



2023 Weekly Devotions

Week of: November 13th - 19th

Sermon: November 12th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community ◊ equipping believers ◊ serving Jesus

November 13

Hebrews 1:1-2

Jesus' Words in John 10 are incredibly concise, "my sheep hear my voice". The statement is intelligible, but it does beg some very interesting, important, questions. Perhaps the most pressing inquiry is this, how do we hear Jesus' voice today? While the primary audience stood in Jesus' midst and heard Him deliver these words audibly, modern day believers are not afforded the same awesome privilege. How do we, then, hear the Words of God?

Today's text shows us that God intended for Jesus' Words to be preserved and the reason is simply because Jesus is the pinnacle and the final object of God's speaking. The author of Hebrews tells us that the initial prophets spoke "in previous days". Interestingly enough, their message terminated on Christ Himself (see Luke 24) but, "in these last days, God has spoken to us by His Son." The prophets looked forward to the time that Christ would arrive and when Jesus came on the scene, there was nothing, from a redemptive perspective, to follow. It's like going to a concert and seeing the acts that "open" for the main artist. While those are nice, and often enjoyable, everyone is there for the star and when he or she comes, sings, and goes, everyone goes home because no one follows the main performer! In the same way, there is no one else coming, Christ is the star, and He has appeared. The only thing left is His reappearing and we are to live in light of both His earthly instructions and His imminent return.

You will notice a note of finality and an aura of completion in these words. Whenever I read this passage, I am reminded that I should expect no new revelation from God. God has revealed all that He desires His children to know in Christ but how do I know anything about Christ? The answer is that God has preserved His message which glorifies and elevates His Son in the Word of God.

You see, the author of Hebrews is certainly writing after Jesus ascended to heaven and yet he is looking back to the time of Christ to elucidate and explain what Jesus meant and why He is important. The entire Bible is meant to teach us about Christ, and how we are to live in light of His coming, and this means that in reading the Scripture we are reading about Jesus and, therefore, we hear His voice.

Folks, we don't hear God's voice in the kooky and the bizarre. Our premonitions are notoriously unreliable and there is no promise that the Spirit is going to give us a new message. Instead, God still speaks through His Word, illuminating the identity and authority of Christ and the Spirit helps us to discern what God's Word says and how to apply it to our lives.

So, stated as simply as I possibly can, how do we hear the voice of Christ? We hear His voice in the Bible. The Bible gives us His message and it is in this preserved Word that we have our instructions to follow. Dear brother and sister, if you are waiting for some special revelation or if you are relying upon your feelings and your intuitions for clarity and instruction, I would implore you to consider the way that Hebrews speaks about God's communication. In Jesus, God has spoken! There is nothing more coming because there is nothing more we need and nothing that could possibly improve upon what God has already told us in Jesus. May we see and savor this truth and may it give us more motivation to search the Scriptures to see what God would have us know as His sheep.

November 14

Colossians 1:18

Yesterday, we dealt with the obvious issue of hearing Christ's voice. How do Jesus' sheep hear Him today, some 2,000 years after He ascended to heaven? The answer, we saw, is through the Bible which is the way that Jesus is revealed to us as His followers. Jesus is the final, pinnacle revelation of God and this means that we should expect no more revelation from God even as we seek to understand who Jesus is and hear from Him through the Scriptures.

However, that only deals with a portion of Jesus' famous statement as Christ not only said that His sheep hear His voice, He also said that the result of that hearing is that Jesus' sheep "follow" Him. My assumption is that I am not alone in saying that I often hear God's voice, in His Word, and do not immediately love what He has to say! Many things in the Bible are hard, they require sacrifice, they are counterintuitive, and they force us to choose whom we will obey.

There are many commands and precepts in the Bible that seem inconvenient or even downright naïve, nevertheless, the true sheep of Jesus obey Him. The question that I want to answer over the next three days is this one, why? Why do we obey Jesus above our own thoughts and the commonly held wisdom of others? What is it about faith that requires this level of obedience?

Let me give you the first answer today. The simplest reason for our obedience is that Jesus is in charge. Christ commands us in His Word to obey Him in various respects and we honor Him in our obedience because of His standing as Lord. Today's passage tells us that Christ is the "head" of the church. This term has both a physical and indicative meaning. Metaphorically speaking, the Bible often refers to the church as the "body of Christ" and, in keeping with this picture, Jesus is the head of the body. This means that He is the control center, the One who gives directions and dictates to each member what should be done. Christ is the head of the church, in this sense, like the head is the leader of the body. Your body, when functioning properly, does nothing without the instruction of the brain and this informs the way we interact with our Lord.

From a more basic point of view, the Bible tells us that Christ is the head of the church in the sense that He is ahead of us... He is our leader! Jesus goes before us and rightly so! He is our leader in redemption, He is our victor over sin and Satan, He is our intercessor before the Father and He is our Lord in all things.

This means that Jesus' commands are not up for debate, they are simply given for submission! Christ is the One whom we must follow, and this means that hearing the voice of Christ **REQUIRES** following His lead in all things. In our world, someone must be in charge. Somebody's opinions and directions need to be articulated and followed if a movement will prosper. In our case, our Lord is that mouthpiece and our responsibility is to follow Him out of conviction that He is our rightful, authoritative King.

November 15

1 Corinthians 1:30

Yesterday we began to answer the question, why? Specifically, we wanted to know why Jesus' sheep obey His voice. The first answer is totally sufficient, Jesus' sheep obey Him because He is our head. Transparently, that is enough, but it is not the only reason the Bible gives us to motivate and inform our submission to Christ's Word. Today we learn yet another reason for our obedience, specifically we learn that we should follow Jesus because of His wisdom.

Part of the growing up process is grounded in learning that you don't know everything! I would surmise that all of us have stories of times that we thought we knew something that we totally miscalculated! I remember older, and far wiser, individuals giving me all kinds of advice in years gone by. Often, I refused to obey them because I simply didn't understand how life works. Some of you can look at decisions you made and grieve that you didn't listen to the wise voices in your life in your youthful arrogance and naivety. You shouldn't have bought that car, taken that job, dated that person or trusted that salesman! Whatever it might be, as we grow older, we realize that wisdom is quite important and those who possess it deserve our honor and respect.

Today's text reminds us that Jesus is wise. The verse goes beyond simply describing Christ as wise as it says that Jesus became wisdom. He is the very essence and embodiment of wisdom, and this has massive implications and ramifications for us as we read His Word and choose to follow His directions.

Sometimes, the Bible commands and commends things that don't seem to make too much sense to us. It's easy to read a passage on loving your enemy or dying to self or giving generously and pridefully mock the idea. Our flesh does not like the pathway that Christ has outlined and, often times, a war ensues in our own hearts as we fight with our flesh to obey. What wins that battle? One answer is grounded in Christ's wisdom.

Jesus has a history of doing things in an unorthodox way (at least from the world's perspective). He began the greatest institution in the history of the world (the church) with 12 common, uneducated men. He chose to run from crowds as much as He ran to them, and He overcame death for us by dying Himself! Each of these things (and countless others) would not be advisable from a worldly perspective and yet we now see the wisdom of Christ in them all!

The point is that Jesus has established that He is all-wise and now His sheep must take that evidence and follow Him, even when the current path seems a bit precarious. He has proven that He sees things and accounts for obstacles in ways that we would not even fathom and this means that we have every reason to trust Him and follow Him when He clearly directs us where to go and what to do once we arrive.

November 16

Galatians 2:20

So, to recap, we have stated that we follow the voice of Christ because He is our leader, and He is all-wise. That seems to be two very good reasons to follow our Lord but the final, perhaps greatest, reason has yet to be mentioned. We not only follow Jesus because He is the authority and He is wise, we also follow Jesus because He loves us.

The love of Jesus is clear in the Gospel. This is the point that Paul is making for us today in Galatians 2 as he reminds us that Christ gave Himself up for His sheep. The Bible is quite clear that you and I are redeemed because of the substitutionary death of Jesus. Jesus shows His love for us in His willingness to descend from heaven, take on flesh, dwell amongst us in this sin-ridden, rebellious world and die in our place. His very reason for coming was to seek and to save those who are lost and His method of bringing us from lostness to salvation is in His dying to redeem us and reconcile us to the Father.

Now, the reason why this matters is obvious in relation to our question. If this Jesus is both the authority and all-wise and this Jesus loves us so much as is evidenced by His dying on our behalf, why wouldn't we follow Him? Would Jesus lead us to a place of our destruction after He sacrificed so much to redeem us? Why would Christ harm the sheep He so clearly loves? The simple truth is that Jesus has done plenty to warrant your trust and obedience. You are not asked to follow a dictator; you are asked to follow a sacrificial King who earnestly desires your good as seen in the actions He undertook to bring you into His Kingdom.

Dear brothers and sisters, I know that sometimes devotions like this can come off as callous or uninformed. I am aware that life is full of tough moments and that it is easier to type exhortations to obey in the challenging moments than it is to follow. Nevertheless, I must remind you that no circumstance can change the truth of what I am saying to you today. Often times in life we don't know where Christ is leading, and we don't know why either. In these moments, this pithy phrase is helpful, "when you can't see where God is leading, you can still trust His heart." How do we know His heart for us? We see His heart at Calvary!

Some of you today are struggling with whether to follow. Perhaps the course that God has illuminated for you is painful or full of challenges. These things being true, you still must follow Christ and you can do so with assurance that difficulties may await but nothing will overwhelm you as you are being led by your fearless, authoritative, and immensely loving shepherd.

When we are tempted to despair, remember the love of Christ. When we are tempted to believe that someone or something else would lead us to a more beneficial place, remember the love of Christ. When we are tempted to wonder if we will be abandoned, remember the love of Jesus who promised He would never leave nor forsake you.

In all these things, the love of Christ shines through in His Gospel. May we reflect upon His cross, think about His love and mercy and fan into flame our love of Him by virtue of our contemplation of all that He has endured for our good.

November 17

Matthew 21: 28-31

In Sunday's message, Daniel emphasized the biblical teaching that those who are saved are truly sheep who belong to Jesus, hear His voice, and follow Him. I imagined how some in the congregation could be sitting there wondering if they were indeed sheep. Why? Truth be told, none of us hear His voice and respond immediately in obedience all the time. For the highly sensitive listener, you may walk away carrying a misplaced shame or guilt that you need not carry. I make this statement realizing that what Daniel said is absolutely true and appropriate in his message. What we must do as listeners is walk the sermons we hear through other biblical truths as well so that we do not end up misapplying what we hear.

The passage chosen for today should help in providing some assurance for the one who may judge themselves too harshly or without enough grace. Jesus tells a parable in Matthew 21 verses 28-31 that speaks to "follow through" in the Christian life. My simple point to ponder this morning is that sometimes obedience can be a struggle. Now, please know that I in no way wish to justify disobedience or to lead anyone to think it is okay to delay obedience anytime you feel spiritually lazy or sinful. This offer of grace is to the one who sincerely longs to be obedient and more often than not, is. Again, I have a soft spot in my heart for the person sitting in the sanctuary beating themselves up where they should not.

So, Jesus tells a parable and in it tells the story of a father who directs his sons to go do some work in the family vineyard. The first son demonstrated some disrespect and rebellion in his heart by telling his dad he would not. The second son quickly responds to his father with respect and what sounded like intentional obedience. At the outset, we would certainly draw the conclusion that the second son was the one who pleased his father and demonstrated all the characteristics with which God would be pleased; however, the parable does not end there.

What we end up learning in the parable is that the first son, who was initially disobedient, repented of his rebellion, and obeyed his father. The second son, who responded quickly with respect and obedience, never actually obeyed his father. Jesus asked the question, "which of the two did the will of his father?" They correctly responded that the first son, who initially rebelled against his father's will, was the one who was obedient and did the will of his father. Now, in the context of the parable, the larger lesson is that the chief priests and elders (v. 23) were the ones who were ultimately being disobedient to God while the sinners, tax collectors, and such, although late in obedience, were the ones most pleasing to Him.

My simple point today is that sometimes when you struggle to obey the Word and will of God initially, stay with it. It is not uncommon to have to, on occasion, get your head and heart right in order to follow Him as you should. I can recall times in my life when my first impulse was not to respond to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, only to wrestle with my flesh and then get my actions in line with His heart. So, it is definitely true that His sheep hear His voice and follow, but it is also true that sometimes the sheep are a little slow in responding as they (we) should. Don't be okay with sin, and don't be okay with delayed obedience, but at the same time offer yourselves a little grace for the battle that sometimes must take place between the spirit and the flesh. It appears to me that Jesus offered a little grace to his hardheaded sheep on occasion.

November 18

Isaiah 6:9-13; Matthew 13:10-17

This point to ponder originated in my mind with the reading of John 10:6 and then verse 24. In verse 6 it says, "This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them." Jesus was speaking using language that was meant to be illustrations intended to make points. His goal was to draw relevant spiritual truths from the "figures of speech" in His teaching. The eventual response of the people was this, "If you are the Christ, tell us plainly" (v. 24b). Obviously, they were not understanding Him. They did not understand the connections between His agricultural analogies and the spiritual truths that He was teaching. Of course, we know that the real reason they could not understand His teachings was because they did not have the Holy Spirit indwelling them to teach them His truth.

An interesting and sometimes puzzling truth is recorded in Matthew's gospel concerning the technique Jesus used of teaching in parables, or we might say, figures of speech. The disciples plainly asked Jesus, "Why do you speak to them in parables" (Matthew 13:10)? Jesus responds by saying, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted" (v. 11). Jesus quotes the passage from Isaiah 6:9-10 concerning the dullness and inability to see and hear of those who have closed their eyes and ears to God's truth for too long. The point of that O.T. passage is that if they had not rejected the Truth, they would have been able to perceive the Truth. When Jesus quoted the passage he said, "Otherwise they would see with their eyes and hear with their ears" (v. 15b). It is important to understand that where He used the word "otherwise," it means, "If they had not." So, in other words, if they had not closed their eyes and ears willfully, they would have been able to hear and see. It was their own disobedience, unbelief, and rebellious hearts that caused the hardening and dullness of seeing and hearing. The fact that Jesus spoke in parables is actually judgment against those who had grown dull due to rejecting God's Word.

Now, before you think poorly of God and fall into despair, keep reading in the book of Isaiah 6. After Isaiah has written about the doom and gloom of God's judgment against an obstinate and unbelieving people, he ends by reminding us that even though judgment will cut down the tree, the stump will remain (Isa. 6:13). This stump is meant to be a lesson that tells us the tree will grow again once God has cleansed and purified through judgment. When Jesus quotes this passage in Matthew 13, which is similar to how He was teaching in John 10, we are to remember that after judgment comes salvation for many. Those who are His true sheep will hear His voice, will understand, and will follow Him. Those who are not His sheep will not hear and will remain lost in their sin.

Keep in mind that this parable is a sign of judgment that is a result of their own rebellion. When Jesus tells His disciples in Matthew 13 that it had not been granted for the rebellious to know the mysteries of the kingdom (v. 11), understand it is because they have not received the Holy Spirit by faith in Jesus. Paul taught that the lost person cannot understand the things of the Spirit because they are spiritually (with the help of the Holy Spirit) discerned (1 Cor. 2:14). Jesus continues in Matthew 13:12 by telling us that to those who have understanding, more understanding will come while those who reject Christ will slowly but surely lose any fragment of faith they may have had. God is not unfair; He is just and will continue to give grace to the humble and resist the proud (James 4:6).

November 19

Luke 9:18-20

In verse 24 of Daniel's text (John 10:22-30) from Sunday, the Jews said, "If you are the Christ, tell us plainly?" I am fairly certain that the question does not originate from a sincere place. Jesus had provided ample evidence of His deity and His purpose, and the people were continuing to remain in unbelief. As a matter of fact, He says, "I told you, and you do not believe" (v. 25). Now, the point that I want us to ponder today centers on the more appropriate and necessary endeavor of sincerely seeking to discover if Jesus is the Christ indeed. I am afraid that many claim to be His followers but who may have never seriously pondered why they even believe that He is the Messiah.

In Luke 9:18-20, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" The exchange began with Him asking who others were saying that He is and culminated with the more personal, "Who do YOU say that I am? Dear ones, it is necessary that we all deal with this question. Who do you say that Jesus is? If you would answer the Christ, that is correct. Now, the reason I speak to this today is because it is easy to say, but sometimes hard to live up to. You see, if He is indeed the Christ, then our decisions, behavior, choices, etc. should all be made in view of this reality. If the Gospel is really true, then a person needs to repent and get "right" with God or else they are going to hell for all of eternity. The point is that this cannot be a flippant answer based on no real conviction in your heart. If it is, then when the going gets tough, your anchor is not going to hold because it is not being held in place by doctrinal truths that have convinced your heart and mind that He is who He claims to be. Genuine obedience and commitment are fostered by deep convictions that give the impetus for obedience.

In Daniel's text from Sunday, we learned that some in the audience were wrestling with His identity. He had taught amazing lessons, preached jaw-dropping sermons, performed incredible miracles, and changed countless lives and still there were many who refused to believe all of the evidence. Jesus had told them in word that He was the Christ and that He was God. He also demonstrated it in the many "works" that He had performed in the Father's Name (John 10:25) which all testified to His identity. My hope today is that we will understand two truths.

First, there will always be people who reject the claims of Christ and the teaching of Scripture regardless of the evidence. At the end of the day, it will not matter what you say, what you do, or even what is true in the minds of some who are not His sheep. Jesus said it plainly, "You do not believe because you are not My sheep (V. 26)". Secondly, I want you to give serious consideration to asking yourself why you believe. My hope is that you would take a look at the ample evidence and draw a well-reasoned and rational decision that Jesus is the Christ. What if Jesus were to ask you today, "Who do you say I am?" What would you say? Now, what would you say if He followed that up with this one, "Why do you believe that?"

May it be that we could tell our Lord that we know the Bible teaches that He is God incarnate. I hope that we could talk some about fulfilled O.T. prophecies, of the amazing continuity of the Scriptures, the reliability of the Texts and the accuracy of them as well. I hope that we would mention the evidence that has been discovered through archeology that testifies to the validity of the Bible and the life of Christ. Finally, I hope that we could tell Him our story of transformation because of the gospel and the Holy Spirit at work in us. May it be that we believe because we are honestly convinced of the claims of Christianity and our Savior the Lord Jesus.