

My Father's Arms

John 10:22-30

INTRODUCTION

Picture this scene: It's a hot July day. A father and his three-year-old son are hanging out in the shallow end of a swimming pool. For the dad, the water is only waist deep. For the little boy, however, the water would be above his head, so his loving father is holding him in his arms. As he does, the boy's toes are barely touching the water. All is well.

But then the father starts to walk toward the other end of the pool. "We're going deeper, deeper," he says to his son. The water begins creeps up on the little boy's legs, and then covers his swimming suit. As the water climbs the face of the little boy shows increasing degrees of panic and he tightens the grip around his father's neck.

Had the little boy been able to logically analyze the situation, he would have realized there was no reason to be afraid. His dad's feet were always firmly anchored on the bottom of the pool. As long as he was in his father's arms he was safe anywhere in that pool.

There are points in every one of our lives when we feel like we are in too deep. Problems abound. A job is lost. Someone we love dies. The water is rising. We are getting wet! In those moments the natural temptation is to panic, because we feel out of control.

Yet, like the child in the pool, the truth is we have never been in control over the most valuable things of life. We have always been held securely in the arms of our Heavenly Father. That never changes.

Isaiah 43 records this wonderful promise that every one of us needs to commit to memory:

But now, this is what the Lord says—
he who created you, Jacob,
he who formed you, Israel:
"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
² When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.
³ For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel ... (Isaiah 43:1-3)

John, the writer of the Gospel, addresses this topic in our text today. In so doing he gives us amazing details with this story. He doesn't want us to forget it.

- The date was the Festival of Dedication.
- This was the latest of the great Jewish Festivals to be founded, and is still observed by Jews today.
- It was sometimes called "The Festival of Lights" but you and I better know it by its Jewish name: *Hanukkah*.
- Hanukkah traditionally falls very near our Christian celebration of Christmas, so as John points out:

Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter. (John 10:22)

The origin of the Festival of Lights is part of the story here. The Jewish people were experiencing one of those "deep water" times in their history.

- They were being ruled by a Syrian king called "Antiochus Epiphanes." He reigned about 150 years prior to the birth of Jesus.
- This king loved everything Greek, so he decided that every other religion needed to be abolished so that everyone in his kingdom could only worship the Greek gods, and think Greek thoughts, and embrace Greek ways of doing things.

The idea didn't go over very well in Jerusalem. Truthfully the Jews didn't really practice their religion very faithfully, but they were not about to be told they had to worship some other way. We would have the same reaction in this country if someone tried to eliminate Christianity and force a different religion on us.

- So, since asking nicely, didn't convince the masses to abandon the Jewish faith, King Antiochus Epiphanes used force.
- He attacked Jerusalem, killed 80,000 people, sold another 80,000 into slavery and looted the Temple.
- The Temple became a brothel for Greek worship.
- But the final straw for these Jews ... was the sacrifice of pigs on the Great Altar.

The people began to revolt. They were led by a man named Judas Maccabeus.

- After a three year struggle, they won.
- The Temple was purified, the Great Altar was rebuilt and all the robes and utensils were replaced.

Many people believed that Judas Maccabeus was the Messiah. He fit the mold.

- He was a conquering military hero.
- He even rode into Jerusalem on a white stallion to the cheers of the people ... like Palm Sunday.
- But the peace he obtained was only temporary and when Rome came into power, the people stopped believing that he was anything more than just another man. Not the Messiah. Definitely not the Messiah.

The Festival of the Dedication was an annual reminder of that high water time in their history. They had been set free, but now Rome was in charge. And the water was rising once again.

- They needed a Messiah.
- Could it be ... that this man Jesus was that Messiah?

- He did miracles. He told great stories. He wasn't afraid to rebuke the religious officials when they needed it.

And so they asked Him.

How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.
(John 10:24)

Instead of a straightforward “yes” or “no” Jesus responded like this:

I did tell you, but you do not believe. (John 10:25)

And then, for the people of that, and for every person who would ever live, Jesus offered them TWO PROOFS and TWO PROMISES. Do you wonder if Jesus is who He claims to be? Do you know someone who does? Jesus says “Here's how you can know for sure.”

PROOF #1: LOOK AT WHAT I DO

Verse 25:

The works I do in my Father's name testify about me... (John 10:25)

Every Jew's dream of the golden age when the Messiah would reign was this, as expressed in Isaiah 35:

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.
Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. (Isaiah 35:5-6)

Jesus did all of those miracles, and more. Every miraculous sign – from healing the sick, to casting out demons, to bringing the dead back to life, to feeding 5000 with a little boy's sack lunch – everything proclaims that He is the Messiah.

Actions speak louder than words, Jesus said, so just look at what I do. But in case you want words ...

PROOF #2: LISTEN TO WHAT I SAY

Verse 27:

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. (John 10:27)

Palestinian shepherds each had a special distinctive call that their sheep knew well and those sheep followed whenever the shepherd spoke.

During the days in the wilderness as the people of Israel were leaving Egypt Moses told them that one day there would be a Messiah with a distinctive voice who must be listened to:

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. (Deuteronomy 18:15)

This prophet would speak the words of God. He would confront injustice and hypocrisy. And He would tell people the truth about themselves and about God. Jesus did that. Sometimes it was harsh; sometimes it was gentle. But it was always the words of God.

The things Jesus said and did all reinforce the truth that He is the Messiah. That should be enough, but there more. In addition to those proofs Jesus makes two promises that only the Messiah could make.

PROMISE #1: LIFE WITHOUT LIMITS

Verse 28:

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish... (John 10:28)

If they would believe that He was who He said He was – if they would believe and accept Him as their Lord and Savior – they would become members of His kingdom, sheep of His flock.

And this is what he promised us—eternal life. (1 John 2:25)

PROMISE #2: LIFE WITHOUT FEAR

Also verse 28:

... no one will snatch them out of my hand. (John 10:28)

This doesn't mean that those who follow Jesus will be immune from the pains of life – things like sorrow and sickness, suffering and death. No, the water still rises, but when it does you know that you are safely in the arms of your Father.

APPLICATION

In his book "The World's Living Religions," Robert Hume observes that the nine founders of the world's greatest religions all had a period in their lives when they doubted who they were and what their mission was.

- All, that is, except Jesus. He never doubted who He was.
- From the time Jesus was 12 until His death, He knew exactly who He was—the Son of God who came to provide salvation for the world. The Messiah. The Holy One.
- Jesus never claimed to be looking for some light for guidance, as other religious leaders claimed. Instead, Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life" (8:12).
- Jesus claimed to be God.
 - He claimed to be able to forgive sins.
 - He claimed to conquer death.
 - He claimed He was coming back to judge the world.

- And given the fact that Jesus claimed all those things, the one thing you cannot say is, "I think He was just a good moral teacher."
 - That is not an intellectually honest conclusion considering what Jesus claimed about Himself.

Given the fact that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, C. S. Lewis said you have to come to one of three conclusions.

- The first possibility is that Jesus was a liar. That is, Jesus claimed to be God when in fact He knew He was not God.
- A second possibility is that He was a lunatic. That is, Jesus thought He was God when in fact He was not. But given what you know about Jesus—His words, His actions, and His teachings—is it logical to say Jesus was a lunatic?
- Lewis said there is only one other conclusion and that is Jesus is Lord. He is exactly who He claimed to be. If Jesus Christ is in fact the Messiah, then that means everything He said is true.

And if it is true, we are called to believe it and to take our place safely in the arms of our Heavenly Father.

Amen.