

The Feast of Dedication

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[0 : 0 0] Well if we could this evening for a short while and with the Lord's leading and enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, the gospel according to John and chapter 10.

John chapter 10 and if we read again at verse 22. John chapter 10 and verse 22.

We're told there, 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.

Now last Tuesday morning I had the privilege of teaching, and I can't say I'm a very good teacher, but I had the privilege of teaching religious and moral education in our local school.

[1 : 1 5] And it's not something I found easy to do, especially with the teacher of the classroom standing beside me. But you know I saw it as a great opportunity to be allowed to teach RME in our school.

In fact the teachers have agreed that the local ministers are allowed to take an RME lesson once a term, as well as school assemblies every month, and then to have four assemblies in the two different churches, four times a year.

And you know it's something that we ought to be so thankful for, and even pray that it continues to develop, especially in the day and generation that we're living in. Because as a local church, living in this community, we have such a responsibility for our local school, and the children of our community.

Now the topic that was assigned to me was the Jewish feast of dedication, or Chanukah, Chanukah, and its connection to Jesus Christ. That's what the teachers asked me to speak about.

And of course the reason the school asked me to teach about Chanukah so close to Christmas is because the Jewish, well the Jews, they celebrate Chanukah at this time of year. In fact Chanukah, it begins on the evening of Sunday the 22nd of December, so two weeks' time.

[2 : 3 1] And Chanukah will continue for eight days until the 30th of December. And it's because Chanukah is celebrated at the same time as Christmas, that most people think that Chanukah is just a sort of Jewish Christmas, or a Jewish festive season.

Because Chanukah begins every year on the 25th of what the Jews call the month Kislev. And we have Christmas on the 25th of December, so you can see the similarities.

The Jews gather together for an eight-day feast, where they have big meals, and they exchange gifts, and they play games. So you can see, again, why people often think of Chanukah as a Jewish Christmas.

But what's interesting is that Chanukah started long before Christmas. It started long before Jesus was born. Because Chanukah celebrates an event which took place 164 years before Christ was born.

164 BC. Because at that time, before Christ was born, the Jews, well, the Jews thought that the Lord had abandoned his people. There had been no prophecy in Israel from the Lord since Malachi, 400 BC, further back.

[3 : 48] And there would be no prophecy from the Lord until Matthew's Gospel, the birth narrative that we have in Matthew's Gospel. And so that intertestamental period of 400 years, it was a period in which God was silent.

And because of this, the Jews thought that the Lord had abandoned his people. Especially because they were now under the power and the authority of a Syrian king. This king called Antiochus IV.

And because he was a Syrian king, he didn't care much for the Lord. And he didn't care much about the temple. And so he desecrated the temple in Jerusalem. Antiochus commanded the Jews to do away with their Bible, the Torah.

And he told them not to worship the Lord, but only to worship the gods that they had made. But what happened in December of 164 BC was that there was this small band of pious Jews called the Maccabees.

And they led a revolt in Jerusalem against this Syrian army. And the Maccabees, they succeeded in driving the Syrian army out of Jerusalem and away from what was the promised land of Israel.

[4 : 57] But after their victory, the Maccabees, the first thing the Maccabees did was go straight into the temple and rededicate the temple. They wanted to cleanse the temple and rededicate it to the Lord.

But when it came to relighting the menorah, which was a lampstand inside the temple, this golden lampstand. When it came to relighting the menorah, the Maccabees only found one small jar of oil.

And Anna will know all about this because she was in the class on Tuesday morning. This one small jar of oil. And the oil was enough just to last one day.

But what's remarkable is that that one small jar of oil, it burned for eight days straight. Which was enough time to produce a new supply of oil to keep the menorah burning continually.

And this oil that burned for eight days, which should have only lasted one day. It reminded the Jews that even though the Lord was silent, the Lord was still with them.

[6 : 02] And since then, the Jews have celebrated their freedom from Syrian oppression, their dedication to the Lord and their commitment to his covenant. They've celebrated freedom, dedication and commitment to the Lord with this eight-day feast called the Feast of Dedication.

They celebrate the Feast of Dedication or Hanukkah, which is the Hebrew word for dedication. They celebrate it at this time of year. And on each evening after sunset, during the Feast of Dedication, one candle will be lit on this special lampstand called a menorah or a Hanukkah.

It was like this nine-branched candelabra. And each evening on the feast, one candle will be lit every night. And there'll be the middle candle, the helper candle.

I'm sure you've seen these menorahs before. And so Hanukkah, it's the Feast of Dedication, during which the Jews celebrate their freedom, their commitment and their dedication to the Lord.

Now, it's into that context which John writes. Because John tells us in verse 22 what time of year it was and what was going on.

[7 : 17] He says, 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.

And John, you know, he's very good at telling us what Jewish festival was being celebrated at that time. Because John actually wrote his gospel in order to convince the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah.

But more than that, by giving us context, John helps us understand what was on the mind of the Jews at that time. And in this case, because they were celebrating the Feast of Dedication, because Hanukkah had come, they were thinking about freedom, commitment and dedication to the Lord.

And you know, John, he's very, very clever in the way he writes his gospel. Because as he highlights the importance of freedom, dedication and commitment to the Lord, he then points us to Jesus.

And he says to us here in the gospel, that's where you'll find freedom. That's who you need to be dedicated to. That's who you need to commit your life to.

[8 : 30] The Lord Jesus Christ. But you know, for many of the Jews who were gathering at the Feast of Dedication, there was confusion about the Christ.

There was confusion about the Christ. And that's the first thing I want us to note. There was confusion about the Christ. Can we read that in verse 22? It says, At that time, the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem.

It was winter. 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.

There was confusion. But you know, because the Feast of Dedication was about freedom and dedication and commitment to the Lord, when the Jews gathered at the temple in Jerusalem, they were already thinking about the Messiah.

Because it was because of their freedom and dedication to the Lord that many people thought that, well, the Messiah, the arrival of the Messiah was imminent. They thought that after the Maccabees had revolted against the Syrians, that the Lord can't be far away.

[9 : 42] And he wasn't far away. But they didn't see him coming. And so that's why you see the Jews here. The Jews, they see Jesus walking in the temple, and they gather around him.

But when John says that the Jewish leaders gathered around Jesus, it wasn't to listen to him preach. No, the Jews, they encircle Jesus. They surround Jesus. You could say they almost ganged up on Jesus, and stopped Jesus from going into the temple, so they could start firing questions at him.

And they all look at Jesus, and they say to him, how long are you going to keep us in suspense? How long are you going to make us doubt? And you know, literally the question they ask is very interesting, because they say, how long are you going to let our souls bother us?

How long are you going to let our souls bother us? It's a fascinating question, isn't it? How long are you going to let our souls bother us?

And you know, my unconverted friend, I wonder, does your soul ever bother you? Do you have a concern about your soul?

[10 : 56] Do you ever think about your soul? Do you care about your never-dying soul? Does your soul bother you?

Well, I hope it does. How long are you going to let our souls bother us? That was the question the Jews were asking Jesus. But then it was followed by this demand.

If you are the Christ, tell us plainly. Now the Jews, they were saying to Jesus, if you are the Christ, give us confidence, give us assurance that you are the Christ.

Don't let us go on wondering who you are. If you are the Christ, just tell us plainly. Tell us who you are. There was confusion about the Christ. And the Jews, they had come to Jesus wanting to know who he really is.

But you know, this was nothing new. Because for long enough, public opinion was divided over the identity of Jesus. Well, as you know, some said that he was John the Baptist.

[11 : 57] Others said he was Elijah. Some said he was Jeremiah. Others said he was just one of the prophets. Its public opinion was divided over the identity of Jesus. They didn't really know who he was or why he came.

But you remember when Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was. He said to them, who do you say that I am? Who do you say that I am?

And you'll remember that it was Peter that stepped forward. And he openly and publicly confessed, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. But you know, my friend, maybe for you, you're not confused about the Christ.

Maybe you're not confused because you know who Jesus is. You know he's the Son of God. You know he's the Savior of sinners. You know that he came into the world to die upon a cross.

You know that he rose again on the third day. You know that he ascended to heaven and one day he's going to come again. Maybe you're not confused about the Christ. But maybe your soul does bother you.

[13 : 06] And your soul bothers you because well, you know that you're still not a committed Christian. Maybe you thought that by now and at the stage you're at in your life that you would be a committed Christian.

Maybe you thought that by now you would be following the Lord openly and publicly. That you'd be a member of this congregation by now. But somehow along the way you've not taken that step.

You've not made that commitment. You've not come out on the side of the Lord dedicated to Jesus Christ. And maybe you think tonight well, it's too late for me. But you know my friend whilst you're on mercy's ground you're never too late.

Whilst you're on mercy's ground you're never too late. And I know that for some of you your soul bothers you. Because well, you know that you need to be saved.

You know that you need to wholeheartedly commit your life to the Lord and dedicate your life to Jesus Christ. Your soul bothers you.

[14 : 15] But you know my friend if your soul is bothering you is it not about time that you did something about it? Because you don't suffer with confusion about the Christ.

But maybe what you need is clarity from the Christ. And that's what I want us to consider secondly. clarity from the Christ. And so at the Feast of Dedication there was confusion about the Christ and clarity from the Christ.

Clarity from the Christ. 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 part of my flock. You know when the Jews questioned Jesus about his identity and ganged up on him and even stopped him going into the temple what becomes obvious is that they weren't genuine.

They weren't really bothered about their soul. They weren't really looking for confidence and assurance that Jesus is the Christ. They may have said they were but they weren't really.

[15 : 34] All they wanted from Jesus was a confession. All they wanted from Jesus was that he would say that he is the Christ so they could put him to death. Therefore their interest in Jesus and all their questions about Jesus was just a front.

It was just a facade. The Jews had no genuine interest in Jesus. There wasn't a real desire for dedication and commitment to Jesus Christ.

And you know that was the great irony of the Jews confronting Jesus because well they'd all come to the temple for the feast of dedication. They'd all gathered together as Jews to celebrate Hanukkah and an event that reminds them about their freedom, dedication and commitment to the Lord.

and yet when they actually stand before the Lord they pass by a perfect opportunity to have freedom from sin and dedicate and commit themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ.

You could put it this way my friend when the Jews came to church they passed by a perfect opportunity for freedom dedication and commitment to Jesus Christ.

[16 : 56] And you know my friend it's safe to say that nothing has changed. Nothing has changed in over 2,000 years. Because you know sometimes I wonder if your questions about Jesus and your interest in Jesus I sometimes wonder is it only superficial?

I sometimes wonder if your attendance here in church it isn't really to dedicate and commit yourself to Jesus it's just a religious front and a religious facade of putting up appearances.

And yes it's great you're here but you know your attendance in church and your appearance here it sometimes makes me think that you like coming to church and you're interested in the gospel and maybe you're being drawn to Jesus but you know with your lack of commitment with your lack of commitment I sometimes wonder if you're just more like these Jews who just put up a front and had no real concern or interest in Jesus no real desire to be saved just here for show and you know Jesus described them and he describes you perfectly he says you do not believe you do not believe and maybe like them you're just here in church tonight because well this is what you've always done it's what your parents did before you maybe what your grandparents did your great grandparents did it's what they all did they all sat in these pews and you feel that this is expected of you as well but do you not have a desire to be here do you not have a desire to be saved do you not have a longing to be brought into the kingdom of God do you not want to experience eternal life for yourself or are you just going to be like these Jews who let all these opportunities of freedom and dedication and commitment to Jesus Christ are you just going to let them pass you by my friend you need clarity about the Christ you need clarity about the Christ that's why Jesus says in verse 25

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 part of my flock Jesus says I told you and you do not believe and the thing is Jesus had told them he had been preaching to them for years he had been performing miracles before their eyes he had been pleading with them to repent and believe in the gospel Jesus had told them and my friend Jesus has told you he's told you that he's the son of God you've read it in his word he's told you about the kingdom of God that you need to come into it he's told you that unless you're born again you cannot enter the kingdom of God he's told you about the urgent need to repent and believe in the gospel he's told you that he alone has power on earth to forgive sins my friend

Jesus has told you he's told you that you need to believe in him because whosoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life but the thing is you do not believe and what I mean by belief is commitment I'm not talking about intellectual assent I'm talking about heart commitment to Jesus Christ that's belief but you know more than that like the Jews you've witnessed the gospel you've witnessed the gospel working in people's lives you've witnessed in the gospels even the works of Jesus what he's done in the name of his father you've read in the bible Jesus casting out demons healing the sick making the lame walk the deaf to hear the blind to see you've witnessed Jesus calm storms forgive sins raise the dead feed thousands of people you've witnessed Jesus die upon a Roman cross and rise again on the third day you've seen the empty tomb because of the gospel testimony my friend you've witnessed in the gospels all that

[21 : 24] Jesus has done in the name of his father and yet Jesus says to you you do not believe you do not believe and why don't you believe because you still haven't confessed the Lord as your shepherd that's why you don't know freedom tonight because you still haven't dedicated and committed your life into the care of the good shepherd and tonight Jesus says about you you do not believe because you are not part of my flock you know what a condemnation for the good shepherd to say you're still not part of my flock you do not believe because you're not part of my flock you know my friend I've said it to you before and I'll say it to you again and

I'll keep saying it to you you need commitment to the Christ you need commitment to the Christ that's the last thing I want us to see here commitment to the Christ we've considered confusion about the Christ clarity from the Christ but lastly commitment to the Christ commitment to the Christ Jesus says in verse 27 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 you and as the feast of dedication or Hanukkah as it got underway Jesus was still discussing with the Jews the importance of freedom dedication and commitment to the Lord and in these verses Jesus explains what it means to experience freedom commitment and dedication to the

Lord the Lord as your shepherd because he says in verse 27 my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me now this metaphor of the sheep and the shepherd it follows on from what Jesus said earlier on in the chapter he says in verse 11 I am the good shepherd the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep Jesus says in verse 14 I am the good shepherd I know my own and my own know me and people and he is the shepherd of his flock Jesus is saying that he is so like any other shepherd that Israel has ever known because he is the good shepherd and what's unique about the good shepherd is that he was willing to lay down his life for the sheep but you know as Jesus as the Jewish leaders questioned

Jesus at the feast of dedication and they questioned him about the importance of freedom and dedication and commitment to the Lord Jesus says to them as the Lord and as the good shepherd Jesus says to them my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me Jesus says that being part of the flock of God is not about having a superficial front or a facade of religion it's not about just showing up in church no no no that's not what it is to follow the good shepherd Jesus says it's about having a personal relationship with him it's about experiencing freedom from sin liberty in Christ it's about confessing the Lord as your shepherd it's about dedicating and committing your life to the Lord as your shepherd and this personal relationship this dedication and commitment that

Jesus requires from us you know that's what's emphasized in Jesus statement verse 27 my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me Jesus says that being dedicated and committed is not a pretend religion it's a personal relationship it's a relationship between the shepherd and the sheep and you know the beautiful thing about a personal relationship with Jesus the good shepherd is that Jesus says about his sheep my sheep are purchased my sheep are purchased he says about his sheep they're my sheep they're my sheep my sheep hear my voice and as every shepherd knows if you have sheep yourself you know that you can only call a sheep my sheep if you have bought it yourself if you've paid the price for it and that's what

[26 : 41] Jesus did the good shepherd we're told he laid down his life for the sheep the good shepherd went to the auction mart of calvary to bid for his sheep to buy us back and when we wholeheartedly trust in this good shepherd we can say that we've been redeemed we've been purchased we've been bought back not with corruptible things such as silver and gold but but by his precious blood my friend Jesus says about his sheep my sheep all they're purchased but more than that Jesus says my sheep are protected my sheep are protected because he says my sheep hear my voice and I know them I know them and they follow me you know when you experience freedom in Christ when you commit your life to Jesus and confess him as your shepherd when you dedicate your life to the good shepherd when you have a personal relationship with

Jesus you respond to the voice of the good shepherd and that's always the test of a shepherd if they listen to his voice my sheep hear my voice so if you have come to know freedom dedication and commitment to Jesus as your shepherd you will respond to his voice you will respond to his invitation when he calls you to repent and believe and come to him for salvation now as you know the purpose of listening to the voice of the shepherd is for your own good listening to Jesus and following Jesus my friend is for your own good ignoring Jesus and walking away from Jesus well that's disastrous but listening to the voice of the good shepherd is for your own good it's for your protection because as you know sheep are the most harmless and helpless of all animals really but they're dependent upon the shepherd especially at this time of year they're dependent upon the shepherd to protect them fence them in to feed them to guide them to keep them and in the same way by listening and responding to the voice of the good shepherd it's the good shepherd that speaks to you in his word and he promises to protect you and feed you and guide you and keep you it's by listening and responding to the voice of the good shepherd that you his sheep will be reminded that your shepherd is still with you because he promises this is the wonderful thing about the shepherd he promises never to leave you never to forsake you because he knows you he knows everything about you there is nothing this shepherd doesn't know about you tonight he knows everything about you and he knows you intimately he knows you personally he knows you individually he knows you lovingly he is the good shepherd and he is saying to you my sheep hear my voice and

I know them and they follow me but Jesus not only says my sheep are purchased because they're my sheep he not only says my sheep are protected because I know them and they follow me he also says that my sheep are privileged my sheep are privileged he says in verse 28 I give them eternal life and they will never perish no one will snatch them out of my hand Jesus says that when you have freedom dedication and commitment to the Lord as your shepherd you have a personal relationship with a good shepherd and you have a personal relationship with him because you've been purchased my sheep you're being protected by Jesus he knows me but you're also privileged because of Jesus and your privilege this is the wonderful thing your privilege is not only the gift of eternal life your privilege is not only the promise that you'll never perish your privilege is not even the fact that nothing or no one is able to separate you or pluck you out of his hand no my friend your privilege is that when you're dedicated and committed to the good shepherd he promises to be dedicated and committed to you this is the wonderful thing about the shepherd he promises eternal life he promises you'll never perish he promises that you'll never be separated from him but more than that he promises to be dedicated and committed to you and you know that's why David confessed in Psalm 23 the Lord is my shepherd you know when David in Psalm 23 when he dedicated and committed his life to the

Lord as his good shepherd he discovered that the good shepherd would be dedicated and committed to him he discovered that the good shepherd would be dedicated and committed to him as he says in the Psalm by going before him into the green pasture and beside the still water David discovered that the good shepherd would be dedicated to him by always walking beside him even when he was faced with the valley of the shadow of death David discovered that Jesus would be dedicated and committed to him by even following behind him he'd be going before him walking beside him and following behind him with his goodness and mercy all the days of his life you know my friend when David confessed that personal confession the Lord is my shepherd you know David knew true freedom he knew commitment he knew dedication to the

Lord and it's because of that that he could say I shall not want I lack nothing the shepherd is my everything I lack nothing you know David he came to discover the freedom the dedication the commitment of the good shepherd and my friend that's what you need to discover that's what you need to cling to you need to discover the freedom and commitment and dedication of this good shepherd but you know you will only discover it you will only discover it when you make that personal confession the Lord is my shepherd you will only know freedom you will only know dedication and commitment when you make that personal confession public you will only know that freedom and commitment to the Lord when you can say to those around you the Lord is my my shepherd can you say that tonight can you say that the Lord is my shepherd and you know when when you can say the

[34 : 08] Lord is my shepherd Jesus says about you my sheep are purchased my sheep are protected my sheep are privileged the Lord is my shepherd and so it was at the feast of dedication at Hanukkah that the confusion about the Christ was met with clarity from the Christ and it all ended with this great call a call to commitment to the Christ and that's the call that's been issued tonight a call to come and make a commitment to the Christ because you know when you commit your life to this shepherd when you confess this shepherd as your shepherd and your Lord do you know the wonderful thing is you will know the promise you will know the promise of Psalm 23 a psalm that you've been singing all your life and you'll know it personally you'll know it intimately you'll know it for yourself goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me and in God's house forevermore my dwelling place shall be my friend the Lord is my shepherd but is the

Lord your shepherd may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray amen amen oh Lord our gracious God we give thanks to thee for the voice of the shepherd and we pray that we would hear him speaking to us so clearly in his word that we would respond in faith and obedience that we would respond by following the good shepherd and confessing as David said long ago the Lord is my shepherd I shall not want oh Lord help us to know that when we come out on the side of the Lord that when we confess him as Lord that when we lack that's then that we lack nothing because we have the promise of him going before us walking beside us and following behind us all the days of our life Lord encourage us then we pray help us to be dedicated and committed to thee to walk in the paths of righteousness for thine own name's sake do us good then we pray go before us for Jesus sake

Amen We're going to bring our time to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 23 Psalm 23 in the Scottish Psalter page 229 Psalm 23 Psalm 23 in the Scottish Psalter page 229 we'll sing the whole psalm the Lord's my shepherd I'll not want he makes me down to lie in pastures green he leadeth me the quiet waters by we'll sing the whole psalm to God's please the Lord's my shepherd I'll not walk he makes me down to lie my soul he doth restore again and we to walk doth make within the part of righteousness in for his own name save yea though

I walk in death's dark veil yet will I fear not ill for thou art with me and thy Lord and staff me comfort still my heart stills my table love has furnished in shed in presence of my foes my head thou dost with with thorn my light and my cup over flows over flows goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me follow me and take

God's house forever more my dwelling place shall be the grace of the Lord Jesus and the grace of the the grace of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more amen