

"I Have Power to Take it Again"

Jesus Christ is risen! It's Easter again, and that means today we have the joy to celebrate what the cross represents. Jesus died and yet he rose again. In the words of verses 17-18 in our passage, Jesus said, "...I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."

Here in this passage, we have one of several predictions that Jesus made in advance about the cross. During his earthly ministry, he foretold his suffering. He foretold the resurrection. Many didn't believe. Many didn't understand. But we're here today because the facts are undeniable. Many thought he was crazy as he spoke these words before the cross. But when he died on that Good Friday and was buried, the grave could not hold him. Death could not keep him down. For three days later he was alive. He had risen. And this same Jesus still lives. He has ascended up into heaven. He sits at the right hand of his Heavenly Father. And now from on high, he sends out the gospel to the world. He calls people into relationship with himself. He is doing that even today, right now, as his words are being proclaimed again today. Today, his voice, his words, are coming right now to you. He is calling out to you right now as a shepherd calls his sheep.

And so this morning we're going to spend some time thinking about the cross. We're going to spend some time thinking about Christ's death and resurrection. We'll do that by looking at these words here in John 10 where he predicts his death and resurrection. You see, he's not just predicting this. He's telling us why it would happen. He's telling us a bit about the significance of his death and resurrection.

And so as we look at today's passage, we'll look at Christ's death and resurrection from three aspects. First, this passage will show us that his death and resurrection was an act of love. Jesus loves his sheep. Second, we'll see that it was an act of his free will and ability. No one forced him to go to the cross, he was in control the entire time; a man on a mission. Third, it was an act of relationship; in other words, an act to bring us into relationship with himself.

And so again, the three points about the cross that we'll think about today: First, it was an act of love. Second, it was an act of his free will and ability. Third, it was an act of relationship.

Let's begin then by considering how this was an act of love. Now to be fair, the word "love" isn't used explicitly here about Christ's actions toward us. But I think the clear implication as you read over this passage is that Christ loves his people. Christ came to die for his people on the cross, because he loves them so much. We see that through the shepherd metaphor here. Jesus twice says he's the *good* shepherd. The contrast is made between the good shepherd and hireling. It's in the contrast that we see that Christ's sacrifice is an act of love.

Look at verse 11 first to start. Jesus connects the fact that he's the good shepherd with the sacrifice of his life. Because he's the good shepherd, he gives up his life for the sheep. But then it goes on to explain in verse 12.

Here's where the contrast with the hireling is introduced. A hireling is just that. Someone hired. An employee. He doesn't own the sheep. He's just paid to help take care of them. In verses 12, Jesus says that a hired shepherd will only go so far to take care of the sheep. If a wolf comes, he'll just flee. Why? Verse 13 tells the answer. He's not the owner of the sheep. He doesn't really care about the sheep. Do you see the implication here? The hireling doesn't really care about the sheep. What's implied then is that the good shepherd really does care about the sheep. Jesus is the good shepherd. Jesus really cares about his sheep.

And so this affects the actions of both the hired man and the good shepherd. When the wolf presents himself, the hired man takes off running. He'll say, it's just a job. I'm not going to risk my life to save these sheep. That hired man loves his own life more than the sheep. I think we can all understand that, can't we? That seems like a natural response. But what does the good shepherd do? He lays down his life for his sheep. This isn't just a job for the good shepherd. He owns the sheep. He cares about them. He's willing to risk his life for them.

But I think Jesus description shows us that there is real love that he has for his sheep. This is more than just a cold concern for the financial investment of some sheep. I mean think about this. If you were a shepherd, and you owned all these sheep, you'd probably go to great lengths to protect them. They would probably represent a sizeable portion of your wealth. You probably would be willing to risk your life. But would you be willing to sacrifice your life? There's a difference there. You can risk your life, while in the back of your mind, having some confidence things will work themselves out okay. But if you knew with certainty that you would die in the place of your sheep, would you really still do it? Wouldn't you probably tell yourself, that your sheep are replaceable, but that your life isn't? Wouldn't you draw the line on how far you're willing to go for a sheep?

Think of an analogy here that might be easier for us to relate to. Imagine your beloved family dog fell into a roaring river. Would you jump after him to save him, knowing that it might cost you your life? Well, some of us might; some of us might not. The ones who do, probably would do it, not just because the dog represented some cold financial investment that you had. But because your beloved family dog was like part of the family. You might be willing to risk your life in that situation. But again, would you really be willing to *sacrifice* your life? If you knew for certain that jumping in after the dog would result in your death. I'm not sure many of us would sacrifice our life for our dog. But then change the example. Instead of it being your dog, what if it was your child? I hope all parents would be willing to sacrifice their life, without question, in that circumstance, to save their child. But then bring the example full circle. If the child fell into the raging water, and only the baby sitter was there. Would the baby sitter sacrifice their life for their child? Maybe, but probably not as likely.

The point in all of this is simple. Christ loves his sheep. Christ didn't say here that we would risk his life for his sheep. He said he would die for his sheep. To save his sheep. By the way, that's part of being a good shepherd, is that you actually save them. If you die for them, but don't actually save them, then that's not a very good shepherd. This is proof for what we call definite atonement, that Christ specifically died for his chosen people. But that's a side note here. Again, the point is that Jesus loves his people. He predicts here that he would die in their place. Verses 11

through 15 tell us that using the analogy of the good shepherd. The analogy starts and ends with the promise that he would lay down his life for his sheep.

Brothers and sisters, he's talking about the cross. Think about what this means. If you are his sheep, then he loves you. He loves you so very much. He calls you his own. He cares for you. If he would sacrifice his life for you, then there's nothing he won't do for your well being. He is your good shepherd. Jesus. This is a reason to celebrate at Easter and all year long.

Let's consider now our second point. Christ's death and resurrection was an act of his free will and ability. Look at verses 17-18. This is why I really wanted to study this passage for today. It's such a profound statement by Jesus. Jesus wasn't forced to go to the cross. He went willingly. He also did this from his own ability and authority. In other words he had the power to accomplish what he freely chose to do in saving us.

Let's look at this in detail. Look at verse 17 to start. Jesus talks both about his death and his resurrection as something he's going to do. It's in the active. I lay down my life. I take it again. These aren't passive statements. Think about the grammar here. When you are born, that's a passive statement. You say something like I was born on July 1. Not, I bore myself. Saying you were born is passive statement. Something else really enabled you to be born that day. You were the passive recipient. We say plenty of passive things, when things are out of our control. I was healed, is another passive statement, for example.

Jesus could have spoken here about his death and resurrection in a passive way. But he doesn't. He could have said this: I will be killed by the Pharisees and the Romans. I will be raised by God. Those statements are true. The Pharisees and Romans were responsible for his death. God the Father would raise him from the dead. But that's not how Jesus described these things here. Even though in one sense you could see Jesus as the passive recipient of these things, Jesus tells us that he's not really passive in any of this. For both his death and resurrection, he can say that he is the active one. Jesus says here in the active voice, "I lay down my life. I take it again. No one takes it from me."

This shows that this was an act of his free will. No one constrained his will. We all have free wills, in a sense. But our so-called free wills have a lot of constraints on them, don't they? My free will can land me in jail if I freely choose to rob a bank. My free will can be thwarted if I try to cross a street at the wrong time and a car hits me before I can actually get across. That constrains my free will. In my free will, I may choose to pay my taxes, but only because of the compulsion of the government coming down upon me if I don't. So our free wills can be funny things. Of course, our sinful natures constrain our free wills as well, making them not so free after all. But Jesus is making very clear that when talking about his death and resurrection, this is ultimately an act of his free will. This is confirmed when we go on to read verse 18. He says "I lay it down of myself." This phrase, "of myself," is telling us just that. This is Christ's free will in action. He goes to the cross, not out of compulsion, but freely as an act of love.

But this is not just an act of his free will, it's also an act of his free ability. I just mentioned that you might have some desire in your free will to do something, but you don't do it, because you can't do it. I might want

to jump off the side of Half Dome and fly like a bird to the ground. But I can't fly. No matter how free my will might be to will that, I just don't have that ability. It's not in my power. And even if it was, the National Park's Service probably wouldn't authorize it anyways. Base jumping, for example, is now illegal in Yosemite. And so you can have free will, but not free ability, in something. Well, Jesus goes on to say in verse 18, that not only does he have the will to lay down and take up his life, but he also has the ability to do both these things.

Again, this is a profound statement. Jesus says in verse 18 that he has the power to lay down his life. And then, even more profound, he has the power to take it again! This word for power in the Greek especially carries with it the idea of authority. He has the authority to do these things. Don't take for granted either of these statements. We might all like to think we are in control of our own bodies, but is that really the case? Do we have the authority to take our own life, for example? Well, in suicide I would say not. Suicide has been illegal in many countries and at many times. Certainly our life doesn't ultimately belong to us, but to God, and so we don't have authority to take our own life. And yet, of course, there may be times where it is the God-honoring thing to do, to sacrifice your life for someone else. John 15:13 "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."

So we might have some exercise of control over giving up our life. But think about Jesus. Jesus knew that he'd be betrayed by one of his closest friends. That would result in his arrest. He'd be falsely convicted and put to death on the cross. But in all that atrocity against himself, he can say confidently that it only happened by his authority. You might remember what Jesus told Pilate during his trial. John 19:10, "Then Pilate said to Him, 'Are you not speaking to me? Do you not know that I have power to crucify you, and power to release you?' Jesus answered, 'You could have no power at all against me unless it had been given you from above.'" Jesus is a man who's confident of his own authority and power, even at the face of his death. Why? Because it was his mission that he was executing. His life was taken from him, not apart from, but under, his own power and authority.

But then apply this to his resurrection. It's one thing for Jesus to have the power and authority to lay down his life. It's another for him to have that same power and authority when he takes back up his life. I mean, if you are dead, how do you have the power to do anything?

Well, certainly this has something to say about Jesus' divinity. That's in contrast to the passage we looked at on Friday where we saw Jesus saying, "I thirst." For Jesus to have this sort of authority even while under the power of death, shows us that he was not only a man. He was also God. Jesus had both a human nature and a divine nature. His human nature could experience a physical death, while his divine nature maintained the power to take back up his life through the resurrection. This is amazing since typically the Scriptures credits God the Father with raising Jesus from the dead. But here we learn that there is a way in which Jesus himself was involved in the authority and power to take back up his life.

And so the reason we're thinking about his death and resurrection being an act of his free will and ability is to remind us what Jesus has done for us. Before any of us ever acknowledged Jesus as Lord, this is how far he went for you. It wasn't an accident. It wasn't done grudgingly. It wasn't compelled upon him. He willfully and deliberately executed his Father's plan to save

us. It was his great joy to do so, even despite the suffering upon sufferings that it entailed. If Jesus did nothing else for us, never answered another prayer for us, wouldn't this one act be enough to demand our life and devotion? And yet he continues to tend us and nurture us and feed us as his sheep!

The third and final point to consider today is that his death and resurrection was an act of relationship. Christ wants to be in a real relationship with each of his sheep. Turn with me to look at verses 14-15. Here you have a picture of what it means for us to be a sheep in Christ's flock. The shepherd knows the sheep and sheep know the shepherd. Verse 16 talks about how the sheep will know the shepherd's voice. I've often thought about this in relationship to my cats. My cats pretty much hate people. But they love me. I spent a lot of time caring for them when they were young, and so we have a real relationship. If anyone else goes outside and calls for them, they'll never come to them. But usually, if I go out there, and call for a few minutes, they'll sense it's safe and pop their heads out. Usually they'll even meow back to me. You see, there's a relationship there. They know my voice. I usually can tell their voices apart as well.

Well, whether its sheep, or cats, the point is clear. Jesus wants an intimate relationship with his people. What's really amazing about this relationship that Christ wants to have with us, is that it's modeled after the relationship he has with God the Father. Verse 15 says that the way Jesus and his sheep will know each other is like how he and his heavenly father know each other.

And so this is not just academic knowledge. God the Father and God the Son really know each other; they have the closest relationship in the Trinity that we can only begin to grasp. Jesus says he wants to have this sort of intimate knowledge between us and him. Now Jesus, as the Son of God, already knows the details of our life, whether we are in relationship to him or not. Jesus doesn't want to just know about us. He wants to know us. He doesn't want us just to know about him. He wants us to know him. My job as a pastor is not just to teach you about God. It's to introduce you to God. To show you how he has actually been the one pursuing you. And this pursuit was shown so visibly by the cross.

If you look at verse 16 it talks about him going up and gathering his sheep from all sorts of places. Interesting, these sheep when they hear his voice calling to them, recognize him. That's true, even though before they really didn't have that relationship to him. You see, that's what the Bible teaches. That God had from before the ages of the world picked out his sheep. From before time began, God had planned to have a special people in relationship to him. But then something got in the way. Sin. Satan. The wolf came, and did what it says the wolf would do in verse 12. The wolf catches and scatters. The wolf tries to snatch up the sheep and scatter them away from the shepherd. But the good shepherd's solution was the cross.

Jesus as the Good Shepherd knew that he could only have a real relationship with his people if the problem of sin was dealt with. You see, sin is ultimately rebellion against God. It's saying we don't really want to have a relationship with God where he is our God. That's the attitude that defines humans apart from the saving work of Jesus. It leaves us guilty and alienated from God. We have no chance at a relationship while that is our state.

And so Jesus went to the cross. He paid our debts to sin. He made things right. He did this so that we could have a real relationship with him. That we would truly know each other. Brothers and sisters, think how amazing this is. Jesus' actions toward us wasn't just some cold, impersonal shepherd just protecting his investment of sheep. His actions are those of a shepherd who loves us so much that he volunteered to die and rise again for us so that he could have a real relationship with us. We have a shepherd that wants to actually know us.

Think of a boss at work that you look up to, and then come to realize that they could care less about you. All their motivating speeches, salary raises, promotions, praise, are just because they think that will motivate you to better serve them, but that's it. Contrast that with a boss that does all those things because they really value their relationship with you. They really appreciate you and want to know you and work with you. Like for example, if you found out that they passed up on a promotion and a raise simply because they enjoyed working with you so much. That would surely color your perspective on that boss. Well, think about the fact, that the God of the World wants to be in relationship with you and me? And so Jesus died and rose again in order to secure this relationship.

My friends, do you recognize your savior's voice today? In closing, I would draw your attention again to verse 16. Jesus says, "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear my voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd." This is talking about how the message of salvation through faith in Christ would go out to the world. It's the Good Shepherd's mission now to bring in all his sheep and proclaim the victory over all the wolves and all the rebellion. That victory happened on Calvary. That was proclaimed on that first Easter morning! Jesus Christ is risen!

And yet we saw how our passage ended today: verses 19-21. People debating who Jesus is. This shows the question that we all have to ask today. Some heard Jesus' words that day and thought it was babble. Some thought he was demon possessed. Others were convinced that he gave the words of life.

What about you? What do you say about these words of Jesus here? Do you hear in these words the voice of a demon-possessed man? Or do you hear your Good Shepherd calling you to himself? If today you hear his voice, maybe even for the first time, let me tell you how to respond. Respond with faith. Believe in him, and begin that faith by turning over your whole life to him. We call that repentance. Pray to Jesus and tell him that you acknowledge all the ways you've lived apart from him, and tell him that you want to really begin this relationship with him. Set Jesus as your Lord and Savior today. Heed his voice. He is calling. If you are his sheep, then you will hear it and respond. Let today be the day.

This is what we celebrate today at Easter. I urge none of us to go away having missed our Savior's call. Turn your ear to your Good Shepherd who died and rose again for you. Have him lead you back to the flock. Know him for eternity.

Amen.

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