

John 10:1-28

Testing Your Spiritual Hearing

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me – v. 27

One of the things that we need to ever keep in mind is that when it comes to chapter divisions in the New Testament, those divisions were created by men. John did not write his gospel by dividing it into chapters and verses. Translators supplied that useful tool many years later. In fact it wasn't until some time after 1550 AD that Robert Stephens in the 4th edition of his Greek New Testament introduced that phenomenon of dividing the New Testament into verses.

I remind you of this now because there are varying opinions as to whether this discourse in chp. 10 is a separate discourse from what we have in chp. 9 or whether it's a continuation of it. It's not hard to see why some translators would put a chapter break here at the beginning of chp. 10. For this chapter begins with what is identified in v. 6 as a parable. On the other hand there are commentators that point out that Christ never began a discourse with the words *Verily, verily*. His use of that double *amen* affirmation always occurs in the middle of His discourses.

I tend to think, myself, that His discourse in chp. 10 is a continuation of the discourse in chp. 9 – not only because of what these commentators and Greek grammarians say about the *verily, verily* phenomenon but also because in v. 21 you find one side of the divided Jews making reference to the miracle performed by Christ in chp. 9. Look at what it says beginning in v. 20 *And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?*

Now you may recall that in our last study, I pointed out that the miracle of healing the man born blind of his blindness served a very definite spiritual purpose. That becomes obvious, I believe, when you look at vv. 39ff: *And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.*

It's very apparent in these verses that Christ is speaking of spiritual sight and spiritual blindness. And we noted the irony of those who thought they could see but were in fact blind. The very fact that you can find many who think they see but in fact are blind means that the Pharisee's question was and is a valid one when they ask in v. 40 *Are we blind also?* You may recall that I pointed out that the same phenomenon can be found even among Christians and cited for you the example of the church at Laodicea in Rev. 3. The members of that church thought they were rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing and yet the truth was (as Christ pointed out to them) that they were wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. Talk about a major misdiagnosis on the part of the Laodiceans!

So the use I made of chp. 9 in our last study was to raise the question – *Are we blind also?* And then I drew from the narrative of chp. 9 to see how the things contained in that chapter assist us in the matter of determining whether or not we’re spiritually blind or do in fact have spiritual sight.

Now when we come to chp. 10 you could say that we discover another spiritual test that John presents to us. This test pertains to our spiritual hearing. Notice the emphasis that is placed in the section we read just now on *hearing*.

Verses 2,3: *But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.*

Verse 4: *And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.*

Verse 16: *And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.*

Verse 27: *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*

You could add to these verses the negative statements that pertain to hearing which have to do with the false teachers, the thieves and the robbers, that the ones refuse to hear that instead hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and follow Him.

So just as I put you through a spiritual eye exam of sorts last week based on Jn. 9, I’d like to this morning put you through a spiritual hearing exam this morning in Jn. 10. And the way I’ll do this is to raise a very simple question and then assist you as to how to answer it – the question, then, is this:

Do You Hear the Voice of the Good Shepherd?

I. The Importance of the Matter

The verses I cited a moment ago placed an emphasis on hearing. Those same verses emphasize hearing as a matter of certainty. *My sheep hear my voice* Christ says in v. 27. He doesn’t make this statement with any kind of ambiguity or lack of clarity. If you are one of Christ’s sheep you will hear His voice. He doesn’t say that some of His sheep hear His voice or that His sheep can sort of make out something that they take to be His voice. No, they hear His voice.

Would you note also that Christ applies this truth to succeeding generations. He’s not restricting the application to those who followed Him and were able to hear His audible voice the way they would hear the voice of any man speaking to them. Listen to what He says in v. 16 *And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.* You see how Christ is looking ahead with this statement? *They shall hear my voice* – This is a future

tense verb that looks down the corridors of time right up to the present hour and it characterizes those that are true Christians.

And what's more Christ describes how His sheep are able to distinguish His voice from the voice of false teachers that are in reality thieves and robbers. So we read in v. 5 *And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.* Verse 8: *All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.*

Commentators describe the work of shepherds. Listen to this detailed explanation of the work of shepherds given by a prominent preacher and theologian:

Jesus drew this illustration from the sheep industry of the day. The way sheep were cared for in ancient Israel was very different from the way they are handled today. In those days, there was one large, central pen, or sheepfold, in a given community, and at the end of the day people brought their small individual flocks and led them into the big sheepfold. With their combined resources, they paid a gatekeeper, and it was his job to stay with the sheep during the night.

In the morning, the gatekeeper opened the gate to those who were truly shepherds, whose sheep were enclosed in the sheepfold. The shepherds entered by the door, for they had every right to — the sheep were theirs and the gatekeeper was their paid servant. When a shepherd entered the sheepfold, the sheep of all the local flocks were mixed, but he began to call, and his sheep recognized his voice and came to him. In fact, a good shepherd was so intimately involved with the care and the nurture of his sheep that he had names for them, and he would call them by name. His sheep followed him out because they knew him...The illustration teaches us that Christ knows the believer and the believer knows Him, recognizes His voice, and follows Him.

Do you begin to see the importance of the matter of hearing the Shepherd's voice? We're told in v. 19 that these words of Christ, as they had done on previous occasions created a division between the Jews. *There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings.* Listen to what the narrative says beginning in v. 22. These verse give the context for our text in v. 27:

And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. 23 And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch. 24 Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. 25 Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. 26 But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. 27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

They couldn't hear His voice because they were not His sheep. Just as certainly as those that are His sheep do hear His voice, those that are not His sheep do not hear His voice. So

the matter of hearing or not hearing His voice is really a matter of being a true Christian or not being a Christian. Listen to these words by J.C. Ryle:

The thing taught in these words is a very curious one, and may seem "foolishness" to the world. There is a spiritual instinct in most true believers, which generally enables them to distinguish between true and false teaching. When they hear unsound religious instruction, there is something within them that says, "This is wrong." When they hear the real truth as it is in Jesus, there is something in their hearts which responds, "This is right." The careless man of the world may see no difference whatever between minister and minister, sermon and sermon. The poorest sheep of Christ, as a general rule, will "distinguish things that differ," though he may sometimes be unable to explain why.

We are dealing, you see, with something that is internal and experiential. It amounts to your effectual calling in which you hear not merely with the physical ear, but you perceive in the depth of your heart the truth of the gospel of Christ. When the gospel is preached to you or taught to you at home, you become convinced of your sin and misery; and you become convinced of the truth of Christ. And you find yourself, therefore, desiring to go to Christ.

And so let me put the question to each of you this morning – and it's a very important question – and you do well to be honest before God in grappling with this question – and the question is just this – have you heard His voice? Have you heard the voice of the good Shepherd of the Sheep which is the voice of Christ Himself. How's your hearing – i.e. your spiritual hearing?

Let's move on to consider:

II. The Nature and Substance of This Hearing

Just as in the 9th chapter where Christ's purpose in healing the blind man served a spiritual purpose, so in this 10th chapter Christ is dealing with a spiritual matter. This becomes pretty obvious when you think about it. It's quite apparent in this discourse that there was no problem with the Jews physical hearing. They could hear what Christ was saying with their physical ears but they could not perceive with their hearts the truth of what Christ was saying.

And when the division took place between the Jews, the antagonists of Christ wanted to know why their Jewish brethren were giving heed to Christ at all. So we read in v. 20 *And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?* Now it becomes obvious, doesn't it, that both sides in the controversy could hear Christ physically. The difference between them had to do with their inward perception of the truth of what Christ was saying.

And just what was Christ saying that created this divide? We find in these verses some very strong affirmations made by Christ that pertain to who He was and why He had come. Listen to the words of v. 9: *I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved,*

and shall go in and out, and find pasture. Do you hear Christ this morning? He's saying in this verse that He is the way to salvation and He is the way to God and He is the way to the congregation of the true people of God.

His disciples would not have heard and known His meaning so well then as they would eventually know it after He rose from the dead when He says to them in v. 11 *I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.* Oh how clearly those words sound out today especially when we have in John's gospel and in the other gospels the accounts of Christ doing just that – giving Himself to be bruised and beaten and crucified and buried. He affirms this again in v. 15 *As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.*

Do you hear Him this morning? Have you heard those words conveyed to your own soul? Do you see your need for One to lay down His life for you? Do you, to borrow from the hymn-writer *hear the words of love?* Now in vv. 17,18 we have yet another very strong affirmation of Christ's deity. Nobody could speak these words but One who was and is God. Listen to what He says: *Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.*

Do you hear what Christ is saying? He reigns over death. Death is subservient to Him. He could never die, anymore than God could die unless He voluntarily laid down His life. And even in His death He still reigned over death. How else could He have the power to take up His own life again after laying in a tomb for 3 days? We'll see when we get to chp. 11 one of Christ's greatest miracles in calling a man by the name of Lazarus from the grave after he'd been dead for 4 days. What a display of Almighty power that will be.

But in the words of vv. 17,18 Christ is foretelling an even greater miracle than that. Not only can He call a man from the grave that's been dead for four days but He'll come forth from the grave Himself after having been crucified and laid in a tomb for 3 days and 3 nights. Now when Christ speaks like this, there's only one of two conclusions you can reach. Either He is mad, like His antagonists say, or He is the Son of God and the Savior of sinners like He Himself says.

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, Christ says in v. 27. And then He extends a promise to His followers – a promise that only One who is God could grant: *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: 28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*

There's a Face Book group that I and my wife follow that's called "Just Breathe." What you find on this group's Face Book page are captivating pictures of nature scenes or things that are similar that are meant to capture your attention and move you to be still a moment to take in the beauty of the scene that's been photographed. We need that sort of thing, don't we, especially when our fast paced lives become so busy and hectic that we're about

to drive ourselves crazy trying to keep up with all the demands. What a blessing to answer the call to be still for a moment and just breathe.

Our Savior's words call us to the same thing. My fear is that such words become so familiar to us that we tend to pass over them rather quickly without taking the time to pause and just breathe, or just take in what our Savior has said. Would you do that now? Would you take in these words of Jesus just now and really listen to what Christ is saying? Can you hear Him when He says *I give them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*

Talk about words of comfort and security! I know that I've referenced these words in the past as words that teach in a sense the double omnipotence of God that is applied to the followers of Christ. Do you see it? – *no man can pluck them out my hand*, Christ says in v. 28. *My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.* And so you have Christ's hands and His Father's hands cupped around each follower of Christ. No force in heaven, earth, or hell can break that kind of grip.

And in the matter of eternal life, Christ not only speaks of the duration of life but He speaks of the highest quality of life. This is made plain by His words in v. 10 ...*I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.* Here then is not only life that never ends but it's life that is more abundant. It's life with meaning and purpose; it's life as life was meant to be which is life in fellowship with God.

Such promises could only be given by One who is equal with God and so it's refreshing and thrilling to hear again Christ's affirmation in v. 30 *I and my Father are one.* As our shorter catechism puts it with regard to the blessed Trinity – the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

Now the Jews in Christ's day heard Him speak these things audibly. There was nothing wrong with their physical hearing just as in the previous chapter there was nothing wrong with their sight. They heard, and yet they didn't hear. They heard, in other words, but they didn't believe.

Christ calls on you to hear this morning. And He calls on you to hear on the basis of the words He spoke and the works He performed. Have you heard His words with the hearing of the heart? Do you perceive the truth of what He said? Do you believe in the miracles He performed?

I have one more point to cover in this spiritual hearing test. We've need the importance of the matter and the nature and substance of the hearing. Let's consider finally and briefly:

III. The Test to Discern True Hearing

The kind of hearing that Christ has in view, you see, leads to something. And what it leads to becomes the true indicators as to whether or not you've truly heard Him. Look again at the words of our text in v. 27 *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they*

follow me. They follow Christ. They don't simply hear His words and then go their own way. This is what many of the Jews did, even the ones who saw and in a sense believed His miracles. They believed what they saw but they didn't really hear with their hearts. They heard His words and may have been impressed with what He said but the ones that truly hear with that internal hearing of the heart show that they've heard by following Christ.

Just as the sheep in the sheepfold would recognize their master's voice and follow Him, so do Christ's sheep follow Him. The next indicator that they've heard is that they truly believe in Him. This is the distinguishing factor between those who hear and those who don't. All the Jews that He addressed heard Him but not all of them believed Him.

Verses 24-26: *Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. 25 Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. 26 But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.*

There's the next indicator, then, that indicates the kind of hearing we're considering this morning. It's the indicator of faith or belief. Just as surely as the Jews of Christ's day heard His words, so can it be said of each one here this morning – you've heard His words. You've heard the words that have been inspired and preserved in His Word. Do you believe what you've heard? And does your belief in His words compel you to follow Him?

The skeptics and doubters will dismiss what Christ has said. Others may even become angry by what He's said. What kind of response do you have to His words? His sheep hear His voice and He knows them and they know Him and they believe in Him and they follow Him.

And then the last indicator of true hearing is that His sheep hear Him exclusively. Verse 5 *And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.* There are those, of course, that want to include the voice of Jesus with other voices. It's all good, they say. If your religion does you good, then go with your religion. And if the other man's religion does him good then he should go with his religion – whatever works to make your life a little better than good for you.

That kind of thinking is a pretty good indicator that such a person has never really heard the voice of the Good Shepherd. One of the key contributors to the reproach the true Christian bears is the exclusivity of Christianity. *There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved*, the Apostles announced to the Jewish authorities (Acts 4:12). *No man cometh unto the Father but by me* Christ Himself says (Jn. 14:6).

His voice, you see, is the only authoritative voice that can speak on such things as heaven or hell or eternal life or being reconciled to God or being brought into the family of God. And so this part of your spiritual physical is complete. Last time it was your spiritual sight, this time it's your spiritual hearing. Have you heard His voice? Have you responded to His voice in such a way that indicates you've truly heard Him?