

If you are with us for the first time today, my name is Rick and I serve as the lead pastor here. We have been on this journey through the gospel of John for a year and a half. What a journey it has been! We come today to John, chapter ten, verse twenty-two and we are going to wrap up this series that we have entitled, "Does God Really Care About Me?" About you? So, I want to start by reading from verse twenty-seven. I want to ask you to lean into this verse. If you feel a little bit drowsy, maybe from too much lunch, shake that off and try to lean into this. All of you joining us online, I hope you are tapped in as well. Listen to the promise that Jesus makes in verse twenty-seven, to you and me. John 10:27. He says, *"My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me."* Here is my favorite part. *"And I give to them eternal life."*

I want to set this up by sharing this with you. A few years back I was in Louisville, Kentucky. I did some graduate study there, and one afternoon after class was out, it occurred to me that I had never really seen the city of Louisville, so I got into my car and drove toward downtown to check it out. I'm not quite sure where I ended up down there, but it was right by the Ohio River, which cuts right through downtown Louisville. At any rate, I parked my car, got out, and started walking down this street with the Ohio River flowing right along beside me. It was so peaceful. But folks, all of a sudden it was like the sky opened up and it just started pouring down rain on me. It was like a deluge coming down. I ran as fast as I could to this downtown overpass, and I just stood there waiting for the rain to let up.

Now, slip into the scene with me because this street was between me and the Ohio River, which was flowing to my left. Over to my right was this large building that looked something like an old train station. I'm not quite sure what that building was, but I remember it having this high pitched roof, a very steep roof. I stood there in the rain and as I did I saw something happening on the top of that roof that fascinated me, because I noticed that the drops falling on the front side of that building were running down that roof into a drainage pipe across that street in front of me, and then down in an embankment and right into the Ohio River. So I stood there looking at this for about two minutes and then this thought hit me. Folks, in the pouring down rain – and this is your dumb pastor – I ran out behind the back side of that building and I noticed that the raindrops falling on the back side were having a completely different journey than those on the front side.

Just like the front side, they hit the roof and ran down the roof, ran into a drainage pipe, but from there, straight into the ground. I thought to myself: those raindrops are having a very short journey. Those drops ran off the roof into the downspout and then

went dead into the ground. But I love it, because those raindrops that fell on the front side of the building were beginning an endless journey. Those drops hit the roof, went into the drainage pipe, went across that road, down into that embankment and into the Ohio River. Folks, I don't have to tell you that from there they would begin a journey that would carry them hundreds and hundreds of miles down the Ohio River. Then they would flow into the mighty Mississippi River. From there they would flow hundreds more miles downstream, past all these cities, through all of these states, all of the way down to the Mississippi delta, and from the Mississippi delta into the Gulf of Mexico, and from the Gulf of Mexico they would flow out into the endless waters of the ocean.

So I looked at those drops on the front side and I thought, "That drop right there is beginning an unstoppable journey that is going to take it out to the endless waters of the open ocean. But folks, don't miss this. Which journey the drops took, the short journey dead into the ground, or the endless journey all the way out to the ocean, totally depended on which side of the roof that drop landed.

Now let me turn a corner and draw an analogy to that, because what an image of the two journeys facing you and me. By that, I mean we can take the short journey in life that dead ends into the dirt, into eternal death. That is an option. You can take that journey, or you can take the endless journey that leads to everlasting life. Folks, don't miss this, because the dividing point between which trajectory your life takes depends totally on what you do with Jesus. In other words, just like the roof was the dividing point between the short journey and the endless journey, just like that, Jesus is the dividing point between eternal death and eternal life.

Now, here is my proposition today. For those of us who are following Jesus, you are on the endless journey. It is like you have already hit the front side of that building and you are on an unstoppable journey that is going to lead you to eternal life. But here is what you need to know. This journey has two parts to it. You say, "What are those parts?" Well, we are going to find out as we go back to John, chapter ten.

I want to give you two thoughts today about the endless journey. Watch what Jesus has to say. The endless journey begins in this life. It doesn't begin when you get to heaven. It begins now. So watch what Jesus says, with that in mind. Listen to verse twenty-two. John 10:22. *Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. (24) The Jews – specifically, that would be the Pharisees – who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered; "I did tell you, but you do not believe."*

Now folks, stop right there and let me put this in the vernacular, because those people were choosing not to believe. They were making a willful decision not to believe in Christ, and in so doing it was as if they were aiming their life at the backside of that building, at the unbelieving side of the building which leads to death and to eternal death. In fact, 1st John 5:11 puts it this way: *"God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life. Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."* Folks, do you see the contrast? In other words, what Jesus is saying is that people who turn away from Christ are aiming their life – and you may be doing this – at eternal death. Transverse: Those who follow Jesus, who turn to follow Him, you are aiming your life at eternal life. Again, Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me, and I give them eternal life."

Folks, here is how that works. Eternal life is given when you turn to Christ; when you turn to Him. Watch what Jesus says, again. He says, "My sheep listen." We don't just hear, but we listen. People who get saved listened to His voice. Stop there for a moment. That word "listen" is very explicit. It is a translation of the Greek word *acouo*. What does that mean? *Acouo* is the word from which we get acoustics. The idea is, we don't just hear the voice of Jesus in our hearts, a lot of people do that, but the idea is that we listen to that voice. We pay attention to that voice. People who get saved actually listen to that voice in their heart, pay attention to that voice in their heart, and they turn to Christ and follow Him and in so doing they are on the journey that never ends.

Now, as ethereal and intangible as hearing the voice of God may be, and I get that, but we all know what it is to sense the voice of God in our heart. If you are here and you don't even believe this, you know what it is to sense God's voice in your heart, wooing you to come to Him, wooing you to follow Him. Listen, when you hear that voice in your heart, you either turn to Christ or you turn away from Christ, and there is no middle ground. You either turn to Him or you turn away from Him in rejection.

Let me give you an image of this. Maybe it will help you. How many of you have ever seen the TV program called *The Voice*? A lot of you have. Maybe some of you haven't. For those of you who haven't, let me give you the quick story on it. To begin with, in *The Voice* these singers will walk up on stage and they will audition their voice to a panel of judges. If you have ever seen it, the panel of judges are these famous people like Blake Shelton, he's a country singer, Usher has been on there, and I can't remember all the others. But these are very famous people. At any rate it looks like this. These judges, these famous people, sit in these red chairs with their back to the contestant, so they cannot see the contestant at all. They can only hear the

contestant's voice. That person begins to let their voice be heard, and if one of those famous people, as they sit there and listen to that voice, as they hear that voice, pay attention to that voice, and if they like that voice, if they want to connect to that voice, you know what they do. They hit a button that turns their chair around to face that person. Then they and that person join together and begin a journey together through the competition.

I love that, because what a picture of us and Jesus. If you are here today and you are not a believer, you need to know that His voice in your heart calls to you; and what He is calling you to do is to turn your chair to Him, because when you turn your chair, He wants to take you and Him together and begin this endless journey through life that will lead you all the way into the eternal state. But when some people hear that voice, and again maybe this is you, they just don't turn around. They just don't listen. They just don't respond.

They are like Hebrews 3:12 says. It says, "*See to it brothers and sisters that none of you have a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.*" But here is what I love. For those of you who are believers, if at some point in your life, at some point in my life, we sort of did this, didn't we. We turned, and when we did, we started to follow Him, here is what happened. Turning to Christ initiates a relationship with Him. This concept comes up over and over in Jesus' words. It is all about a relationship with Him. Listen to what He says. He says, "My sheep, the ones who become His sheep are the ones who listen. They turn, and watch this: Then He says, "I know them." He doesn't know everybody else, but He knows His own sheep.

By the way, the word "know" there, the Greek word *ginosko*, doesn't mean to know intellectually. He knows everybody intellectually. It means to know someone relationally; to know them personally; to know them intimately; to know them closely. Let me give you an idea how this word is used to make perfect sense to you. The Bible will say something like this. It will say, "Adam knew his wife, Eve, and she bore him a son." She got pregnant, and had a son. Now, I don't have to tell you that when it said "Adam knew her" it doesn't mean Adam sat over in a corner and said, "Eve, I think I know you now. Go have a baby." It means he knew her in the most intimate, personal, close relationship possible between two human beings. Folks, that is the idea of this word that Jesus said, "I know you". In other words, when you become His sheep, He doesn't just know about you; He knows about you; He knows everything about you, the good, the bad, and He loves you through all of it. But more than that, He now knows you in the most personal, intimate, close relationship possible in the universe. That is you and God, one on one in life, walking together, loving each other together, knowing

each other together, and doing right together. Folks, without equivocation, this is the most wonderful life possible: You and God in a relationship, going through life together.

Now, for some of you, God bless you, you may be here today and for whatever reason you've kind of kept the chair without turning around. You sense that voice, but you haven't turned to Christ because you think in your mind that His voice is calling you to religion. So you think, if I turn around, what He wants to do is put religion on me. If I turn around, I've got to be religious. If I turn around, He is going to throw these routines, the formality, a rule book on me, and you just don't want to do that. You don't want to become religious. Listen, here is a news flash for you: Nor does God. You were created for something much higher than religion. You were created for a relationship with God. In other words, when God made the decision to bring you into this world, He had one purpose, and that was not religion. It was to have a relationship with you. Any guidelines that God puts on you, any commandments that God puts on you, they are all for your own good. They are all to protect you. It's not we are just religion; we're just a bunch of stuff that is put on you for no rhyme or reason at all, it is all for protection.

Here is what you need to know. It is about a relationship. The relationship calls you to follow. Jesus said – and watch the sequence – “My sheep listen”. We listen. We turn. Then He says, “I know them.” It gets very personal, and they what? They follow. So get it folks. Here is the sequence. The same voice in your heart that calls you to start the relationship with Christ, that same voice in your heart is always calling you to follow Him in the relationship; to stay on the path; to follow the Good Shepherd; to stay with Him all the way. That's what that voice is always doing.

You might be saying, “Rick, come on! How do I hear God's voice?” Well, it is simple. Here is how you hear. *“My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me.”* How do we hear God's voice? You hear His voice in His word. That Bible you have in your hand is the very Word of God. It came from the heart and the mind of God, and it is God's voice. It is God's voice that speaks to your mind. God never bypasses your brain. The Bible is God's voice that speaks to your heart. God always aims at your heart. The Bible is God's voice that speaks to your conscience. Listen: This voice is always telling you; “Follow the Shepherd. Stay with the Shepherd. Stay on the path. Stay behind Him.”

Now, I don't have to tell you. There are a lot of other voices out there calling us to follow them, aren't there? Often they are calling us to go away from Him. I'm talking about the voices of temptation, adultery, lust, hate, bitterness, jealousy, greed, to have

more and more and more of what you already have enough of. These voices call us further and further away from God. Folks, here is what I love about us who are the sheep. We know the difference between these two forces, don't we? We know which one is the Shepherd, right? We know which one is not the Shepherd. We don't always go with the Shepherd. Sometimes we go with the other voices, but we know the difference, and we should be like good sheep, and that is, don't listen to those other voices out there. Only listen to the voice of your Shepherd.

I want you to imagine you are one of the sheep, and when you hear the voice of temptation, the next time you hear the voice of adultery, the next time you hear the voice of lust, the next time you hear the voice of bitterness, the voice of jealousy, the voice of greed calling you to more and more. The next time you hear those kind of voices, I want you to ask yourself: "Is that the voice of my Shepherd?, or is that a voice that wants to destroy my life?" Because folks, have no illusions: all temptation, no matter what form it comes to you in, is always designed to destroy your life. All temptation is designed to destroy your faith, your family, your future, and then your fun. Let me say that again, and in that order. All temptation is first designed to destroy your faith in God. It tries to pull you away from God. Then it destroys your family; then it destroys your future, and eventually it destroys your fun in life. That is what temptation is designed to do.

The next time you hear the voice of temptation, here is what I want you to do. Like those sheep, don't even look up, but only listen to the voice of the Shepherd in your heart and always stay with Him. Always stay close to Him. Always follow Him, and here is why. The endless journey begins in this life, and here is what I love: The endless journey is assured. It is going to happen, and here is why. It is going to happen because you already have eternal life. You are not going to get eternal life. If you are a believer, you already have it. That is why Jesus said, *"My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me, and I give them eternal life."* In other words folks, the moment you turned your chair around to Christ, you were given eternal life. The idea is, you are not going to get eternal life when you get to heaven. You know, we always hear that when we get to heaven Peter is going to be at the gate. Who concocted that, is what I want to know. That is religion for you, by the way. Peter, St. Peter, whatever that means, is going to be at the gate and St. Peter will decide if you get eternal life. That's a theory you can immediately reject, out of hand. That ain't gonna happen, folks! What is going to happen is this, if you are a believer. You already have eternal life, so that when you die, instant heaven: no lights, no tunnels, no floating, no weird stuff, no St. Peter at the gate; just instant heaven. That is why Jesus said in John 3:36: *"Whoever*

*believes in the Son has eternal life.* "What kind of verb is "has". Present tense, meaning you already have it. It is in you. This means your destination is guaranteed. That is why Jesus said, *"My sheep listen to my voice. I know them, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish."* Folks, don't miss the strength of that promise, because what that means is once you turn the chair around, and receive Christ as your Savior, from that moment on, I don't care what you do or what anybody else does, you cannot perish from that moment on. There is nothing you could do that would cause you to perish, because you have been given everlasting life. It's just like the moment that drop of rain hits the front side of that building, versus the back side; the moment it lands on the front side, it is unstoppably, inexorably headed out to the ocean. Nothing is going to stop it. It is going to go into the Ohio River, down to the Mississippi River, down to the delta and out to the ocean. The idea is, the moment you trusted Christ, you put your life on the front side of the building and nothing can stop you. You are on your way to eternity with God.

So, what does this mean? It means you can follow with confidence. You can follow on, carry on, with confidence. Why? Listen to what Jesus said. *"My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish."* He says, *"No one will snatch them out of my hand."* You are in Christ's hands. You are in His grip. If that doesn't cinch it for you, look at verse twenty-nine. He brings the Father in. This is the God head. He brings the Holy Spirit, God, everybody in. *"My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all and no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."* You are in the grip of Christ and you are in the grip of God Almighty. Listen: The Trinity would have to dissolve itself for you to be lost again. That is how tight you are. You are in the Father's hand. You are in Christ's hand, and you are headed for eternity.

Folks, let me help you understand what that means. Don't miss this. That means as you walk through this life, there are probably going to be times when you are going to fall into sin. But when you do, you are in the Father's hand, and His hand is always underneath you when you fall. Let me give you an image of that. I want you to think of the Christian walk as a high wire that you have got to walk across from this life to the next life. You've got to walk across that line and I want you to imagine that one slip into sin and you fall in the abyss below, lost forever. But then, you come to Christ, and when you do it is like He stretches a net underneath you, all the way from this life to the next life. That net is His very own hand. Now when you are walking in this life and you fall into sin, you don't fall into the abyss. You are not lost again. When you fall into

sin, you fall into the loving hands of God, every time; no matter how many times you blow it.

Folks, you wouldn't believe the amount of emails I get, almost every week, somebody is texting me, emailing me: "Pastor Rick, you won't believe what I did. Could God ever love me? I think I am lost. I don't think God wants me. I don't think God loves me anymore." Listen, every time you fall, you are in His hands. Every time you slip, you are in His hands. Folks, do you see how this changes the emotion of the Christian walk? Do you see the confidence that God gives you to walk with Him, knowing that if you fall into sin, you are not lost again. God does not turn off the love. God doesn't say, "Oh, you are not on the journey anymore." Every time you fall, you fall into His hand.

Don't get me wrong. This doesn't give you the right to go out and live like hell. Right? It doesn't. It doesn't mean you are on the wire and you just into sin you go. You see, that would be to abuse God's love, wouldn't it? That would be to abuse the net. But if you walk with God, and some of you are struggling with the sin that just snags you. You think: Maybe God is going to give up. No, every time you are in His hands, you are in God's hands. He is going to catch you because He loves you. Again, don't abuse that. He is there to catch you. You are in good hands with Christ; and you walk with confidence.

I want to close with this, because some of you are here today and you are on the journey, you are on the way but you came in today and life is just hard for you. You are just way down with hard times, tough times. Well, let me tell you this. This life, at best, is like the water drop that hit the right side of the building, but it's in the drain. This is life on earth, at best. It's like that drop of rain that goes down the downspout and is crossing the road. It is hitting the gravel and concrete and down the embankment and into the mud, but inexorably it is going into the Ohio River, and from the Ohio River it has a journey of hundreds and hundreds of miles out to the open ocean. It is going places.

You see, this life is the downspout, and not only that, you are headed for heaven, but heaven is like the Ohio River. Heaven is like the Mississippi River. I always tell you, heaven is not the permanent home for the believers. It is temporary. When you read the end of the Book, Revelation, chapter twenty-one, the Bible says God is going to create a new earth, and we are going to a new earth, a new planet – just like it was in the Garden of Eden. You are not going to be a ghost. You are not going to be an angel sitting around on a cloud, playing a harp the rest of your life, bored to tears. Nobody wants that. You are going to an earth, just like this, with a body like you have now, without the possibility of sin, or death, or disease, or sorrow, or depression, or

sadness, or hate, or bitterness. All of that is gone. That is your destination, and as you are going along, always remember: He has got you in His hands. You can never be pulled out of His hands. You cannot do nothing to get out of His hands. You are going to heaven, like it or not. You are going, and you are going to love it. You are in His hand. Do you remember that old song, "He's got the whole world in His hands: Would you help me sing it. Let's sing that together.

Maybe you are here today, you are listening to this, and you have never turned to Christ. Maybe you are wishing you were in His hands. "I wish I was on the endless journey." "I wish I had a relationship with my Creator." "I wish I was headed for eternal life." Listen, if that is the desire of your heart, here is good news. All you need to do is turn to Him. Let's bow our heads in prayer with that in mind.

While all of our heads are bowed and eyes are closed, let me ask you this question. Do you know for certain that you are in the hand of God, and that you are on the endless journey, that you hit the right side of the building, and if you died today, do you know, not do you hope so, but do you know K N O W that you will go to be with Him? If you know that beyond any shadow of a doubt, while nobody is looking around, would you raise your hand as a testimony to that fact? You say, "Rick, I know that beyond any shadow of a doubt." God bless you. Many hands! You can put your hands down.

I always notice when I ask that question that there are folks who couldn't raise their hand. Maybe that was you, and you say, "Well Rick, the reason I couldn't raise my hand is because I don't know that I have eternal life." Maybe at the same time, you wish you did know that. You wish you were in God's hands. You wish you were on the endless journey. Listen, if you are wishing that, you need to know that is the voice of God in your heart, calling you. If that is what you are feeling in your heart, I want to pray for you. I'm not going to come to you, nor is anybody else, but I want to pray for you. I need to know who to pray for, so if that is the desire of your heart and you have never really turned to Christ, and you don't know that you are in His hands, but in your heart you wish you were, I want to pray for you. So, I want to ask you right now while no one is looking around; this is between you and God, you say "Rick, pray for me. I want to be in God's hands. I want go on the endless journey. If that is your prayer, just slip up your hand while nobody is looking, all over the building, saying "Rick, pray for me. I need what you are talking about."

If you have your hand up, you need to know you are not alone. There are about thirty people in here that have their hands up. Now, you can put your hands down. For all of you who raised your hands, I've got great news for you. The Bible says, "Every one, that means you, who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." So, how do you get

saved? You don't have to join this church, you don't have to become a member of anything. You don't have to get sprinkled, or confirmed. The Bible says what you have to do is you just have to call on Him. It's like turning the chair to Him, and He says He will give you eternal life, just for the asking. Why don't you do that right there where you are seated, in the quietness of this moment? Why don't you call on Him? You might say, "Rick, I'm not sure what to say. I don't know how to put it." Well, let me lead you in a prayer. You pray this prayer, not to me; you pray it to God, quietly in your heart, because He is listening with all of His heart. You pray this prayer:

"Dear Lord Jesus, I know you are the Good Shepherd, and I have sensed your voice in my heart calling me for so long. I have listened to all the other voices: voices that may have led me away from you, but right now, today, I turn to you. I call out to you, and I ask you to forgive all of my sins, and I ask you to put me in your hand and to give me everlasting, eternal life. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for loving me. Thank you for caring about me. Thank you for putting me on the journey, for putting me into your hands. Thank you for giving me eternal life. May I from this day forward spend the rest of my life following you, and loving you, and being loved by you. In your name I pray. Amen!"