

Powerfully Kept

Jim Elliff

I've seen a few extremely powerful things. Just recently I watched a tornado whirling debris on the lawn as it rose up and passed us just beside our house. I know that it was insane to be outside watching, but power is intriguing. I've been in a tropical storm on the Florida coast, packed and ready to leave in an instant if it accelerated to a hurricane. I've felt the ground rumbling while watching a space shuttle launch, and I've circled three times in a small plane over the mighty Victoria Falls in southern Africa. I've faced an angry bull elephant in the wild and stood on the bed of an open truck in the middle a buffalo stampede.

I've also met a few powerful people—congressmen, CEOs of this or that—even a former president of the United States.

But how much more powerful is God than all of these?

It is interesting that Jesus would choose to talk about power in his teaching on sheep, but that's what He does in John 10. Perhaps it makes some sense when you think about how stupid and helpless sheep tend to be. They're good for being eaten, looking great on a hillside, and producing a few wool sweaters, but that's about it. They cannot be ridden or milked—whoever heard of sheep milk? They don't lead or even follow very well. And they are vulnerable to attack. Perhaps there is nothing so "eatable" as a dumb sheep, standing befuddled in the view of a hungry predator. They do need somebody else's power on their behalf.

Here's what Jesus said in that passage on sheep to some Jews when they questioned Him as to whether He was the Christ:

"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 eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." (Jn. 10: 27-28)

Then, to make the emphasis even stronger, He says,

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." (Jn. 10: 29-30)

These are power words—"My Father . . . is *greater than all*; and no one is *able* to snatch them out of My Father's hand."

The point Christ is making, of course, is that the "sheep" (that is, the true believers) are kept by the power of the One who is "greater than all" and that there is no force in the universe that has the ability to take these Christians out of His hands. Helpless sheep need such power.



In this passage there is the resolve to a misconception. It is the mistaken idea of many religious people that the security of the Christian is found in how tightly he or she can hold on to God. If the believer sins badly (an inevitability) and the grip is loosened, the once happy and secure believer drops into lost-ness. Then, through much effort and grieving, he struggles up to get a grasp on God again. This happens *ad infinitum* throughout the struggler's life. This kind of person would never speak confidently about security in Christ—no sense of rest or peace for this individual. To them, being a confident Christian sure of eternal life would be a matter of pride, since it implies an ability to hold on perfectly.

But is this what Jesus said? Not on your life! Jesus said the opposite, in fact. The point in what Christ said is not that the Christian is to hold on to God or lose it all; rather, it is all about God holding on to you. This is not a subtle shade of difference; it is contradistinctive in a most complete sense.

True believers are held "in Christ," not by an armed guard, or even the entire national guard, or the complete armed forces of the country, or even the armed forces of all the countries for all time. No, you are kept secure in Christ by the greatest power even known—God Himself. There has never been anyone able to snatch a person out of God's hands, once God has wrapped his fingers around him.

I'm not so excited about being called a sheep, but since God sees me that way, I am enormously energized by the fact that such a powerful Shepherd keeps me in the flock forever.

An unsuspecting child was running around the grounds of a baseball complex in the Midwest of the United States, having as much fun as any little girl could have. This was a safe environment as far as the mother was concerned, as she watched her other child play his game. But when the mother discovered her daughter was not in sight, she quickly jumped up and went to find her. This had happened before. She would be right around the corner, behind the refreshment stand, or under the bleachers. But this time, something was different—the moments passed, and the mother became frantic in her search. What the mother feared had happened—the child was abducted!

Perhaps few experiences in the imagination of parents could compare to abduction. The child who had been so much a part of the family, who had been the admiration and love of them all, in whom so much had been invested, and whose daily needs had been met for all those years, was now gone—gone for good.

But such abduction can never take place for the true Christian. You are kept by the power of God once you are His.

And nobody can snatch you out of the Father's hand!

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