

A Brand-New Hope

John 10:22-30

Introduction

Did you notice how the Apostle John, the writer of today's Gospel lesson, began this section?

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

More than any other Gospel writer, John loves to set the teachings and activities of Jesus in their historical context. For John the day and location are critically important to understanding the deeper meaning of the text. In other words, in the Gospel of John Jesus says a particular thing at a particular place for a particular reason.

The “where” is key to understand the “what.”

That kind of connection between the circumstances of an event is nothing unusual for us. Today, we see politicians do exactly the same thing all the time. For example, if I were President of the United States and ...

- I wanted to introduce a new initiative to support members of the military I probably would make my speech on Memorial Day while standing in Arlington National Cemetery.
- I wanted to talk about a civil rights issue I would travel to Selma, AL on Martin Luther King Day.

And that's the way it is in today's text. The setting is the Temple in Jerusalem, and the occasion is the Festival of Dedication. That feast is also known as the Festival of Lights, but you more likely know it as Hanukkah. Hanukkah is approximately the same time of year that we celebrate Christmas so, John notes, it was winter.

The Festival of Dedication commemorates one of the greatest ordeals and acts of heroism in Jewish history. Antiochus Epiphanes was king of Syria from 175-164 B.C. He loved everything Greek, so he decided it would be good to eliminate the Jewish faith and turn all the Jews into Greek lovers too. At first he tried to do this peacefully, but the Jews, of course, refused to cooperate.

So in 170 B.C. he attacked Jerusalem.

- More than 80,000 Jews were killed, and another 80,000 were sold as slaves
- The equivalent of several million dollars was stolen from the Temple treasury
- It became illegal to circumcise a child. Mothers who failed to obey were crucified and their children were hung around their necks.
- The Temple was turned into a brothel
- The Great Altar on which the lambs were offered during Passover became the slaughtering table for sacrificing pigs to the Olympian god Zeus.

The hero of the story for the Jews was a man named Judas Maccabaeus. He led a fight to regain control of the Temple, and eventually won it in 164 B.C. The Temple was

cleansed and rededicated ... hence "The Festival of Dedication." Many people at that time were sure that Judas Maccabaeus was the Messiah: a military hero who kicked out the enemy and purified the Temple. After all, he certainly fit the mold.

From that day on, the Festival of Dedication always was celebrated as a time of renewed hope. The people knew that their God had not forgotten them, and that one day soon the Messiah would come. "Could this be the year?" they would ask each other.

So it is not at all surprising that on this occasion and at this location, the Jews surrounding Jesus as He taught them would ask:

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

ILL: When Karen and I were in college, we were in a theater production of *"You Can't Take it With You."* I played her grandfather. Toward the end of the show, she had to throw her arms around my neck and say "Oh Grandpa, you're wonderful." And response was "I've been telling you that for years." That line got the biggest laugh of the night, because every audience was filled with people who knew us.

Essentially, that's line Jesus offered to the waiting crowd. Are you the Messiah? Tell us!

I've been telling you that for years! But you don't believe. Everything I have done has been authorized by my Father, actions that speak louder than words. (John 10:25, *The Message*)

"I did tell you. Look around! The blind see. The deaf hear. The lame walk. The dead are raised. You've seen me turn water into wine, and turn a little boy's lunch into a feast for more than 5,000 people. Am I the Messiah? You bet I am. I've been telling you that for years."

But they refused to believe it, because Jesus was not the kind of Messiah they were expecting. He was a military leader like Judas Maccabeus or even King David. For Jesus, David the shepherd boy was the preferred leadership model, not David the King. His would be a spiritual kingdom operating out of the hearts of his followers. And His followers would not be soldiers, but sheep.

So here in front of the Temple, during the Feast of Dedication, faced with this all-important question, Jesus turns the concept of Messiah into a conversation about having a personal relationship with Him.

You do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. (John 10:26-27)

The relationship between sheep and shepherd is one of renewed hope. Sheep are

totally dependent on the shepherd. Without a good shepherd, they don't stand a chance.

These days between the resurrection and the ascension are all about the things that are new because of what Jesus did. We are inspired by the words of Isaiah 43:

Be alert, be present. I'm about to do something brand-new. It's bursting out!
Don't you see it? (Isaiah 43:19, The Message)

So here on this day, in this place, Jesus tells this audience that there is hope – but it is a different kind of hope. He says:

I am not here to bring you a military victory. I am here to bring you life!

#1: A RENEWED HOPE FOR LIFE ETERNAL

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

That's the promise of John 3:16:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

It is the message of the empty tomb on Easter. In Jesus, death loses its grip. Those who place their trust in Jesus will live on for all of eternity.

Dwight Moody once said:

Some day you will read in the papers, "D. L. Moody of East Northfield is dead."
Don't you believe a word of it!

At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now;
I shall have gone up higher, that is all,
out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal –
a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint;
a body fashioned like unto His glorious body.
I was born of the flesh in 1837.
I was born of the Spirit in 1856.
That which is born of the flesh may die.
That which is born of the Spirit will live forever.

This life ...

#2: A RENEWED HOP FOR LIFE THAT IS SECURE

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

The Greek word for snatch is the word used to describe a ravenous wolf coming in to steal a sheep from the flock as it is grazing. It is the job of the shepherd to protect the flock from wolves like that.

When the shepherd boy David was outlining his qualifications to take on the Philistine giant he described that very scene:

When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them... (1 Samuel 17:34-36)

In a world full of ravenous wolves, we can rest in the security that Jesus our shepherd is protecting us.

APPLICATION

Once there was a shepherd living in the Scottish highlands. He had a daughter and he would often take her with him when he went out on the moors to take care of the sheep. More than anything else this little girl liked to hear her father call the sheep. The sound of the shepherd's call was so free and so beautiful as carried across the valleys of the moors.

As the years went by the little girl became a beautiful young woman and went off to the big city, determined to build a life of her own. At first she would write back home to her parents every week. But as life began to take her by the hand, these letters soon dropped off in their frequency and eventually there were none.

Rumors begin to filter back home to that shepherd and his wife that their daughter was hanging out with some unsavory characters who were having a negative influence on her life. When father shepherd heard this, he gathered a few things together and went to the city to find his daughter.

For days on end he looked for her. He looked everywhere; the slums, the rows of houses, the markets, the taverns, and everywhere in between to no avail. After all of this searching he became very discouraged with the thought that he had lost his daughter to the evil city. So he started the long journey back home.

Just as he came to the outskirts of the city, he remembered how his daughter had always loved to hear the voice of the shepherd calling out to the sheep. So he turned around and once again began his search. This time, though, his voice rang out the shepherd's call. The people in the city looked at him as if he had lost his mind.

But he hadn't searched for long when, from inside one of those dilapidated houses, his daughter heard his voice. She leaped up and rushed out to the street and ran into the arms of that old shepherd, her father.

Her life – once feeling hopeless – had a brand-new hope.

The Good Shepherd Jesus Christ invites everyone – you included – to be in relationship with Him. He invites you to be one of His sheep. Responding in faith to that invitation carries with it two amazing benefits:

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. (John 10:28)

And that's the truth. Amen.