***Speak Plainly***

**John 10:22-30**

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**April 17, 2016**

“Speak plainly!” “Why don’t you just say what you mean?” Has someone ever said this to you or have you yourself said these words? I’ll bet you have. When someone says them to you, what do you think they are asking for? Most likely they are asking for clarity in something you have said. When this happens, how do you feel? My first reaction is usually, “Weren’t you listening?” But quickly I take a deep breath and begin to think about what I said and why what was perfectly clear to me was not communicated.

Now I will freely admit that I hear one of these statements frequently. Given a simple question, I seem constitutionally unable to give a simple answer. My dear wife will attest to this. Let me give you an example. She might ask, “Are you going to the store?” A plain answer would be, “Yes” or “Yes, do you need anything?” Instead I will answer, “Yes” followed by a detailed description of the route I will take, how long I estimate I will be gone, and a discourse on possibilities that may cause my estimated time to be longer.

Let me give you another example of my loquaciousness, one that at least some or many of you have experienced in one form or another. Someone will ask me, “What happens when we die?” Now I know they want a short definitive answer to a specific question. But for some reason, I feel that short definitive answer is inadequate. Instead what they get is an impromptu lecture.

I will start with God’s creation, how death came into the world and what the ancient Hebrews though about death. This will be followed by a discourse on two thousand years of Christian thought and theology on the subject of death, with a long aside on eschatology. By the time I’m done, I have thoroughly answered their question, but they may be more confused than they were before they asked the question.

So what are the Jews saying to Jesus? In verse 10:24 of John we hear, “So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, ‘How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.’” What is it the Jews don’t understand about what Jesus has told them? Just previous to this conversation, in John 10:1-19, Jesus tells the Jews the story of a good shepherd, whose flock knows his voice and will follow only the shepherd. They will run from a stranger, whose voice they do not know.

But John tells us the Jews do not understand what Jesus is telling them. So Jesus tells them, “I came that they [the flock] may have life, and have it abundantly. … I am the good shepherd.” (John 10:10, 11). But John tells us the Jews still do not understand and are divided over what Jesus’ words mean. For this reason, they said, “If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” (John. 10:24)

Now we would probably think, “How can they not understand? It seems plainly clear to me.” After all, Jesus did not drone on when he spoke to them. He told a simple story and when his audience didn’t understand, he explained it to them. But the key is, we know the whole story. Jesus’ audience didn’t. They only knew part of the story.

The Jews had long anticipated a Messiah who would save Israel, but Jesus did not fit their expectations. They expected a warrior-king who would lead an army to drive the Romans out of Palestine and restore the Kingdom of David. But Jesus doesn’t let them off the hook. Jesus answered them saying, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep.” (John 10:25-26)

Despite the fact that Jesus did not come as a warrior-king, the words and works that Jesus had performed should have convinced the Jews that he had been sent by God. He was the Messiah sent to redeem the world. But so deeply was the Jewish idea of the Messiah as a warrior-king imbedded in Jewish culture, the Jews were blinded to the significance of Jesus’ words and signs.

Now there has been a great deal of mistaken interpretation of verse 26, “you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep.” People have wanted to say this verse means that the Jews are not saved, even that they are all going to Hell. That with the advent of Christianity, God had abandoned Israel, the Jewish people. This has contributed to the abomination of anti-Semitism.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Let’s look at verses 27-29, “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand.”

The Greek in verse 29 is difficult to interpret and there is dispute over what the Father gave to Jesus. People have wanted to interpret this in terms of the doctrine of election, viewing Jesus’ sheep as the elect and by implication making the Jews not among the elect. But this goes against the weight of scripture. The Old Testament tells us that God elected Israel to be his people. Israel, the Jewish people, are still and will remain God’s people. All whom God has chosen remain in his hands and cannot be snatched away.

So what does all this weighty discussion mean to us? Have I once again failed to speak plainly? Then let me speak plainly. Do you know Jesus’ voice and follow him, or are you confused about who Jesus is and where he leads? I would say that most of us are confused, I know I am. Jesus’ way is a radical rejection of the ways of this world. Honestly look in your heart, most of us find it difficult to reject the ways of the world that offer us such material wealth and comfort.

Does this inability to follow Jesus’ way mean we are not his sheep? No! No, what it means is just as there are sheep in any flock who will wander, we have a tendency to wander from our shepherd. The good news is that as any good shepherd will search for a lost sheep, Jesus, our shepherd, will seek us out when we have wandered. He will call us back to the way. We will hear his voice; we just need to respond when he calls. Scripture clearly shows us that God continues to love his people even when they deny and disobey him. We are in God’s hands and no one can snatch us away.