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Gospel of John 10:27–30, ESV.

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

I want to sell you John.

This is the second to last verse of the Gospel of John: *²⁴ This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.* This line is one of the strongest pieces of evidence that the Apostle John wrote the Gospel of John. Here is why this is a significant issue. Luke, the person whom we believe wrote the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, was not an Apostle of Jesus. He was a gentile (or perhaps Hellenized Jewish) evangelical partner and mentee of Paul: Luke did not know Jesus. Mark, the person who is attributed as having written the Gospel of Mark, is someone we can't even properly identify. He might have been a cousin of Barnabas, and in this case, Mark was a surname, and his full name was John Mark. He, too, was an evangelical companion of Paul. He did not witness the ministry of Jesus, either. Then there is Matthew. Like Mark, it is tradition that associates him with a Gospel. Nowhere in

the text does the author say he is named Matthew. If it was Matthew, if it was *the* Matthew, then yes, he was indeed an Apostle and a close associate of Jesus, and a true witness to his work on Earth. But the author does not identify himself and very few biblical scholars believe he wrote the Gospel. So, the author, like Luke and Mark, probably got his material secondhand. Interestingly, it appears that Mark was written first, and then the authors of Matthew and Luke used material from Mark in their Gospels. That leaves the Gospel of John. It is unique in that there is no material in it that comes directly from the other Gospels. John does not include the parables, which are prominent in the other Gospels. The author might not even have had access to those Gospels; we simply do not know. This unique, single Gospel is the only one of the four that is quite likely to have been written by an actual associate of Jesus, a firsthand witness and an Apostle. That is why this passage is so important. It seems to identify the author as an Apostle: ²⁴ *This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.* And in fact, the author of the Gospel is unambiguous about what this means. Let me read to you the entire passage that ends with this line:

²⁰ *Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?"* ²¹ *When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord,*

what about this man?”²² Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!”²³ So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?”

²⁴ This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

This took place at the last supper – and only Jesus and the Apostles were there. So, there it is: Peter turns to this Apostle, who is called the disciple that Jesus loved, and who has written these things. The author clearly says he is an Apostle.

That would make the Gospel of John the one and only firsthand report - that we can be sure of - of the ministry of Jesus Christ. There is more evidence that the Apostle John wrote this Gospel. The Apostle John is never mentioned by name in this Gospel, although other Apostles, and many lesser-known people are referred to by their names. It would make sense that he was being modest and not making the story about himself, John. It is the Gospel of John that gives us a timeline of Jesus’ ministry, letting us know that it apparently took about three to three and a half years. The other Gospels do not clue us into the length of Jesus’ ministry. Also, unlike the other three Gospels, the author of John puts in tremendous detail into his story, often including minor facts that are not relevant to the overall story. All of this is the sort of content we find in firsthand histories. It strongly suggests that the author was there and was not getting his information by interviewing others.

The author also knows the Palestinian topography extremely well, providing minute, highly accurate details we do not find in the other Gospels. There are also repeated statements in the Gospel saying that he, the author, was there as a personal witness. In sum, this Gospel, unlike the other three, truly feels like a first-person account. But we do have to note that like the other three Gospels, the existing manuscripts do not fully identify the authors. We certainly do not have the originals of any of the Gospels, just fairly early manuscripts, dating from about the year 200 A.D. onward – more than a hundred years after Jesus left the Earth.

What about external evidence, information from outside the Bible, that speaks to the authorship of the Gospel of John? First of all, there is a tiny fragment of the Gospel of John, something about the size of a credit card, and containing fragments of seven lines of the Gospel, that might be dated as early as the year 125 A.D. This would put it so close to the life of John that the historical association of the Apostle John with this manuscript might well be accurate. And what about this tradition of associating this Apostle with this Gospel? A group of early church leaders, who are often loosely called the Church Fathers, all unanimously said that John wrote this Gospel. Irenaeus, a Greek Bishop born in the year 120 A.D., Clement of Alexandria, a Christian theologian, born in 150 A.D., and Tertullian, a priest born in 155 A.D. and living in Carthage, all believed that the Apostle John was

the author. Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, a Bishop from Smyrna who was born in the year 69 A.D., and Polycarp himself was a disciple of the Apostle John. Irenaeus wrote this: *“John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.”* It is believed that he got this information directly from Polycarp. Another person to put this belief in writing, that the Gospel was written by the Apostle John himself, was Theophilus of Antioch, around 180 A.D. In sum, there is dramatic historical evidence to support the argument that the Apostle John wrote this Gospel.

Why am I telling you all this? Because I want to sell the Gospel of John to you. I want you to read it. Let’s look at today’s quote, from Chapter 10 of John:

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.”

Our story starts in the beginning of Chapter 10. It’s the feast of the Dedication, which is known as Hanukkah, the eight day long Jewish festival that commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem in the 2nd century B.C. This happened after the Seleucids had desecrated it. Remember that a common construct in the Gospels is for Jesus to use these festivals as opportunities for teaching. After the Seleucids attacked, the Jews fought back and they reclaimed Jerusalem. There are

two themes to Hanukkah, as it was practiced in ancient times. The first is the role of God as the shepherd of Israel and the People of God as the sheep in God's fold. The second is the anticipation of God sending a shepherd in the line of David to be a king over the Jewish people. So, in Chapter 10, the Apostle John places his Lord in Jerusalem on this holiday. Jesus starts out by teaching the people about sheep and shepherds. He says that the only way into a sheepfold is by the door. Anyone entering by any other way must be a robber or a bandit. We, the sheep, enter into the sheepfold by going through the proper door, and that door is Jesus. Only in this way, can we have the Holy Spirit descend upon us. Jesus goes on to point out that there are sheep who have not yet entered the fold. These are the gentiles. But they will indeed hear, and they will indeed follow him. Jesus says this:

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

This says it all: We hear the voice of Jesus, telling us to model our lives after him, with peace, forgiveness, and love for all. In return, we begin an eternal life right now. It also gets at the heart of what makes the Gospel of John different. John focuses on the majesty of Jesus, his role as the Messiah and the fact that the true path to a life with God is through Jesus. This Gospel is about knowing God in

a truly deep and personal way. This is a very theological Gospel, but it is also quite readable. It's a beautiful read. This is the Gospel where Jesus says: *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

The Gospel of John has a specific focus that we don't see in the other three Gospels. John focuses on the benefits of eternal life now, in the present. He tells us that salvation is already within us. We can live out that eternal life right now in our present, earthly lives. This is because salvation is equivalent to knowing God, which is a relationship we develop through the son, Jesus. At the formation of that relationship, we pass from death to life. Here are words of Jesus, from Chapter 5:

²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

²⁵ "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.

John really wants us to know that a life with God is a joyous thing and it is ours now. This is from Chapter 10:

⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Jesus is all we need. It's that simple. We just open the gate by accepting Jesus and his ways into our lives. Then we find green pasture. I mean, I don't eat grass, but I

think we all get the idea. We find ourselves in a beautiful place in life, and we are living a temporal life and an eternal life – and we are living it to the full.

In Chapter 11 of the Gospel of John we find Jesus coming to Bethany, the home of Martha and her sister Mary. Martha and Mary's brother, Lazarus was sick. But by the time Jesus gets there, Lazarus is dead, and has been in the tomb for four days. Martha goes out to greet Jesus. Martha tells Jesus that if he had gotten there sooner, her brother would still be alive. Jesus tells her that her brother will "*rise again*". She says that she knows that he will rise again at the time of the final resurrection. Jesus responds in almost an ambiguous way. Rather than saying he is about to bring Lazarus back to life, he says this:

"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

John doesn't see our lives as ending when we die on earth and then a new life begins. Yes, Jesus is going to raise Lazarus, but the real point is that he is going to give Lazarus a continuous life, starting now and never ending.

In Chapter 17, Jesus prays for his Apostles. He is near the end of his ministry and his life on Earth. He knows that he about to be arrested. Before he begins, he centers himself by praying to God. He looks up toward heaven and he says this:

"Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ²For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those

you have given him. ³ Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴ I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.”

He's telling us that yes, he is the Messiah, and all of this has been in the works since before time began. Glory has been brought to Earth by the life of Jesus and we inherit that glory. And most importantly, *“Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”*

Finally, remember that it is the Gospel of John that gives us that incredible metaphor of being saved, of finding God through Jesus Christ. He is talking to Nicodemus, the man who is a Pharisee, and should be an enemy of Jesus, but Nicodemus has sensed that Jesus is indeed the path to God. Jesus gives him this advice, telling him what he needs to do to get onto that path. Jesus says: *“I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.”*

If you want to be sure that you are born again or if you simply want to renew your faith, read the Gospel of John. The honest truth is that we cannot know for sure that the Apostle John is the person who wrote this Gospel. But I personally believe that he is indeed the author of the most authentic, detailed, theological, majestic, and compelling Gospel.

Please pray with me:

God, thank you for the Scriptures that were preserved for us. We thank you for the Gospels that tell us of the life of Jesus, the life that we strive to emulate. Today, we celebrate the Gospel According to John, the one that makes it very clear to us that we find you through Jesus, and when we do that, we live life to its fullest. Amen.