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Substance of Sermon preached by our Pastor,
on Thursday, April 17. 1980.

Lesson. John 10. vv. 1-30.

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. John 10. 27.
The manner of presentation of this sacred subject to our immortal souls who hunger and thirst after righteousness, now and at all times is, "Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause me to hear it." That is the presentation. One might view it, properly so, as a divine, heavenly, exclusive subject of the holy, good, divine Shepherd, the Lord Jesus and to contemplate His beloved flock,- that is to say, that part on the earth already blessed with spiritual life and consequently all the functions, motions, faculties of divine life in their souls, so we might seek divine aid to dilate on the subject. This is the epitome of it, the nucleus of the whole: you not only want to know concerning the sacred subject, "My sheep hear my voice," you will be pleading, "Lord, cause me to hear it, to night and at all times." I shall feel I am richly rewarded if precious souls hear the voice of the beloved Shepherd in this divine service. After all, it constitutes a living, vital exercise of soul in the activity of all the graces of the Spirit, especially living faith, to hear His voice which they are favoured to know. His voice is unparalleled because of the sweetness, holy efficacy, divine unction, almighty power. His voice communicates life, salvation, bliss, peace, conviction, warning, comfort, healing, direction, and brings Heaven to your soul.

I put it to the beloved friends in this way. It is Thursday evening; the sands of time are sinking rapidly. Take this week: have you heard the voice of the Good Shepherd? If so, and I well recognise the various facets of application and interpretation of 'voice': if you have heard the voice of the beloved Shepherd of the sheep it will be speaking to you in love if it is warning and reproofing, - you are supremely happy, especially if the precious voice which is knowable and known exclusively by the sheep, - if He has spoken Heaven, pardon, comfort, healing, blessing, as it must and shall, into your soul: how favoured and happy you are. If I take the alternative to this in relation to the vicissitudes

through which the people of God pass to show the method of communication of His love to your soul,- if you feel destitute of blessing, the Lord seems silent to you, we shall see the paramount importance of the divine method of communication to those the Lord loves and are His. "My sheep," you are owned. If you can think of that you are owned by God in Christ it is heavenly bliss for you. "My sheep," If you have heard His sweet voice, known the method of divine communication and you come into the other part, (it is on our part.)- sin, backslidings, wanderings, and things that please the flesh deaden the spirit; if you have recently had things that pleased your flesh it is certain your spirit is deadened. That is why the Lord sends things to mar, or we should idolise and go after that which pleases the flesh. But the way to be called away is to know as at Easter tide, the dolorous, vicarious sufferings of the Saviour and His glorious resurrection. His sorrows and joys wean from the earth. A contemplation of His sorrows will diminish all activity the mind would have in perishing things. And His joy,- O the effect of it! His triumph and victory. You will get an intense longing to share it and to celebrate it in Heaven.

To show the paramount importance of the method of divine communication of love which is eternal; the Psalmist said, "Be not silent to me: lest, if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit." Is the Lord silent to you? or does He speak? I can not bear, (I speak to you spontaneously from my soul) I cannot bear to go a week without hearing the voice of the Lord, and you may be surprised,- you ought not to be: how can I preach if the Lord is silent to me? How would our brethren go forth with a message unless the Lord spoke to them? If there is a succession of divine services we need to hear the voice of the Lord for all of them. There are times when we venture in the dark. You dear gracious people, you pray that the Lord would speak to His servants and your unworthy pastor; that there will be a message, and when the Lord gives to His beloved servants a message you hear His voice. There are precious souls seeking Thy face, and they go to the Table, what shall I do if the Lord is silent? He speaks; it is done. You may have heard me refer to this: when the Lord speaks and gives a message, sometimes the whole of the substance is opened before me: it is the Lord's voice. You

see what heavenly authority, divine unction flows when a minister comes like that, when he has heard the voice of the Shepherd. We feel to fail. There is one thing always marks this. As the Lord gives His dear servants to hear the voice of the Great Shepherd, in the sermon there is a realisation of heavenly unction that flows to the soul and declares from whence it comes, and it is a complete answer. As I come perhaps to ^{the end of} that part of the dissertation I ask you and myself, have you heard the voice of the dear Shepherd lately? in the night, in trouble, as you travel, in the House of God? The other part is if the Lord is silent: and we ask no questions; we are guilty. If our mind has wandered, if we have indulged mentally the lusts of the flesh, so we never find it possible for our thoughts to be made public and feel no one is as vile as we, certain^{things} are seen by Almighty God, and we are not surprised if the Lord is silent. If you have felt your heart lifted up because of anything you are not surprised if the Lord is silent. It is a mercy if the Lord speaks and reproveth, and there is a word from Him that wounds the spirit and convinces of sin. If the Lord is silent you will find what the Psalmist said to be the expression of your soul. You will plead, "Be not silent to me. What good would it do me if I could grasp in all the shores, have all I wished for, and life was smooth and easy, if the Lord remained silent?" Has the Lord spoken to you recently?

He says, "I know them." He knows our frailty. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." "I know them," and He knows what we are in and passing through, and about to come into. I will make this application. He knows what you are in: no one else knows. It is a matter of loving discretion: much love as it flows in your spirit teaches you not to overburden your dearest ones: parents do not put all their burdens on dear children, and it applies the other way. Obviously you do not want to put everything on your dear wife, and the dear saintly person does not feel it discreet to put all her burdens on her husband. The Lord says, "I know them," He knows you in Himself.

"He saw me ruined in the fall,
Yet loved me notwithstanding all."

He knows all about your exercises. He gave the exercises to His dear people. He knows your sighs and groans. You cannot fully identify your

groans. He knows what they express. He knows what you are in ^{on} this Thursday evening, this week. One of the divine methods of communication for your comfort and blessing is that He speaks to you. O the bliss of it! You sit before the Lord in the Sanctuary and take your case with you and your concerns, and sitting before the Lord you have pleaded with Him: you have cried and groaned and He speaks to you through His own blessed ordinance, the ministry. I may refer to the amazing miracle that fills us with humility and praise: a preacher sent of God preaches to himself sometimes. He almost forgets he is the man in the pulpit. He hears the word of the Lord and preaches to himself and it feeds his soul. Not only are we as ordained and favoured of God, we are hearers too. I am listening to hear the voice of the blessed Shepherd. Do you understand? "Be not silent to me.- it is an unbearable thing: I cannot bear the thought of it,- lest, if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit." Your grandchildren may be the vehicle the Lord uses to speak to you; your own dear children may speak to you; friends may. You have the usual salutation and then there is the voice of the Lord to your soul. Years ago I remember going to preach in several places and the exercise of my soul was this, "Lord, cause Thy dear people to speak to me that I may hear Thy voice through them." It came to Westoning, and dear old Mr Lockey met me and took me to his son's house, and we engaged in spiritual conversation. Presently he said, "We must get in," and I had heard nothing. He opened the door, and said, "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have...showed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these." That was the word. I had heard the voice of the Shepherd, and when he announced Hymn 961,

"Be still, my heart! these anxious cares
 To thee are burdens, thorns, and snares;
 They cast dishonour on thy Lord,
 And contradict His gracious word."

I heard the voice of the Lord. What about it? Are you pleading, "Be not silent to me."? That is why a godly, gracious, spiritual deacon is so valuable. Hymns forged in the furnace of affliction flow out of holy communion with the Lord, and the Lord speaks in the Hymns. I refute the suggestion,- it is dishonouring to the Lord; "That is the Hymn Book. I must have the Bible." What are the Hymns? They are the truth of God good

men and women were inspired to write. It is a disgraceful attitude to say the Hymn Book is nothing. The Lord speaks: and it is wonderful in prayer. It is one of the blessings of a Prayer Meeting, for men inspired of God to pray as they plead with the Lord. They use a word and it drops into the heart, and it is the voice of the Lord to you. You can never assess the blessing and the volume of blessing there is in the speech of the Lord to His people. Why? Because it signifies they are His. He loves them. He knows them: they know Him. He lay down His life for them. He is the Door through which you had entrance to the King's palace, the Church, the vineyard, the field and Heaven. What a proof this^{is} of your eternal salvation and safety! O this voice of the Lord!

Let us look at the three sides of the triangle. You have already recognised how sweet this is. "My sheep." It is tragic on earth for people to feel they are not loved or owned. "My sheep: they are Mine." Can you ever fathom the dimensions of it? "My sheep." They are sheep because they possess the nature and Spirit of the Lamb of God; the new man of grace and the faculties and the spirit of the new man. "My sheep." They are defenceless: the Hymn calls them silly. We are rather foolish; sometimes very. If there is a gap in the hedge and one goes through the others follow. They are poor, defenceless, docile, tractable, useful. The whole point is, 'sheep' expresses the nature and Spirit of the Lord Jesus, "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." "and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." "My sheep." If the Lord is with us we shall get to Heaven. A wonderful thing concerning this is this of union, oneness, recognition and methods of communication. "My sheep." It is laid down by our blessed Lord Himself, "The good shepherd giveth his life for the ~~sheep~~." Don't you love Him? He gave His precious, spotless life for you, and in the work of grace He gives all His sheep a being: they are all born into the world. I suppose you have often said to yourself, "Why was I born? I do not seem to be much good. I have never done much." As Mr J.H.Gosden said once near the end of his life, he felt he had done little else but sin. "Why am I here? I have nothing much to commend me. I have a lot to be ashamed of." Wonderful if we are born, not of the will of the flesh, but of God. Go back to 64. "He who formed me, - made in secret, and curiously wrought

in the lowest parts of the earth. He who formed me in the womb, He shall guide me to the tomb." He gave you a being. Some are not wanted: in some cases they are welcome. O the mystery! He gave you a being so on the stage of time He might perform and enact all divine purposes of grace toward and in you; show you your ruin and wretchedness; show you His Son, bless you, bring you into living union with Him and communion. And giving you life He maintains it.

Take one view. Think of love on the earth level. It is a wonderful favour and gift of God. Love needs to be cherished: you cannot take it for granted. You will know the wonder of this. If you went through life and a child never showed love to mother or father, or the other way; and with husband and wife. He gave you the blessing to know His Son and to enjoy communion, and speech is a part of it. "My sheep hear my voice." Another wonderful thing is, there is inbuilt recognition. It does not take a babe long to recognise its mother and father. It is intuition: there is affinity, oneness. The Lord knows you: you know Him and His voice. There might be a million voices speaking: you will recognise the voice of your Beloved; there is no other voice like His. "My sheep hear my voice." There is a fulness in this to me to night. He uses His voice. The dear Shepherd gave His life for us, and He leads us in green pastures, - not the wilderness; and beside the still waters. You will know if He is your Shepherd. David did. The dear Shepherd protects you from the lion and the bear, from your wicked heart. He healeth, restoreth your soul, and He guides you. When He putteth forth His own sheep He is the Door. If any would endanger the sheep they must pass over the body of the Shepherd. The next morning He putteth them forth step by step, and He goes before them. It is sweet to have a Shepherd; to know He is our Shepherd. You remember one of the outstanding times of Mr F. Gosden when he took both services. "My meditation of him shall be sweet." It was to many as a dying testimony.

You know His voice, and He speaks to convince of sin. "Thou art the Man." And He speaks to direct you to the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. "Come unto me, - to broken-hearted sinners, - and I will give you rest." And He speaks to direct us; "This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." And He speaks to warn us; "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."

And He speaks to reprove us; "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" And He speaks to draw us to His lovely, loving breast and to Heaven. "My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." And He speaks to comfort all His sheep. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." And He speaks to revive you. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, ~~wher~~for the help of his countenance." And He speaks to bring pardon to your soul. "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." And He speaks so you know how incomparable God is to you. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? - you are under the shelter of His blood- he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy." He tells you this; "He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us: he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." Blessed be His holy Name for ever and ever. Amen.