

UNEDITED DRAFT

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

What's going on? It's been a tough week here in the United States of America. Deadly bombs killed 3 and wounded 170 at the Boston marathon. A violent manhunt ensued that shut down a major city and filled it with the sounds of gunfire and pipe bombs exploding. In addition, this week poison letters were sent to U.S. officials, but were intercepted. Also, a town in Texas was shattered by a massive explosion with at least 14 killed, a couple hundred wounded, 50 houses and buildings destroyed. Finally, you may not have even heard that torrential rains have caused flooding along the Mississippi River. By Wednesday the river will have passed minor and moderate flood stages and is expected to peak just shy of major flood stage.

What is going on? What does this mean? Who will lead us through the chaos, the pain, the uncertainty? We need leadership. We need guidance. We need reassurance. We need hope.

We need Jesus.k

Let's turn our attention to John 10:22-30 where God lets us know that Jesus our Good Shepherd provides all of these things that we need.

John 10:22-30

22 Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem.

[I'm not going to go into much detail, but a quick word about this Feast of Dedication, all called the Feast of Lights and better known today as Hannakuh. Here's a quick overview of what Hannakuh is all about. 175 years before Christ, a Syrian king and ruler named Antiochus Epiphanes attacked and conquered Jerusalem. It was a brutal battle. 8-,000 people were killed another 80,000 sold into slavery. Antichus loved Greek culture and the Greek gods. He hated Jewish culture and the Jewish God. And so after his conquest of Jerusalem was complete, he forced pagan worship to take place at the temple in Jerusalem. Pig (an unclean animal) were sacrificed on the altar to Zeus. He turned the outer courts into brothels for prostitution. Worship of the one true God was made illegal.

But God raised up a brave Jewish man named Judas Maccabeus. He was God's instrument of justice and deliverance. He raised up an army of Israelites and they went up to Jerusalem to recapture the city and take the temple back. And they ended up winning. And one of the first things they did was have a commemorative ceremony that became an annual celebration. It was a rededication of the temple and a celebration of the victory God gave. They celebrated with many lights in the temple and in people's houses which is why it's also called the Feast of Lights. To this day it is celebrated by Jewish people, but now called Hannakuh.

So this was the feast going on in Jerusalem when Jesus was there.

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."

Solomon's Colonnade was a high wall in the temple area that provided some shelter from the wind on chilly winter days. Rabbis often taught in this place. So Jesus walked there, teaching the people as he walked around.

Do you understand the question they are asking? The word Christ and the word Messiah mean the same thing. Christ is the Greek word. Messiah is the Hebrew word. They both mean, "Anointed One." Anointing was an Old Testament rite. Oil was poured on the head of a person who was being dedicated for special service to God. Prophets, priests and kings were anointed. And not only did the anointing set them apart for special service to God, but in the anointing, the Holy Spirit also filled them

and empowered them for that special service. In the Old Testament a special Messiah, Christ, Anointed One was foretold... one who would be the perfect prophet speaking the very words of God, final High Priest who offered the perfect sacrifice for the people – himself, the most powerful, mighty, eternal King who would rule forever. Devout Jewish people who knew their Old Testaments were waiting for “the Christ.”

And so they asked Jesus to tell them directly whether or not he was the Christ... the long-promised Messiah. Complicating this question, however, was that most people had a false concept of who the Christ would be and what he would do. They thought he would be a great king and deliverer along the lines of Judas Maccabeus. That he would do to the Roman oppressors what Maccabeus had done to the Syrian oppressors.

So what were they asking and why? Were they looking for an earthly deliverer or spiritual? Did they want to love him and follow him? Or did they want him to confess to blasphemy so they could hate him and kill him? What happens next tells us.

25 Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe.” [Jesus said it to a woman in Samaria. He said it again to a man born blind in John 9. We can presume not every instance he said it is recorded in the Gospels. Finally, the content of his preaching was a continuous confession of the fact that he was the promised Christ. But there was something else that testified even more clearly:] **The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me, 26 but you do not believe because you are not my sheep.**

The miracles of Jesus testified to who he was. And Jesus had done many. They were surely aware of some if not many of them. Jesus had already fed a crowd of thousands with a little boy’s sack lunch. He had opened the eyes of a blind man. He had healed an invalid at the Pool of Siloam. If they’re won’t believe he is the Son of God through the miracles, why would they believe him if he told them?

The same is true today. People claim they would believe in Jesus if they just saw a miracle. That’s not true. All kinds of people saw Jesus do miracles in his day, but they did not believe.

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.

Some people hear the Word of God and they recognize the voice. This is the Word of God! Others hear it and they don’t recognize it. Because of unbelief, it sounds like fairy tales and gibberish to them.

Our three year old son, Micah, is a brave soul. Some kids are clingy and they have to be near their parents, or see their parents or they’ll start to cry. Not Micah. He is fearless. He trusts everybody. He doesn’t care if his parents are around or not. In spite of what we’ve told him, he still sometimes will put his shoes on by himself (usually on the wrong feet) put on his clothes and go play in his sandbox. However, when he hears the voice of his Father, he’s almost always quick to listen and obey. He can be out in the sandbox and his brothers or sisters can tell him to go in. Nothing. Like they didn’t say a word. Any of you could walk up to him and tell him to go inside, and I expect he may just look at you blankly then keep playing. But if speak to him directly, and say, “Micah, come inside.” He recognizes my voice and my authority and he will come in. The same is true if he were in danger... walking toward the road. I’m afraid he might not listen to others. But if I call out to him to stop, he would do it.

Jesus says it’s like that with him. If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus, when you hear his voice, you recognize it. You know his authority. You listen to him. You follow him. The unbeliever, however, hears that same voice and ignores it. They don’t know him. They don’t follow Jesus.

And listen to blessings that belong to those who listen to Jesus and follow:

28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; When Jesus says that he gives eternal life, he doesn’t mean some day. He means now. When you are connected to Jesus by faith, God pours life into you.

By nature we are dead in our trespasses and sin. That is, we are cut off from the living God and the life he gives because of our disobedience and rebellion. Even as we are physically alive, many

remain spiritually dead. Maybe this is where the zombie movies come from. Apart from Christ, we are the living dead. There is no real or eternal life in us.

God doesn't want to see you a zombie. So he has a plan to give you life. That life comes to you only through God's Son, Jesus. He himself said, "**I give them eternal life.**" He gives life by taking away that which makes us dead: sin. He lived a perfect life on your behalf. He died on the cross to pay your sin-debt in full. That means that although by nature we are DEAD in our trespasses and sins, in Christ those sins are removed. With sins removed, God is free to give us life. And eternal life in Christ is exactly what he gives to all who believe!

God pours into you his grace, and love, and truth, and presence, and spirit. Your value system is turned upside down. You begin an entirely new kind of living with a new kind of life, filled with the eternal Holy Spirit. That life begins right now and it continues through all eternity. There's no end to it, and it's marked by joy, peace, and contentment. You shall never perish.

Another blessing of listening to the voice of Jesus:

no one can snatch them out of my hand.

God doesn't want you to fear that somehow your eternal life might get stolen from you. What if Satan comes along and robs me of what God has given me? He can't! No one can snatch you out of Jesus' hands. Jesus won't let them. Now don't mistake this for a false teaching we find in many churches called eternal security. Once saved always saved. Once you are a believer you can never lose your faith. "**If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!**" **1 Cor. 10:12.** Is it possible for you to reject what God has freely given you. Can you choose to willfully, intentionally jump into disobedience instead of remaining with Christ who rescued you? Yes, you can. But what Jesus is saying is that you were born into this world in sin. The default position is belonging to Satan. But when Christ claims you and makes you his own and redeems you, Satan has no more claim on you. He cannot grab you back. Remain in Christ, and there is nothing that could ever rob you of the life he has given you. And so he says:

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."

You are a believer and you are here today, not because by your will, and power, and decision, you decided to accept Jesus into your heart as Savior. You are here because the Father has given you to Jesus. Through his Word and the Sacraments by the power of the Holy Spirit, he has created faith in your heart. He chose you from eternity to be his own. The almighty Father in heaven has you in his hand. Wait... didn't Jesus say you are in *his* hand? So which is it? Are you in Jesus hand or the Father's hand? Yes. "**I and the Father are one.**"

The Jewish people confessed, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." God is one. And Jesus says he is one with the Father. Jesus clearly confesses to be true God and the Christ. That's exactly what they wanted him to confess! In a round about way, he does exactly that. He is the one true God who gives life. So they picked up stones to kill him because this was blasphemy. But that's a story we'll save for another day.

What is going on? What do all these evil things that happened this last week mean? What is this world coming to? Is all lost? Is it time to despair? Should stockpile weapon and food? Hold on stop. Listen. Do you hear it? It's your Good Shepherd speaking. He's saying he loves you. He died for you. And you are forgiven. He says he's given you eternal life already. He says you will not be in need. He promises to care for you. He promises to be with you every step of the way through this valley of the shadow of death. There is no evil to fear. Take comfort! Goodness and love follow you. Dwelling with God in heaven is before you. And the Lord Jesus himself walks with you. Don't let all the noise distract you. Listen! Your Shepherd is speaking. Follow him. Amen.