

Main Idea: People do one of two things with the Good Shepherd, as we’ll see in today’s text. In John 10:31-42, the Good Shepherd is put on trial, the trial resulted in two responses.

- I. The Good Shepherd is rejected (31-39).
 - A. The Jews tried to kill Jesus (31-32).
 1. Jesus demonstrated courage.
 2. Jesus used a question to put the focus where it needed to be.
 - B. The Jews said Jesus was guilty of blasphemy (33).
 1. On the one hand, they misunderstood Jesus.
 2. On the other hand, they understood Jesus very well.
 - C. Jesus offered His defense (34-38).
 1. He pointed to the Scriptures (34-36).
 2. He pointed to His miracles (37).
 3. He pointed to His Father (38).
 - D. The Jews rejected the evidence and tried to get rid of Jesus (39).
- II. The Good Shepherd is received (40-42).
 - A. True sheep come to Jesus.
 - B. True sheep believe in Jesus.

Make It Personal: Ask yourself these important questions...

1. What do you think about Jesus?
2. What have you done with Jesus?
3. What are you doing with Jesus?

Jesus was constantly making people mad and glad. Have you noticed? In our day many have watered Him down to just a nice do-gooder, but if we take the Bible seriously, that’s not an option. When the real Jesus entered a room, He did and said things that made some people very *mad* and other people very *glad*.

And He does the same today. When we open the Bible, as we’re doing right now, and when we see Jesus, you can expect some things to happen. By the time I’m done with this message some people will have reason to be very *mad*, or at least *sad*, and still others to be very *glad*.

In John 10 Jesus identified Himself as the Good Shepherd. You would expect that claim to make some people *glad*. But mad? You wouldn’t think, but it did.

Jesus actually made that claim two times in John 10, saying in verse 11, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” And in verse 14, “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.”

That assertion caught the attention of every Jew that heard it, especially the leaders. Every Jew knew that *the Lord* was the shepherd of Israel. King David said in the familiar Psalm 23, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

Now Jesus says, *That’s who I am. I am the good shepherd.* And He didn’t stop there. He made other claims too, like, “I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved (9).” And, “I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full (10).” And, “I know the Father (15).” And, “I lay down my life, only to take it up again (17).” And, “I give my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish (28).” And, “I and the Father are one (30).”

If you’ve been in church very long at all, you may not feel the weight of those claims like you once did, like those who heard Him first utter those astounding words did. *What did He say? This Jewish man says that He is the key to life, and not just life, but everlasting life? And did He just say that He and God the Father are one?*

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is intended to prompt continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

Yes, that's what He said. Now what are you going to do with it? What are you going to do with *Him*?

That's the question of the hour when we come to the end of the Good Shepherd text in John 10. The Good Shepherd has spoken. He's made His claims. That's John 10:1-30. Now it's crunch time. It's time to respond. That's John 10:31-42.

The truth is, people do one of two things with the Good Shepherd, as we'll see demonstrated in today's text. In John 10:31-42, the Good Shepherd is put on trial, and the trial resulted in two responses.

I want to give you the two responses up front because I want to help you assess where you stand with Jesus. In order to respond rightly to His claims, you need to be aware of the options. In scene one, the Good Shepherd is rejected (31-39)—He made some people *mad*. In scene two, the Good Shepherd is received (40-42)—He made some people *glad*. When it comes to the claims of the Good Shepherd, those are the two and only two options. You can either *reject* Him or *receive* Him. There is no neutral ground when it comes to the Good Shepherd.

I've entitled this message, "The Good Shepherd on Trial." That's what's happening in the passage before us today. That's what's happening in this room and all over the world today. Here's the first potential response.

I. The Good Shepherd is rejected (31-39).

Let's walk through the first scene. We'll notice four things happen during some heated back and forth interaction between the Jews and Jesus.

A. The Jews tried to kill Jesus (31-32). Verse 31 begins, "Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him." The first word is *again*. This is actually the fourth time in John's Gospel that they tried to kill Jesus, for He was constantly making people mad (5:16-18; 7:1; 8:59).¹ In reality, they couldn't kill Him legally for the Romans did not give the Jews authority to execute capital punishment (see John 18:31), but this lynch mob isn't thinking about Roman law. They have in mind only God's law, and they're convinced Jesus is in violation of it.

John refers to *the Jews*. Not all Jews, for not all Jews agreed with the assessment of these Jews. When John uses the phrase, "the Jews," he has particularly in mind the Jewish leaders, and especially the Pharisees. They've been hounding Jesus since He first launched His public ministry, which was almost three years prior to this.

Back in chapter nine the Jews were furious with Jesus for healing a blind man on the Sabbath day, and they criticized Him sharply, and even excommunicated the blind man. It was that event that prompted Jesus to share the Good Shepherd illustration, in which He warned of hired hands and thieves that abuse and use the sheep, obviously with these very Jewish leaders in mind.

John says they *picked up stones to stone Him*. Quite obviously, Jesus made them mad, so much so that they were willing to take the law into their own hands and eliminate Him.

I'm amazed by Jesus' response. Verse 32—"But Jesus said to them, 'I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?'" Notice two things about Jesus' response.

1. Jesus demonstrated courage. I know what I would have done if I were in Jesus' shoes and I saw a mob of people coming at me with rocks. I'm looking for the exit sign. But not Jesus. He didn't run. In fact, He didn't show any sign of fear or alarm.

¹ Observation by John MacArthur, p. 443.

The text specifically says they *picked up stones to stone him*. In other words, they had the intent to kill with weapon in hand. Why didn't they, then? Why didn't they throw the stones?

The truth is, they couldn't, not yet. It wasn't His time to die. When the soldiers later came to arrest Jesus, they fell to the ground when He spoke, such was His power, and only when He submitted to their wicked intent could they succeed.

As G. Campbell Morgan explains, "He was invincible against all hostility until, as Peter said on the day of Pentecost, He 'was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.' We cannot read the story without seeing the things of infinite and awe-inspiring majesty."²

But it's not just courage we see here. It's His mercy, too. Notice that...

2. *Jesus used a question to put the focus where it needed to be.* They're flaming mad and want to kill Him, but Jesus sees a teachable moment here, and He turns it into one with a question.

"I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" They're upset because of what He just *said*. He reminds them of what He *did*, of His miracles.

He says His miracles (lit. 'works') were "from the Father." Jesus didn't do His own thing. He made it clear He was under authority and always did what His Father told Him to do (see John 5:36; 10:25). "For which of my God-given works are you going to stone me?" He asked.

They replied in verse 33, "We are not stoning you for any of these, but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God." So they say it's not what He did that's cause for the death penalty. It's what He *said*. And what He said, they said, is *blasphemy*.

In the Mosaic Law, God gave this instruction to the nation of Israel in Leviticus 24:16, "Anyone who blasphemes the name of the Lord must be put to death. The entire assembly must stone him. Whether an alien or native-born, when he blasphemes the Name, he must be put to death." That's what's going on here.

B. The Jews said Jesus was guilty of blasphemy (33). Which meant they were justified and even required by divine law to stone Him.

I want you to see two things regarding these men with the stones.

1. *On the one hand, they misunderstood Jesus.* They accused Him of blasphemy because "you, a mere man." Stop there. Is that true? Was Jesus a mere man? If a mere man claimed what Jesus claimed, in this case, to be equal with God the Father, now that's cause for alarm. But the premise of these accusers is wrong, isn't it? Jesus isn't a mere man. He Himself will have more to say about that momentarily.

So on the one hand, they misunderstood Jesus. However...

2. *On the other hand, they understood Jesus very well.* Hear their words, "You, a mere man, *claim to be God*." They said He claimed to be God. Were they right? At this point, they surely were. *I am the Good Shepherd*, the One David worshipped in Psalm 23. *I and the Father are one*. At this point the Jews got the point. They understood Jesus very well, and when that happens He makes you either very mad or very glad.

By the way, can God be guilty of blasphemy? Blasphemy, of course, occurs when someone uses the name of God in vain, in empty and improper ways. That's not just swearing. It happens when a person flippantly says, "O Lordy," or "O God," without thinking, or when a person claims to be a Christian but doesn't live a Christ-honoring

² G. Campbell Morgan, p. 183.

life. That's a form of taking God's name in vain. And that's the accusation that the Jews brought against Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. You deserve to die because you are guilty of blasphemy.

C. Jesus offered His defense (34-38). We'll work through His defense line by line in a moment, but let me point out something at the outset. In His defense, Jesus doesn't deny the claim. He doesn't say they've got it wrong, nor that they misunderstood Him.

That's what some say. For instance, I was talking with a Jehovah's Witness once, and he of course insisted that Jesus was not God and that He never claimed to be. So I cited Jesus' claim in John 10 as support of Jesus' deity, and particularly the Jews' attempt to stone Him for this claim and their insistence that it was blasphemy. As we stood in my front yard, the man's response was that the Jews *misunderstood* His claim and *wrongly* thought He was claiming to be God.

But if that was the case, all Jesus had to say to diffuse this situation was, "Excuse me, fellows. You didn't hear me correctly. I didn't say what you thought I said." But He did, and they *did* hear Him correctly, and that's what infuriated them to the point of wanting to kill Him.

So how did Jesus respond? He pointed to three things in His defense.

1. *He pointed to the Scriptures (34-36).* Notice verses 34-36, "Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'? If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be broken—what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'?"

In His defense Jesus took His critics to the Scriptures. He asked them, "Is it not written in *your* Law?" He's using *your* because these men pride themselves in being men of the Book, Bible men, and He's reminding them that their Book, which they're using as grounds for stoning Him, says something else, too, something they seem to have forgotten.

So He quotes their Law. Actually, He's using the term "Law" in a broad sense, for the Hebrew Bible had three parts: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, but the designation "the Law" could signify the whole.

Jesus quotes from Psalm 82:6, so let's go back and look at Psalm 82. Psalm 82, which is a psalm of Asaph, is basically a warning given by God to judges who weren't doing their jobs rightly. In essence, the Lord told them to stop their unjust ways and start defending the poor and needy.

We see that in verses 1-4, "God presides in the great assembly; he gives judgment among the "gods": How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked? Selah. Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."

Then in verse 5 the Lord talks about the wicked that are causing the poor such problems, saying, "They know nothing, they understand nothing. They walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken."

So there's the setting. Psalm 82 begins with God challenging some human judges to stop turning a deaf ear to injustice and start doing their job, to protect needy people and vulnerable orphans and so forth from wicked oppressors.

Then the Lord lays before these judges this basis for His charge. Notice verse 6, "I say, 'You are gods; you are all sons of the Most High.'" That's the verse Jesus quoted in John 10, and in that verse God is actually talking to men, to earthly judges, but He calls them "gods" (small 'g') and "sons of the Most High."

Psalm 82 ends with God reminding these judges of their inevitable end in verse 7, “But you will die like mere men; you will fall like every other ruler.” And in the final verse Asaph adds this request, “Rise up, O God, judge the earth, for all the nations are your inheritance.”

You say, “That sounds odd. Why did God call these human judges “gods” in Psalm 82?” It’s because in the Old Testament God commissioned human judges to represent Him in their judgment, as Barclay puts it, “to be god to men.”³

And there’s something else you need to know. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for God, *elohim*, can also be translated “judges” (it’s a plural term), as in Exodus 21:6 and 22:8-9. In Exodus 21:6 God gave the Israelites instruction concerning what to do with a servant that loved his master and wanted to remain loyal to his master for life. “Then his master must take him before *the judges* [Hebrew *elohim*]. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life.”

The Jews in John 10 knew their Hebrew Bible, and that meant they knew the term *elohim* could have broader reference than only to God Himself. They know Jesus is speaking the truth. They know that God Himself used the term “god” to refer to individuals other than Himself. So Jesus is using the Jews’ own Bible to substantiate His own claim.

He says to them, “If he called them ‘gods,’ what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God’s Son?’” In other words, *If God Himself used the term “elohim” in reference to human judges, how much more can I use the term to refer to Myself, for the Father Himself sent Me into the world.*

Now be careful. Some miss the point Jesus is making. As Leon Morris explains, “It is sometimes said that this verse classes Jesus as a man among men, and shows that His claims to divinity are not to be taken seriously. But notice that His argument runs not, ‘Psalm 82 speaks of men as gods; therefore I in common with other men may use the term of Myself’, but rather, ‘If in any sense the Psalm may apply this term to men, then much more may it be applied to Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world.’”⁴

Don’t miss this. Jesus isn’t citing Psalm 82 as if to say, “I’m just like those judges that Asaph is describing.” No. Jesus is not merely a man and He’s not claiming to be merely a man by using this quotation. What He’s saying is that if the word *elohim* could be used in God’s Word to speak of human (and even sinful) judges, how much more so can He use the term, since God Himself actually sent Him into the world. It’s an argument from the lesser to the greater.

So in His defense, Jesus first pointed to the Scriptures. Secondly...

2. *He pointed to His miracles (37).* He told His accusers in verse 37, “Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does.” And then in verse 38, “...even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles.” Look at my miracles, He says. Can a mere man do what I’ve done? Can a man cause eyes that have never worked to start working? Can a man repair paralyzed legs? These are not the works of a man. These are things God the Father does. So don’t believe in me *unless I’m doing what my Father does*, the implication being, *and I am!*

³ William Barclay, p. 77.

⁴ Leon Morris, pp. 527-8.

We must not miss the patience of Jesus with these unregenerate, uncooperative unbelievers. He doesn't write them off. There they are standing with rocks in their hands, ready to kill Him, and He keeps appealing to them.

Okay, so you won't believe in Me and accept Me as your Savior. Then do some more thinking about My miracles, and believe them. That will help you, and that will be a helpful step towards believing in Me.

What grace the Lord shows, even to the hardest of sinners! As long as there's breath, there's hope. As long as a sinner's heart continues to beat, that sinner can receive a new heart, by the sovereign grace of God. And while salvation is all of grace, Jesus reminds the sinner that he's responsible to cooperate with divine initiative. *Believe the miracles so that you may know and understand*, said Jesus to these hardened sinners.

My friend, if you're a lost sinner and don't feel a thing for Jesus and don't see a reason in the world why you should put your trust in Him, there's still hope for you. There's something that could help you, something you need to do, and Jesus tells you what it is right here. Investigate His life, and especially His miracles. Find out what the Son of God did during His thirty-three years on earth. If you don't yet believe in Him, then investigate and become a believer in the truthfulness of His miracles. Jesus says that's a step in the right direction.

That reminds me of the story of Viggo Olsen who wrote the little biography, *An Agnostic Who Dared to Search*. When Viggo was a young medical student, he was an agnostic but feeling pressure from family to consider Jesus. So he decided to study the Bible to prove them wrong, and he began to search the Scriptures for inconsistencies so he could prove the whole thing was a misguided hoax. But when this agnostic began to search, he discovered that he was the one who was misguided. As he investigated the claims and works of Jesus, the Spirit of God opened his eyes, granted him saving faith, and redirected the whole course of his life. He ended up becoming a medical missionary with ABWE and took the hope of Jesus Christ to millions of needy people living in what is today Bangladesh.

Jesus called on one more witness in His defense. First, the Scriptures, then His miracles, and thirdly...

3. *He pointed to His Father (38)*. At the end of verse 38 He says, "Believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father." Jesus talks a lot about His Father in John's Gospel (the term "Father" appears 134 times in John's Gospel). When He refers to *the Father*, He has in mind the person the Jews consider to be God. The Jews insisted, then as today, "The LORD is one God," and they were right, for that's what God said in Deuteronomy 6:4.

But here Jesus says, "The Father is in me, and I in the Father." If you want to know who I am, look at Him. If you want to know who He is, look at Me. I and the Father are one.

You say, "So Jesus was making Himself to be God with this claim. Is that what we're saying?" No. That's what the Jews who accused Him thought, but to borrow again from Leon Morris, "They thought He was making Himself equal with God. He held that He was not making Himself anything. He was what He was."⁵

So He convinced them, right? After Jesus pointed their attention to the Scriptures, and to His miracles, and to His Father, the angry Jews considered the evidence, changed their minds, and believed in Jesus. Not at all. To the contrary...

D. The Jews rejected the evidence and tried to get rid of Jesus (39). Verse 39 says, "Again they tried to seize him [ESV 'arrest him'], but he escaped their grasp."

⁵ Morris, p. 528.

They don't try to stone Him this time, just arrest Him. My guess is their heads are swimming with the stunning defense they've heard. They know it's true. They know they don't have a leg to stand on. But they're not about to let the truth stand in the way of what they want. They want life as it stands now over Jesus. So though they can't kill Him, He's got to go.

But not yet. He escaped. It's not time for His arrest and mock trial and scourging, not yet. It's not time for these angry Jews to hand Him over to the Romans who will drive the spikes into hands and feet and suspend Him in space on a cross. That will come in another three months or so, when Passover comes, when He becomes the final Passover lamb. But not yet.

Beloved, the Good Shepherd did not allow anyone to take His life, for He came to *give His life*, and in giving His life, to save His people from their sins.

So Jesus makes people mad.

You say, "I'm not a Christian, but I'm not *mad* at Jesus." Really? Think about it. The reason these Jews are mad is because they're giving serious attention to what Jesus is saying. If you would do that, one of two things will happen. You will either accept His claims, stop living the way you're living, and submit your life to Him, or you will reject Him and look for a way to get Him out of the way. There is no middle ground with Jesus.

The reason you're not mad at Him is because you've convinced yourself, "I'm fine without Him." But He disagrees. He says you need a shepherd to die for you and to lead you, and if you take Him seriously, you'll have to either agree with His claim, or fight against Him. Mad or glad. Those are the only two ultimate options.

Thankfully, by the grace of God, Jesus does make some people glad. That brings us to scene two.

II. The Good Shepherd is received (40-42).

Here's how it happened. Notice verses 40-42, "Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days. Here he stayed and many people came to him. They said, 'Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true.' And in that place many believed in Jesus."

So the text says that Jesus left Jerusalem. He didn't return either until Palm Sunday, about three months later. This marks the end of the Master's public ministry, and it concludes right here with this line-in-the-sand rejection by the Jews.

John says Jesus went *back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days*. We're not sure where the location, but "the other side of the Jordan" would probably put Him in Perea. Wiersbe suggests the place was perhaps eighteen to twenty miles from Jerusalem.⁶

We're told that *many people* came to Him there. We're also told that *many people* believed in Him there. That's what true sheep do, don't they?

A. True sheep come to Jesus. And...

B. True sheep believe in Jesus. These people *came* and *believed*. And they believed because they remembered what John the Baptist said about Jesus, and were convinced.

Was this saving faith? We can't be sure. The validity of faith is always proven by its actions, and we don't have enough data to know the true nature of this faith.

But nonetheless, the contrast is striking. Having just made some people very mad, Jesus now makes some other people very glad. And John emphasizes where it

⁶ Wiersbe, p. 333.

happened, “in *that place*.” Not in Jerusalem, and not even in Judea, but in *that place*, across the river, on the other side of the tracks so to speak, that’s where the people believed in Jesus.

Leon Morris said it well, “In the place where one might have thought He would be welcomed men tried to stone Him. Now in despised Perea men believe in Him.”⁷

There’s a reality here I’ve seen many times in my years as a pastor. It’s not the ones you might expect that believe in Jesus. You’d think the highly educated, the moral, the upstanding leaders of society would believe in Jesus. And by the grace of God, once in a while, there is a Nicodemus that puts his faith in Jesus. But usually, they don’t. Usually, it’s the foolish and ignorant and weak and immoral and despised that believe in the Savior. And we know why, don’t we? If you’re ever going to believe in the Savior, you must be impressed by your need, not your worth.

Paul reminds us of this in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31, “Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.’”

So now let’s make it personal. We’ve just examined some people who put Jesus on trial, and some became mad, and some became glad. Now it’s your turn.

Make It Personal: Ask yourself these important questions...

1. *What do you think about Jesus?* He said He was and is *the Good Shepherd*. Do you agree? Do you believe Him? He said He was and is one with God the Father. Do you agree? Do you believe Him? He said He came from the Father to earth to lay down His life to rescue sinners and bring them back into the fold of God. Do you agree? Do you believe Him when He says you are a sinner who needs to be rescued and brought back to God? And do you believe that He came to do for you what you cannot do for yourself? Do you believe that He died on the cross in the place of sinners and that He defeated death and left His tomb alive and then returned to His Father’s side in heaven? Do you agree with His assessment that you can’t live without Him and that you need a Good Shepherd?

That’s the first question. What do you *think* about Jesus? Some of you need help right here. You’re not *thinking* rightly about Jesus. So you need to do what He challenged the Jews in John 10 to do, to investigate His life and especially His miracles.

2. *What have you done with Jesus?* The Bible makes it clear what a sinner must do to be saved. He must repent of his sins and believe in Jesus. That means he must turn from living life his own way and turn to the Good Shepherd and put his full trust in Him. Have you done that with Jesus? If so, one more question...

3. *What are you doing with Jesus?* In a moment, we’ll be coming to the communion table, and that’s the perfect time to ask this question. The Good Shepherd said, “My sheep hear my voice and follow Me.” Are you doing that? Are you following Him? Are you living your life by going your own way, or are you truly seeking to go day by day where the Good Shepherd wants you to go?

⁷ Leon Morris, p. 531.