

**VOICES**  
**John 10**

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Let's begin this morning by doing a little voice recognition test. See if you can identify these figures.

There's a lot of voices out there, aren't there? Friendly, happy ones. Sad and angry ones. Well-adjusted ones. Sorely misguided ones. Selfish. Greedy. Compassionate. Kind. You name it, there's a voice to represent it. We've got some beautiful singing voices standing up here this morning – and some others out there who have told me they can't sing a note. We've got some public speakers who just love being in front of the crowd and some less-verbal folks who prefer to chat only when someone begins the conversation.

Sheep live by a voice – it is the voice of their shepherd. They trust that voice because it has proven, time and again, to take them the direction they want to go. It leads them to water, to shelter, to food and to safety. And sheep seem to have the uncanny ability to know the voice of their shepherd above any pretenders and mimics. And they will always follow the voice of their shepherd.

It's a little like the new gadget they have in high-tech industry: voice recognition software. Before you can enter high security areas you must pass the test of voice – and those things can even tell when you have a cold or when you're faking a different voice.

Don't you wish that there was such a thing when it came to God? That is, don't you wish that you had some type of gadget that could tell you when someone was sharing God's truth in all its purity or if they were just giving you their own opinions or if, even worse, they were trying to lead you astray?

And don't you wish, also, that you had special software that would help you know the difference between the voice of good and bad – the voice of right and wrong – the voice of correct decisions versus bad decisions?

Actually, the earth has known such “software.” His name was Jesus Christ, and He came to our world as the Son of God in human flesh to get us back on track. He came as the Servant and Savior to free us from the captivity of the wolves and back into the pasture of God's love. His Shepherd's voice was a voice we could trust.

But not everyone was very excited about His ministry. They wanted a different voice. They are the people in our text and surrounding it, who keep asking Jesus who He is, but don't bother to really listen when He tells them the answer. They want Him to conform to them. They want his voice to mirror their own opinions, feelings, hopes and dreams.

And the REAL Messiah, to their view, should be strong and powerful, winsome and wise, and be taking over control of the territory from the Romans. As the Son of David, He should be a King like David, who would catapult Israel back onto the limelight and make them a world power once again. That's the voice they wanted to hear.

But Jesus makes claims like He is the Messiah without any of this kind of conversation. He travels quietly and humbly like a shepherd, performs a few miracles (but tells people not to talk about them), and, in the political and civil realm, doesn't seem to be making a large-scale difference at all.

And so, when Jesus does make clear to them who He is by saying the striking words, “I and the Father are One” – rather than bowing down to worship

Him, they pick up stones to kill Him. If He's not going to be their type of Messiah, fulfill all their hopes and dreams, then they don't want Him to do anything else. They'd rather be rid of Him.

“Oh, those people!” we say. “How could they be so foolish?” And we would be right. They were foolish to not recognize Him who was ready to bring them life, love, hope, and joy.

But how different are we? Oh yes, we call ourselves Christians and we say we want to follow Jesus – that we want to hear His voice and live according to His will -- that we are His flock and the people of His pasture. But then we don't take the time to listen to His voice or pay attention to His teaching. Or, if we do know His voice, sometimes we shun it in favor of other voices.

The voices out there are powerful and plentiful, and so often we would rather listen to them. There is the voice of selfishness: “I care only about me – I live for me – I do what I want and live how I please.” There is the voice of materialism: “It's all about what I got – the newest gadget, the finest car, the biggest house, the latest clothes. There's the voice of pleasure: “If it feels good, I'm there. If it's fun, bring it on. That's what it's all about. Eat, drink, and be merry – for tomorrow you may die.” There's the voice of popularity: “what can I do so that people will like me? I'm willing to bend. I'm willing to compromise. I just want to be accepted, admired, part of the 'in' crowd.”

Sometimes it's the voice of anger – sometimes it's the voice of pride. Sometimes it's the voice of jealousy – sometimes it's the voice of laziness. But the voices shout frequently and loudly. It's hard not to pay attention to them – to get caught up in them. After all, we are sheep – and sheep like to go after voices – they like to follow – to be led.

Enter the Good Shepherd, Jesus, who says: “27My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.”

Can we trust Him? Is His a voice worth listening to? Or is he just another voice, like the others, that makes empty promises, plays on our weaknesses, exploits our vulnerabilities, seeks to get us wrapped up in things that really aren't good for us?

Two words answer that question: 1) The Crucifixion and 2) The Resurrection.

First, the Crucifixion. A Shepherd you can trust -- a voice you should follow, is one that is filled purely with one characteristic: love for the sheep. That love is proved genuine when the Shepherd puts it all on the line.

When Jesus walked the road toward Calvary He put it all on the line. He was stripped of his honor and dignity, treated with scorn and contempt, and was savagely murdered for sins He didn't commit. But He did it for us – so that our sins might be paid for, our evils atoned for, our iniquities washed away. For, without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. But He offered up His own body so that we might be free. All for the flock – all for the sheep. That is a selfless love – an incredible love. As Romans says,

6You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. 8But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Certainly, that is a voice worth listening to. But suppose that is simply a misguided or mistaken voice – compassionate yes, but unable to do anything more than martyrdom for those he loves? Did He die in vain? Was He just a victim?

That's where #2, the resurrection comes in. For not only is Jesus the voice of unconditional love even unto the point of sacrifice, but He is also the voice of omnipotent power. His miracles are one thing – water to wine, bread and fish multiplied, the sick healed and the blind see. That's amazing enough. But to have power over death and the grave. To have command over life and death not only for Jairus' daughter and Lazarus, his friend, but even for Himself. Beyond doubt that shows us that this Shepherd is not speaking empty words of hope, but has the incredible power to back it up.

So where does that leave us? Well, let's travel where we began. Is there a way to connect to the voice of this Shepherd and find strength and hope and help every single day? Is there a way to discern the difference between the voice of good and bad – the voice of right and wrong – the voice of correct decisions versus bad decisions?

The answer is yes. The voice recognition software is right here, in God's Holy Word. The more we immerse ourselves in His Good News, in His life of love, in His acts of grace, the more we will be prepared to face all the other voices that shout out to us daily.

May God richly bless sheep like you and me so that we do what sheep do: -- shut out all the other voices and listen, hear, trust, believe, and live by the voice of our Good Shepherd.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.