

DCF:

Have you ever gone to a county or state fair with your parents? Maybe you went because your cousin entered a competition and your parents wanted to support her when they judged her entry. So, you entered the fairgrounds and headed for the judging pavilion. On the way, you saw those so-called games of chance. You heard barkers encouraging you to come on in and see some amazing sight. You smelled the cotton candy and funnel cakes. And the rides! The ferris wheel, the Octopus, the bumper cars. You started to hang back, distracted by all those things. Then, you heard your dad’s voice. “Come on. Keep up. We’re almost there.” You knew your dad’s voice. You trusted him, and followed, right?

Today we are in the presence of our Savior, no matter where we are sitting. And once again, our Savior calls to us, cutting through the distractions of this world. **“DO YOU HEAR YOUR SHEPHERD’S VOICE?”** Many are trying to drown it out, but He calls us to bless us. Come with me today and listen to the voice of Jesus.

Part One: Many try to drown it out

Jesus was engaging in verbal combat with the Pharisees. Gone were the days when Jesus was tolerated by the religious establishment. Now, they attacked Him at every opportunity. In the verses just before our text, we see the Pharisees denying that Jesus is the Son of God. They denied He was the Messiah. Why? Well, because Jesus was a threat to them. If Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah, He would effectively cut off their positions of influence and power. No longer would people look up to them as spiritual guides. No longer would they be revered for their knowledge. No longer could they tell people what to do and how much to give. No, Jesus was a threat and they acted accordingly.

So, being threatened, they actively tried to drown out the voice of Jesus. They didn’t want the people to hear what Jesus was saying. They didn’t want people to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. They tried every trick in the book to silence Jesus. At the end of this chapter we read that they wanted to stone Jesus. They wanted to kill Him. That would silence Him for good, right? Well, we know the answer to that. You can’t silence God. You can’t silence Jesus.

You know what is amazing to me? That even after all this opposition, all this hatred, all the attacks against Him, Jesus still reached out to them. He uses a picture that is very familiar to them - a picture of a shepherd and his sheep. We understand His method, don’t we? After all, we do the same thing. We use pictures to get our thoughts across, too. We call our dad or husband the rock of my life. We call our wives the sunshine in my life. We describe a friend as strong as an ox, or a bull in a china shop. We use pictures to get our point across, don’t we?

Well, that’s what Jesus does, too. ***“I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.”***

Jesus is the only way to heaven for anyone. He is the One who knows His sheep, and His sheep listen to His voice.

His listeners knew very well who the thieves and robbers were that Jesus is mentioning. It was them. Jesus lays into them and describes them in this way: ***“¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy;”*** The spiritual thief steals money, or praise or hope. The spiritual thief kills the soul, along with hope and trust in God. The spiritual thief destroys peace and a relationship with a loving Lord. The spiritual thief, a false shepherd, isn’t interested in leading a person to paradise. A spiritual thief is interested only in himself and what he can get from you.

There are a tumult of voices in our world, trying to drown out Jesus’ voice and steal what Jesus has won for us. The thieves of this world shout “Don’t trust anyone else. Trust yourself.” The thieves of this world shout “Listen to what I have to say about your money, your lifestyle. Trust me.” The thieves of this world sometimes wrap themselves in spiritual clothing and say “Send money. Buy my book. I know the way to eternal life.” And they never point us to the true gate, Jesus Christ. We’ve

all heard these voices. They're blaring from our radios and flooding our news feed on the internet. If you google "spirit guide", you'll find 462 million links! Oh, there are many voices in our lives that want to drown out the voice of our good Shepherd!

Part Two: He calls to bless you

We need wisdom as we hear the voices of the world. Which one is a thief or robber, and which one is the voice of our Lord? Thank God that the Holy Spirit is so active in our hearts! He is the One who gently, calmly and correctly opens our ears to the voice of the One who saved us. He gently points out to us again and again where the voice of the Savior is heard. It's heard in Scriptures! Jesus continues to clearly call to us in the Word, and we hear His voice. ***"He calls his own sheep by name."*** He knows who we are. He knows what we need. He knows how to bless us.

By the grace of God, we hear and follow. The Holy Spirit gave us the faith, the ears to hear the voice of Jesus. He also guides us in discerning what is and what is not Jesus' voice. Have you ever heard a spiritual statement by someone and said to yourself "That doesn't sound quite right. I'm not sure what's wrong about it, but it just doesn't sound right." You've been listening to the voice of your Savior for a while, and the Holy Spirit nudges your spiritual ears so that you know. He's the One who guides us as we listen to the voices of the world and our Savior. He's the One who moves us to listen to Him and ignore the voices of the thieves and robbers of this life.

It's a good thing that the Holy Spirit does this, for Jesus' desire for us is not to steal and kill and destroy, but to bless us. ***"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."*** Our Lord, out of love, simply wants to give us the very best life that He can. He wants us to have the very best life here on earth and also our very best life in heaven with Him. He calls us to bless us!

Can you hear His voice? Or do you hear the voices of this world trying to drown Him out? You've heard the voices. In fact, one of them might be your own sinful nature. That's the one that looks at this world and says "Jesus, You're not doing such a great job. I've lost my job. The economy's tanking. The virus has taken away my freedoms and one of my close friends. Is this what you call a full life?"

We might look at our lives that way. Step back and take a look at our lives from Jesus' viewpoint. He's the gate to heaven, the only way any of us can have a wonderful life forever. His desire is first of all to bless us with eternal life by getting us through the gate. His main goal is to save us forever. So, He lived the perfect life we could not. He died the perfect death to pay for all sins. He sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts so that we would believe and be saved. His main goal is to get us to and through the gate to paradise. And once He has given us our faith, He wants to fill our present earthly life with comfort, peace, hope and contentment.

With these words Jesus is not promising health, wealth and a pain-free life on earth. Oh, you may hear voices saying that's what Jesus is going to do. If you give money to them, Jesus will bless you with a bigger bank account. If you follow Jesus, all your dreams will come true and you'll have everything you want right here and now. Thieves and robbers say such things, don't they? No, Jesus knows that sin has broken His creation. Sin has brought pain, suffering and death into your life. When Jesus says that He wants us to have life and have it to the full, He wants to give us what we need as we struggle in life. As we listen to our Good Shepherd's voice, that's exactly what He gives to us.

So, how can we focus on the Shepherd's voice in today's world? Figure out how much time you spend listening to the news and how much time you spend in the Word. Turn off the news once in a while. Why listen to Fox News or CNN all day, every day? You're listening to the voices of this world. Pick up the Bible and listen to the voice of your Savior. Spend time in prayer with Him, pouring out your heart, your worries and your thanks to Him.

My friends, we're running a spiritual steeplechase. In a 2,000 meter steeplechase, there are 18 barriers to jump over and 5 water barriers to jump as well. Together, we've hit one of those barriers, and it's not fun, is it? But remember the goal. Remember the finish line, the gate that is Jesus. His plan and purpose is to get us safely home. Listen to your Shepherd's voice, and you'll get there!

AMEN