Who Is Holding Whom?

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." John 10:27–28

There are days when we feel that we are holding firmly to Christ.

Our confidence is strong. Prayer comes readily. The Scriptures speak clearly to us, and we move through the day with a settled awareness that we belong to Him.

Then there are other days.

We are tired. Our thoughts wander. An old sin troubles us again. Something happens that we cannot understand, and the confidence that seemed so steady yesterday feels surprisingly fragile today.

And a question begins to form.

What if I cannot hold on?

It is an understandable question. But before we try to answer it, we should listen carefully to what Jesus said about His sheep.

He did not begin with the strength of their grip.

He began with His knowledge of them.

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." John 10:27

I know them.

We must not hurry past those words. The Shepherd does not care for an unidentified crowd. He knows His sheep. The one who feels weak today is not lost among the others or overlooked because someone else appears stronger.

He knows whom He is holding.

And then Jesus says something we could never have promised ourselves.

"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish." John 10:28

Eternal life is His gift. The promise that His sheep will never perish rests upon His authority to give it and His power to keep them.

If our final safety depended upon the steadiness of our confidence, we would have reason to be afraid. We know too much about ourselves to make our own strength the foundation of our peace.

But Jesus directs our attention to His hand.

"Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." John 10:28

Who is holding whom?

A small child walking beside his father may be holding his father's hand. From the child's point of view, he is holding on.

But when he stumbles, something becomes clear. His safety does not depend upon the strength of those small fingers. His father has hold of him.

The illustration is imperfect, as all such illustrations are. An earthly father has limits. Jesus' promise rests upon a power that does not.

He continues:

"My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one." John 10:29–30

The sheep belong to the Son and are held in the Father's hand. There is no uncertainty between the Father and the Son concerning their keeping.

That is where Jesus places our assurance.

We should not overlook what He says about His sheep. They hear His voice and follow Him. His promise is not an invitation to disregard the Shepherd and find comfort in a religious claim made long ago.

The comfort belongs to those who belong to Him.

But hearing and following must not be turned into another way of saying that our grip is what saves us. The sheep follow the Shepherd who gives them life. Their following does not make Him faithful. He already is.

On a difficult day, we may have very little confidence in ourselves.

That may be an honest assessment.

But we need not transfer our uncertainty about ourselves to the Savior. Our weakness does not establish weakness in Him. Our troubled feelings do not cancel His words.

We can bring Him our fear, confess our sin, and ask for help with the next step.

The hand that holds us belongs to the Shepherd who knows us.

Perhaps the question, then, is not simply, "Am I holding tightly enough?"

Perhaps we need to ask, "Who is holding me?"

And listen again to His answer.

"They shall never perish." John 10:28

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