



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

The Court of Public Opinion

The Gospel of John

John 10:22–42

Tim Badal | February 13, 2022

We're in a series titled "The Gospel of John." We're meeting and learning from Jesus so we might trust Him and believe in Him. We're now near the end of John 10. Last week we learned that

Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the One who guides and leads people into a relationship with God. We also learned that He's the door, the One by Whom we enter into the relationship that brings everlasting life.

This morning we'll be seeing a lot of opinions and thoughts about Jesus. Back in verse 21, we saw the response of many to Jesus' claim to be the Good Shepherd and the door. *"These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"* This argument came on the heels of the accusation that Jesus indeed had a demon or was insane.

Our world is not that different from the world of the first century. We also find that many people have opinions about Jesus. Many times their opinions are not based on any evidence. Today Jesus will give us three evidences that explain why He is in fact the Son of God. Nevertheless, many people were not convinced. In fact, we see in verse 31 that some people were ready to stone Him for blasphemy.

Today it seems as if everyone has their own perspective on Who Jesus is, usually with no evidence for what they think. Taken as a whole, this might be what we call "the court of public opinion." The decisions aren't being made in a courtroom or derived from what the text teaches. They come from the outside.

We can see a similar pattern regarding modern football today. I could ask, "Who's going to win the Super Bowl game today?" Some of you will say the Bengals, others will say the Rams. Then I would ask you a follow-up question and very few of you would be able to answer it: "Why do you think that?"

In the first service I asked a lady this question and she replied, "I think the Rams are going to win." I was a little surprised. She's an older woman who didn't appear to be much of a football fan. So I asked her, "What makes you so sure of that?" She told me, "Their uniforms are awesome." That's not empirical evidence. That's not based on any fact; it's based on an opinion that has little to no bearing on the game. Maybe some of you have opinions about Jesus that aren't based on any facts, but simply on popular opinion.

Regarding the court of public opinion, one author said, "It's simply mob justice." In other words, any random idea about anything can eventually carry the day if enough people believe it. So the question we have to bring to our text this morning is this: "Who is Jesus? Is He Who He says He is or can He be whatever we want to make Him?"

Actually, all religions in the world tip their cap to Jesus. They might say He's a great model, a great teacher, a great leader, a statesman. Some say He showed us what it means to live the right life. But none of them, other than Christianity, consider Jesus to be God. Islam is probably the closest, saying Jesus is a prophet and in the line of prophets. But they also think He didn't complete the work given to Him, so Mohammad had to come as the final prophet to do what Jesus couldn't do. In that sense, they believe Jesus was a lot like Moses.

We also get other opinions from today's leaders. Did you know that Hitler had something to say about Jesus? He said, "In boundless love as a Christian and as a man, I read through the passage which tells us how the Lord at last rose in His might,



seized the scourge, driving out of the temple the brood of vipers and adders." It's clear that not everyone who calls themselves a Christian actually is one. But in Hitler's opinion, Jesus was a good Nazi. He got rid of the Jews. He was doing what Hitler himself was doing.

Fast forward to Hollywood and let's hear from three people there who have opinions about Jesus. We'll start with Brad Pitt. He says this about Jesus and His claim to be God: "I didn't understand this idea of a God Who says you have to acknowledge Me, you have to say I'm the best, then I'll give you eternal happiness." It's as if he's reading the end of John 10, where Jesus says, "Believe in Me and I'll give you eternal life." Brad continues, "And if you don't, then you won't get it. It seemed to me to be about ego. I can't see God operating from ego, so it made no sense to me." In short, he's saying the claims of Jesus are an ego trip. Even though Jesus says we must follow Him or we're lost, Brad thinks this is simply an ego trip.

What about Oprah? She says, "One of the biggest mistakes humans make is to believe there's only one way. There are many diverse paths leading to what you call God." I have so many issues with that statement, but we only have three hours, right? Jesus declares in John 14:6, "*I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" Oprah disagrees. She is basically saying to Jesus that He's wrong. She would also say she loves Jesus, but her opinion is that He isn't speaking truth. In her mind, there are many ways to get God—whatever it is you call God.

Rapper JAY-Z made waves by saying, "Jesus can't save you. Life starts where the church ends." In other words he's saying, "Don't waste your time with Jesus. When reporters asked him if he had a beef with Jesus, he responded, "Take it as you will." This leaves us with ambiguity. Surely his lifestyle says Jesus doesn't save.

Hollywood has opinions about Jesus. Leaders, even dictators, tell us about Jesus. The world religions tell us about Jesus. What about the cults? Let's ask Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, the first and second leaders of the Mormons. We have a Mormon church right up the street; it's the closest church to us geographically. By the way, the Mormons are the fastest-growing "Christian" denomination in America. They're growing by leaps and bounds. If you think Village Bible Church is growing fast, we're at a snail's pace compared to them.

So what are their beliefs? In their teaching, God inhabits a planet called Kolob. There he has a multiplicity of wives. His job and their job is to produce lots of spirit children, including you and me. We inhabit the planet Kolob until we are incarnated here on earth. Jesus was the firstborn of our heavenly father with one of his wives. He lived a life intended to be an example to us, showing us how we too can become gods.

I get it. They look clean cut. Many of them are way better looking than your pastor. They are articulate. They'll point to the Bible. They will say passionate things about Jesus. But I want you to know that their opinion about Jesus is wrong.

What about Jehovah's Witnesses? This guy in the picture is sporting a cool beard. He's Charles Taze Russell, the founder of the Jehovah's Witness movement. He said Jesus is the human manifestation of the archangel Michael. Before He existed in Bethlehem, Jesus was an angel. After He ascended to heaven, He went back to being Michael. They'll refer to Bible passages that say Jesus will return with the shout of an archangel.

So as you can see, there's quite a variety of opinions about Who Jesus is. I could have spent the whole morning giving you more opinions. Everyone has one. You do, I do, your family does, your neighbors do, your friends do, your boss does, your schoolmates do. John 10 is asking us to identify what our opinion about Jesus is. Now really, there are only two positions, with no middle ground.

After Jesus described to the people and the religious leaders that He was the Good Shepherd and the door to the sheepfold, the general response to Him was negative. At worst they thought He was demon possessed. Others were simply confused, realizing demon possessed people can't do what Jesus was doing. So as we will see, they decided to ask Him point blank Who He was.

Let's start going through our text today, beginning in verse 22: "*At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter.*" Why did John tell us it was winter? He hasn't mentioned the season anywhere else. Many scholars think he was doing two things here. First, he was letting us know what time of year this particular feast was being held. He also may have been alluding to the fact that a cold front was approaching, symbolic of the response Jesus was facing. Either way, we'll soon read about the coldest response Jesus had yet received in John's Gospel because we'll see in verse 31 that the people were ready to stone Him.

No longer were the religious leaders trying to hide their thoughts or be political about their position. When Jesus tells them, "I and the Father are one," that went past their limits. They wanted Him to die. In fact, it was only three months later, in the springtime, that they would have their way.

As it happens, there is no reference in the Old Testament to the Feast of Dedication. That's because it was created to celebrate a military victory that took place after the final books of the Old Testament were written, during the years we refer to as the "Intertestamental Period." During that time, a ruler named Antiochus Epiphanes, who was of Assyrian descent but who ruled the Greek empire, wanted to expand his empire. He wanted to reclaim the land that had been conquered by Alexander the Great. But when he got to Egypt, he was stopped. So unlike Hitler, he decided to take a break from conquering in order to shore up his control over the existing territory. He learned from some of his generals that the hot spot of insurgency was in Israel—in Jerusalem. The Israelites had been commanded to worship Zeus instead of God. They were a monotheistic people and Yahweh was their only God, so they refused to obey the command. Antiochus Epiphanes then left Egypt to go to Jerusalem.

This story is told in an apocryphal book, which was written during the Intertestamental Period. These books are helpful in understanding history but are not considered part of our canon. So in the book of 2 Maccabees, we read that Antiochus Epiphanes thought Judea was in revolt. Raging like a wild animal, he set out from Egypt and took Jerusalem by storm. He ordered his soldiers to cut down anyone they met without mercy. There was a massacre of men and women, young virgins and children. In the space of three days, 80,000 were lost, half in violent death and the other half sold into slavery.

So in some ways, the Feast of Dedication was something like our remembrance of the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, or like 9-11 when we as a nation mourn the loss of life that happened that day. But the Feast of Dedication was also something more. Antiochus Epiphanes ruled Israel for three years, bringing great pain to the people. He condemned all the Old Testament writings, burning many scrolls. He prohibited any form of worship of Jehovah God. The people who remained were hurting deeply.

Then eventually a group of Israelite men, under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus, began a form of guerilla warfare. In the third year, on December 25—yes, Christmas day—those men finally retook Jerusalem, including the temple. They cleaned up the city and reconsecrated the temple, which had been terribly defiled. In fact, one of the atrocities Antiochus Epiphanes had committed was to take a pregnant female hog and slaughter it on the altar, giving praise and homage to Zeus. Daniel 11:31 actually foretold these events, calling it "the abomination that causes desolation."

So the Feast for the people was like D-Day. It was when they pushed back their enemies with great victory. Today we know this Feast by a different name—the celebration of Hannukah. Jesus and the people were giving eight nights of praise and homage to God for rescuing the people from their captivity.

So why does John include this information in this story? Because during this season, more than any other time, the people were again longing for someone to free them from their captivity to Rome, 200 years after Antiochus Epiphanes. Jesus showed up and began to do great things; He even spoke of setting captives free. He told them, "I'm the One the prophets foretold." The people had begun to be excited, but the Pharisees insisted that He wasn't the One they were looking for. "Don't listen to Him, don't follow Him, don't worship Him. He's insane."

I want to look at this story using three legal terms.

Accusation: The public views Jesus with hostility.

First, we have an accusation in verses 23-26: *"Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.'" In other words, "Stop beating around the bush. Stop talking in riddles. We want to know: are You the next Judas Maccabeus? Are You the one who's going to set us free?"*

This wasn't, "Hey, Jesus, we've got a quick question for You." It was a hostile group of people. Notice that they gathered around Him. It's not like your small group gathering around the leader. You get together, sit in chairs, share prayer requests, ask questions. It's all nice and friendly. The Greek word used here is a military term that speaks of an invading army surrounding a city to destroy it. Some of you are thinking, "That describes my small group." No, these people were encircling Jesus like a group of bullies in a schoolyard.

How He answered their question would determine what they would do next. “Tell us who You are.” It was a test. If Jesus responded, “I am God,” they would see that as grounds to kill Him for blasphemy. If He said something else, then He would have ruined everything He had said up to that point. He would be understood as someone who was simply insane. A lot of people had claimed to be the Messiah before Him, but it was clear they weren’t.

The Pharisees believed they had trapped Him. But then how did Jesus respond? After elaborating on some things He had already said, He summed it up in verse 30, *“I and the Father are one.”* In other words, He was explicitly claiming He was God. So *“the Jews picked up stones again to stone him.”* They believed they were totally justified in this. But Jesus stopped them by saying this in verse 32: *“I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?”* Remember, He had done six miracles in their presence so far—which one meant He deserved to die? They come back with this: *“It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you”*—notice that they acknowledge that His works were good—*“but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.”*

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 Scripture cannot be broken— ³⁶ do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’?”

If you ever have someone tell you that Jesus never claimed to be God, take them to this passage. He says it twice here: “I and the Father are one. I am God.”

Deliberation: A personal decision regarding Him is a necessity.

This begins a time of deliberation, something that takes place in a courtroom situation. The people need to come to a decision about Who Jesus is. He’s said He is God, they have accused Him of blasphemy, now He’s making His defense by pointing them to the Law which we find in Psalm 82. This Psalm opens by saying, *“God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment.”* Jesus was not exactly saying we are gods as He is God. This word “gods” is used for angels and is sometimes used for people in great authority. Jesus was telling the Pharisees that this Psalm was speaking to them, because they were in authority; that He had a word for them: *“How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?”*

Essentially He was saying, “You think you have the right to decide who’s in and who’s out. You think you’re doing this justly, but God sees your judgments as unjust, showing partiality to the wicked.” He’s also implying that the reason they want to kill Him is because they see Him as competition. “I think I’m God and you think you’re gods.”

This is always the crux of the issue for us as well. Either we will bow our knee to Jesus as God and worship Him—either we give Him our lives—or we say, “No, Jesus. I’m god.” Some of you are living your lives as if you are god. Jesus is telling you, “There’s judgment coming. You’re like those Pharisees, thinking you have the authority to make all the decisions in your life.” That’s essentially telling Him you want nothing to do with Him.

Verses six and seven then give the result: *“I said, ‘You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince.’”* Jesus was telling the Pharisees, “Your time of leading will come to an end.” Just like Antiochus Epiphany eventually saw his end, just like Hitler saw his end, just like every rebel against God, these men too would see their end. Like all men, they too shall die. Like every other prince or king or ruler, they will fall.

Then we read in Psalm 82:8 the end that applies to Jesus: *“Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations!”* Jesus was there when the Pharisees were given their authority. They wasted their authority, so God has given Jesus the right to judge the nations, who will then become His inheritance. Jesus was telling these men that even they would one day sit under His judgment.

Jesus has brought His evidence from Psalm 82 that what He spoke was in accordance with the Scriptures. He also often claimed that His words and actions were specifically in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Three times in this passage He tells them He’s doing the “works” of His Father, which included the six miracles they had seen so far:

- He turned the water into wine.
- He healed the nobleman’s son.
- He healed the man who had been crippled for 38 years.
- He multiplied the loaves and fishes to feed the multitudes.

- He had walked on water.
- And now finally, He healed the blind man.

This last miracle was important, because healing someone who was blind was something they knew only God could do, according to the Law. Psalm 146:8 and Isaiah 35:4-5 both say this specifically. This was Jesus' proof. He had given sight to the blind, but they still would not believe. We also see in John 8:41 that everything John the Baptist said about the Messiah was confirmed by Jesus. All of these things witnessed to the fact that Jesus was the Son of God.

Conclusion: The verdict is in—it is time to pick your identity.

So we now have a classic decision to make. We have seen the accusation. The public viewed Jesus with hostility. We have gone through the deliberation and see that a decision about Jesus was a necessity. The people had to make a decision about Who He was—and you do as well. If you say no to Jesus and yes to yourself, that's actually a hostile decision. So the verdict is in and now it is time for each of us to choose our identity.

Right now in our free time, Amanda and I are watching a law show on television. Every time we are given a case and all the arguments involved, the judge and jury then need to render a verdict. When we get to that point, I always hit the pause button. I say to Amanda, "What do you think? Guilty or innocent?" She gives me an answer—and she's usually wrong. I'm usually right. Like the jury, we're watching the case unfold. We're trying to determine what the truth actually is.

Now you and I are the jury. We've heard the Pharisees' accusations. We've heard Jesus' defense. We have a decision to make. We find this decision spelled out in verses 30-31. Either we believe Jesus is one with the Father, or we effectively want to stone Him. In order to prove that you are part of the Good Shepherd's flock, can you hear His voice and do you follow Him, as it says in verse 27?

If you are one who follows Him, He says in verse 28, *"I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."* Eternal life refers to the abundant life we read about in John 10:10. Everlasting life means that rather than the thief coming to steal, kill and destroy us, we will instead never perish, nor can anyone snatch us out of His hand. Jesus was telling the people that if they followed Him, the Pharisees could not touch their everlasting life. He repeats this in verse 29: *"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."*

Jesus is reminding us that there are thieves out there, but if you're truly a follower of Jesus Christ, no one can take you away from Him. You can't take it away. The devil can't take it away. False teachers can't take it away. The world can't take it away. Sin can't take it away. You are always safe and secure in the hands of God Himself. But in order for this to be true, you have to make a decision to worship Jesus as Savior and Lord. If you don't, then the Bible tells us in other places that the only thing you can expect is a fiery judgment. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God and your future depends on the decision you make in the here and now. Will you make much of Jesus in this life? Will you follow Him? Will you go where He goes? Or will you, in rebellion against Him, choose to go your own way? You have a choice. It is either repentance which leads to abundant and everlasting life, or it is rebellion which leads to hell.

My prayer and hope is that you will listen to the words of Jesus and that your opinion about Who Jesus is will be that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God.