

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED:

John 10:22-39**NOT INTIMIDATED**

Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch. 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."

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. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you.

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone 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 My Father's hand. I and My Father are one.

Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, Many good works I have shown you from My Father—for which of those works do you stone Me?

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.

Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, "I [God] said, You are gods"? If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), 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? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me. 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.

Therefore, they sought again to seize Him, but He escaped out of their hand.

Have you ever been described as being "timid"? To be timid means to be fearful, not willing to step out, or speak up, or ask. People are usually timid in one situation or another. (I think only the make believe heroes on TV are not timid—Marshall Dillon, for example.) To "intimidate" someone means to make them fearful, to bend them to your own will. Think of a gang intimidating one who stands in their way.

In our text for today, the leaders of the Jews in Jerusalem were seeking to intimidate Jesus, to get Him to cower and to back down. He had been at Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles a few months earlier. He had upset them with His words and actions—not seeking to taunt them, but to reach deep into their hearts and convince them that He was the promised Savior. They, however, only wanted to shut Jesus down. A few months later was the Feast of Dedication, the feast in our text. We know this feast by its Hebrew name—Hannukah. Hannukah was a more recent feast. It had begun only 200 years earlier (rather than 1500 years earlier at Mt. Sinai, for Passover). When the Syrians had conquered Israel, King Antiochus IV Epiphanes of Syria had taken steps to eradicate Jewish worship. He set up an altar to Zeus in the temple and offered sacrifices on it! The Jewish people were incensed. A priest, Judas Maccabeus, led a revolt, drove out the Syrians, cleansed the temple, and rededicated the Lord's altar. The tradition is that one container of "kosher" lamp oil—lamp oil approved and blessed by the priests—was still found in the temple and it alone kept the lamp in the Temple burning for the eight days of the feast. Every year thereafter Hanukkah was celebrated. A festival of joy, of lights, and of gifts.

In our text, it doesn't seem the leaders of the Jews were happy to see Jesus at this Feast of Dedication. Surely they feared He would take away more attention from them, and the people would be attentive to Him. The enemies encircled Jesus, wanted to corner Jesus, to get Him to back down, to intimidate Him. And maybe the weather didn't help any. John tells us it was winter, which in their climate did not mean snow and subfreezing temps, but rainy, wet, stormy weather. They encircled Jesus in the portico, or porch of the temple called Solomon's Porch. Intimidating! They demanded a straight answer—are you really the Christ?. Tell us straight out so we can decide how to deal with You once and for all. If you're not, then back off. If you are, then you better shape up and fall in line with what the Christ is supposed to be and do.

Do you get what it mean for Jesus to be the "Christ"? "Christ" is the Greek word for the Hebrew word "Messiah." The leaders were saying, "Are you the promised Messiah?" And what does "Messiah" mean? Christ or Messiah both mean "The Anointed One." The Old Testament kings, and prophets, and priests were anointed with a special blend of olive oil. The oil was poured on their heads to signify that they were chosen by the Lord and to given them special blessings from the Lord for their special work among His people. I imagine at t this Dedication Festival, at this Hannukah, the enemies were thinking of a Messiah who would rejuvenate the "nation" of Israel and free Israel from the obnoxious control of the Romans. Therefore, their intent to Jesus, "Either back off! Or shape up and do what you're supposed to do to set up the great Israelite Kingdom."

Their understanding of the Messiah was wrong, wasn't it? They didn't see their desperate need for a Savior from sin, a Savior who would make them right with God. They wanted a Messiah who would make them awesome in the eyes of the world. They didn't see the need for a spiritual rescuer who would break the chains of death for them with His great resurrection from the grave. In fact, the book of Acts tells us that many of the leading priests did not even believe in a resurrection!

Is your understanding of the Messiah right? Will Good Friday and Easter be days built upon His spiritual redemption and victory—His paying the price to set you free from your guilt and His resurrection assuring you of forgiveness and resurrection from the grave at the last day? Will Jesus the crucified and risen Savior be the springboard for new “dedication” and “renovation” in your heart at Easter? Will Jesus the crucified and risen Messiah be the light and joy of your life? Or will Jesus just get in the way of your Easter festival, because you've made it out to be just a spring festival, new flowers, new rabbits, new chicks? Will focusing on Jesus get in the way of your family get together? Or will you take time, will you find it your privilege, to be in the house of your spiritual Savior on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday? Don't you think the church should be packed on these days? This is the heart and core of your deliverance and freedom from sin, death, hell! Don't push Jesus the Christ and Messiah, the Anointed One, into a corner somewhere, so He fits YOUR celebration.

Jesus was not intimidated by the leaders who encircled Him. He was blunt with them. His answer to their question: “I've told you before.” Oh, maybe not in short sweet words that they could file away, saying this guy mocks—blasphemes—God by saying He is the Messiah, so let's get rid of Him. His earlier Words had been clear. Example: At the Feast of Tabernacles a few months earlier, “If anyone keeps My Word, He shall never see death. . . . Before Abraham was I AM” (John 8:49-58). And if, in fact, His words didn't speak to them. then His works, His miracles certainly should have! Healing the crippled, raising the dead, driving out demons! But the enemies' ears were plugged and their eyes were covered.

You do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone 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 My Father's hand. I and My Father are one.

What words of comfort for the disciples. Were they standing right there? It doesn't say. But likely. Were they feeling “the heat,” the intimidation? Were they even more taken aback when Jesus was blunt and said to the enemies, *I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you.*

Maybe sometimes you feel intimidated to stand with Jesus. The devil, the greatest intimidator, wants to shut you up and back you and your faith in Jesus into a corner. He doesn't want you ruining his version of Good Friday and Easter by putting Jesus front and center in your heart and in your life. I mean, who would say? “*Happy Easter—Jesus Lives!*” or “*Happy Easter—Now we know we too will and go to heaven!*” People don't want to hear that. But people need to hear that. And you need to hear that. Jesus is your loving Shepherd. *And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.* There is no intimidation with Jesus at your side.

The enemies increased the pressure. They took up stones to strike Jesus. But Jesus calmly pointed them to His works. “How can you stone someone who has shown and done so many works of power and love?” All they could answer was “You can't be the Messiah. Blasphemy!” Satan had successfully hoodwinked them. They didn't want a spiritual Savior, because it would mean they were helpless sinners. Jesus continued, “If you are upset that I say I am “God,” what do you make of Psalm 82? There God Himself calls the leaders of the people, who were responsible for “defending the poor and the fatherless, delivering the poor and the needy from the hand of the wicked”—He calls them “gods,” mighty ones. Anyone who leads others out of the clutches of Satan through the Father's mercy and forgiveness is a mighty one, and in that sense a “god.” Then why should it surprise you that the One that God Himself appointed and sent from His side to be the Messiah, the King, Prophet, and Priest, to save sinners should call Himself “God” and should even be “God”? If you can't get past My words, then at least look at My works. *Believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.* Jesus was seeking to reach into their hearts.

Jesus was not intimidated by them, or by Satan's show of force. Even though He would surrender Himself to them at the cross, He would exit the tomb, the VICTOR! Intimidated? Not at all. In reality it was the enemies who were intimidated by Jesus. *Therefore, they sought again to seize Him. But He escaped out of their hand.* The enemies were powerless to do anything to Him until the Father so allowed it.

That same confidence and strength is yours this Easter in Jesus. In Christ, do not be intimidated. Easter in Christ will intimidate the forces of Satan. Scowl as they will, in Christ you will be safe.

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So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach----