

Hearing His Voice

John 10:22-30

Jesus was being pressed to declare himself as the Messiah - or not - and the pressure was not friendly! But straight away, he makes it clear that he doesn't work that way.

He refers them to what he has already said and done, but at no time has he said publicly "I am the Messiah" in those words. He has said plenty of things which only the Messiah could (honestly) say, and done many things which only the Messiah could do. (See much of **John 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9**)

John the Baptist, languishing in Herod's prison, was not sure. Had his mission been in vain? Was Jesus really the Anointed One? So he sent two of his followers to check (**Matthew 11:2-19, Luke 7:18-30**). But even to John, Jesus makes no direct declaration, but points him to what can be seen and heard. John must come to his own conclusion.

The Jews who were challenging Jesus did not believe in him - that much is clear - but why not? Perhaps they thought that they needed a clear statement from Jesus so that they could either go along with it or not. Nowadays they might have asked for a political manifesto or a statement of faith. Did they agree with it? Then they could sign their names at the bottom - or not!

But Jesus says that is **not** the reason for their unbelief. "*You do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.*"

So, which comes first, believing or being one of his sheep? According to Jesus, being one of his sheep, hearing his voice, comes first. Belief follows on. Maybe not what we would expect!

When Peter made his clear confession in **Matthew 16:13-20**, the Lord Jesus makes it clear that this is no humanly-inspired 'statement of faith', not a definitive doctrinal statement but a **response to revelation** from the Father, and then goes on to strictly instruct the disciples NOT to tell others that he is the Messiah.

Perhaps we would have said "Why not? Surely this is the most fantastic news - we MUST tell everyone!" Jesus insists that they say nothing. Why?

We can gain a lot of insight from Jesus's prayer in **John 17**. Here he goes over with his Father the processes of the last few years as he has been with his disciples. Please sit down and read the whole chapter, but look at **verses 6-8, 14, 17 and 26**. He is describing the processes by which he has been teaching his 'sheep' to hear and respond to his voice.

He has revealed / manifested the Father to the disciples. (The word comes from the word meaning 'to shine'.) As a result of this revelation. they have come to know that everything that Jesus has said and done has come from the Father, they have received words from the Father and have believed that the Father sent Jesus.

Verse 26 makes it clear that the process will continue. He has already told the disciples about this in **John 16:7-15**. Ongoing revelation is the work of the Holy Spirit.

These realities are reflected in our own experience. If we have, as it were, simply 'signed the manifesto' to state that we believe in Jesus, then our experience stops there. We may do many 'Christian' things, for our own satisfaction or to impress others - maybe we think we are serving God.

On the other hand, we may or may not be able to make such a clearly defined 'statement of faith', but perhaps we are learning to respond to the voice of the Shepherd. Having heard his voice, we have responded. Perhaps not immediately, but eventually!

He has shown us things about ourselves, probably things which we would prefer not to have seen, things which demand a response.

At the same time, he has shown us about himself, the power of his forgiveness through the blood of Jesus, the freedom of a life set free from slavery to failure, the ability of the Holy Spirit to transform us from the inside. These also demand a response.

In both cases, the response is one of acknowledging reality. Not an academic truth, encapsulated in a document, but the inescapable truth of what really **is**. Sometimes we feel that the Lord has backed us into a corner and all we can do is respond in agreement with what he has shown us. It may not always feel very great to us, but he counts it as faith!

As we have learned, and go on learning, to respond to his voice, so we learn to give in to more and more revelation that the Holy Spirit 'shines in' to our lives. We are learning to be his sheep or, to put it another way, we are being transformed 'from one degree of glory to another'. See **2 Corinthians 3:12-18**.

This ongoing revelation is vital to our own spiritual growth and the growth of the Body of Christ, as Paul makes clear in **Ephesians 1:15-18**, **Colossians 1:9** and **Colossians 2:6-7** (and on to the end of that chapter).

All the gifts in **1 Corinthians 12** and the ministries in **Ephesians 4: 11-16** depend on hearing and responding to the voice of the Lord.

At the most basic daily level, we need to go on learning to respond promptly to his voice, as **Hebrews 3:12-13** says: "*See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.*"

It is too easy to be 'conned' in this way, and one of the key values of real fellowship is to help to refresh each other's personal response to the Lord.

Dave Taylor

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