

AT THE FEAST OF DEDICATION

JOHN 10:22-42

1. Introduction

In this Outline we will deal with a fairly short section. In it we read about the last dispute which the Lord Jesus had with the Jews concerning His Messianic office. This was discussed many times in the previous chapter. Thus we could not expand at great length on every detail mentioned in these discussions. We have more opportunity for that in this Outline, especially because some of the elements of those earlier discussions recur here.

Thus we now have the opportunity to pay more attention to these elements. At the same time, we will again be able to summarise clearly the crux of the legal arguments (twistgeding) between Jesus and the Jews.

2. In Jerusalem (verses 22-39)

- a. As far as the date of this episode is concerned, it occurs on the so-called Hanukkah Feast. This is celebrated near the middle of December, that is, a few months after the Feast of Tabernacles mentioned in the preceding chapters. This was not a very old feast - dating back to the year 165 BC when Judea lived under the tyranny of Syria. It was a spiritual tyranny especially carried out by the well-known Antiochus Epiphanes, the Syrian king (and the prototype of the Antichrist in the prophecies of Daniel!) His aim was to make the Jewish people the same, spiritually, as the Greek heathendom. Thus, for example, circumcision was forbidden and made punishable by death, while an image of the Greek supreme god, Zeus, was erected in the temple and pigs were sacrificed on the altar there. In this way the temple, the house of the LORD, was most terribly defiled. However, under the leadership of the family of the Maccabees, the heavily oppressed people rebelled and Judas the Maccabee was able to defeat the Syrian armies and liberate the land and people from the oppressor.

On the 25th of the month Kislev (approximately our December), the temple was cleansed of heathen defilements and rededicated to the LORD's service. This event is commemorated at the Hanukkah Feast, especially by the lighting up of festive lights in the homes.

We gain the impression that the Lord Jesus has not shown Himself in Jerusalem in the intervening months; He is again noticed at this feast. The Jews soon approach Him. They find Him walking in the portico of Solomon where people could shelter from the inclement winter weather.

We know that the rift between Jesus and the Jews has by now become absolute. As we have seen earlier, John always uses the word “Jews” in a spiritual sense. It is used especially to describe the unbelieving hostile leaders of the people; here in Jerusalem it refers also to the members of the Sanhedrin. After they had excommunicated the healed blind man, the Lord had unmasked them as being false shepherds and had called the people to Himself, the only true and good Shepherd of the sheep of Israel. Naturally this did not remain hidden from these leaders. From their side, too, the enmity has reached a definitive stage. They do not only throw every declared follower of this Jesus out of the synagogue, but they have also decided it is time to put a stop to this Jesus Himself, the instigator of all the unrest and misery. They are determined to kill Him in one way or another. Therefore, as soon as they find out that He has once again turned up in Jerusalem, they approach Him with an obviously aggressive aim. They are no longer concerned about issues like the defilement of the Sabbath day and such like, but they strike at the heart of the whole matter. Their tone is clearly aggressive when they address the Lord. They believe it is now high time that He stops making His fancy speeches which He has used to circumvent the main issue and which have kept them and the people in uncertainty and confusion. Let Him say openly and directly whether He is passing Himself off as the Messiah, yes or no!, is their sharpened hostile summons (vs 24). The gentlemen are of the opinion that the game has been played long enough, that it must now end: let Jesus declare straight-out whether or not He is the Messiah. If the answer is “yes”, then they know what they have to do.

- b. In His answer (vs 25) the Lord flatly denies having hidden His identity from them and the people. He has on many occasions given clear testimonies concerning Himself. How often has He not used signs to show that He has been sent by His Father and that He has come from God to fulfil His divine mission and calling here on earth? He has also spoken many “I am...” sayings: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life”, “I am the Bread of Life”, “I am the Light of the World”, etc. Each of these is a Messianic statement. It can only be said by Someone who is fully aware of His Messianic office and being.

When the question “Are you the one?” was asked, Christ always answered “I am”. It was not only a testimony of words however but also of deeds. It is not for the first time, either, that He points this out to them now. He has confronted them with it before (cf. 5:16ff). These works - factual, real, verifiable, - stand as vocal witnesses next to Jesus. They testify as clear as crystal that He does the works of God, and that He can only do these works - healing the sick, casting out devils and raising people from the dead - through the power and command from Above. It is through these works that His mission as the Christ sent by God was brought to light. Unbelief can never be motivated or justified by the ‘obscurity’ of Jesus’ words and works - it originates solely from the hardening of the heart and an unwillingness to submit to the clear testimony. The Lord Jesus, therefore twice reproaches these leaders: “You do not believe” (vs 25,26). These words imply that they do not want to believe, do not wish to be convinced. They shut their eyes to the light that shines right in their faces.

- c. Why is it that these leaders do not believe? They say, it is Your fault. It is because of Your vagueness, because of Your constant refusal to reveal Yourself fully, that we are left in a state of confusion. The Lord, however, sharply rejects this opinion. Reason for unbelief can never be found with Him. Even today, nobody can rightly say that the gospel is so unclear and leaves so many questions, that it is possible to have more than one opinion as to Who Jesus really is. Did He, for example, know of Himself that He was the Christ? Or did the later ‘free theology’ (gemeente-theologie) introduce this idea? The Lord Himself, however, flatly rejects the justification of such uncertainty and such questions. He has revealed clearly enough Who He is. The unbelief of the leaders has a totally different origin: they do not belong to His sheep (vs 26). It is not a tragic fate which rests upon them, but it is because of the condition of their hearts. Sheep are characterised by humility and docility. The Jewish leaders however, wish to rule, to uphold their own positions. They definitely do not want to live out of grace. Therefore they refuse to listen to the voice of the only good Shepherd. They block their ears to the Shepherd’s and Saviour’s voice.
- d. Thus the Lord connects His speech to His previous preaching, held a few months ago, the sermon which had announced the radical split between Him and these leaders. He now repeats this preaching by pointing to the close relationship between His sheep and Himself, a relationship which completely excludes these unbelieving leaders. He does this in a manner which has the characteristics of a song, a hymn of praise (vs 27,28). This utterance consists of three pairs of

phrases which describe this intimate relationship. In each pair of phrases, He first says something characteristic about the sheep and then follows by explaining what He is to the sheep.

The first pair of phrases, “My sheep hear my voice...” vs 27a,b (cf. vs 3), imply that in His voice they recognise the voice of their Shepherd. Therefore they listen to this voice, surrendering their hearts to Him in faith. While the sheep know Him as their Shepherd, from His side He knows them to be His sheep, which assures them of His love, His care, His salvation.

The second pair of phrases say that “they follow Me” vs 27c, 28a; because they know that they can find life with this Shepherd only. The Shepherd’s action is connected to this: He indeed gives life to the sheep - true, full and absolute life which is everlasting.

Then in the third pair of phrases we read: “they shall (therefore) never perish...” (vs 28b,c). The sheep would never be disappointed in following this Shepherd to find life because - and once again the matter is looked at from the Shepherd’s point of view - “no one shall snatch them out of my hand”. The mighty, protecting care of the Shepherd acts as a surety. When one considers all the hostile, demonic powers (Satan and his might, but also the “thieves and robbers” in his service) which try with all their might to steal the sheep from the hand of the Shepherd, this last pair of phrases seems to say something which is almost unbelievable.

Are the sheep truly safe from all these powers? Yes, because the Father’s power and loyalty are surety for this. The heavenly Father gave these sheep to the Shepherd so that He could save and keep them, and assure them of eternal life. Because the Father entrusted them to Him, the sheep are more valuable to Him than anything else, and He will protect and guard them with His might. Nobody will therefore ever be able to steal them from His or His Father’s hand. This way of speaking about the sheep’s safety, where the words about the power, the care and the love of the Father and of Christ towards the sheep seem to flow into each other imperceptibly, automatically leads to that higher level of Jesus’ self-revelation: “I and the Father are one” (vs 29,30).

- e. The Jews understood correctly that here the Lord Jesus is referring to His divine origin. In fierce indignation at such blasphemy - in their eyes - they pick up stones in order to throw them at His head. The Lord does not allow Himself to be intimidated. He raises His hand as it were to swear an oath, and asks them the penetrating question as to the reason of their wanting to kill Him (vs 31,32). He raises the matter of His works as a direct continuation of His

earlier words in verse 25: it was His works that bore testimony to the fact that He is the Christ. The Lord stresses that these works were 'good', bringing the salvation and spreading mercy, and that He could only do these works through the power bestowed on Him by the Father. Concerning which particular point in this testimony of works about His identity do the leaders think they can argue with Him?

In their reply (vs 33), the Jews obstinately refuse to accept this testifying nature of Jesus' works. They cannot deny that these works are 'good', but they refuse to acknowledge that the Lord had done them in divine almighty power. They insist that He is a man, albeit a man with special gifts of healing and such like. When He, however, has the insolence to declare Himself one with the Father, to declare His divine origin and glory, then they pick up stones. Does the law not say that blasphemy is punishable by stoning (Leviticus 24:16)? The Lord has answered their question openly (vs 24); He has again presented them with the evidence (vs 25,32). Once again, however, they harden themselves in their unbelief by determinedly rejecting this testimony.

- f. No matter how much these leaders are guided by their unbelief and obstinacy, the Lord Jesus still does not let them go. They have accused Him outright of blasphemy. The Lord, using the Scriptures, now shows them how totally unfounded this accusation is. The word "law" in verse 34, refers to the whole Old Testament as can be seen also from Paul's usage of the word in the New Testament in Romans 3: 19 and 1 Corinthians 14: 21, where the word "law" refers to the Psalms and the prophets. In verse 34, Jesus uses the words "Is it not written" to emphasise the normative character of the Scriptures professed also by the Jews. In verse 35 He stresses this by saying, "and scripture cannot be broken". He stresses that which these leaders also acknowledge: the eternally binding character of the Scriptures. That which applied in days of old, also applies now and will continue to apply throughout the ages. Using this normative and binding emphasis of the Scriptures, the Lord calls upon Psalm 82:6 (vs 35). There the LORD gives the judges, by virtue of their high office in which they represent Him as the supreme Judge, the honourable title of "gods".

From this pronouncement from the Scriptures, the Lord Jesus now draws His conclusion, going from the minor to the major issue. The minor is: Psalm 82 applies to earthly, sinful people who are given a high office by the LORD. The major is: Jesus comes from heaven where He has been "sanctified" long before His birth, that is, set

aside and ordained to fulfil the works of the Father; after that He was sent into the world by the Father in order to do this.

The minor: if the LORD has given these earthly judges the name “gods” in order to indicate their relationship to God as the One who gave them their instructions, then the major issue is: how can the Jews accuse Jesus of blasphemy when He, with an eye to His Messianic office and mission, testifies concerning Himself: “I am the Son of God”? Then, of course, everything is indeed related to the testimony of verse 25. The works which Jesus had done would determine whether He is telling the truth or lying when He speaks thus about Himself. Are they Messianic works, yes or no (vs 37,38)? Again the Lord Christ ties them with all power to that testimony of works. If they really are not Messianic then the Jews are correct in making their accusations and taking up stones against Him. On the other hand, if His works deliver a clear testimony that they are Messianic works, then those works would have to convince them that the conclusive force of Psalm 82 is binding and that Jesus’ self-revelation as the Son of God is true.

- g. These verses are also important in connection with the authority of the Scriptures. We see that people everywhere, by appealing to the so-called ‘human character’ of Scripture, undermine its divine authority. We certainly profess that the Holy Spirit, at the inspiration of the Scriptures, took people - the writers of the Bible - into His service with the full engagement and use of their person, natural ability, character, own research, etc. (cf. Luke 1:1-4). We can call this the human factor of the Holy Scriptures. However, the Holy Spirit has employed this human factor in such a way that whatever was written became the infallible and trustworthy Word of God. Many, however, separate this human factor from the work of the Spirit of God and make this ‘factor’ an independent entity, in such a way that Bible criticism receives full room to manoeuvre. On the other hand it should be noted a.o. how the Lord Christ here - with reference to Psalm 82 - speaks about the Scriptures. Three points should be noted in this context.

In the first place, we should note how He uses the word “law”, in verse 34, to summarise all the Scriptures of the Old Testament into a unity. In the second place, the Lord uses the formula “It is written”, in the sense of “that which is written once and for always”. In this formula, the Jews professed the absolute authority and divine power of the Old Testament. The Lord Jesus makes this profession completely His: He concurs fully with this divine authority and this absolute power. This is the strength of His calling

upon the Scriptures before the Jews. In the third place, He says, "Scripture cannot be broken" (vs 35); that is to say, the Scripture has and will keep normative authority throughout all times and in all circumstances. Whoever, then, denies and opposes the normative authority of the Scripture on the basis of its divine authority, at the same time opposes the Lord Christ Himself and declares that He had a faulty and primitive insight into the Scriptures. That person has also removed the conclusive proof which the Lord uses to declare of Himself: "I am the Son of God".

- h. Although the Jews do not know how to answer the Lord Jesus, they harden themselves even more in their unbelief. Although they want to capture Him, they are unable to do so, because the hour of the Lord, the hour of the Father, has not yet come. It becomes more and more clear that the arrest and death of the Lord are chance events which would befall Him; they are not a course of fateful events that He can do nothing about. But His dying will be a self-surrendering in death. At the Father's hour, He will bring the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world.

3. In Peraea (verses 40-42)

- a. In the chapters 7 to 10, John has described the rapid escalation of the conflict between Jesus and the Jews. After 10: 30, the situation has become so tense that it could easily result in the horrible arrest and death of the Lord Jesus at any moment. However, that time is not determined by the Jews but by the "hour" of the Father. Because that hour has not yet come, Jesus withdraws Himself from the Jews by going to Peraea, the district on the other side of the Jordan, in the area where John the Baptist first started his work. It is not revealed how long Jesus remained there. We do, however, gain the impression that this was a time of relative peace and refreshment for Him before the fulfilment of the last and most difficult part of the Father's work plan would demand all of His energy in spirit and body. The influence of the Jewish leaders is rather minimal in Peraea. The people there are much freer from the tyrannical oppression of the Jewish leaders and are therefore more receptive to Jesus' preaching.
- b. The memory of the work of John the Baptist was still very much alive in Peraea. John's preaching concerning the Lord Jesus had not been forgotten. This preaching proclaimed that this Jesus is the Christ, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. It was three years ago that this had been pronounced and since then, the people in this remote region had not heard or seen much of Jesus. Now that He is spending some time in their midst, however, they flock to Him. His preaching brings many of them to faith. At the

time they had thought it a great lack that John performed no signs to prove that he was truly the herald of the Messiah. In this they were true Jews (cf. Luke 11:29; John 6:30; 1Corinthians 1:22). Now that they hear the preaching of the Lord Jesus, however, they are forced to acknowledge that John had spoken the truth concerning Him (vs 41). This text is a beautiful illustration of the fact that it is not the performance of signs but the preaching of the Gospel which works faith (cf. Romans 10:17). Note also the emphasis placed on the word “there” in verse 42: it points out the vivid contrast between these very ordinary people who put their faith in the preached Word, and the Pharisees and Scribes in Jerusalem “whose pride listens to no reason, no matter how clearly it sounds in their ears”. In the light of what has happened and is about to occur, this must indeed have been a period of refreshment for the Lord Jesus. The rejection by Jerusalem does not at all mean that His work is a failure. With this comforting knowledge, He may now enter the night of suffering and death.

Questions

1. *The Bible nowadays is seen as a human book. It is said to contain many contradictions and opinions of various authors. What was the Lord Jesus’ attitude towards the Bible of His days (the Old Testament)? Which two points become apparent to you in connection with this (vs 34,35)?*
2. *Can unbelief and the hardening of one’s heart against instructional admonitions be in any way excused? e.g. By saying, “I had no choice”?*
3. *Miracles and signs do not bring a person to faith. From where must our faith come? (cf. Luke 16: 27-31).*