

Elizabeth Elliot once wrote:

“Does it make sense to pray for guidance about the future if we are not obeying in the thing that lies before us today? How many momentous events in Scripture depended on one person’s seemingly small act of obedience! Rest assured: Do what God tells you to do now, and, depend upon it, you will be shown what to do next.”

The voice of Jesus is also a voice of peace and fullness. In our text, we are told that the Shepherd is also the gate. The gate was literally an open place in the pen and the Shepherd would lay down at night across the opening to protect the sheep from others and from themselves. Jesus also states in this text “I have come that they might have life and have it to the full.” There is a sense of protection and a sense of well being or peace in this statement. So, let me suggest that the voice of Jesus although it calls us to sacrifice and the way of the cross there comes with this call a peace and fullness of life. It sounds so odd to others who do not know Jesus, that one could live a life that is self giving and yet also find in that life fullness and peace. Yet, that is the exact promise.

It is prom season and many of you know that the “ask” is now mandatory for boys to ask girls to the prom. You don’t call someone up on the phone or get the courage to stop a girl in the hallway and stumble through the nervousness of asking her out on a date... especially the prom. No, the “ask” is filled with props, set ups, friends, and all kinds of techniques, and even more so now when it comes to engagement. You can’t simply go to a restaurant or your favorite spot as a couple pull out a ring and say do you want too. No, it is a production. So different from marriage proposal of C.T. Studd to his girlfriend in 1887, which said to his future wife Priscilla Stewart:

It will be no easy life, no life of ease which I could offer you, but one of toil and hardship; in fact, if I did not know you to be a woman of God, I would not dream of asking you. It is to be a fellow soldier in his army. It is to live a life of faith in God, a fighting life, remembering that here we have no abiding city, no certain dwelling place, but only a home eternal in the Father’s House above. Such would be the life:

May the Lord alone guide you. She eventually said yes, and the first thing they did before their marriage was give away to the ministries of Dwight L. Moody, William Booth and others the entire fortune Studd inherited from his father -- some 30,000 pounds. --Norman P. Grubb, C. T. Studd: Cricketer & Pioneer (London: Religious Tract Society, 1937), 84-85.

Charles Studd was a famous Cricket player in England, but gave that all up to become a missionary. He and Priscilla served in China, India and is best known for his work in the Congo where he would die. It was a life of sacrifice but it was a life of fullness.

Jim Elliot before his death at the hands of the very ones he was evangelizing would write in his journal, “I do not pray for a long life, but for a full one-like you Lord Jesus.”

Jesus’ voice calls us to peace and fullness.

Lastly, the voice of Jesus calls us to unity. Jesus says there are sheep of other pens, which belong to him, and they listen to his voice as well and the Good Shepherd will bring them together so that they might be one flock. The last thing I want to say to you is that Jesus’ voice always calls us to reconciliation, unity and inclusion of those God loves.

*You could say I’m a little bit crazy.
You could call me insane.
Walking ‘round with all these whispers.
Running ‘round here in my brain - says Chris Young.*

We hear voices. We hear the voices of those who have instructed us and loved us, but the voice we long for... is the voice of Jesus. Let me assure you the voice of Jesus comes from a relationship with Jesus, it is the voice of selflessness, it is the voice of obedience, it is the voice of peace and fullness, it is the voice of unity.

In the midst of all the voices we hear, let us learn to listen for the voice of Jesus.



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I Hear Voices

John 10:1-15



Country artist Chris Young sang a song a few years ago that I really like called “I Hear Voices”. The lyrics say:

*You could say I’m a little bit crazy.
You could call me insane.
Walking ‘round with all these whispers.
Running ‘round here in my brain.*

*I just can’t help but hear ‘em.
Man, I can’t avoid it .
I hear voices, I hear voices like...
My dad saying, “Work that job, But don’t work your life away”
And mama telling me to drop some cash in the offering plate on Sunday.
And granddad saying, “You can have a few, but don’t ever cross that line.”
Yeah, I hear voices all the time.*

If we are blessed by a family that loves us, friends that care for us and others who gave us their attention and time... we also hear voices. On this Mother’s day, I was thinking of my mom’s voice. I can think of things that she said to me that are a part of my decision-making and my living.

Three things my Mom would say, and let me add that I was raised on guilt. First she would say, “never be somewhere or doing something you would not want to be or be doing when Jesus returned.” Now that was truly a guilt filled statement, but I think it was her way of saying that I should live my life in the view that God is present all the time and in every place. That thought can keep us disciplined in our faith when we find ourselves in moments of temptation, but it also can keep us encouraged when we find ourselves in dark places in life. To remember that all of life is lived in the presence of God is a “good voice” in my head.

Another saying she would have is... “Glenn Jeffery, be sure that your sins will find you out.” Again, that is a guilt filled saying, but

it was her way of saying that sin is nothing to rationalize. Our sins are serious business and when we think we are getting away with something or that no one else knows, we are reminded that we know and God knows. We sin against God and thus God always knows my sin.

The third thing she would say is... “Always do your best.” I think that was her way of saying that we must live with a purpose. This life is a gift from God and how we live is important. What do we present to God each and everyday at work, at home, in our relationships? Is it our best?

I don’t know about you, but I hear voices. I am sure that you too, this Mother’s Day, can reflect on statements your Mom may have made and what they taught you. There are other voices in my mind as well, each day. There are the voices of my father, my grandfather and grandmothers, my brother, my mentors, my teachers and professors, my friends. These are just a few of the voices that accompany me and I am sure accompanying you each and every day.

However for those of us who follow Jesus, the one voice we want to hear above all other voices... is the voice of Jesus. It is good to have the voices of those we love and those who love us speaking to us, but the voice we all long to hear is the voice of Jesus. In our passage from John, Jesus says that he is the Good Shepherd and that his sheep know His voice and that they will follow no other. His sheep do not follow the voice of the stranger but only follow the voice of the Good Shepherd.

How do we hear the voice of Jesus? Henry Blackaby, in Experiencing God, always maintained that when the Christian cannot determine the voice of God, then the Christian is in serious trouble. However, many of us might admit this morning that we live anxiously and sometimes in a paralyzed state

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trying to discern the voice of Jesus. We, the sheep of his pasture, are many times uncertain of the voice of the Good Shepherd.

How do we hear the voice of Jesus in the midst of the clamor of our lives? How do we hear the still small voice over the shouting and screaming and talking heads of our culture? How do we hear the voice of Jesus over all the sale pitches? How do we hear the voice of Jesus when all we hear is one tragic story after another? How do we hear the voice of Jesus when we are hear of school girls who are kidnapped and sold into slavery, and school boys who are massacred in Nigeria? How do we hear the voice of Jesus in the midst of busyness, layoffs, prognosis, and our culture's continued call away from God and away from the church?

If you are like me, you long for it. We strain to hear it. We want to hear it. It is almost like we are listening for God and we are listening to a radio station that is fading. Soon, all we get is a word here or there. The signal is faint and interrupted and we turn up the volume only to hear more static. There are other stations we can turn to, but we want this one. We need this voice above all others. We know that no other voice but the voice of Jesus will do. So many times we are left to sit in the silence and wait for the voice of the Good Shepherd.

We long like the Psalmist who writes, "where can I go and meet God." The Psalms are filled with a longing to hear from God. There is a longing in all of our hearts to hear the one voice that is more important than any other voice. We as followers of Jesus need to be able to hear the voice of Jesus.

Jesus says in John 10 that is not only possible, but also essential in our relationship with Him. Jesus says that the Good Shepherd calls His own sheep by name and they listen to Him and He leads them out. Jesus says that His sheep do not follow the voice of the stranger. In fact, they run away from the voice of the stranger. Later, Jesus would say I know my sheep and my sheep know Me, just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father.

In Palestine, there was a special relationship between sheep and shepherds. In many places, sheep were raised for slaughter but not in Palestine. In Palestine, they were raised for wool. This would mean that the sheep spent many years with the Shepherd. Many times the shepherd would name the sheep like we might name a pet. It is not odd to name a livestock animal if you live on a farm. I know at my grandfathers' farm, us grandkids would always name the animals. There were cows with names and our favorite was Arnold the pig.

We would go to the pigpen and feed Arnold and then, one day we discovered for breakfast we were eating Arnold.

In Palestine, the Shepherd and the sheep had a caring relationship. The shepherd would lead the sheep to pastureland. The Shepherd would protect the sheep from predators. Archeologist tells us that shepherds even had a unique language with sheep that was almost musical. It did not sound like any other voice. Thus, the sheep could distinguish the shepherd from the stranger.

Jesus claims that our relationship with Him is similar. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, cares for us. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, leads us to the places in life where there is blessing and provision. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, seeks to protect us from that which would destroy us. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, calls us to follow.

What does the voice of Jesus sound like? How can we know that Jesus is speaking?

First, we need to think about how God speaks to us. How does God choose to speak to us? How did God speak in the past? God spoke to the ancients in various ways. Prior to the written law, God spoke through angels, burning bushes, and in ways that are hard to determine. God came to Adam and Eve as a companion in the Garden. God spoke to Noah, so that Noah knows what he is to do. God spoke to Jacob as one who contends with him by the Jabok River. God spoke to Moses in the wilderness. God spoke to Balaam through his donkey. The Old Testament is full of ways that God spoke. In the New Testament period, after Jesus' resurrection, the Holy Spirit came and spoke to individuals as well. The Spirit spoke to Peter about his exclusiveness toward the gentiles. Jesus spoke to Paul in a blinding light on the Damascus Road. No one else gest the blinding light. So, first we might say that God speaks to us as individuals. God will speak to you in a way that might be unique to you. I might not hear God's voice in the same way you do. God has always spoken in unique ways to those God calls.

Second, we must also realize that God speaks to us together. That is the purpose of the law and the scriptures. The Bible is God's word to us. The law was given so the people of God might know how to live in a way that was pleasing to God. The Bible, as a whole, is given to us so we might know how to live a life that is pleasing to God. I think the Bible is a word to us as much as it is a word to me. In fact, if we really read the scripture closely, we will discover how relational oriented it is. Jesus speaks of sheep plural; Jesus' sermons are how to live life in relation to God

and to each other. Much of Jesus' teaching is how to live life together and in relation to those in the world. The writings of Paul are for the church, not just for one individual. Much of Paul's instructions are meant to be read and applied in relationship in the church.

Thus, there is an underlying character to the Bible that the Word of God is for us and not just for me. I think this is important because although God does speak in unique ways to each of us, God calls us into community together. We live our faith together as sheep, not just a sheep.

Primarily, we must say that God speaks through Jesus. Jesus is God's only unique Son and the words, teaching and example of Jesus is the revelation of God. Thus, if we want to hear the voice of God... we must listen to the voice of Jesus. So if this is the case, then what are some ways to measure God speaking to us? In other words, when we have a decision to make, a consideration to consider, or a choice to follow... how can we discern the voice of Jesus?

Let me suggest three thoughts for your consideration from our text as you consider Jesus' voice in your life. The first is relationship. Jesus says the Good Shepherd knows the sheep and the sheep know the Good Shepherd. My friends, we cannot hear the voice of Jesus if we do not know Jesus. This seems elementary, but it is of utter importance. You cannot discern the voice of Jesus if you do not know Jesus. Until you enter into a relationship with Jesus through faith, the voice of Jesus will continue to be a voice of a stranger.

Too many people want to know God's will and God's activity, but are unwilling to enter into a relationship with God. The Bible teaches us plainly that we enter into a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. We accept that we have sinned, we accept Jesus died on the cross as payment for our sin and we ask for God's forgiveness and we make the choice to follow the Jesus as Lord of our lives. Until we make this decision of faith, we cannot know the voice of Jesus. We must begin with a relationship with Jesus through faith.

That relationship is also not a one-time decision. It is not enough to have an experience with Jesus and not follow Jesus. I like what Timothy Allen writes in

his book "When the Season is Dry." He writes that the call to discipleship that is following Jesus is not so much a call to go, as it is to come along. He called his disciples to follow Him or come along with Him. The call to go is filled with questions of where, when, how and living carelessly and dangerously through life. However the call to come along implies friendship and companionship.

You may be here this morning and you want to follow God, you want to do what is right, you question what God is up too. You wish you knew what God was doing. My friend, in the most loving way I know how to say this... you need a personal relationship with Jesus before you can hear the voice of Jesus day-to-day. You must begin at the beginning.

MY FRIENDS, WE CANNOT HEAR THE VOICE OF JESUS IF WE DO NOT KNOW JESUS. THIS SEEMS ELEMENTARY, BUT IT IS OF UTTER IMPORTANCE. YOU CANNOT DISCERN THE VOICE OF JESUS IF YOU DO NOT KNOW JESUS. UNTIL YOU ENTER INTO A RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS THROUGH FAITH, THE VOICE OF JESUS WILL CONTINUE TO BE A VOICE OF A STRANGER.

The second is sacrifice. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. The Good Shepherd is one of sacrifice that always is putting the sheep first. In some decisions, the way we can determine Jesus' voice from a stranger's voice is whether we are being called to be self-serving or self-giving. It is amazing how we can rationalize what is the voice of Jesus and yet when we are honest, it really is our voice doing what we want to do. The way of Jesus is the way of the cross. The way of Jesus is not self-seeking, nor

self-promoting, nor selfish, but always giving, putting others before self, seeking the good of the whole. In many of our decisions we must be honest and say, "is this self-seeking or is it really the way of Jesus?" The voice of Jesus calls us to way of the cross. Many times the voice of Jesus is not to the easy way, but the harder way.

The voice of Jesus calls us to obedience. I notice that sheep follow the shepherd because they know his voice. They follow. They go out and go in at the command and the act of the shepherd. We must not only know Jesus in relationship and recognize that Jesus' way is the way of the cross, but we must also realize that we are called to obedience. Jesus says that if you love me, you will keep my commands. The way we show we are following the voice of Jesus is that we read his words and we put them to practice. When it comes to making a decision about the voice of Jesus we simply ask does this directly go against something Jesus said or taught? Is my decision in keeping with being obedient to the commands of Jesus?