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Bridgeway Church  
Gospel of John #31  
January 26, 2020

### **Sermon Summary #31**

#### **Safely Secured in the Gracious and Great Grip of God John 10:22-30**

As all of you know, there are theological differences among those who call themselves evangelicals. By “evangelical” I mean those who affirm the fundamental and foundational truths of Christianity, such as the inspiration and authority of the Bible, the deity, virgin birth, sinless life, and substitutionary death of Jesus, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, the reality and necessity of being born again, salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and of course his second coming at the close of human history.

As evangelicals, we rejoice in our unity on these truths. And we are quick to warn one another if someone should deviate from or deny any of these essential, foundational doctrines. But that doesn’t mean evangelicals agree on everything. There are several doctrinal matters on which there is undeniable disagreement. For example:

The role of women in leadership and ministry / The validity or cessation of certain miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit / The timing of the rapture / The nature and meaning of the millennial reign of Christ / The proper recipients of baptism: do we baptize infants or only those who have come to conscious faith in Jesus? / Church government: should the local church be governed by a plurality of Elders or by a single Senior Pastor or by congregational vote? / The use of traditional hymns or contemporary worship songs or both.

And there are others. Today, however we are only concerned with one such issue. And I find it instructive that this issue often stirs up more emotion than any of the others I’ve just mentioned. I have talked about this issue many times before, and we encountered it earlier in our study of John’s gospel in chapter six.

I’m talking about the subject of the security of the believer. Simply put: can a born-again, justified by faith, adopted child of God ever lose their salvation? Or as others have expressed it, is it possible for a born-again, justified by faith, adopted child of God to forfeit their salvation by fully and finally turning their back on Jesus Christ and reverting to unrepentant unbelief? Some say, Yes. Others, such as myself, believe that God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is committed to preserving all his children in saving faith and will uphold and protect them not only until the final day of judgment but also throughout eternity.

The issue before us isn’t whether or not a born-again, justified by faith, adopted child of God can sin. Of course they can. The issue isn’t whether or not this person can backslide or wander away from the Lord or spend an extended season of their life in doubt about their faith. Yes, all acknowledge they can. This isn’t a question of whether such a person can become addicted to a drug or to alcohol or to greed or to some form of sexual sin. Yes, they can. The issue is, instead, whether or not they remain in their sin unrepentant and defiant, or eventually come under conviction and seek God’s forgiveness and fellowship.

So how do we account for the behavior of someone who claims to have been born again, claims that they truly trusted Jesus for forgiveness of sins and have been adopted into the family of God, who then turns away from Christ and lives like those who never claimed to be Christian in the first place? Typically you will hear one of three explanations.

One view is that such people were in fact born again, genuinely saved and justified by faith in Jesus, and were undeniably at one time a child of God, but they no longer are. They somehow lost their new birth and reverted to a condition of spiritual death. They were de-justified or went from a state of being declared righteous in Christ to one of being unrighteous and under God’s judgment. And although they were once a son or daughter of God, they have been disowned by God and cast out of his family. Whether or not such a person can ever come back again to true saving faith or is forever consigned to condemnation is a matter of dispute among those who hold this view.

A second view is that if someone who once professed faith in Christ and gave every appearance of having been born again turns or reverts to unbelief and rejection of the gospel, he/she was never truly saved in the first place. Their so-called “faith” in Jesus was spurious and artificial and was never the sincere expression of having been born again. This person was self-deceived and deluded into thinking they were forgiven and saved, but their abandonment of Christ and rejection of the gospel proves that they were never saved and justified in the first place. They haven’t lost their salvation because they never had it in the first place.

There are several texts that appear to support this option. We saw earlier in John 8 that some of the Jewish leaders who “believed” (John 8:30-31) in Jesus were, in point of fact, the children of the devil (John 8:37-47). In his first epistle, John described many of those who professed faith in Jesus in this way:

“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us” (1 John 2:19).

Another position is that if someone is truly born again and justified by faith in Christ, he/she will always remain born again, justified, forgiven, and an adopted child of God. If they do, for a season in life, walk away from the Christian faith and live in sin and even repudiate the gospel, they are not lost or condemned or irreversibly consigned to hell. If they were truly born again and became a child of God, the Father will do one of two things.

In some, perhaps most, cases, he will bring conviction to their hearts and restore them and eventually bring them back to their formerly robust faith in Jesus. Even after years of living as if they were not Christians, they will repent of their sin and seek renewed fellowship with God. Or, the other possibility is that they will come under the Father’s loving discipline. This discipline may be light and successfully restores the person to a vibrant faith in Christ, or it may be severe and could even entail physical death. In this latter case, the person is still saved but he/she is taken home into heaven prematurely. We see this in what had happened in the church at Corinth among those who were treating with disdain the Lord’s Supper:

“Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world” (1 Cor. 11:27-32).

As you probably are aware, people of certain denominations typically embrace one or the other of these views. Those denominations that believe one can lose or forfeit his/her salvation include Methodists, Nazarenes, the Assemblies of God, Free-Will Baptists, and many of the independent Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. Those that believe a person is eternally secure would include Presbyterians, Southern Baptists, Acts 29 churches, and most that identify themselves as independent Bible churches.

So, why have I taken the time today to lay out before you the theological landscape of evangelical Christianity on this one particular issue? It is because it is staring us in the face in John 10. I certainly don’t expect all of you to agree with me on this issue. And, as I’ve said many times before, if you choose to disagree with me and the Elders on this point, you can still be a vital, contributing, fully loved and participating member of this local church.

#### *Setting the Context*

We read in vv. 22-23 that Jesus was in Jerusalem at the time of “the Feast of Dedication.” He was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. This colonnade was probably the covered walkway on the eastern side of the Temple Mount.

The Feast of Dedication is probably best known to you as ***Hanukkah***, also called the Feast of Lights. It is not mentioned in the OT because it didn’t become a part of Jewish religious practice until after the last book of the OT was written. In 167 b.c., the Syrian commander, Antiochus Epiphanes, conquered Jerusalem and polluted or defiled the Temple by sacrificing a pig on the altar. The Jews who survived his terror banded together and became experts in what might be called guerilla warfare. Three years later, in 164 b.c., they recaptured the city and re-consecrated the

Temple. This took place on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the month Kislev, which coincides approximately with our December. Thus the Feast of Dedication or Hanukkah is an 8-day celebration that commemorates the rededication of the Temple.

The Jewish religious leaders were not seeking clarity so that they might worship Jesus, but wanted to hear from his own lips something that would give them legal grounds for charging him with blasphemy:

“How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ [the promised and long-awaited Messiah], tell us plainly” (John 10:24).

The fact of the matter is that, up until now, Jesus had not claimed to be the Messiah in a public setting. He had done so in private. He claimed to be the Messiah in his private conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4:26. He had made it clear to his disciples that he was indeed the Messiah (see Matt. 16:13ff.). But he had chosen not to do so in public before a mob of angry unbelievers who had political and revolutionary aspirations. Jesus didn't want to provoke a military uprising.

When he says in v. 25, “I told you, and you do not believe,” he is not referring to some explicit statement or claim he had made but is directing their attention to the vast array of works and supernatural deeds and miracles or signs that spoke volumes on his behalf and should have made crystal clear to them who he was.

You may recall how Jesus responded to John the Baptist when he had his doubts about whether Jesus was the promised Messiah. “Go and tell John,” said Jesus, “what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them” (Matt. 11:4-5).

These religious leaders had seen the same things John the Baptist and the other disciples had seen. Why, then, were they so obtuse, so resistant, so unbelieving? Jesus tells us in vv. 26-27,

“you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:26-27).

This, then, brings us to the declaration of Jesus concerning the spiritual security of all his sheep.

### *Safely Secured in the Gracious and Great Grip of God*

There are many texts in the NT that I believe affirm in no uncertain terms the eternal security of the sheep of the Good Shepherd, such as John 6:37-44; Romans 5:1-11; 8:29-39; 1 Corinthians 1:7-9; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:4-14; Philippians 1:6; 2:12-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15; 2 Timothy 1:8-14; Hebrews 10:14; 1 Peter 1:3-5; 5:10; 1 John 2:1-2, 19; Jude 24-25; Revelation 13:8; 17:8.

But John 10:27-30 may well be the clearest, strongest, and most convincing text of all. Let's look closely at what Jesus says.

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one” (John 10:27-30).

Let's begin by taking note of ten assertions Jesus makes.

**First**, “I *give* them eternal life” (v. 28a). Eternal life is a gift! There isn't anything you can do to earn it, win it, or bargain for it. You can't earn a gift by merits or lose it by demerits. A gift is by definition an expression of grace and therefore does not depend on works of any sort.

**Second**, “I give them *eternal life*.” Eternal life is life that not only lasts forever but is qualitatively suited to life forever in the new heavens and new earth. Jesus does not say I give them 6 months of life or 11 years of life or life until such time as they decide they don't want it anymore.

Most everyone in the world, except for atheists, believe that they will live forever. A global survey was conducted several years ago and showed that approximately 94% of Americans believe in God. I strongly suspect that this has gone down in more recent years. But what I found most interesting is that of those 94%, **78% believe in life after death**. The percentage of those who both believe in God and in life after death were highest in New Zealand, Israel, Poland, Ireland, and Italy.

As I've said to you many times before, most people who believe in life after death are universalists. They believe that everyone will be saved. Fewer and fewer believe in the reality of hell. One five-year old boy was asked by his dad, "Son, if you were to die tonight and God asked, 'Why should I let you into my heaven?' what would you say in response?" Without the slightest hesitation, the young boy shouted aloud: "Because I'm dead!" Even at this early age the young boy was a universalist. Everyone who dies goes to heaven. The only requirement to enter heaven is that you have died! This little boy didn't believe in justification by faith or justification by works. He believed in justification by death!

**Third**, "and they will *never* perish." Literally, Jesus uses a double negative: they will never, no, by no means ever perish. There is no way in the Greek language to make a statement with greater force. It is an absolute negative, an unequivocal negative, an unassailable negative. I find it incredibly odd that Jesus would say this if in fact many of his sheep will perish.

Let me bring out the force of this statement with even greater clarity. Again, to translate this as literally as one can, Jesus says, "and they will never, no, by no means ever perish unto the ages" or "unto eternity." Jesus doesn't merely refer to what won't happen to them now, in the present age. He also extends this promise into eternity itself!

**Fourth**, "and *no one will snatch them out of my hand*." The word translated "snatch" is the verb used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 to describe the Rapture – "Then we who are alive, who are left, will be *caught up* together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."

No one, says Jesus, can sever the relationship between me and my sheep. No one. Not the attacking wolf (John 10:12), nor thieves and robbers (John 10:1), no one. To suggest otherwise is to say Jesus failed to do God's will. We saw this in John 6.

"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. [Why?] For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, [i.e., that none of those he has given me should be "snatched" out of my hand] but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:37-40).

Here in John 6 we see *the unified resolve of the Father and the Son* to preserve eternally secure the sheep, those whom the Father has given to the Son. They are of one will. This emphasis on the unity of their will is seen again in John 10.

**Fifth**, "my Father, *who has given them to me*, is greater than all" (v. 29a). Here we see that the security of the believer, of the sheep of the Good Shepherd, is rooted in God's election of them in eternity past. The Father "gave" the sheep to the Shepherd by choosing them to inherit eternal life. We see this yet again in John 17, where Jesus prays:

"Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him" (John 17:1b-2).

This unbreakable connection between election and eternal security is what Paul was describing in Romans 8:29-30,

"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined [i.e., those whom he gave to the Son] he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified" (Romans 8:29-30).

**Sixth**, “my Father, who has given them to me, is *greater than all*, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand” (v. 29).

What does Jesus have in mind when he refers to the Father’s incomparable “greatness”? Clearly, he is talking about his power, his omnipotence, his limitless and infinite strength. Here Jesus grounds the impossibility of any of his sheep ever being fully and finally lost in the omnipotence of the Father. What is omnipotence? Why do we describe God’s power as great?

The answer is found in numerous biblical texts. He is “mighty in strength” (Job 9:4). He is “the Lord strong and mighty” (Ps. 24:8; see also Deut. 7:21; Isa. 1:24). “Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you” (Jer. 32:17).

“Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases” (Ps. 115:3).

“Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and in all deeps” (Ps. 135:6).

“For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?” (Isa. 14:27).

“declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose’” (Isa. 46:10).

“Then Job answered the Lord and said: ‘I know that you can do all things; and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted’” (Job 42:1-2).

“all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’” (Dan. 4:35).

See also 2 Chron. 20:6; Job 23:13; Prov. 21:30; Isa. 40:26; 43:13.

Jesus grounds his confidence in the safety of his sheep in the incomparable omnipotence of his Father. It is because there is no one greater or more powerful than God the Father that the sheep are secure. Was Jesus mistaken in his assessment of the Father’s power and purpose? Are you greater than God? Is your will stronger than his? Can you stand up against the infinite power of the one who called everything into existence out of nothing? Jesus declares that no one can snatch a single sheep out of his Father’s hand because the Father’s hand is omnipotent and limitless in power.

**Seventh**, in v. 28 Jesus said that no one “*will*” snatch them out of my hand, but in v. 29 he says that no one “*is able*” or “*can*” snatch them out of the Father’s hand. They can’t do it now and they won’t do it in the future. There is no “will” in heaven or on earth that is greater and more powerful than the “will” of the Father and the Son! Again, why is it that no one, not even you, can snatch the sheep out of the Shepherd’s hand? It is because no one is greater than God! They can’t do it and never will do it! To say that even one of the Shepherd’s sheep can be lost is to say that God is not, in fact, greater than all. Are you willing to say that?

**Eighth**, finally, Jesus declares that “I and the Father are one” (v. 30). Jesus means two things by this. First, he is claiming to be equal in deity and glory with the Father. They are distinct persons but one God, together with the Holy Spirit. They share a common divine nature. Whatever power abides in the Father also abides in the Son. If the Father is greater than all, then so too is the Son, for they share a common nature that is omnipotent. We know that Jesus was claiming to be equal with the Father in power and glory because the religious leaders picked up stones to kill him (v. 31). When Jesus asks why, they tell him it is for “blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God” (v. 33).

The second thing Jesus has in mind is the unity of will and purpose that he and his Father share. This we already saw in John 6:37-40. Jesus came to do the Father’s will, and that will is that not one of those whom the Father has given to the Son should ever be lost. So, too, here in John 10, *Jesus and the Father are united in their determination that not one of the sheep shall ever be snatched out of their hands*. Their hands are united in this purpose. We are in the hand of Jesus and we are in the hand of the Father and from that unified divine, omnipotent hand no one will be snatched!

Someone might say, “OK, I agree that no one *else* can snatch me from God’s hand. But what if I myself, through my willful stupidity and hard-hearted rebellion, wriggle free and jump out of it of my own accord?” Ah, so now you *are*

claiming to be greater than God! *Your* power exceeds that of God! *Your* will is stronger than his! Are you really prepared to say that your determination to jump out of God's hand is greater and stronger than God's determination to keep you securely in his grip?

**Ninth**, twice (in v. 28 and again in v. 29) Jesus declares that "no one" can snatch them out of our hand. What does "**no one**" mean? It means "no one"! You don't have to be a Greek scholar to figure that out. No one means not Satan nor an abusive parent nor an unbelieving spouse nor even yourself can separate you from God's love in Christ.

If you believe that any believer could at any time jump out of the hand of the Father and the Son and perish eternally, it means you believe that "no one" actually means "anyone"! ***If everyone can be lost, should they choose to walk away, why does Jesus say that "no one" can?*** If you mean "everyone" you don't say "no one"! Let me say it again: Jesus doesn't say, "no one *except* for the person himself/herself." Paul reaffirms this truth in Romans 8:39 when he excludes "**anything else in all creation**" from having the power to separate you from the love of God in Christ. And the last time I checked, each and everyone of you is a part of "all creation"!

**Tenth**, let me ask you a question. Just assume for the sake of argument that Jesus wanted to teach the eternal security of his sheep. How else could he have done it than how he does it in John 10? If you wanted to assert eternal security, how could you do it more clearly than by using the words that Jesus uses? How could Jesus have said it with any more force or persuasion than we read here?

Someone might still object by saying: "They won't perish *so long as they remain sheep.*" But the text doesn't say that, does it? The assertion of the text is precisely that sheep always *do* remain sheep! The point of the text is: "Once a sheep, always a sheep."

If Jesus wanted us to believe that some of his sheep could cease being sheep and suffer eternal death, why did he say his sheep will never suffer eternal death and no one can snatch them from him or from his Father? Surely Jesus is not guilty of the crassest form of double-talk. In other words, "they will never perish" = "they shall always stay sheep!"

"But what if some sin I commit or failure in life or weakness or lapse of faith occurs repeatedly?" How repeatedly? How much sin does it take to lose one's salvation? What does a Good Shepherd do with wandering sheep? He wouldn't be a good shepherd if he didn't restore them when they wander. Our security is ultimately dependent on God's character and commitment, not ours. People say: "If we change, we lose our salvation." No. We can't lose it, not because we can't change, but because *God* can't.

Also, if you believe Christians can lose their salvation on earth, you have to believe they can lose it in heaven too. People who deny eternal security do so because they say God can't override our will and keep us saved against our desires. But if God can preserve and keep you secure in heaven without destroying your freedom, he can surely do it on earth as well! And furthermore, God is committed to preserving and upholding your will in faith and trust in Jesus so that you never fall or finally fail. That is why Peter said that "by God's power" we "are being guarded through faith" (1 Peter 1:5). Faith is required to stay secure and God is committed to sustaining us in faith (see also Phil. 1:6).

So, I will leave you with these simple questions. First, why would Jesus say "never" if he meant "often"? Second, why would Jesus say "no one" if he meant "anyone"? Third, why would he say God is "greater" than all if all are potentially greater than he? And fourth, why would he say, "no one is able" if, in point of fact, "everyone is able"?

In the final analysis, the only reason I affirm the *perseverance* of the saints is because I believe in their *preservation* by the Savior. We persevere only because God preserves us in faith. Praise be to God!

### **A Brief Summation of John 10:31-42**

Unlike so many today who insist that Jesus never claimed to be God, the Jewish religious leaders knew that he did. For this reason they picked up stones to kill him! They believed he was guilty of blasphemy for making himself out to be God (v. 33).

Our Lord responds to them by quoting Psalm 82:6-7 – “I said, ‘You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince.’” Who are these that God calls “gods”?

In the OT, the word “*elohim*,” here translated “gods,” can refer to angels (Psalm 8:5; 82:1 where “the gods” = the divine council), pagan deities or demons (Deut. 32:17; Pss. 96:4, 5; 97:7, 9; 135:5), and humans (Exodus 4:16; 7:1; 21:6; 22:8-9). Whatever the case, Jesus points out that God, Yahweh, has no problem applying the word “god” or “elohim” to others beside himself. So, on what basis do they object when Jesus says, “I am God”? If fallen angels are in view in Psalm 82, and are addressed as “gods”, how much more appropriate is it that Jesus is himself referred to as “god”? Or again, “If God uses the term ‘gods’ for something less than God, might it not be feasible that he would use the term ‘Son of God’ for the one whom he ‘consecrated and sent into the world’”? (John Piper).

However, Jesus is not using this OT text to prove he is God. He employs this response to put off the ever-increasing animus of his enemies. As Carson says, “he administers a short, sharp shock, a *scriptural* reason why they should not take umbrage just because he calls himself the Son of God” (399). Or, as John Piper puts it, “What happens then is that Jesus answers them way beyond what they expected. They are on the brink of killing him for blasphemy, and to defuse the crisis (since it’s not time yet for his death), he deflects their rage with a peculiar biblical maneuver, and in the little time that this buys him before they try to seize him, he offers them one more invitation to at least make a start in understanding and accepting who he is.”

He then proceeds to encourage them not to believe him based solely on his own personal claims but also on the basis of the obvious and undeniable miraculous signs that he has performed in their presence.