Jesus. Verse 31. They pick up stones. Again, his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him. This is our second point. The question this time is, are you God?

The answer, the Father calls me son. Verse 31. Again, his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him. I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?

We're not stoning you for any good work, they replied, but for blasphemy. Because you, a mere man, claim to be God. You see, they think a man is trying to be a God.

But John's Gospel says, no, no, no. It's a God trying to be a man. It's not just that God has spoken. It's that he became flesh.

And made his dwelling amongst us. Jesus is visible and touchable. These religious leaders, they're professional blasphemy hunters.

[14 : 07] But what happens on the day when God himself shows up? Does he not claim to be who he is? Does he not do any of the miracles which come so naturally to him?

Does Jesus lie about his identity? It was a capital crime in Israel for a man to claim to be God. They picked up stones to give Jesus the death penalty.

And so he tries to calm them down. Verse 34. Jesus answered them. Is it not written in your law? I have said you are gods. If you call them gods to whom the word of God came and scripture cannot be set aside.

What about the one whom the father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Jesus says, don't get angry about vocabulary. About the name God.

He says, is it not written in your own law in Psalm 82, which is our first reading? In Psalm 82, is it not written that other human beings can be called gods with a lowercase g?

[15 : 07] He says, don't get upset if I use that same vocabulary about myself. Here's another contrast. Verse 35 and 36. If the father can call any human being a god, verse 36, what about the one whom the father set apart as his very own and sent into the world?

Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy? Because I said I'm God's son. Jesus is on a totally different level to all other men claiming to be gods.

Jesus is set apart as God's very own. At the feast of dedication, they would set the temple apart. They would dedicate it again to God.

Jesus stands up and says the exact same words about himself. I too am set apart by the father. He's saying that he is the temple now.

Jesus is now the place where the world will meet the father. He's the new temple. Are you God, Jesus? Jesus, the father thinks so.

[16 : 16] He's happy to call me son. He says, verse 37, do not believe me, however, unless I do the works of my father. Seeing is believing.

But if I do them, even though you do not believe, believe the works at least that you may know and understand that the father is in me and I in the father. At least believe the miracles that you see me doing.

What do they say about who I am? Surely they prove that, verse 38, I am in the father and the father is in me. It's the language of sonship.

But again, they tried to seize Jesus. Verse 39. Why? Because they refuse to let God disrupt their view of the son.

Can Jesus really be the son? Can Jesus really be God's temple? Aren't all religions equally valid ways to God? People out there always think that, don't they?

[17 : 17] To do that is to get between the father and the son. I don't know if you've ever been to the woods, but you know they say you never get between a mother bear and her cubs.

That's when the claws come out. I can also say, speaking to my ex-girlfriends when I was a teenager, never get between a mother and her son. My mother had three sons.

Never get between a mother and her son. Similarly, never get between the father and the son. Saying that Muhammad and Buddha and all other religions are equally valid ways to the father is to get between the father and the son.

When it comes to religion, people all out there always want to agree that all religions are equally valid. Usually they do that, you know, to keep the peace and these sorts of things.

But ultimately they will not allow God to disrupt their casual view of religion, their casual view of the son. Are you the Christ? The father thinks so.

[18 : 21] He's given me the people. Are you God? The father thinks so. He calls me son. Let's finish by asking some questions about ourselves.

Are you the true Israel? Are we the true Israel? Well, speaking of Israel, Jesus seems to be done with that country now. He did his miracles there.

He told them who he was, but they tried to stone him. They tried to seize him. And so verse 40. Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days.

There he stayed and many people came to him. They said, though John never performed a sign, all that John said about this man was true. And in that place, many believed in Jesus.

Here he is on the other side of the Jordan. He's in Gentile lands, unclean for Jewish people. But many people believed. They came to him.

[19 : 21] They didn't even need a miracle. They didn't even need a sign, we're told. You see, there's nothing wrong with God's shepherd. There's nothing wrong with the miracles he does.

He will have plenty of sheep. The shocking thing is that not all of the sheep will be Jewish. The country of Israel was the father's flock.

But by opposing the son, they have de-Israelled themselves. By refusing to listen to Jesus, they show which type of sheep they are in the universe.

That was the warning for the Jews back then. And I guess it's the warning for religious types today. Trying to get to heaven without Jesus, trying to approach God through man-made religion, is to get between the father and the son.

The warning is, this shepherd will go and find other sheep. The feast of dedication, it remembers when the Jewish religious leaders defiled the temple by allowing other religions a place there.

[20 : 29] When people do that today, when people say that all religions are equal, they are defiling the temple all over again. When people say that Jesus is just one of many equally valid religious figures, they are getting between the father and the son.

The warning is, the father will find, the son will find another Israel. Jesus started in the temple, in Solomon's colonnade.

It was the very centre of Jewish life. He finishes the passage across the Jordan in unclean Gentile lands with his sheep. Jewish or not.

And so here's the question. Are you part of the true Israel? Because you believe in Jesus. Are you the true Israel?

Do we listen to the shepherd? Do we listen to Jesus when he says things we just don't agree with? Will we follow this shepherd even when, or especially when life is tough?

[21 : 34] Or are we not willing to let God disrupt our view of who Jesus is? Let's finish with a positive.

Anyone, anyone, whether they are unclean Gentiles, whether they are religious Jews, religious Anglicans, religious Catholics, Australians, Chinese, Malaysians, Singaporeans, South Africans, even Indians.

Anyone, anyone can be part of the true Israel. That the true people, the special people of God. No matter who we are, no matter what we have done in our lives, if we obey the voice of the shepherd, if we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, he will hold us in his hands, hands that are big enough to carry us from a place called perishing to a place called eternal life.

As we approach Easter, we will see again how he does that. These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God.

And that by believing you may have life, eternal life in his name. Amen.