

## **“Who do you fear the most?” John 10:22-30**

**At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and 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.” Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. 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.”**

We are privileged people. Highly privileged; to be invited into God's house, to receive His blessings. Today for our meditation we have this rather challenging topic. What is more important for us, our God and Savior or this world? Who do we fear more, the Triune God, or men? This is what we'll try to reflect on today.

We read in the Gospel according John, that the Jews came to Jesus and asked Him to tell them whether He was the promised Savior or not. From Jesus answer we can see that theirs was not genuine a question.

The reason they asked this question was because Jesus didn't seem to be the Savior they were looking for. Sure, He had these powers and He could do what no man could do, but He wasn't exactly what they were expecting Him to be.

He didn't match their criteria. What were their criteria? The Jews were waiting for someone who will restore their kingdom, who will be glorious and triumphant over all their enemies. Who will come with power and will make them powerful again.

To summarize, they used the criteria of this world. They wanted all things that this world desires. To have power and glory and recognition of the world.

The problem with Jesus was this. Even if He had demonstrated these supernatural powers, He refused to use His powers to advance His position in the world. And what was worse, He didn't use His powers to advance the position of the Jews, He didn't help them to achieve what they longed for. What kind of god is that, who doesn't do what we want him to do? Who needs that kind of a god?

Now, what about today? Isn't the same true today? So many among Christians think about Jesus in these categories – we want Him to deliver what we want. What is that? To give us glory in this world, power over enemies, fame and recognition for our good works, success in what we do.

We want to look good in the eyes of this world. We want this world to like us. To think well of us. To listen to us and to appreciate how nice people we are. We really crave to receive recognition from men. Not so much from our God.

This is why we try to offer our worldview, our faith, appealing to what this world likes. Do you recognize these phrases? “Come to church and you will see that it is awesome a place.

There is so much fun, we have new things happening. Besides, we are nice people, accepting, loving, we’ll help you to feel good about yourself, you will have a really good time together with us.” Sounds familiar?

We want to be loved by this world. We want to show that we are worthy of their respect, and sadly, but sometimes it seems that we are ready to do whatever the world expects, and demands from us, so that only they would ‘play’ with us.

If this is how we want to think about our God, if this is how we understand what being a Christian means, then we need to be ready to hear the words which Jesus said to the Jews: **“You are not among my sheep.”**

Who do we want to please? Who do we fear more, judgment of men or judgment of the Holy God? I imagine that those who use earlier mentioned language to invite and attract people may have good intentions.

However, why would we hide what Christianity is about? Are we ashamed of Jesus? Why would we promise someone a party and fun, and high self-esteem, when in reality being a Christian is about cross and sufferings and denying ourselves?

Can anyone point to the words of Jesus where He says: “Come guys, follow me and we’ll have so much fun, it will be so awesome, you will love it. And, of course, everyone will love you.” Show me where it is written! Nowhere.

But let us be reminded about what Jesus really said: “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves...” (Mat 10:16) “...and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” (Mat 10:22)

“They will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. [...] And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. [...] But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” (Mat 24:9-13)

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.” (Mar 8:34-36)

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” (John 15:18-19)

Isn't that awesome, and so much fun? Doesn't it make us feel great about ourselves? Whatever harsh it sounds to us, at least this is what Jesus has called us to do and this is what following Him entails.

Do you hear these hard words? If you hear them and you still want to follow this Lord and Savior then this is what He says to you: **“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.”**

There is one common theme in Jesus' word which we just read. Yes, being Jesus' disciples entails denying ourselves and following our Lord, and if we do so, it will lead to salvation and eternal life.

Jesus is, in fact, a triumphant Savior, at the end He triumphed over all His enemies. He is the One to whom all authority and power is given, in heaven and on earth. And His followers have received the most beautiful promises. However, the most important ones apply to the life to come.

Let's remember, what glory and fame did Jesus or His faithful disciples receive during their life? Sure, there were moments when people wanted to make Jesus a king, and so on, but He always rejected the glory of this world. He quietly withdrew when it happened.

And at the end, He willingly extended His arms to die on the cross. To die for those, who put Him to death. This is how our Lord was glorified by the world. “OK, that's Jesus, we are not Him”, someone could object. Fine, let's look at the twelve whom Jesus entrusted to bring the Gospel to all nations.

Peter, crucified upside down. Andrew, his brother, crucified. James, decapitated. Phillip, stoned. Bartholomeus – crucified. Thomas, stabbed till death. Matthew, beaten till death with axe. James, beaten till death. Matias, burned alive.

Why? Because the world hates the Gospel. The world hates the truth. And the truth is that this is fallen world, that we all are sinners, rebelling against our Creator, and the Almighty God will come to judge and restore His fallen creation and there is only one way out of eternal condemnation – through Jesus Christ. This is the message that the world hates.

The world rejects, ridicules and kills those who are sent to bring them forgiveness and life. The world hates those who speak the truth. This is why following Jesus is not about fun and awesomeness as the world understands it.

The Church's history keeps records of how many faithful Christians were murdered during the first few centuries. Think about our own, Martin Luther, his whole life he was declared to be a person outside of law, anyone could take his life unpunished.

And, of course, then we have the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The most bloody century in the Church's history. Millions and millions Christians murdered. The same story continues today. Not here, not yet at least. But faithful Christians are murdered every day, because they fear and love and trust God more than the world.

The Church in the West have lived in safety and prosperity for too long. For so long the Church was a part of Western culture. Something that everyone took for granted. Something everyone appreciated and was in favor of, in one way or in another. These days are gone. They are not coming back.

There will be no more favor from the world. At least not if we remain faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ. Not if we keep speaking the truth and calling people to repentance so that they can be saved and inherit eternal life.

We are not here, so that God can satisfy our whims, or to have fun, or to work on our self-esteem. We are here as Jesus' disciples. We are here to deny ourselves and consider others as more important. To take our crosses and to follow our Lord.

We are here to love God for what He has done and does for us. We are here to sit at the feet of our Lord and learn from Him, from His word, so that we can go out and tell the world what gracious and merciful God has done for them. So that we know how to do it.

We are here to love our neighbors as ourselves. We are here to pray for enemies. We are here to forgive. We are here to serve others self-sacrificially, to those who don't deserve it. We are here to carry one others burdens.

And when we do it, it actually is awesome, and it gives so much joy. The more we deny ourselves and the more we listen to our Lord, to His Word, the more joy and wisdom, and peace and happiness fill our lives.

For the truth is entrusted to us, God's wisdom is revealed to us, we are sent to speak with Christ's authority, His own life-giving words, to confess the truth before the world, to be on God's mission, to bring the salvation to the nations. This is why we are here.

Our ultimate hope is not in this life, but in the life to come. Do you remember what we read from Revelation? Keep this image before your eyes: "Behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white

robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

“Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. [Not from having fun.] They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

These are Jesus’ disciples who denied themselves and took their crosses and followed their crucified Lord. “Therefore they are before the throne of God [...] and he who sits on the throne will shelter you with his presence. You shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore... For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be your shepherd, and he will guide you to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from your eyes.” (Rev 7:9-17)

This is where you are heading. If you listen to the words of Jesus, He knows you, and you will follow Him. He gives you eternal life, and you will never perish, and no one will snatch you out of Jesus’ hand.

How do we know that Jesus will be able to keep this promise? For God the Father, who has given you to Jesus, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch you out of the Father’s hand.

To deny yourself, to do what Jesus expects from you, and not what you would like to, it may sound hard. Yes, and to take your cross and care for those who don’t deserve it, and to share the Gospel with those who reject it, it doesn’t sound like much fun either. I agree.

But as you respond to God calling, as you listen to your Savior, as you fear God more than men, as you try to follow your crucified and risen Lord, keep this image before your eyes.

You, among the multitude of God’s saints, who similarly have come from tribulations, standing in the presence of the Holy God, protected and sheltered by His presence, cared for and loved by this Jesus, who denied Himself and took the cross, for He considers you as more important.

This is our ultimate hope. This is what gives us strengths to follow our Lord, not on our, but on His terms. This is what makes Christian life truly awesome and beautiful. For He knows you, and no one will snatch you out of His hand.

Amen.