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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer",
Clapham, on Wednesday evening 5.8.70.

Hymns 345, 139, 354

Reading John 10 (vv. 7-29)

Text John 10. 27-28

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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow
Me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish,
neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand".

I shall have to say that I did not come into this pulpit
with any thought of preaching from these words but the hymns have
so touched me, and what I have read here, that what I formerly had
upon my mind is rather irrelevant, and I hope that there may be some
point in the fact that my mind has been diverted, for the Lord does
have a particular purpose in some particular matters.

The speaker here is the Lord Jesus Christ. The relationship
between the Lord and His dear people is referred to in the Scriptures
under various symbols, as the Head and the body; the Vine and the
branches; the Foundation and the building set upon it; and so on.
There is a relationship here in this verse, a very close relation-
ship between the Shepherd and His sheep. Even naturally speaking
as this was such a feature among the Jews, so in a spiritual sense
is it a feature with the Lord's dear children. In the Eastern lands
I understand they do not drive the sheep but the shepherd goes
before them, and I understand that they know His voice. This is a
mark of being a sheep.

It is said here, "He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth
before them, and the sheep follow Him: for they know His voice".
This matter of hearing the Shepherd's voice is quite a feature in
the subject, for the Lord says, "My sheep hear my voice". This may
seem at first to cut some of the Lord's poor seeking ones off in
that some may feel to have to say they have never heard His voice,
that is as they may desire to hear it; but that does not mean you
never will; and besides this you may be under quite mistaken concl-
usions about this. It is here a particular feature of a sheep

that they hear His voice; this does not mean an audible voice. It is true that when the Lord Jesus was upon earth in the days of His flesh they did hear His voice audibly, but many heard His voice audibly who never believed on Him. That voice in itself was not always effective to change the heart of those who heard it - only as the Lord Himself made it effective. There are many, many, who have never heard His audible voice; neither can we anticipate this; but the voice in this Gospel is the voice of His good Spirit in the heart in that divine teaching that is necessary to a gracious preparation for heaven. Properly speaking, all real, sacred teaching is as the voice of the good Shepherd by His Spirit in a quickened believer. Sometimes this is by the Holy Scriptures, by some portion, or word, or sentence, or verse, being made particularly precious. We cannot do this of ourselves. We may read many very choice portions of Scripture, probably all of us have many times, but the Lord's voice is when something comes home and brings some feeling, a little softening of heart, a little drawing forth of the soul toward Him. When there is a little lifting of the veil, a little, although it may not seem very much, inshining of the light of Truth into the poor dark heart of a sinner, this is the Shepherd's voice; so that all gracious teaching is the Shepherd's voice in a poor sinner's heart, whose ears have been opened to hear it and to receive it.

This voice may be referred to in different ways; sometimes it can be a word of warning; but what ever it may be it is always timely and suited to the condition of the one who hears it. We cannot say that we have no need of warnings. If we read those second and third chapters of the Revelation we shall see there are quite a number of solemn warnings, and these were particularly to those churches to whom also the Lord did say some good things; it is a mercy to be warned because of our danger and our propensity to turn aside. It is a mercy to be warned of the consequences of backsliding or turning away from the Lord, of falling a prey to the spirit of the world or drifting into some error. We need the Lord to keep us night and day. Sometimes when the Lord's voice is heard in a warning it tends to searching of heart before the Lord as to where we really are, where

we stand in His holy sight, and the danger that we may be in; as though one was on the edge of a precipice and in danger of falling. O what love there can be in hearing the Shepherd's voice in warning.

Sometimes His voice is heard in a reproof. I am sure this must be so, because the Lord said in the Revelation, "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten". He does not chasten because He has no love to such a one, but because of His love to one, although this may not always be felt; but sometimes it can be that the sweet love of Christ is felt in a chastening. "My sheep hear my voice". This indicates that the ear is opened to hear His voice as we read in the exhortation, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith", let Him hear My voice. In fact a good part of this chapter, and the Gospel of John, and especially the 14th-17th chapters, is all the Shepherd's voice; and profoundly sacred words they are. But you may say, yes, I am quite aware of all this; but still I feel I come short. It is a mercy to be exercised in this way if that is how you feel, but if you should be reading these sacred chapters and something enters with some feeling, that is the Shepherd's voice to you, is it not? It is that good Spirit that takes the Word and applies it with some efficacy in the heart of a waiting one. They hear His voice,

Sometimes the Shepherd speaks in a very confirming way. You may know what it is to hear a warning voice, a reproofing voice; but you may also have heard a very confirming voice, that may reassure you of your interest in His love and blood. He may say that you are one of His sheep and He is your Shepherd, so that you can say, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want". There are many very gracious promises but merely reading them will not of itself satisfy one who is deeply concerned about his soul's standing, not merely to read a promise as we have it here, "I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish". It is wonderfully confirming when the promise comes inside and takes you up and brings you forth out of yourself to Him; when a promise brings you feelingly to the mercy seat; when you have to take it to the Lord and plead it before Him, and can feel that He will never disdain your entreaties.

"My sheep hear My voice". Sometimes they hear His voice directing them, both in a spiritual and providential way, as I have

recently referred to that in Isaiah 30 concerning the Lord's children when they hear a voice behind them saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it". This is a directing voice; it is not going before them, but they hear a voice behind them, so that it shall be a venture of faith to follow that voice that is heard, putting our trust in Him. "My sheep hear My voice and I know them". This knowledge is a perfect knowledge that the Lord has of them as we read in another place where the Apostle Paul says, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His". This knowledge can be taken first of all in a collective sense, that is as incorporating the whole elect of God. His knowledge is universal and complete and "the eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth"; but this is something different from that. There is a knowledge the Lord has of His dear sheep that He has not of the world, of the ungodly, or of professors; because we read that even some of these will make a boast of themselves in that great day, and He shall say, "Depart from Me, I never knew you". He never knew them in that blessed covenant of grace as His own chosen and redeemed sheep. He says "I know them". This is a knowledge of His dear people as such which the Lord had from everlasting. Although we read of the Father as making choice of His people in Christ, we must remember that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the Father's Eternal Son, possessed a knowledge of them in that blessed covenant of grace before the world was. So here they are, everyone of them without exception, and none will be lost that the Saviour knows in that covenant that is ordered in all things and sure.

Then secondly there is a personal knowledge, "I know them", He says, and we may take it that this is personal knowledge of each one individually, so this must take in you and me, if we are of His sheep. This knowledge has two particular features in it; first of all it is a knowledge of them spiritually in that blessed Gospel, a knowledge that He has of them that moved Him, as we have it here, to lay down His life for them, which He did to redeem them from the wrath to come. He knows them in the precious Gospel. He says "I know them"; He knows all their spiritual exercises. Whether you seem to pray to no purpose or not makes no difference to this, His knowledge is perfect knowledge incorporating every sigh, every groan. It does not pass unnoticed from His point of view though it may appear so to us; all the prayers, we

are ready to conclude are to little if any purpose, but they are all in His 'book', every sigh, every tear, every look, every plea, "I know them", He says, "I know all about those inward heavings, all those tempest tossings, those bitter assaults of Satan - I know them", He says.

Then there is another knowledge beside this, and that is a perfect knowledge of all their providential matters. This is sometimes very important, but we cannot read the Holy Scriptures without perceiving that providence and grace are woven together, although they are in a way distinct; they are interlaced; your providences will be closely linked with your spiritual exercises. But some things you may have to pass through may weigh your spirit down, some things you pass through may lift your spirit up; some things may greatly relieve you, some things may greatly burden you. Providential matters may come in a number of different ways, but even so He has a perfect knowledge of them. He says "I know them". The Lord knoweth them that are His in a particular sense. "I know them". It is very sweet when you are favoured with a nearness at the Throne of grace and when you can take your spiritual need and your providential matters and feel for a few moments a sweet liberty in laying them before Him, seeking His guiding hand, praying that He will go before you and be your God, your Shepherd, your King. When you get near to Him like this, then you can say, I believe I know Him. I know this Shepherd, for He says in one place, "I am known of Mine"; not only that "I know My sheep", but He says "I am the Good Shepherd and know My sheep and am known of Mine". Why, do not all these exercises and that fact that you seek Him and have to do with Him about your matters evidence that you have a knowledge of Him? When you take your matters to the Lord you do not take them to a stranger do you? No, you take them to one in Whom you have complete dependence, and sometimes you may have to take a Word to the Lord to confirm it in your heart that He did speak it to you. I was reading quite recently of a good old minister who was in very heavy exercise indeed and he felt the Word from the Lord come to him but he hesitated to receive it, he said, "Say it again Lord" and the Lord said it again and it was a blessed confirmation to the good man. You may know something about this if the Lord says a Word to you; it does not mean that it will be the last time the Lord will say it to you, you may hear it again and again.

He says, "I know them and am known of Mine and they follow Me". They follow Me. What will move you to follow Him? I can tell you - when you hear His voice then you will follow that voice, follow that teaching. This must incorporate much of your soul's experience. You follow after Him. He is set before you, it is to Him you look, to Him you come; O may you depend on Him, follow after Him as the good Shepherd Who has gone before, follow Him in your trials knowing that He had far heavier trials than you. You follow Him in your afflictions knowing that He had far deeper afflictions, not bodily diseases but afflictions. "In all their afflictions He was afflicted", O yes, and in your providences you follow Him. You will listen for His voice and pray to be directed and sometimes this also follows in relation to owning Him, putting Him on; putting on the Lord Jesus Christ and following Him in His gospel ordinances. He is worth it, is He not? If He passed through seas of blood for you is He not worthy to be followed through the water for His Name's sake? Of if you hear His voice that will move you to follow Him. I know many godly people do not agree with immersion baptism but that is beside the point for we do and we believe it is in the Scriptures. We believe that when the Lord favours an exercised one, at least to have a page out of my own book, He moves the heart with a warm desire to honour Him because He has said, "them that honour Me I will honour". This does not affect our eternal destiny but this is what the Lord says, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me". "This is the love of God", says the Apostle John, "that we keep His commandments". As an old friend said many years ago, the reward is not for keeping them but in keeping them; that reward is a sense of His approbation and blessing in your heart; you do not want a better reward, do you? I know it has been sweet to follow Him. When I followed Him it was a time of love to me and after I was baptised and came out of the water I felt that I would have liked to have told the people what He had done for my soul. It would not have been wrong if I had. "They follow Me". If you love Him you will find that drawing work as in the Canticles where the church prays like this, "Draw me; we will run after Thee". What was the effect of this? "The king brought me into His chambers." They were the chambers of communion; the prayer was answered; He drew them to Himself

"I give unto them eternal life". Not, I ask them to purchase it, for we have nothing to purchase it with. The Lord Jesus has purchased it for His dear sheep at a cost beyond all our comprehension. We cannot begin to understand the cost in suffering to Him to open the gates of heaven to sinners deserving hell, but it is all a gift, dear friends; it is a gift! "I give unto them eternal life". It does not say, I will give unto them a lot of this world's goods, for many of His people have been hard pressed; but the Lord has given them the highest gift that can be given them, and that is eternal life. I was reading the other day of a couple that lived in Clapham about 120 years ago who were in extremely poor circumstances. The godly man died and in a week or so his wife died and left a daughter penniless, with nothing to bury her mother with, but friends came to her help and took it all in hand for her and arranged to provide for her so that all she could do was to look on: the Lord did wondrously. Some of these poor people heard the Lord's voice in their poverty, in their times of distress, in their difficulties, in the things that pressed upon them. "I give unto them eternal life". In many places this is spoken of as a gift, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord". This is salvation, and the blessed effects of that redemption wrought by the Saviour Himself. Eternal life cannot be without blood, substitution, satisfaction, but the Saviour has done all this, all that justice required, and now to these poor helpless things like you and me He says eternal life is a gift and "they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand". Amen.