

03-13-16 – The Fifth Sunday of Lent
The God We Worship – Hearing God’s Voice
John 10:1-5

Brother Lawrence - - *“This is what being in His holy presence is like. My day-to-day life consists of giving God my simple, loving attention. If I’m distracted, He calls me back in tones that are supernaturally beautiful... My prayers consist of a simple continuation of this same exercise. Sometimes I imagine that I’m a piece of stone, waiting for the sculptor. When I give myself to God this way, He begins sculpting my soul into the perfect image of His beloved Son. At other times, I feel my whole mind and heart being raised up into God’s presence, as if, without effort, they had always belonged there.”*

Brother Lawrence understood the practice of the presence of God. His biographer said this of him: *“His soul was resting in God, having lost its awareness of everything but love of Him... Because of this, his life was full of continual joy.”*

WAYS GOD SPEAKS TODAY

1 – Through the Bible – 2 Tim. 3:16a, NLT – “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives.” Of all the ways God may choose to speak to us, the Bible is always the final authority. He will never tell us anything that is in opposition to what the Bible has already said. He never contradicts Himself!

2 – Through other Christians – Pr. 11:14 - NLT – “There is safety in having many advisers.” God has put us together with other Christians so we can encourage each other, and sometimes even correct each other. This is one reason it’s so important to be part of a church fellowship.

There is a story called the Silent Sermon that you probably have heard before... There was a man who had not been to church for several weeks in a row. The pastor decided to visit him and see if he was OK and possibly why he hadn’t been around. He went to the door and the man saw it was the pastor and knew what he was coming to talk about. He opened the door and let him in. They went into the living room and sat in front of the fire burning in the fireplace. They watched the fire in silence for a few minutes. Then the pastor got up and took the tongs. He picked up a burning ember and put it off by itself away from the other flames. Within a minute the ember stopped burning and smoldered out. The pastor then took the tongs and put the ember back into the fire with the rest of the flames, and it immediately began to burn again. Without saying a word, the pastor left and went on his way.

We need to be in fellowship with other Christians. It is critical to our spiritual life.

3 – Through Circumstances – Someone once said, **“Circumstances drive us to our knees so the only way we can look is up!”** In our anchor story from 2 Chron. 20, three armies were coming to attack the people of Judah. I would call that a pretty scary circumstance to face. Rather than panic (well maybe they panicked a little too) they fell to their knees to seek God’s help.

Circumstances don't always have to be bad... **Rom. 2:4b**, NKJV – ***“The goodness of God leads you to repentance”*** One way or another God can allow circumstances into our lives so He can speak to us when we seek Him.

4 – Through the Holy Spirit – **1 Cor. 2:13**, NLT – ***“When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit’s words to explain spiritual truths.”***

The Holy Spirit is still speaking to us today. **John 14:16 & 16:13**, NLT – ***“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you.” “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future.”***

God is still speaking to His children, and you can hear Him yourself. He even begins speaking to our hearts before we ever accept Jesus as Savior and Lord, drawing us to Himself. This is what we Nazarenes call prevenient grace – grace that comes beforehand.

Once we become children of God through Christ, we need to constantly hear His voice.

Conditions to Hear the Shepherd

Let's turn to our text for today – John 10:1-5 –

“I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber! ² But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know his voice.”

Saved – The first condition of hearing God's voice is that we must be saved. We have to be part of His sheepfold. In this same chapter of John in verse 11 it says, ***“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep.”*** “When we place our faith in the One who laid down His life for us, He becomes our Shepherd, and we become His sheep.” (Pure Praise, p. 56).

When we accept Christ, we are given spiritual ears to hear and recognize the Shepherd's voice. John 10:3 – ***“... and the sheep recognize His voice and come to Him.”*** We don't have to do anything, nor can we do anything, to deserve this. It is part of the salvation package God offers to every one of us. If you are in Christ, you have been given spiritual ears.

Sensitive – Having ears is not enough though. Our ears must be sensitive to His voice. John 10:4 says, ***“His sheep follow Him...”*** How do the sheep know to follow Him? ***“The sheep know His voice.”*** It is something familiar to them. They have heard it before – many times.

Jesus tells us in the Gospels that the Pharisees were dull of hearing. They had human ears, but they lacked spiritual hearing. Even the disciples missed the point on occasion, and they walked with the Master day in and day out. They didn't have the Holy Spirit at that point. We have been given the Spirit when we were saved. He is our spiritual ears, but we still have to spend time listening in order to develop the kind of sensitivity to know we are hearing God's voice. This takes time and practice – like most things – to develop, but it is God's will for each of us to hear Him and discern that it is God speaking. It is critical to everything we attempt to do for Him.

An example of when the disciples heard correctly is found in Matt. 16. Jesus asked who people say he is. Then in 15-17 we are told this: ***“Then He (Jesus) asked them, ‘But who do YOU say I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.’ Jesus replied, ‘You are blessed Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being.’”***

Peter heard God's voice. Only God could have shown such deep spiritual truth to Peter. “Likewise, only the Spirit of God can open up God's Word to us and help us understand what the Lord wants to say to and through us. Therefore, we must constantly stay sensitive to the Spirit's instructing.” (Pure Praise, p. 57).

Surrendered – One final condition we must meet in order to be certain we can hear from God is surrender. We must have, not only open, sensitive ears, but bended ears waiting to receive whatever words of instruction God has for us. Our attitude must be “Lord, counsel me, correct me, teach me, direct me, rebuke me, just please talk to me!” (all from Pure Praise, p. 57).

Our Most Important Ability

John 10:3b – ***“He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”*** This lesson in the Pure Praise book is titled, “Our Most Important Ability.” Being able to hear from God should be our highest priority as Christians, and especially for those who are ministry leaders and workers, pastors, and board members. We must be seeking God's direction and hearing His voice in order lead effectively and spiritually. If we don't hear from God, how can we lead others?

Let's again focus on our story from 2 Chron. 20. The people of Judah were faced with a crisis situation. The King, Jehoshaphat, didn't make a snap decision how to combat against these three powerful armies that were about to attack them. Instead, he decided not to make a decision on his own. Rather, he wisely led the people to seek God's help.

As a manager on my day job, I am expected and sought after to make decisions all day long. It has become part of my DNA to quickly assess the situation and make a decision on how to proceed. Most of the time, I make the right decision, but sometimes I blow it. Unfortunately, this carries over into my spiritual life at times. I never want to make the wrong decision regarding spiritual matters and ministry matters. My tendency to react in the flesh can be a dangerous thing spiritually. I need to learn from King Jehoshaphat.

We all should assess our situations, stop, regroup, and seek God first, before acting or deciding. That's really hard for me. So, I need to realize this and work toward a better approach.

The King could have made a military decision, a strategic decision, a logical decision (logic is my blessing and curse attribute), but he chose to have the people pray and ask for God's help. His response to God was, ***"We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon You."*** (2 Chron. 20:12)

1 John 4:4 – *"But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory over those people, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world."*

I know this – you know this, but we have to get this to become who we are consistently. Instead we often worry and get anxious first. Paul told us what we should rather do...

Phil. 4:6-7 – *"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷ Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."*

We also hear God when he leads us in His peace. The key to this is to do as the King of Judah did, pray first. It's only natural to become anxious and worry about things when they arise, but God's way is always un-natural because it is super-natural. We must determine to hear from God about our situations.

The people of Judah were faced with a serious situation. They didn't only want to hear from God; they had to hear from God. He was their only hope. Their situation was way beyond their own strength and determination. They took three important steps to hear from God:

1 – They consecrated themselves to God – they fasted and prayed, seeking God in their situation.

2 – They confessed their need for God – They gathered in the Temple and confessed their weakness and need for God's intervention.

3 – They prepared to hear from God – They concentrated their attention on hearing God's voice so they would know what to do. Their eyes were fixed on God because they had nowhere else to look.

They had already decided God was going to speak to them and tell them what to do. God used a prophet to give them the advice they needed and the victory came when they obeyed that word from God. The people stood there until they received the answer they desperately needed. As soon as they heard from God, their crisis was over. They rested in God's promise and watched as the victory came for them fulfilling that promise.

Recognizing God's Voice

How do you know when it is God speaking to you? What does His voice sound like to you?

The Characteristics of His Voice

Familiar – If we have heard his voice enough, it is familiar to us, like the voice of a family member – our Father. My dad's whistle – my mom's call – I could recognize these anywhere, anytime. An infant will respond to the voice of its mother. They have been hearing it.

Personal – The shepherd calls his sheep by name. You will know when it's him speaking.

Simple and clear – the author tells us that his mom didn't say, "Dwayne, I implore thee to make haste and move in the general direction of thy homestead with the express purpose of finding sustenance and renewed energy for thy body." She yelled – Dwaanyne – it's time for supper. God knows our level of understanding, and he will speak to us in these terms. **John 10:9 – "Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures."**

Loving – My mom's voice was loving. She may have had to yell at me along the way, but I knew it was said with a backdrop of love motivation. She wanted me to be protected and do the right thing. **John 10:10-11 – "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep."**

We fight a real battle in the spiritual realms. The enemy wants nothing less than to destroy us and our relationship with God. He will do anything he can to distract and derail us.

What crisis, situation, or circumstance are you facing right now? It may be for someone you love. As we close today, take the time to pray for that situation with a new approach. Pray, confessing your need for God to step in; pray that you will hear His voice; pray a prayer of dedication of yourself to God and that you will not stop seeking until He answers. Does the Bible say anything that you can hold onto about it? You may want to partner up with someone else and agree together about the situation. You don't have to tell each other what it is about; God knows. Just agree to support each other in prayer. Is the Holy Spirit prompting you or someone else about this, so you can receive from God directly or through another person? Have you devoted your life to following Christ – are you saved? Are you sensitively listening to God? Are you familiar with His voice enough that you will know when He speaks to you? Are you surrendered to Him, so that you are willing to change your approach and obey His voice? Are you desperate and determined to hear from Him? Have you decided that you are going to hear God's voice?

Then pray this way and have confidence that God will answer, and you will receive His indescribable peace even in the midst of your circumstances.

Part of understanding this God we Worship is [Hearing God's Voice](#).