

His Sheep Know His Voice – The Voice Series
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We are in a sermon series entitled The Voice. Our basic premise is that God is speaking and you can hear Him!

My sermon today is called His Sheep Know His Voice. My text is John 10:1-10. Jesus said in verse 4:

His sheep follow him because they know his voice.

In John 10 – Jesus contrasts true and false shepherds. The reason He was doing this was because of what happened in John 9. Jesus was attacked by the Pharisees for healing a blind man on the Sabbath. The Pharisees did not recognize Jesus as the son of God. By their own admission they did not know who He was. John 9:28-29 says

Then they hurled insults at him (the blind man) and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! (referring to Jesus). We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from.

They called Jesus a “fellow.” The language of this word is one of contempt. Jesus was standing right in front of them performing miracles and they declared they did not know where He came from or who He was.

We’re so hard on the Pharisees but how many times has Jesus been in our midst performing miracles and healings and we didn’t recognize Him or hear His voice? This is why in John 10 Jesus teaches that He is the true Shepherd.

That is also why in John 10 Jesus makes a clear distinction between true and false shepherds. John 10:1-2 says:

I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep.

In this passage – Jesus is telling us to be on guard – there are false shepherds who want to steal and kill.

In doing a study of false shepherds, I was surprised to see a variety of graphic descriptions for false shepherds. This includes things like:

Clouds Without Water	Trees Without Fruit
Dogs	Idols
Scorpions	Wandering Stars
Wolves	Watchmen that are blind and Ignorant.

These statements give us a clear picture of false shepherds. But just to be sure there is no confusion - Jesus paints a picture of a true shepherd.

So, let's look at the characteristics of a True Shepherd. Keep in mind that Jesus is the True Shepherd. As we study these characteristics of a True Shepherd we are studying the characteristics of Jesus so we can know Him and hear His voice.

Many of us are not hearing His voice because we don't have a true understanding of who Jesus is. Knowing who Jesus really is and hearing His voice go together. The two cannot be separated. That's why - my first point is:

1- THE TRUE SHEPHERD'S VOICE IS RECOGNIZABLE

If you have the right understanding of who Jesus is - you will hear His voice. John 10:3-6 says

The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what He was telling them.

It is interesting that Jesus uses the analogy of a shepherd and sheep. The shepherd metaphor shows up more than 500 times in Scripture. In Bible times shepherds and sheep were as common and familiar to people as cars and mechanics are to us today. You could gaze across almost any landscape and see a shepherd grazing his sheep. So Jesus knew the people would relate to this language

Here is the interesting thing about the shepherd, sheep analogy. It is based completely on relationship. Ancient, middle-Eastern shepherds lived in the pasture with their sheep for their entire lives. From the moment they were born the shepherd would take the sheep in his arms and warm them, caress them, feed them and speak to them.

The first voice the lamb heard was the voice of the shepherd. By the time a lamb grew up - it naturally knew the touch of the shepherds hand and the sound of his voice.

I found a video that perfectly illustrates what Jesus meant when he said his sheep listen to His voice but do not recognize a stranger's voice. It shows three people trying to call sheep in a field, but they do not respond. Then the shepherd calls the sheep and they immediately look up and run to him. The sheep totally ignored the voice of others but totally heard the voice of the shepherd. That's how we should be. We should totally ignore the voices of the world, or self or false shepherds and only answer the voice of Jesus our shepherd.

Jesus is our shepherd. We are His sheep. From the time we are born into the kingdom He cares for us. He longs to speak to us and guide us and protect us. Speaking of guiding us – my second point is:

2- THE TRUE SHEPHERD LEADS - HE DOESN'T DRIVE

John 10:3 says *He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.*

Notice this verse says he leads them out.
It doesn't say He "forces" them out.
It doesn't say He "drives" them out.
It doesn't say He "shoves" them out.
It says He leads them out.

Have you ever felt like you were being forced or pushed by God? That is not the voice of God. Jesus is a true Shepherd and a true Shepherd doesn't drive the sheep He leads them.

I heard a story that a tour bus driver taking a couple through through Israel's countryside. As he explained the history of the land he talked about the shepherd - sheep relationship. He talked about how the shepherd cares for the sheep, and how he feeds and protects them. He told how the shepherd leads the sheep and doesn't drive them.

Then he told a story of a previous tour. He said he was right in the middle of telling this same story, when he realized he had lost his audience. They were all staring out the window watching a guy chasing a herd of sheep. He was throwing rocks at them and hitting them with sticks.

So much for the bus driver's heartwarming story of the shepherds! He was so angry that he started yelling at the man. "I was telling these people about the gentle ways of a shepherd and here you are mistreating these sheep."

For a moment the man just stared at him with a puzzled look. Then he responded, "Man, you've got me all wrong. I'm not a shepherd, I'm a butcher."

This man was driving sheep rather than leading them because he was not a true shepherd. Jesus is the true Shepherd and His voice will always lead us, not drive us.

3- THE TRUE SHEPHERD IS THE GATE

John 10:7-8 says:

Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before Me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.

A doorway is an important part of any building. It marks the entry way where you get in and out. This means that a position by a doorway is a strategic place to be.

Porters stand by the doors of hotels and airports so they can open car doors and help people with their bags. Joe and I stand at the sanctuary or foyer door every Sunday so we can greet people as they leave.

When Jesus said “I am the gate”, he wanted to convey this idea of a doorway. To understand this we must understand the sheep pen.

The sheep pen was usually a crude structure made of brush, sticks, and rocks that stood about 4 to 10 feet high. It usually did not have a roof. But it never had a door.

The pen was necessary so the shepherd could protect his sheep at night. There were thieves and wild animals that would threaten the sheep. To protect the sheep at night – the shepherd would call them and they would follow his voice to the sheep pen. When all the sheep were inside the shepherd himself would lie down in the entrance. He literally became the gate. He literally became the doorway to the sheepfold.

This is what Jesus meant when he said, 'I am the gate.' He is saying is that He is the entrance to life. We see this truth in verses like Psalm 118:19-20

Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter.

John 14:6 says:

Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

Notice that Jesus is the only entrance. The sheep enclosures only had one entrance. This one entrance meant nothing went in or came out without going through the only door available. Jesus was identifying Himself as the only hope, the only voice and the only entrance for the sheep! It is only Christ that can change a wicked heart to a godly one, Christ alone has the power to save!

All roads DON'T lead to heaven! Don't let anyone pull the wool over your eyes. It has become politically correct to believe that all religions are right and that if you're sincere you will be saved too.

Jesus obliterates any such thought in John 10. There can be only ONE gate into the sheep pen, and Christ Himself is that gate! The claims of Christ are exclusive. He said: 'I am the door to life; there is no other; there is only one way.' There is only one voice. Everyone who has promised eternal life through any other way except Christ have been thieves and robbers.

The only safe way is Jesus Christ, the true gate!
The only voice to follow is the voice of Jesus our True Shepherd.

The only sense of protection the sheep had was from the shepherd who became the "gate." They knew that they were safe as long as the "gate" was there. This was the only way in, and the only way out.

No sheep in their right mind would refuse to use the "gate"...since it was the only one! Why anyone would reject the only entrance to God is beyond understanding ... yet so many do! Why is this? Psalm 20:7 says:

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

In Bible times armies relied entirely on chariots and horses. They provided a huge advantage in defeating the enemy. Chariots and horses represent man's solution, man's strength and man's self-sufficiency. A chariot is anything we are depending on other than God.

Maybe your chariot is your paycheck or your job?
Maybe it's your degree or your education?
Maybe it's your outgoing personality or your ability to influence people?
Maybe it's your disciplined lifestyle or your good behavior?

The question is - does my life reflect self-sufficiency or God dependency? Am I listening to His voice or following my own?

This is a difficult question to answer because it is so ingrained in us to do things in our own strength. It is like pulling teeth to get us to admit we can't handle something or that we are weak. Often times God has to get us to the end of ourselves before we listen to His voice and accept His help.

In this way we are very much like the sheep Jesus speaks of in John 10. Did you know that it is not uncommon for sheep to wander off while they are grazing? They like sweet grass and sometimes they will jump down ten or twelve feet to get it, and then they can't jump back again.

However, when the shepherd hears them bleating in distress he will leave them there for days before he helps them. He will wait until they are so faint they cannot stand, and then he will put a rope around them and pull him out. So, "Why doesn't the shepherd help when the sheep first gets stuck?" Because sheep are so very foolish that they would go right over the edge trying to save themselves.

And the same is true of us; we would go right over the edge trying to save our self. We don't let God help until we have completely exhausted our own strength.

Yet, the Good Shepherd will rescue us the moment we give up trying and let Him save us His way.

But it doesn't end here. Once we recognize God's voice and quit going our own way looking for "sweeter grass"...then God will feed us because....

4- THE TRUE SHEPHERD FEEDS THE SHEEP

In John 10:9-10 Jesus said:

I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

The pasture is a place of nourishment for our soul. It is where we are spiritually fed. It is where we hear His voice. We find pasture and get fed by hearing God's voice in prayer and worship and the word of God. But most of all we find pasture in His presence.

We can pray and worship and read our Bible but if we are not experiencing His presence we only have religion. Jesus said in John 5:39-40

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life.

I ask you today...do you have eternal life in Jesus Christ? Or do you just have religion? Are you hearing His voice? Or following your own?

If Jesus is your shepherd He will speak to you.

If Jesus is your shepherd you will recognize and follow His voice.

If Jesus is your shepherd He will lead you.

If Jesus is your shepherd you will enter through the gate and find safety in Him.

If Jesus is your shepherd He will feed you and nourish you.

Today the true shepherd is speaking... "Come follow Me."

Will you hear His voice and answer the call?

Let's pray.