

Hearing His voice John 10:2-4

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, today we want to hear your voice. It may be loud or it may be a whisper. But we need to learn to listen to you, and to know your voice. Help us, through your Holy Spirit, the Teacher.

Amen.

Jesus said: "The Shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice."

Shepherds in the East did not herd their sheep from behind, with dogs, like in New Zealand. They called them to follow their voice, as they went ahead of them.

Jesus is our Shepherd.

His sheep hear his voice. His sheep follow that voice.

When we are tiny babies, we learn to recognise voices. The voice of our mother, the voice of our father and other family members. Different voices bring different feelings in our hearts. Some voices make us smile, some voices make us fearful.

What is the voice of Jesus like?

As we read the Scriptures we see that he talked in many different ways. He called people to follow him, and they left everything and walked with him. He spoke to people who were troubled or sick or afraid – and his voice brought peace and love and joy to them.

His voice had authority – his voice touched peoples hearts – his voice brought peace.

Today we hear many voices. Our work calls to us urgently... 'lots to do' 'work hard' 'keep going'

There are the voices of entertainment that call to us persuasively – 'You must see this...' 'You will love this movie' 'You must read this magazine..'

There are the voices of our family and friends. They call for our time, our love, our listening, our help...

There are the voices of advertising – seeking to compel us to do what they promote. 'Eat this food' 'Buy this car' 'You need this in your home'

So many voices...

And there voices in our own hearts... our own thoughts of regret, or fear, or loneliness or anxiety...or our dreams and longings.

In a world full of voices, we need to learn to hear the voice of our loving Shepherd, Jesus.

How can we do this? Where will we hear his voice?

1. We must start by choosing to listen. If we have a friend who needs to talk to us, we choose to phone them, or have lunch with them, or make an appointment to see them. It is the same with Jesus. We must make time to listen. Jesus gave us a wonderful example. He took time to be with his Father and talk with him and listen to him.

We too must plan time to think about our Lord, and talk to him alone. It could be at home, or it could be in your car, or at work - or when you go for a walk alone. Find time to be alone with Jesus – even for just a few minutes... it is very important. I find a good time is when I am going to sleep - I open my heart and mind to him. There are always some spaces in our day to listen.

I read the story of John Wesley's mother, Susannah. She had over a dozen children and life was very, very busy for her. But when she needed to pray and to listen to God she would sit with her apron over her head. And no one disturbed her!

2. It helps if we get to know the things that help us to listen to God. Is it walking outside in a park? Is it while we sit alone with our bible? Is it when we listen to lovely music? Is it when we are together with others praying? Find your prayer doorways. What helps you listen to God? What makes your heart open to his voice?

3. We also need to learn to recognize his voice. He does not condemn us or judge us or make us feel bad. He speaks with love, for He intends to help us and do us good. Sometimes his voice is more a feeling than words we hear. I was reading an email from a friend who is teaching and preaching overseas... and her words struck my heart so deeply I began to weep and to pray. It was God speaking to me and awakening my heart. He speaks peace. Hundreds of times in the Scripture the Lord says "Be at peace" to those who are meeting him. If the voice we hear makes us agitated and afraid, then it is not God. He speaks to quieten our hearts, to bring rest, and assurance.

'My sheep hear my voice.'

His voice stirs our faith. Often when Jesus spoke to people they felt bold and full of faith afterwards.

His voice can challenge and convict us. We can feel a deep repentance, knowing we must change our ways and agree with God about the right way to live – or we must put things right.

His voice is a healing voice. Sometimes when he speaks burdens are lifted, and a sense of freedom comes to our hearts.

His voice brings light to our minds – new understanding comes to us. We say 'Oh I see it now!' This can be new insight or revelation about things that were confusing or unclear.

His voice can lead us. We may feel perplexed, unable to make good choices. And his voice can quietly show us the way ahead. He is our Shepherd. He leads us in paths of righteousness. He leads us through hard places into a place of rest.

The single most important thing we must learn to do in our life with Jesus, is to listen to his voice.

He is our wise and loving Shepherd. He is our Friend who wants to share his heart with us. He is our King, who has kingdom work for us. He wants to direct us and instruct us.

Most often, he speaks through the Scriptures. Words and phrases and truths 'come alive' to us. It is as if a light shines on them so we see them as never before. This is God speaking to us.

Everyone who has believed in Jesus and received his life in their hearts can hear his voice.

This is our inheritance as God's children. It is a normal part of our friendship with Jesus.

You may not hear loud words, but instead get fresh thoughts in your mind that uplift you and encourage you.

You may not remember clear words – but you will know he has called you or asked you to do something. You feel very convinced in your heart.

When did you last hear the Lord speak to you? What did he say? What did you feel? What did you do? Sometimes we stop hearing for a while. Perhaps we are too busy to listen. Perhaps we have not done what he asked last time. Perhaps our minds are filled with anxiety.

He wants to talk to us. Every day he wants to talk to us. It is so important for us to learn to listen.

When we read the book of Acts, we see there that time after time the Lord spoke to people and gave them direction, and encouragement and insight. And he did not just talk to leaders – he spoke to ordinary people.

One day an angel spoke to a soldier called Cornelius, and told him to call for the Apostle Peter. And Peter also was receiving a special message from God about this man Cornelius. God prepared both of them for a new way he was going to work among the Gentiles. He spoke clearly to them.

When Saul of Tarsus was blinded on the road to Damascus, the Lord spoke to a disciple called Ananias and told him to go and pray with Saul who was chosen by God to spread the gospel

All the way through this record of the early church we see that people expected to hear from God. They understood that The Shepherd would lead them with his voice. They recognized his voice. This is to be our experience too. We must ask the Lord to help us to listen.

Read these Scriptures aloud slowly. Then close your eyes and listen for the Lord's voice. See if he speaks to you from them. See if they 'come alive' for you and touch your heart or help your understanding.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Matt.11:28-29

"Keep on asking, and it will be given to you; keep on seeking, and you will find; keep on knocking and the door will be opened to you." Matt. 7:7

"Come, follow me!"

"I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." John 6:35

"Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me and eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest of food. Give ear and come to me; hear me that your soul may live." Is.55:2-3

"The Lord longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him." Is.30:16

"Humble yourselves under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares for you." 1 Peter 5:6-7

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid." John 14:27

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