

# The Sheep of His Pasture

## John 10:22-42

Call: Ps 95; 79:13

### I. Intro

Thank you Christine and friends. Good morning! Is it possible to hear the voice of the Lord today like Samuel heard it back then? Jesus says, *"I am the good shepherd. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me"* (John 10:27). Is it possible to hear the good shepherd's voice today?

We come back to our studies in John this week, continuing in chapter 10, the good shepherd discourse. As we said last time, we are in the Feast of Dedication. Remember that's Hannukah, which has the shepherd/sheep theme running throughout its liturgy. So, it is during this feast that Jesus says he is the good and noble shepherd. And if you remember two weeks ago, we explored the first 21 verses of the chapter. We explored Jesus as the gate, as the good and noble shepherd and as the promiser and provider of an abundant life. As the gate, we have safety and security. As the good and noble shepherd, he cares deeply for his sheep, so much so he will lay his life down for them. And, as the promiser and provider of an abundant life, he leads his sheep from out front, inviting his sheep to come and follow him to new and lush pastures. And I left you with three questions to consider:

1. Who am I following?
2. What voice(s) am I listening to?
3. Where do I go for security and satisfaction, the abundant life?

As we explore the rest of the chapter today, I want to especially address question two, what voice(s) am I listening to? To do that, I will be focusing especially on verses 25-30 today.

### II. Another Intense Debate (22-24, 31-39)

Before and after these particular verses, there is another intense debate between the Religious Authorities and their followers and Jesus. So much so that they pick up stones to stone Jesus. I'm not going to read this debate because it rehashes much of what we've seen throughout the Gospel, summed up in verse 33, where they accuse Jesus that *"...you being a man make yourself God"* (33). In reality, they have it backwards. Though Jesus is God, the great I Am, he has made himself man, and Jesus asserts that his miracles are the evidence. The greatest one of all is coming next week – Lazarus! Jesus clinches his claim with this, *"The Father is in me and I am in the Father,"* another trinitarian statement (38).

Now, I invite you into our key verses today, John 10:25-30.

### III. Being Sheep (25-30)

*25 Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, 26 but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. 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." (ESV)*

#### A. Intro

Jesus is the good and noble shepherd and the Religious Authorities are not his sheep. They do not hear his voice, do not know him and do not follow him. But, for those of us who are his sheep, the sheep of his pasture, Jesus lists several privileges, the first two we briefly talked about two weeks ago.

#### B. Eternal life (28)

Verse 28, his sheep have eternal life. Jesus states the positive and the negative. His sheep will have eternal life *and* will never perish. Life through Jesus is really what this Gospel is all about. Life is God's bounty. God created us so that we may have life abundantly, and have life abundantly forever. And, we enter into that life by following the Good Shepherd now.

Unfortunately, sometimes we get caught up thinking that life is found in having a nice house or higher education or self-discipline. But, true life is found in Jesus and him alone. To be in Jesus is to be in life. To not be in Jesus, is to be out of life, because he is the way, the truth and the life.

#### C. Assurance (28-29)

Secondly, verses 28-29, his sheep have safety and security. This is to refer back to him being the door of the sheepfold. There is assurance in being the sheep of his pasture. Jesus says that nothing can snatch his sheep out of either his hands or his Father's hands. He and the Father both have steadfast and unshakable grips on their sheep.

No big bad wolves will come in and snatch his sheep away, not even the baddest wolf of all, death. He is saying that their grip is stronger than anything else in heaven or on earth. We have utmost assurance.

The Heidelberg Catechism from the 16<sup>th</sup> century captures this well. Question 1 asks, "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" Answer: "That I am not my own, but belong – body and soul, in life and in death – to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil... And, because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him."

That's the good news! Indeed, our assurance is not based on our weak and imperfect hold on him. Our assurance is rooted in God the Father and God the Son's firm grip on us!

Now, as I said last time, it's important to note that Jesus is not saying that we will be saved from troubles or calamity or hardships. What Jesus is saying is that even in troubles, calamities and hardships, nothing will separate us from his grip! To which Dale Bruner responds, "Who would not want to live with a friend like this forever" (Bruner, 638)?

#### **D. Hearing (27)**

And, now we come to verse 27, Jesus says, "*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*" His sheep hear his voice so they can know him and follow him. This is now the fifth time in this short chapter that Jesus refers to his sheep hearing his voice (3, 4, 5, 16, 27). It seems to me Jesus really wants his sheep to prioritize hearing his voice. And, this is why I want to spend the rest of the morning focused here.

But, as I began this morning, is this really possible today? For the first group of disciples, it was obviously possible. They literally heard the voice of Jesus and they literally followed Him down the road. But, is it possible for us today?

Answer: Yes. And we've probably heard His voice more than we know. It's just that we either didn't recognize it, or we refused to believe it.

After all, the risen Jesus is present with us, isn't he? Although Jesus is not present in a visible way today, he is present, isn't he? After his resurrection and before his ascension, he promised he would be with us until the end of the age, Matt 28. So, he *is* present with us. Everywhere we go, any time, day or night, he is with us.

And, he knows us, doesn't he? After all, he calls us into a genuine relationship. Even more, he calls us his disciples. Even more, he calls us his friends (John 15:15). And, even more, he calls us his bride (John 3:29). He really knows us.

So, if he is with us always and knows us as his bride, do you think he would not speak to us? That's like me not speaking to my wife, Suzanne. That would be very odd wouldn't it? No, he speaks. And, he speaks as the good and noble shepherd, leading us away from obstacles, guiding us to green pastures, steering us back to him after we wander off and helping us as we walk through life's troubles.

Yet, as with any relationship, it takes time to hear and recognize his voice and understand his voice. I've been married for 23 years as of last week, and I'm still trying to hear and understand my wife! It takes time, so there is grace.

The problem is not him speaking. He speaks. The problem, as the Psalmist pointed out many years ago, is that his sheep don't listen. Psalm 81:

8 Hear me, my people, and I will warn you—  
if you would only listen to me, Israel!

...

10 I am the LORD your God,  
who brought you up out of Egypt.  
Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.

11 “But my people would not listen to me;  
they would not submit to me.

...

13 “If my people would only listen to me,  
if they would only follow my ways. (NIV)

The problem is not him speaking. The problem is that his sheep don't listen.

It's a bit like when I coach baseball. I tell the kids, “Listen to my voice. Don't listen to your parent's voices. Don't listen to the other coach's voice. Don't listen to the other player's voices. Listen to my voice and follow what I say.” In the midst of all the yelling and noise (especially from your parents), listen for my voice. And, it typically takes several games for the players to attune their ears to my voice but they get there.

Jesus, the great coach, the good shepherd says, *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them and they follow me.”* So, there are two questions that arise from this saying of Jesus.

- First of all, how does the good shepherd speak to us today? Isn't that a question you have? Where should we go to hear his voice?
- And, secondly, how can his sheep discern His voice from all the others we hear around us today?

## **E. How the Good Shepherd Speaks**

Let's tackle #1, how does the good shepherd speak to us today?

Well, there are many different ways that he can speak to us. After all, as the deeply personal shepherd, he needs to speak in every personal dialect. Today, I will quickly mention seven. And, I've listed them in your worship guide.

1. **Scripture:** The main way is Jesus' written voice, his Word, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. As the writer of Hebrew says, *“the Word of God is living and active” ...* meaning that the Word continues to speak today, and will continue to speak even if we've read it all before (Heb 4:12). No matter how many times we've read it, it will continue to speak.

The Good Shepherd, the living Word, meets us in his written voice. Now, that doesn't mean that we can pick up a Bible, throw up a quick prayer – “Speak to me Lord” – and open it just anywhere and expect to hear His voice. No, the words of the Bible must be

read and heard in their contexts. And in context, the words, written long ago, speak as though written today.

Yes, the most reliable place to hear the voice of Jesus is Scripture, properly read and interpreted. So, are you soaking in Scripture? We'll come back to this in a moment.

2. A second way is **the preached word**. The Good Shepherd chooses to speak through the exposition and proclamation of His written word. As Paul rhetorically asks in Romans, *"How can anyone hear without someone preaching to them"* (Rom 10:14)? This is also one of the fundamental convictions of the Protestant Reformation. Preaching is an event, an event in which the Living Word Himself addresses a particular people at a particular place in a particular place for a particular purpose (Green). This is not to say that the preacher is always speaking God's word and that every word the preacher speaks is God's word. Rather, it is to say that to the degree that the sermon is rooted in, flowing from, and faithful to the Scriptures, the living Word speaks.
3. He speaks through **trusted friends and counselors**. Yes God has been known to speak through donkeys, but most of the time it is through people. This is why it is so important to be in a small group, not that God can't speak outside of a small group. But, as we open our hearts to other believers, they are led to respond with the Spirit's prompting with just the right question or suggestion. The word comes out of their minds and mouth, but also from the mind and mouth of the Spirit.

Also, these trusted friends and counselors are not only the voice of Jesus. Many times, they are also a help in discerning the voice of Jesus. Our authentic faith community can be a powerful help in the discernment process.

4. The good shepherd speaks through **circumstances**. The problem, of course, is that circumstances change daily. But He does often warn us by putting obstacles in the way, or draw us by opening doors we could have never opened ourselves.

And combined with this is how he speaks through the obstacles and doors. Many times he will speak to us by bringing a peace or by bringing a restlessness. As we stand before our circumstances, navigating a decision, he works a deep sense of assurance that one of the ways is of Him. *"A peace that passes all understanding,"* as Paul called it.

In an opposite way, he sometimes speaks by creating in us a "restlessness." He creates in us a sense that something is off, or something is missing, or that there is more, and we are restless. I think we need to especially listen to prolonged restlessness.

5. A fifth way Jesus speaks is **books**. This has become an important part of my life. He has spoken to me through authors like Darrell Johnson, Tim Keller, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, C.S. Lewis, J.I. Packer, Bruce Hindmarsh, Gordon Smith, Michael Reeves, and many more. As I have said many times, I feel like no sermon is complete without a C.S. Lewis quote.

6. The good shepherd speaks through **dreams**. This is a more dicey means, as the source of dreams is complex. But our good shepherd, nevertheless, speaks in and through dreams. We see him doing this throughout Scripture: In the lives of Abraham and Sarah. In the life of Joseph, son of Jacob. In the lives of the apostles Peter and Paul. We see this in the life of Joseph the carpenter, the adoptive father of Jesus, four times the Lord speaks to him in a dream. Today, we keep hearing stories of how Jesus is meeting our Muslim friends in dreams. Yes, Jesus still does speak through dreams.
7. And, seven, the Good Shepherd speaks to us through **the Holy Spirit**. He speaks from deep within us. And, sometimes, this can get a bit tricky. For there are other possible sources for “inner” voices. One of course is all the noise around us, that we have internalized. Another is our fears. Another is our longings. Yet another is the evil one, the “father of lies.” Many times, the evil one will try to imitate the voice of the Spirit. Yet, deep within, the Good Shepherd is there, dwelling within us through His Spirit and speaking to us through His Spirit.

So, that is only seven of many, many ways that the good shepherd speaks to us today.

#### **F. Discerning His Voice**

Now we come to our second question. How do we discern the voice of Jesus in the midst of all the other noise in our life? In other words, how do we recognize whether we are hearing his voice or someone else’s? Of course, there are many answers to this question too, but I want to share four key ways today:

1. **Scripture:** The Good Shepherd’s voice always speaks in agreement with Scripture. Always. The Good Shepherd will never contradict scripture, in fact, there will be a greater regard for Scripture through the discernment process. He has revealed Himself, and His will for humanity in Scripture. And, any new guidance will always square with what we have already received in His Word. For example, his voice will never go against Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of humanity, revealed through Scripture. Another example is that his voice will never have us set aside the Sermon on the Mount. Lord, should I bless those who persecute me? You’ll never hear no. Lord, should I love my enemy? You’ll never hear no. Lord should I ever condemn someone by standing in judgment over them? You’ll never hear no.

A modern day example is found in the Barman Declaration, written during the rise of Naziism by the Confessing Church in Germany. It says this:

If you find that we are speaking contrary to Scripture, then do not listen to us!  
But if you find we are taking our stand upon Scripture, then let no fear or temptation keep you from treading with us the path of faith and obedience.

So, are you soaking in Scripture? In order to know if anything is of the good shepherd, my mind and my heart must be saturated in the Word. You probably know that when

FBI agents are trained to look for counterfeit money, they are not shown a counterfeit bill. Rather, they so master real money, that when the counterfeit passes by them they instantly recognize something is off. If we soak our minds and hearts in the living Word, we will instantly recognize when something is off, when something isn't quite right.

2. **Character of Jesus:** The Good Shepherd's voice always speaks in concert with the character of Jesus, of course. His voice never speaks out of character. The Good Shepherd always speaks in concert with His character, which says I need to immerse myself in the four Gospels especially, so I know His character.
3. **Actions of Jesus:** The Good Shepherd's voice always tells us to do the "Jesus-like" thing. His voice always calls us to do what He does. This is to follow him. To sum this up, I know the Good Shepherd is speaking if what I hear heightens my love for God and my love for neighbor.
4. **Intimacy with Jesus:** The Good Shepherd's voice will always draw us closer to him. When he addresses particular issues in our lives, he always does it in love and always for the greater good of drawing us closer to him. We may not like his words. His words may be difficult and make us uncomfortable, but they will always draw us to himself.

The evil one's voice does just the opposite. That voice is full of accusation and condemnation. His voice seeks to make us feel so badly, we will want to withdraw from Jesus. Jesus' voice will always invite us to come to him, even when he is correcting us.

## **G. Summary**

So, there are four ways for discerning his voice in our lives. As sheep following the good shepherd, we need to be intentionally wrestling with hearing and discerning the good shepherd's voice. That's not to say it will be easy, or that it's not challenging. It is challenging. It's simply to say that if we are the sheep following the good shepherd, we should get into the habit of hearing for and then discerning his voice.

I've often been asked how Suzanne and I made the shift from engineering to youth pastoring in 2007. And, I laugh. It certainly was challenging. We wrestled with discerning the good shepherd's voice for 6 months. We sought counsel from everyone we knew. We prayed a lot. We journaled a lot. I still have my journal – it's a file called "The Big Decision." We kept wrestling. We kept asking questions. We kept seeking counsel. We kept working through the implications for the different people in our lives, specifically our children – for 6 long months. And, in the end, we were led to peace in our big decision. For me, I remember thinking the timing of all of it could not have been more perfect. That brought me peace.

## **IV. Conclusion**

So how can we, his sheep, get into the habit of intentionally listening for and discerning the good shepherd's voice in order to know him and follow him to the green pastures? Perhaps we need to intentionally find some spots where we can be still and listen, special listening places.

God can speak anywhere of course, but perhaps in our noisy culture, we need to find special times and places where it is easier to hear and discern his voice? When we think about characters from scripture, many had special listening places. For Jacob, it was Bethel. For Moses, it was a burning bush. For Samuel, it was the tabernacle at Shiloh. For Elijah, it was Mt. Carmel. For Daniel, it was an upstairs window facing Jerusalem. For Jesus, it was probably the Eremos Cave overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Where is it for you? Where do you find it easier to be still and listen for the shepherd's voice?

Jesus says, *"I am the Good Shepherd... My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me to an abundant and eternal life and no one will ever snatch them out of my hand."* Is there any better news for you today than those words?  
Amen.

## **Benediction**

Now receive this benediction from Hebrews 13:20-21:

*Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will [and hearing his voice], and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

## **Resources**

Batterson, Mark, *Whisper*

Bruner, Dale, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*

Johnson, Darrell, *Preaching the Gospel According to John* (Regent College Course)

Klink, Edward, *John* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)

Smith, Gordon, *The Voice of Jesus: Discernment, Prayer and the Witness of the Spirit*