All You Need

The 'I Ams' of John's Gospel

"I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD"

What are the loudest voices, the main influences/ers in your life?

Family?

Friends?

Teachers?

Celebrities?

Media?

Arts?

Ideologies?

Faith?

Right from day 1, we hear voices. In our mother's womb we could hear the voices of those around us, and we could detect differences in mood from the tone of those voices. And all throughout our lives, we are bombarded by voices, thousands upon thousands of them, some of them good, some of them not so good: "This is how you should think …" "This is how you should speak …" This is how you should look …" "This is how you should act …" "This is who you are …" They might appeal to our needs, our wants, our hopes, our fears, our sinfulness. And sometimes, they can be so loud it can be difficult to know who to be or what to do next.

So, which voice should we listen to? Whose voice should be loudest? And how do we decide?

John 10:1-21

Jesus' followers would have grown up with several voices shouting in their ears. There was the voice of Pharisaic Judaism: "Keep this tradition and that, and God will be pleased with you." There was the voice of anything-goes Hellenism: "If it feels good, do it!" And there was the voice of Roman imperialism: "You can believe what you like, as long as you pay your taxes and honour Caesar." And it's against that backdrop that Jesus says this:

"I am the good shepherd."

Or *anokhi hu, ha'ro'eh ha'tov* in His original Hebrew.

What does Jesus mean by this? He's spelling out what qualifies Him to be the main influence in our lives. There are 4 things in particular:

1) He Knows Us Like No Other. Jesus here refers to false teachers ('thieves'), John the Baptist ('watchman'), Himself ('gate' and 'shepherd'), then us: "He calls His own sheep by name."

In the ancient Jewish world, your name was more than a tag or label. Your name meant everything about you: your history, your destiny, your identity. So the point that Jesus is making here is: "I know you inside and out – everything you've ever said, ever done, or ever thought, and everything you ever will. But, in spite of that, I love you."

He also says, "I know My sheep and My sheep know Me." Shepherds spent all their time with their sheep – even on the Sabbath – and that made them ritually unclean and marginalised in the eyes of the community. But it also meant that they understood their sheep – and vice versa. Similarly, Jesus was willing to live His life on the edge, so that He could understand *us,* and vice versa.

I.e. no-one knows people like Jesus knows people.

2) He Leads Us Like No Other. Jesus says, "When He has brought out all His own, He goes on ahead of them, and His sheep follow Him because they know His voice."

Even today, Bedouin shepherds will take their sheep to an oasis and allow them to mingle with the sheep of other flocks, without fear of losing them. Because every shepherd has his own unique signal – a whistle, a chirrup – that is known only to *his* sheep. So when it's time to leave, he gets up, gives the signal … and away they go!

But – and this is important – he always goes ahead of them. Just like Jesus promises to do here.

So, what does that mean? It means 1) He's never going to ask us to do anything or go anywhere where He has not gone Himself; 2) He's always watching out for us, even when we think He isn't; and 3) He'll always be there for us, in good times and in bad. Just like a shepherd.

Because no-one leads people like Jesus leads people.

3) He Feeds Us Like No Other. Jesus says of each of His sheep, "He will come in and go out, and find pasture."

Domesticated sheep can be pretty daft, so they have to rely on the skills of a shepherd to find green grass and clean water (which is no mean feat when you live in the desert). And if we're honest, we know we can be daft too, sometimes. We watch stuff and read stuff and listen to stuff that's no good for us – a bit like a sheep munching away on bits of dried-up twig and drinking from dirty streams. And then we wonder why we don't feel good!

What we really need is 1) God's Word and 2) God's Spirit, to meet our spiritual hunger and quench our spiritual thirst. And that's what God in Jesus provides for us – green pastures and still waters, as Psalm 23:1-2 puts it.

Jesus here is saying, "I know what's best for you – so follow Me."

Because no-one feeds people like Jesus feeds people.

4) He Loves Us Like No Other. Sheep can face all kinds of hazards: hunger; thirst; injury; disease; separation; thieves; attacks from wild animals. A hired hand couldn't care less, and would probably do a runner if necessary. But a shepherd, he has a vested interest in those sheep – because they are *his* sheep. His whole life revolves around them – which means he has to be as rough and ready as the average shepherd's crook. He has to be willing to fight for his sheep, and if necessary, die for them.

And that, of course, is exactly what Jesus did.

Twice here Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." I.e. not only did He give up eternity for us, He laid down His life for us. He allowed Himself to be whipped, tortured, crucified – so His flock could be saved. But He also makes the point, "I have authority to pick it up again." And why did He do it?

Because no-one loves people like Jesus loves people.

The Loudest Voice

So what does this tell us about Jesus? That He is the divine shepherd *(ra'ah)* referred to so often in the OT (Isaiah 40:10-11; Ezekiel 34:11-12; Micah 2:12-13; etc). And that's what qualifies Him to have the most influence.

What does it tell us about us? That Jesus' flock is open to us all. "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also," Jesus says. Who is He talking about? Jews outside of Israel? Samaritans? Gentiles? People then? People now? Basically, yes. Question is: are you a part of that flock? Do you belong to Him and is He *your* shepherd? Maybe you feel that you've wandered from Him. Is He calling you, today?

Yes, there are so many influences, so many 'voices' in our lives. But Jesus' voice deserves to be loudest of all.