

What the Sheep Believe

Back in 1995, Joan Osborne released a hit song called *One of Us*. Some of the lyrics went as follows:

*What if God was one of us
Just a slob like one of us
Just a stranger on the bus
Trying to make his way home
He's trying to make his way home
Back up to heaven all alone
Nobody calling on the phone
Except for the pope maybe in Rome*

The writers of the song were either trying to be deliberately provocative, or else they were totally ignorant of what Christians believe the Gospel message is all about: that in fact, God did become one of us. At Christmas time, when we ignore all the commercial clutter and seasonal sentimentalism, Christians make the remarkable claim that God did become one of us, 2000 years ago.

The aim of the Gospel of John is given in 20:31. ³¹ but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:31)

John wrote this book to present Jesus of Nazareth to us so that we would see that He is both Messiah and God in the flesh, and that through trusting in Him, we would gain true, eternal, spiritual life. John did not write everything Jesus said and did, but carefully selected certain events so that we could draw conclusions. He presented all the opposition to Jesus, so that we could hear all the objections to Jesus, both legitimate and illegitimate in the mouths of His enemies, and hear Jesus respond to those objections.

But once all that evidence is in, people either believe or reject. And in that moment, something mysterious is taking place. Belief in Jesus is plain to those who see, but blasphemous to those who don't. It's as if people who believe find belief so obvious, so compelling, that they couldn't do anything else. And people who reject Jesus find His claims so ridiculous, so blasphemous that faith in Him seems like madness.

So why do some think Jesus was the God-Man, and some think He was a mad-man? What splits people into those two groups? This scene at the end of John 10 is rather like a climactic scene, the end of Act I in a 3-Act play. It is a moment when the real identity of Jesus is challenged publicly, and comes out boldly and clearly. We find out the real and deep reason why some people realise He is the God-man. This last scene contains a repetition of His identity, a refutation of the charge of blasphemy, and a recognition of His validity.

I. The Repetition of Identity

²² Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. ²³ And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch. ²⁴ Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly."

²⁵ Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. ²⁶ But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. ²⁷ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. ²⁸ And I give them eternal life, and they shall

never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand. ³⁰ I and My Father are one."

Verse 22 tells us this was the feast of Dedication, which is the Jewish festival of Chanukkah. This is not a biblically prescribed feast; it was a feast began in the time between the Old and New Testament. During a time of persecution of the Jewish people by a ruler named Antiochus, some brave Jews known as the Maccabees resisted and restored worship at the Temple. The oil that was needed to be burned in the menorah or candlestick had been desecrated and only one flagon was discovered of pure oil, sealed with the very signet of the High-Priest. But it was only enough to feed for one day the Sacred Candlestick. The tradition is that by a miracle the flagon was continually replenished during eight days, till a fresh supply could be brought. In memory of this, it was ordered the following year, that the Temple be illuminated for eight days on the anniversary of its 'Dedication'. The Hebrew word for dedication is Chanukkah, so this was the feast of Dedication.

Remember, John has chosen Jewish feasts as the snapshots to highlight who Jesus is. In chapter 2, it was Passover, when Jesus cleansed the Temple. In chapter 5, it was another unnamed feast when he healed the lame man. Chapter 6, it was Passover again, when he fed the 5000. In chapter 7 and 8, it was the Feast of Tabernacles, when he forgave the women caught in adultery, and healed the man born blind. Here we are about three months later, at another feast. John will finish his book with the events that took place at that last Passover. John is using these events to also show how Jesus is the fulfilment of these feasts: He is the ultimate Passover – the true manna from Heaven for the people leaving spiritual Egypt, the true Passover Lamb, the true and ultimate Tabernacle of God among us. And now, at the Feast of Dedication, Jesus is the ultimate Dedicated one, the one sanctified and sent by the Father.

Jesus is walking in the Temple complex in a place called Solomon's Porch, where in a few months, the newborn church will meet. As He is walking, the Jewish leaders apparently encircle Him, like a gang, ready to rough-up their victim. They accuse Jesus of keeping them in suspense, of deliberately being evasive with who He is. The same thing is going to happen at His trial in a few months, where Luke 22:67 records them saying "If You are the Christ, tell us." His reply then is similar to His reply here. But He said to them, "If I tell you, you will by no means believe." (Luke 22:67).

Here He says, I have already told you, and you didn't believe. When did Jesus tell them plainly, "I am the Messiah"? We know He told the Samaritan woman that He was the Messiah. He told the blind man that He healed that He was the Son of God. But we search both John's Gospel and the other Gospels in vain to find Jesus saying those words to the Pharisees and Sadducees, or even to public groups of people. The reason is simple and practical. The title Messiah or Christ was so associated with politics and the military. To most people, Messiah was a general, a warrior, the captain of Israel's armies that would vanquish Rome, or any other political enemy. So Jesus seldom used those words. Rome would have accused Him of being a rebel, an insurrectionist, and His Jewish opponents would also have capitalised on that, saying that He wanted to replace Caesar as king. So instead, He says the same thing but gives them images, images which explain the real mission and identity of Messiah. I am the Bread from Heaven, the Bread of life. I am the Light of the world. I am the giver of living water. I am the door of the sheep, and the Good Shepherd. I am the Son who acts like His Father.

That last phrase is one Jesus uses throughout this passage. Verse 25: The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me.

He is going to say the same thing in verse ³⁷ If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; ³⁸

but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.”

I am doing these miracles by the power of, and for the glory of, my Father. That means He is working through Me. Who He is, explains who I am, because I am His Son.

Now they have already heard this, but they don't believe. Why not? Jesus tells us why.

He recalls the image He used a few months prior: shepherd and sheep. He is going to explain that belonging to Christ is really the basis for believing in Him and His Father.

But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. ²⁷ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

The order here is deliberate and unmistakable: you do not believe, because you are not of my sheep. He didn't say, you are not my sheep, because you don't believe. That is also true. You believe to become one of His sheep. But here the order is reversed. You don't believe, because you are not one of my sheep, one of my people. This is Jesus again invoking the doctrine of election, of divine sovereign choosing. He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.” (John 8:47)

From the human point of view, you believe to become a sheep. From the divine point of view, you are chosen as a sheep, and that is why you believe. As Harry Ironside put it, from this side of eternity you see a door which says, believe and you will be saved. So you believe and enter eternity. But then once in eternity, you look back and see on this side the door says, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. Election and human choice are perfectly balanced, what God has joined, let no man put asunder.

Back in chapter 10, Jesus explained that His sheep recognise His voice and do not listen to the strange voices of false teachers. The relationship produces recognition. Christ's sheep believe who He is. They hear His voice. He knows them. They follow Him.

Verses 28 and 29 then explain the relationship that both Son and Father have to the sheep. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one can pluck them out of my hand. Verse 29 repeats the phrase, and links the Father to the Son. The Father gave these people to the Son in the first place. He is greater than all, and no one is able to pluck them out of the Father's hand.

Here are two of the most important verses on eternal security. Notice three reasons why true salvation cannot be lost. First, Jesus calls it eternal life. If it is eternal in quality and in duration, then you cannot have it and then it dies. If you have eternal life, it must last forever in you, not stop at some point. It's a contradiction to speak about temporary eternal life. Second, Jesus says that He and His Father give this life as a gift. The Father gives the people to the Son, and the Son gives them this eternal life. It is not earned, merited, worked for or deserved. And if you could not do something to earn it or gain it, you cannot do something to lose it. Third, Jesus promises that no one can pluck, snatch, steal His sheep out of His hand or His Father's hand, who is greater than all. God's full omnipotent, sovereign power is keeping you as His own. It is not a literal hand, hand means protection and personal ownership. To carry something in your hand usually means it is yours. When you belong to God, no one can steal from God. Not Satan, not the world, not angels, not powers heavenly or earthly, not anything in all creation can separate you from His ownership. But surely I can pluck myself out of His hand? Well stay with the image. Can a sheep wander from the Shepherd? Yes. What does the Shepherd do when you wander? Does He de-flock you? Does He

chase you away? Does He give you to another shepherd? No, He fetches you. No one, including you yourself, can steal you from God's ownership.

Now all this talk of how the Son does the Father's work, and the Father and the Son both choose and keep and protect the sheep leads Jesus to this ultimate statement of identity. If the Work of Christ is really that of the Father, and His Working also that of the Father, then it follows that He 'and the Father are One'.

What does Jesus mean? Now some think Jesus just means, one in purpose, one in goals. Later on in this book, Jesus is going to pray that believers have a unity and a oneness like He has with the Father. ²² And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: (John 17:22)

But while this oneness of the Father and Son includes that kind of unity, it is much more than that. After all, would the Jews have taken up stones to stone Him, if all He meant was, I agree with God's will? All Jews were to do that. Jesus is claiming not just oneness of purpose. They are one in a much deeper way. Are they one person? The word for one in the Greek language is in the neuter, not the masculine. If it were masculine, we might think Jesus meant, I and the Father are the same One, the same Person.

But we already learnt back in 1:1 – the Word was with God, and the Word was God. We learnt in chapter 5, complete unity, complete equality, but distinct plurality. In the neuter form, this means something like one thing, or one essence, one substance. My Father and I are one. One what? The only answer can be, one God. Before Abraham was, I AM. My Father has worked, and I work. So how can Father and Son both be God, be one, and yet there be one God? Verse 38 Jesus says the same thing as verse 30 another way: ³⁸ but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father *is* in Me, and I in Him."

The Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father. That is how they are one.

The only way two can be one is when they indwell each other, when the one is inside the other. A child is in her mother, but the mother's life and blood is in the child. They indwell each other, two but one. You put iron into fire, and when it is hot enough, the fire is in the iron as well. The iron is in the fire, and the fire is in the iron. Theologians have some big words for this idea: the Greeks called it perichoresis, in English it is coinherence. Father in Son, Son in Father, Father in Spirit, Spirit in Father, Son in Spirit, Spirit in Son.

They wanted it in plain language, and now they have more than they bargained for. Jesus is one in essence with God the Father.

II. The Refutation of Blasphemy

³¹ Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. ³² Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?" ³³ The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God."

So as they pick up stones to stone Jesus for blasphemy, note the calm courage of Jesus. He is not shrinking, running for cover. With cool and calm irony He asks, I have blessed Israel with healings and exorcisms and feeding. Which of those good works deserve death? To put it another way, what exactly have I done that has earned the death penalty? Healing the blind and lame? Their answer is that they want to execute Him, not for miracles but for blasphemy. How amazing for us who know

the truth to see them saying, “You are man make yourself God”. when the real truth is that Jesus was not a man making Himself God. He was God who had made Himself man. The Word was God, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Now what Jesus does in verse 34 to 36 is He refutes their idea. The essence of their argument is this: If a man is called God, then it is blasphemy. You can never say of a man that he is God. That's idolatry.

Verse 34 to 36 is Jesus refutation of the charge of blasphemy:

³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, “*You are gods*”?’ ³⁵ If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), ³⁶ do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’?”

What Jesus does is quote from Psalm 82 (the word law is a generic term for all of Old Testament Scripture). In Psalm 82, it is either fallen angels or human judges that are called by the term gods. It is the Hebrew Elohim, which is actually a plural, meaning gods, but it is also used of the God in the singular. So Jesus is first off all refuting the idea that it is blasphemy to call anyone other than God Himself by that term.

But He is not leaving it there, as some people think. Jesus is not saying, all I am saying is that I am a mere man or no more than the ones in Psalm 82.

No, Jesus is doing something we call arguing from the lesser to the greater. It is an argument of, if this is true in this small instance, how much more is it true in this much bigger instance. In fact, it was a well-known Hebrew teaching tool known as Qal -vahomer, literally light and heavy. Jesus uses this when He says, If a sheep falls into a ditch and you pull it out on the Sabbath, how much more should this man with the withered hand all these years be healed on the Sabbath.

Scripture allows people and angels to be called gods. If Scripture is infallible when it says those things, then how is it a problem for the sent and sanctified Messiah to say, I am the Son of God? He is at least a son of God in the lesser sense, but He is really the Son of God in the greater sense.

Verse 36 shows us that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Feast of Dedication. He is the One the Father set apart, dedicated, sanctified and sent into the world.

³⁷ If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; ³⁸ but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father *is* in Me, and I in Him.”

Again: if you don't believe Me, believe the works. If I don't do works, ignore Me, but if I do the works of My Father, believe them. Believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me, that I and the Father are one.

III. The Recognition of Validity

³⁹ Therefore they sought again to seize Him, but He escaped out of their hand. ⁴⁰ And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was baptizing at first, and there He stayed. ⁴¹ Then many came to Him and said, “John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true.” ⁴² And many believed in Him there.

Once again, they try to seize Him, but He escapes, whether miraculously, or by force of His authority, or providentially. But it is time to move away from the intense pressure and heat of religious Jerusalem, where all His enemies are concentrated. So Jesus goes to that place beyond the Jordan when John had first testified about Jesus.

Now even though this is history, John, the author of this Gospel, is also a writer. He sees beauty and poetry in life. So here the apostle John is tying together something that He began with. When John wrote the Gospel. He started with that 18 verse prologue, but then the very first thing he wrote about was John the Baptist in 1:19.

¹⁹ Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” (John 1:19)

²⁸ These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing. (John 1:28)

So here the apostle John is finishing the section of his book, from chapter 1 to end chapter 12 dealing with John the Baptist's testimony to Jesus, Jesus's own testimony of Himself, the testimony of His works, the whole witness to Israel. There is only one more sign left: the raising of Lazarus and its effects in chapter 11 and 12, before the book shifts gear from the book of signs to the book of glory.

And notice the comments. John did not do miracles. But everything He said about Jesus was true. So if the non-miraculous John spoke truth about Jesus, what should people conclude about the miracle-working Jesus? If John was truthful about Jesus without miracles, what does that say about Jesus' truthfulness with miracles? Again, this seems to be an argument from the lesser to the greater. It is return to what John said originally, and validating it.

Some people, like Thomas, believe when they see signs. Some people, like the Pharisees, refuse to believe even when they see signs. Some people believe, even without signs, trusting in the character of the one speaking. John, writing to us, wants us to be of that last group. John knows most of His readers will neither be Thomas's who saw miracles and believed, or Pharisees who saw miracles and rejected. We will all be people reading and hearing these evidences. We will read and hear Jesus' Words. We will read and hear the testimony of John the Baptist. We will read and hear of the Old Testament prophecies. We will read and hear of the miracles of Jesus. We will read and hear of the Father testifying to the Son. We must decide if we will agree that Jesus and the Father are One, that He is indeed the Christ.

And if we do, it will turn out that we were His sheep.