

**Sermon on May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020**  
**John 10:1-10/1 Peter 2:19-25**  
**The Shepherd's Voice and Abundant Life**

Our readings today are very familiar and the themes of Jesus as our Good Shepherd and that He came to give us abundant life are also ones that we have all heard many times. But I believe that the Word of God always has something new to say to us if we have ears to hear. God will always use it to challenge us if we are willing to be challenged. I think that intimacy with Jesus or closeness to Him if you prefer is one particular challenge today. Another is how exactly we can hear Him speak to us and thirdly how through that closeness and ability to hear His voice we can experience the fullness of life that Jesus said He came to give us.

The first 6 verses of John 10 are a parable very specifically being used against the Pharisees and to include someone they had rejected. Jesus had healed a blind man and twice the Pharisees had questioned him, told Him that Jesus was a sinner and then thrown the man out of the Temple. Jesus then talked to the man about spiritual blindness and the man worshipped Jesus. The Pharisees witnessed this and asked Jesus if He was inferring that they were blind. Jesus tells them that if they were blind they might have some excuse but they claimed to see and understand the scriptures. Then he talks about the Shepherd of the sheep whom the Gatekeeper, meaning God has opened the gate for and about the sheep hearing and understanding His voice. Now although the Pharisees didn't really understand what He was talking about, they would probably not have missed the reference to the beginning of Jeremiah 23 where God condemns the wicked shepherds who have scattered His sheep. He promises to gather them to Himself again and to punish the wicked shepherds. Then Jesus goes on to refer to Himself as the actual gate for the sheep. This may refer to the fact that if the sheep were gathered into

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a pen at night, a shepherd often slept across the entrance, ensuring no sheep wandered off and no thieves got in. He also says that the sheep know the voice of their shepherd and follow Him, and He watches over them.

Jesus is revealing the blessing that we receive as His sheep, His followers. Firstly salvation, we are no longer lost and no longer threatened by the dangers around us. Jesus is the gate to our salvation. Secondly the flock come in and go out and find pasture. So under our Shepherd's care we have security and are nurtured. And our security is provided by our proximity to the Shepherd not by the walls of the enclosure. Bruce Milne says this:

When the people of Christ have forgotten this and tried to secure unity or safety by building walls around themselves, the results have not been encouraging. They have either managed to enclose a number of wolves with the sheep or have been so restrictive that they have excluded more sheep than they have enclosed.

He is not talking about the buildings but about religiosity, just like the Pharisees we tend to create rules and conditions in order to feel secure, rather than finding our security in Jesus alone. When we are near enough to Jesus to hear His voice then not only do we find true security but He also promises us abundant life – life to the full.

So what is this abundant full life? Well it clearly isn't one of material wealth, you only have to look at the lives of the apostles and followers of Jesus in the New Testament to know that. We may have material wealth, or we may not, it is irrelevant to the abundant life that Jesus is talking about, other than the fact that having too many material comforts might distract us from pursuing the fullness of life that He offers. It is of course the eternal life of the Kingdom of God and all its richness and blessing that are available to us right

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now. Peace and joy and thankfulness and all the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives us even in the midst of suffering and hardship.

And so we turn to look at our reading from 1 Peter. Suffering may be unjust, unfair, we may not understand why we are suffering or what possible good might come from it. I guess our current situation couldn't be a better example.

We are encouraged to bear suffering with patient forbearance. And we have in Jesus the ultimate example of a man who endured unbearable and entirely unjustified suffering with total submission and grace. And He did that for us, for you and for me exactly in order that we might enter into that fullness of life that we have been talking about. He is the suffering servant from Isaiah, prophesied about hundreds of years before His birth. He suffered and died for us, bearing our sins in His body on the cross. Just think about that for a moment. His suffering was entirely down to our sins, He endured every insult, every cut of the whip, every nail, every tortured breath for us, and by those very wounds we have been healed. Through His suffering, His death and His resurrection we have have been healed and restored to a right relationship with God. No longer sheep that have gone astray but returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.

And the key to the abundant life that we can now enjoy is hearing His voice. Amongst all the clamour and noise of the material world that we live in, we need to always be listening to hear Him, because as long as we listen to His voice and obey His commands then He will continue to lead us, nurture us, sustain, us and fill us with good things no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in. I have some practical suggestions for you. The first is that we need to ask to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit. He is the comforter

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and the enabler. The main way that God speaks to us, not the only way by any means, but the main way, is through the Bible, and it is the Holy Spirit who gives us understanding of God's word. We are told quite clearly to go on being filled with the Spirit. So when you come to read God's Word.....

**Hearing the voice of Jesus our Shepherd in the Bible**

**Ask – to be filled with the Holy Spirit.**

**Observe – What do you notice in the passage you are reading?**

**Reflect – How do you feel as you read this passage?**

**Interpret – What do you understand this passage to be saying?**

**Decide – What are you going to do in response to this passage?**

*Andrew Roberts in Holy Habits*

**We will put these pointers up on the website along with the sermon later today.**