

Coach House Church BEACONS

RECOGNISING GODS VOICE

4TH NOVEMBER 2020

There was a scam email that I got the other day. This claimed to be from a friend of mine. When I read it, something seemed off. It didn't sound like the person I knew. I didn't recognise the voice of the email. I know my friend and how they write and what they would normally say. When we get to know somebody, we get to know what they sound like, so if someone imitates them, we are more likely to recognise it. I know my husband well so I would know if someone pretended to be Jamie on the phone or by text because I know how he writes and the sorts of things he says.

There is a story a bit like this that can be found in John. Jesus talks about sheep and a shepherd in John 10:1-14 Jesus says this: "Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."

The reason Jesus relates this story to sheep is because in the time he was saying it people understood farming. They knew about sheep and shepherds and sheep pens in a way that we don't understand because we are more removed from it. He spoke to them in a way they could access and relate to what they knew from the world around them. Sheep pens were where sheep would stay overnight. When they had been out all day grazing the shepherd would take them there to stay safe while they slept.

Jesus told this story in response to some Pharisees. Jesus had just healed a man that had been born blind and the Pharisees had not responded well. They didn't want to put their faith in Jesus so instead put the man out of the synagogue. Jesus was explaining to them the reaction they should have had.

You see, just like I recognise my husband's voice, Jesus' sheep recognise His voice. There is something within us that knows when Jesus is speaking to us. To improve this ability, we need to get to know Jesus better. The reason that I know which texts are from my husband is that I've seen thousands of them before and I know the way he writes. I know, for example, that he puts a space before his exclamation marks in a way that is truly unique. I also know the kinds of things he would say. I know he loves me and values me and wouldn't say something that is against that nature.

In the same way, when we read the bible we get to know the way God speaks. We see the watermarks and the unique way He talks. We see the kinds of things that He says and we know that He wouldn't say anything against His nature. It takes a lot of practice to hear Him properly. It might take thousands of "texts" to recognise the way He wants to speak to us, but we will begin to recognise which are the things that God would say to us and which are the things that come from somewhere else.

There will be thieves and robbers in our lives that want to take us away from the safety of the sheep pen or rob us of something else. Thieves and robbers do the same job but are quite different in how they operate.

Thieves are quiet. When someone has had a thief they might not know about it until they have arrived home or woken up to find precious valuables missing. This is like the quiet things in life that distract us. They're things we might not notice appearing until all our precious time or relationships are gone. Maybe it's gossip or procrastination or lying. Maybe it's that person we talk to and we tell ourselves that it's just a friendship but deep down we know we want more. We don't realise what's happening until it feels like it's too late. They are sneaky and will mask themselves as other things, as acceptance or productivity at work or other things that seem positive moment to moment but long term are bad for us. These things get deeply entrenched and it takes a long time to root them out.

Robbers, on the other hand, are much louder. They come straight at us and we know we're doing wrong but somehow we can't help it. Maybe we get angry

quickly or we say cruel things in the heat of the moment. We know we are doing wrong and we do it anyway because in the moment that's what we prefer to do. This is again dangerous and difficult to control.

The truth is there is nothing we can do against robbers or thieves. We can try to protect ourselves with house alarms or with body armour. These things do help and we should do all we can to put in a first line of defence but at the end of the day we can't stop thieves or robbers by ourselves. What we need is a shepherd that will care for us and look after us. A shepherd to protect us from the thieves and robbers, that will stop them stealing from us. A shepherd that will help us keep our relationships in tact and make our time truly productive in the right way. We have a shepherd, ready and waiting to take us into His sheep pen. A shepherd that will care for us always, no matter what. A shepherd that gave His very life to save us and bring us back to Him.

We need to learn to hear the words of our shepherd and recognise His call by learning our bible and what God would say to us. We need to learn to follow in His footsteps and go wherever He leads. We need to defend ourselves against robbers and thieves to the best of our ability, but at the end of the day we need to rely on God to move us from death to life, to take us from sin to living the best life that He has made for us.



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