Normal Christianity

Are You Normal?

I was recently asked to substitute teach at a school I had not been to in months. As I stood at the door, waiting for the kids to arrive, students from other classes started passing by me. One by one they called me by name. "Hey Mr. Walkup!" They smiled broadly and gave me high fives. It was immensely gratifying that so many kids remembered my name and were genuinely glad to see me. I have Telegram and I have WhatsApp and on both platforms I get messages that imply that the one sending the message knows me. But they don't call me by name, and the reason is that those people, if they are people, do not know me. It is funny but when you become a parent, you often are known as your child's mom or dad and not by your name. CEOs of companies don't know the names of most of the employees and celebrities don't know the names of their fans. Senators and Congressman don't know the names of the people who vote for them. Don't you appreciate it if your mechanic calls you by name or if your hair stylist knows your name? Although maybe thousands or even millions have the same name as you, your name still is you and it matters if someone knows you by name. What if God did not know your name? Would that trouble you? Would you want that sort of God? The Bible makes a profoundly important declaration about God that is nearly as significant as anything you will ever discover there and we will look at it today. Here is our big idea. Look and listen.

In John 10, Christ called Himself the good shepherd, the good shepherd who is also the Savior. **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."** (John 10: 11 NIV) Notice what He states regarding the shepherd. **The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.** (John 10:2-3 NIV) Perhaps you have never given this much thought but there is a wonderful promise made here. Jesus knows His sheep by name and guides them Himself. Are you one of His sheep? If you are, then Jesus knows your name and leads you when you listen to His voice. Remember the affection and care God has for His sheep as laid out in Psalm 23? It is so beautiful that Christians often memorize it. **The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.** (Psalm 23: 1-3 NIV) That very God, who does that for you, not just after you die but here and now calls you by name and leads you. It is amazing to consider that Jesus is so personally involved in your life and so desirous to care for you.

Many think of God as like a father I recently read about on a post. He worked two jobs and never attended any of his son's sporting events. He did not go to games, graduations or birthday parties. His son married and had a son of his own and that same father was not involved in their lives either. But then the son discovered that his father had been going to his grandson's games. He just dressed so he wouldn't be recognized and came late and left early so he wouldn't be seen. Jesus is not like that. He speaks to you. He makes Himself known to you and guides you if you look and listen. He cares for you and comforts you. But if you don't pay attention to Christ, you will not notice. However, Jesus made it clear that His sheep do notice. They do pay attention. They look and listen because they expect Jesus to call to them and lead them. It is normal Christianity for Christian people to know God is speaking to them and guiding them. That is how it is supposed to be all the time for you. God calls you by name. He makes it clear He is talking to you. Then He shows you the way. But you must look and listen.

One of the great historical accounts found in the Bible is the narrative of the most trusted friend Abraham had, being sent on a great mission. Abraham's son Isaac was forty and unmarried. Isaac's mother had died and Abraham was desperate for Isaac to have a wife who was god-fearing and righteous. The only place he knew such young women might be was among the families of his clan who lived 450 miles away. Abraham summoned his servant Eliezer, a beloved friend and confidante to travel to where his relatives lived and locate a woman to be Isaac's bride. You talk about a nearly impossible task. He would have to dodge roving gangs of thieves and if he did get to his destination safely, he needed to somehow pick out a woman Isaac would be glad to marry and who also would be willing to leave her friends and family and be wed to a man she never met. It perhaps seemed an impossible task for Eliezer but as a loyal friend, he undertook the mission.

Have you ever faced an impossible challenge, one where you asked yourself, "How can I do this?" Abraham reassured Eliezer that God Himself would guide him but even if he couldn't find a bride for Isaac willing to return with him, Abraham promised that he would not be faulted for it. The servant left and finally made it to the town Abraham

sent him. Eliezer had a powerful ally in this work though that gave him hope. When he arrived at the spring where the young women of the village would come and fill water jars to bring home with them, Eliezer prayed what many would deem an impertinent prayer, one that many Christians would have been too proud or unbelieving to pray. Here it is. **"O Lord, God of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that when I say to a girl, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too' — let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master."** (Genesis 24: 12b-14 NIV) That is pretty specific. And what happened? The beautiful young maiden, Rebekah came to the well and did all of that, just as Eliezer prayed. Rebekah and her family soon agreed that she would go with Eliezer and marry Isaac and Eliezer, Isaac, Abraham and Rebekah along with all of us learned an important lesson about God. He is a good shepherd who calls His sheep by name and leads them. Would all this great joy and blessing have come if Eliezer did not look and listen, pay attention to what God was doing? Probably not.

Jesus has promised to call you by name and lead you if you are willing for Him to do that. Look and listen when it comes to God is not something all people are willing to do. Only His sheep, those who are born again and become Christian have it in mind for one reason. Like Jesus said, His "**sheep listen to his voice**" and they **"follow him because they know his voice.**" That is normal Christianity according to our Lord. His people recognize when He is speaking to them and they follow Him because they know Him. It is an aberration, a strange approach to life for Christian people to not look and listen for Jesus and then take what they see and hear from Him and follow Him. Assume Christ will guide you and that He will make it clear where to go. God will never take you on a path that will pull you away from the perfect way laid out for you in Scripture. But in the same way, never assume the Lord will not call you by name and lead you. Trust Him to do it because He said He would. You may wonder how you can know Christ is guiding you when you don't yet know His voice. Look and listen. Keep going to Him and expect Him to guide you and speak to you and He will and soon enough you will be familiar with His voice and how He talks to you. Spend this week talking to Jesus and asking Him to guide you through the normal parts of the day. How great it would be if Christian moms and dads became so familiar with Jesus that they really did know when He was talking to them? And wouldn't grandparents have great lives if they were looking and listening to God? Politicians would sure be better leaders and medical personnel would be of such great help if they look and listen for God. Our big idea. Look and listen.