

There is a popular apologetic tact that goes something like this (apologetics – the logical defense of the Christian faith; one of my nerdy interests): If Jesus rose from the dead, than anything that he said is worth paying really close attention to.

In a world obsessed with slowing down the effects of aging; in a world investing billions of dollars each year in life-saving medical research; if you will spend hours researching how to take care of your body; if you would fly across the country to get the best medical care for someone you love, then it is completely logical to assume that you will pay really close attention to the one man who stopped the effects of aging and was beaten to within an inch of his life, crucified, stabbed with a spear, but showed up alive, with no ill effects (other than a few well-earned scars) three days later. He might know something about life that you don't...

There is solid historical evidence, both inside and outside the Bible, that Jesus did in fact get crucified and then turn up alive three days later. So, the argument to the skeptic goes, look into the evidence for yourself – and then maybe consider cracking open a Bible and listening to the words of a man who rose from the dead.

It's a good argument to have in your back pocket (especially if you can memorize some of the convincing evidence that Jesus did rise from the dead), but I can tell you from experience that it doesn't always work.

It hasn't always worked for me, but as an amateur apologist I draw some comfort from the fact that it didn't always work for Jesus either.

Think through it with me:

One would think that if you saw the other-worldly power of Jesus with your own eyes (instead of just relying on 2000 year old eye witness accounts); one would think that if you watched a man feed thousands from nothing; if you watched blind people see, deaf people hear, crippled people walk not because of advances in medicine but with a touch, or a simple command; if you saw crazy, demon-possessed people suddenly become sane; one would think that if you saw a man doing that kind of stuff not just once or twice (that you could maybe dismiss), but on an almost daily basis to hundreds of people; one would think that the only logical response would be listen to whatever that guy has to say – because clearly he has somethings figured out that the rest of us don't.

Seems like sound logic, doesn't it?

And yet there they stood on the Festival of Dedication (aka Hanukah) in the temple courts asking the question of this miracle working Jesus, **“How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”**

Jesus' response: **“What more do I have to do? Not only have I told you plainly, but the works I've been doing in my Father's name (all those miracles) testify about me – the proof is in the pudding...”**

One would think that having watched Jesus for years, they would know he was the Messiah – that he was the anointed, chosen Savior that all of the Old Testament promised; that as the Messiah, they needed to not only listen to what he had to say, but obey and even worship him.

But they didn't.

There stood the proof right in front of their eyes that Jesus was worth listening to, but they didn't.

And I think I know why.

Sheep can be quite resentful of the Shepherd.

It's the same reason we call the third year of a child's life the “terrible two's.” It's the same reason that the teenage years are so universally challenging. It's the same reason you still sometimes bristle when someone tells you what to do.

Sheep can be quite resentful of the Shepherd's voice – they'd rather call their own shots, go their own way.

And make no mistake about it, Jesus claimed the authority of a Shepherd over a world full of sheep. Read the gospels and Jesus is unabashedly confrontational. He claims to be in charge- it's his way or the highway. And not only does he claim the authority of a Shepherd, he did more than enough to prove he had that authority.

If Jesus could command fish to swim into a net, demons to leave a body, fevers to dissipate, blind eyes to open, storms to stop raging, the very atoms of bread and fish to spontaneously multiply, it is pretty clear that Jesus is calling the shots. It is pretty logical to think that whatever Jesus says, matters more than whatever I might say or think.

But, as illogical as it may seem from the outside, many people in Jesus' day saw the miracles, but they refused to accept the fact that the miracle doer might have a right to claim the last word. Even though the Shepherd proved that he had control over things they didn't (things the sheep tended to be really afraid of, like sickness and death), they refused to admit that he should have control over them.

Because sheep can be quite resentful of the Shepherd.

And the heartbreaking part? There is little worse than watching sheep walk away from a Shepherd as good as Jesus simply because they refuse to accept that he has the last word. It is heartbreaking to watch eye-witnesses of Jesus' powerful love, eye-witnesses of his amazing grace walk away because Jesus refused to give up the control and authority that were rightly his as the Good Shepherd in a world full of helpless sheep.

Maybe some of you here today are little skeptical about this Jesus guy, or for those of you who aren't skeptics, but know and love someone who is skeptical, I'd love for you to walk through the logic – nothing good can come from turning your back on a guy who has proven to have control over the very things we humans are so afraid of. My biggest encouragement to skeptics is this: I'm not

asking you to dump your skepticism. I'm simply arguing, if Jesus actually did half the stuff the Bible claims he did, it might be worth at least reading what he has to say.

There are always going to be skeptics when it comes to Jesus, but I know that most of you here today are like me – you love the image of Jesus as your Good Shepherd. You love Psalm 23. You've been singing I Am Jesus' Little Lamb since you were a kid – it filled you with joy then, maybe it brings tears to your eyes now.

Many of us love thinking of Jesus as our Shepherd. But that doesn't mean that we don't need reminders about what it means to be good sheep.

In that section from John 10 Jesus is specifically addressing sheep that refuse him as Shepherd in spite of the facts, but in the process he also reminds the rest of us how to be good sheep.

There are two parts to it.

First, **"My sheep listen to my voice,"** Jesus says.

Second, **"My sheep follow me,"** Jesus says.

Good sheep listen to the voice of their Shepherd. The good sheep realizes that there are lots of voices in this world – your peers, your parents, your professors, your social media feed, your own heart and head all have voices. They all want to tell you how to live, how to spend your money, your time, your days; voices that want to tell you what is important, to help you set your priorities and tackle life; voices shouting out advice on what to say, who to love, how to react in different life-circumstances. There are a lot of voices in this world, but the good sheep has his ears tuned in to one voice and one voice only and above all the others – Jesus.

Good sheep know that the voice of Jesus isn't some whisper in your ear, or some intuitive butterflies in your stomach, but that the voice of Jesus is the Bible – his word given to us to shepherd us. A good sheep says, "Jesus, you rose from the dead, so whatever you are saying, whatever guidance you have in the Bible, I'm listening."

Good sheep listen to the voice of Jesus and then they follow him – they obey what the voice says. They don't treat the Bible like a spiritual buffet where they follow some of Jesus' directives, but others that may not feel right to them, they just ignore. They don't wear different masks – with their friends they are one kind of sheep, at work they are another kind of sheep, with their grandma's they are yet another kind of sheep – no matter who they are with they are following the directions of their Shepherd.

Good sheep don't just claim to like the voice of their Shepherd, they prove it by obeying the voice of their Shepherd.

Good sheep listen to and follow their Shepherd – that's what Jesus says.

And if any of that makes you feel a little guilty, if hearing Jesus' description of good sheep prods your heart at all, like it does for me, then it is so important that we remember that today isn't called "Good Sheep Sunday", but "Good Shepherd Sunday."

As good as it is for us to remember what good sheep look like, as good as it is for us to strive to be good sheep, today isn't about good sheep getting better. Today is about the Good Shepherd.

The Shepherd described in Psalm 23 – the one who is really good at leading his sheep where they need to be – green pastures, quiet waters, paths of righteousness, the house of the LORD forever. You may not be very good at listening to his voice and following him, but he is so very good and leading you exactly where you need to be – to places where he can refresh your body and soul with his unending love for you.

The Shepherd who would leave the 99 behind to go in search of the one lost sheep. We may be sheep that are apt to stray, but he is the Good Shepherd who makes it his full time job to seek and to save the lost. The shepherd who loves nothing more than to find and to bring back sheep who haven't been very good at listening and following.

The Shepherd who has a really good grip (that's what Jesus says about himself in John 10) – **"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand."**

Nothing has a grip stronger than your Good Shepherd. There is no demon strong enough, no sickness buff enough, no suffering tough enough to pry you out of Jesus' hand. Even death itself, with its infamously unrelenting grip, isn't up to the task.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He's in control in a world full of sheep. He's done more than enough to prove that. For the skeptic and non-skeptic alike he has a voice worth listening to, he is a Shepherd worth following because he is a Shepherd who would protect and save his sheep.

No one can snatch you out of his hand.

Amen.