

Discerning the Voice of God

John 10:1-10

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Several years ago, Bob's Famous Ice Cream Shop in Bethesda, MD was robbed, but manager Nathan Peabody was warned ahead of time. Moments before the robbery, he was contacted by telephone.

The voice said:

- Are you the manager?
- Listen carefully, don't panic.
- This is the police. You are going to be robbed.
- Do not resist.
- Let the robber have your money.
- We will be waiting right outside your store and we will catch him.
- Thank you for your cooperation.

Moments later, a man with a scruffy beard and a knife walked in and demanded the money. Mr. Peabody, the store manager took the cash out of the register and gave it to the man. After the robber left the store, Mr. Peabody watched and waited for the police to arrest the robber.

Instead, the robber got into his car and drove away. As the store manager saw the taillights disappear in the distance, he realized that the phone call did not come from police, but from the thief himself.

In the spiritual realm, it is important for us to discern God's voice and not be confused with someone else's. In John 10:1-10, Jesus is the shepherd, and we are the sheep.

Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.^[a] They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. This is the Word of God.

Jesus used this illustration of shepherd and sheep as the same type of relationship between the Lord and his people. In Biblical times, the number of sheep in a herd was relatively small and each animal was considered a valued pet.

To an untrained eye, all sheep look alike, but to the shepherd, he can tell the difference. And because of the unique character traits or individual markings, the shepherd is able to give each one of the sheep a name such as "Blackie, Whitey, Spot, Big Eyes, Gimpy, Pretty Boy, Grumpy and Happy".

It is the same with the Lord. Of the billions of people on earth, he knows us by name, and he does what is best for us.

And because the shepherd is always with the sheep, these gentle creatures have the ability to distinguish between their shepherd's voice versus another's. As Christian believers who live in the 21st century, we too understand Jesus' words, his will as we will follow him.

At night, when the shepherds bring their sheep to a common sheepfold or pen, they will inspect each animal for injuries. Once they are inside and fed. A hired worker would guard the gate of the sheep pen while the shepherds went home for the evening.

When morning arrived, the shepherds would arrive, they would give their distinctive calls and the sheep knew who to follow.

Known for their keen hearing, sheep are able to recognize their master's voice. That was proven a number of years ago, when a man in Australia was arrested and charged with stealing one of his neighbor's sheep. The man protested to the police and said that one of his own who had been missing, but they doubted his story and took him into custody.

When the case went to court, the savvy judge asked that this particular animal be brought into the courtroom. Then he ordered the man accused of theft to step outside and call the animal, which he did.

The animal made no response except to raise its head and look frightened. Then the judge instructed the other man who claimed that the sheep was really his to go outside into the courtyard and call the animal. When he began to make his distinctive call, the sheep ran towards the door.

It was obvious to all that the animal recognized the familiar voice. And the judge said, "His sheep knows him, case is solved."

I think if you were to ask any child what type of animal they would like to be. Their answer might be eagle, tiger, lion, elephant, or dolphin, but never sheep. If you think about it, lambs or sheep are never mascots or names of sports teams. Here in Hillsboro the high school team is named a Hillcat, which is a combination of a bobcat and a lynx.

What I want you to notice is that Jesus referred to his people as his sheep. Does anyone know why?

- Sheep are social creatures.
- By nature, they are docile creatures.
- By nature, they are followers.
- They have good memories.
- Sheep like routine.
- They react negatively to loud noises or yelling.

- They react better to calm or reassuring voice.
- Don't like the darkness.
- They can be timid or fearful.
- They are easily jealous and competitive.
- They are kindhearted.
- They are dependent on others and at times get confused.
- They need guidance and protection.
- They do have a habit of following other sheep and will get lost if not careful.

Sheep may not be the strongest or shrewdest in the animal kingdom, but their hearing is keen, and they will follow the voice of the shepherd. That sort of describes us and Jesus has love for all of us.

There are many voices in the world that clamor for our attention and unfortunately our Lord's voice often gets drowned out. Social media is the number one influence maker. Add to that we are bombarded with hundreds and thousands of advertising messages whether it be Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, internet product placement, digital banners, emails, search and video ads just to name.

Not too long ago I was at Shell gas station in Concord and was watching an ad as I pumped gas into my car. If we are not careful, all these things can drown out God's voice.

Steve Bartkowski, a successful the quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons in the 1970's and 1980's later is now a Christian believer and he had this to say about God's voice.

"For years the Bible was a dead book to me, like grits without the salt. But after I gave my life to Jesus Christ, I became alive. I saw that the Bible was God's way of talking to me".

To hear God's voice, let me suggest we start our day with the Scriptures. It could be listening to God's word on DVD in the car, reading a few chapters from your personal Bible or reading a devotion such as the Upper Room.

I would encourage you to join a Bible Study or go on-line for more depth on a subject. Have some quiet time with the Lord. Turn off the T.V. or shut off the internet. Ask God to reveal his will.

In the old "Directions" magazine, James Hamilton wrote about the time, someone had lost an expensive watch while he worked in an icehouse. An icehouse is where blocks of ice were kept long before the invention of refrigerators.

Well this person searched and carefully raked through the sawdust. Others looked, but their efforts proved futile, and they gave up. However, a small boy who heard about the missing watch and quickly found it. When asked how he did it, the boy said, "I closed the door and lay down in the sawdust and kept very still. Soon I heard the watch ticking."

Often the question is not whether God is speaking, but whether we are quiet enough to hear. Jesus is our shepherd and longs to lead us.

In my introduction, I spoke about the manager of Bob's Famous Ice Cream and Gourmet Express Deli who was embarrassed when he listened to the wrong voice.

There is a song, Day by Day by Godspell, and I would like to leave you with the Words of that song. May it become our daily prayer.

Godspell - Day By Day Lyrics

Day by day, oh, dear Lord, three things I pray
To see thee more clearly
Love thee more dearly
Follow thee more nearly, day by day.